

Just Another Soldier - A Very Special Message

Make sure you looks at the pictures on the hyperlink. A picture is definitely worth a thousand words. Also, the narration on his unit patch is excellent.

Dennis

Subject: Just Another Soldier - A Very Special Message

A few days ago we held a ceremony at our forward operations base to award a Purple Heart to a soldier in one of our companies who had been wounded. A few soldiers from each platoon were sent to the ceremony to stand in formation while the award was presented. Somehow I was chosen to represent my platoon along with a few other guys, a duty I frankly could have done without. Not that I don't want to show my respect to the guy that was getting the award, it's just that it kinda sucks to stand at attention in ungodly Iraqi heat in full battle rattle then have to listen to our battalion commander speak.

I was driving my company commander to the ceremony (we were late) and out of the blue he asks me, "So how's the writing coming". He asked me this once before when I ran into him in our shower trailer a month or so ago. As you probably know, back in February he demanded I "dismantle" my blog when he discovered it on the internet. It was a bit of a fiasco. It's because of this adjudication that you are reading this in email format and not on the web. In an effort to honor his demands and to satisfy my own impetus, I quietly email you my subversive spleening, away from the omniscience of Google.

I have a penchant for openness and honesty, so I immediately responded with, "It's going well." I paused for a moment then added, "Actually sir, I haven't written in a while because there hasn't been that much to write about lately." "That'll change soon", he said matter-of-factly. We have a lot of missions planned over the next few weeks to-- how shall I put it-- to "celebrate" the turnover of power on the 30th. It's been mostly quiet around here other than the damn lucky shot of a rocket that killed two soldiers and wounded dozens of others at a nearby base.

By the way, the ceremony was good. This is soldierspeak for it was short. The guy got his award for getting wounded, a distinction for an award that has always seemed a little odd to me. When I was a kid my dad once gave me a prize for having the most number of bones in the piece of fish my mother served us for dinner that night. The bullet is still lodged in this soldier's shoulder. Apparently it entered the Humvee through an open window on the passenger side, shot the night vision goggles off the helmet of a soldier in the back seat, ricocheted off the vehicle's radio, then struck him in the shoulder. The battalion commander didn't mention any of this aside from the night vision goggles part, something he seemed to find hilarious and macho. I got the rest of this information from Ray on the drive back to our bunkers. (For those not familiar with Ray, I'll try to give you some more stories on him again soon, he's the craziest person I know and all Ray stories are guaranteed to satisfy.) At the end of the ceremony everyone sang the Army song and the First Infantry Division song. Oh my god what an abortion that was. "Blah blah blah and the Army keeps blah blah along!" "Blah blah blah blah The Big Red One! Blah blah blah blah!" It was embarrassing. Not one person in my company knew one word of either song. The chaplain, however, sang with gusto.

We're attached to the 1st ID, and hell, we're even wearing their patch on our right shoulders now to signify that we've been to combat with the Big Red One, or "BRO" as we like to call them, a unit patch I've never worn a day in my life.

06/21/2004

The 1st ID is cool and they have an incredible history (but what active duty unit doesn't have an incredible history) and I'm proud to wear the patch, but some guys think it would be more correct to wear our own unit patch as our combat patch-- the patch of the 27th Infantry Brigade. But here's the thing: With all the restructuring and shit that the National Guard is going through, there is no 27th Brigade anymore, or at least not for us. Why wear a patch to a unit that doesn't really exist to us anymore? All the guys who got left back home from our unit have now been absorbed into the 42nd Infantry Division (another unit with an incredible history). A lot of guys are not excited about this because the unit patch for the 42nd is a rainbow. The very same patch the guy in the Village People had on his uniform incidentally, only he wore his improperly. A rainbow was used for the patch since the entire unit was originally an all-Irish militia once upon a time, and later the patch became half a rainbow to signify how half the soldiers got wiped out in a single battle. The 42nd has fought in every major conflict since the revolution. Their history is awesome. But this is all lost on today's soldiers. Guys will literally leave the Army because of a patch. "I'm not gonna wear that fag patch!" was a common response to the news that we'd be folding into the 42nd. There was a time when our New York National Guard unit wore the patch of the 10th Mountain Division-- a cool patch with crossed swords and the word "Mountain" across the top. The irony is that the 10th Mountain is located at Fort Drum, New York, nowhere near a single fucking mountain. Anyway, retention rates were astronomical and unit strengths were well over one-hundred percent back then.

The thing where active duty units have cool patches and National Guard units have lame patches is a whole other discussion.

What I want to talk about for a minute is the 27th Brigade patch. The brigade isn't that old. It was named after an officer named O'Ryan. You'll have to forgive me, I am the world's worst guy when it comes to history, I don't remember details worth a shit. Anyway, it's named after this guy O'Ryan. I know this doesn't make any sense, lemme explain. So one of the patch planner guys I think said, "Okay, they want us to make a patch for the Brigade and it has to be in honor of O'Ryan. Hmm... Hey, we're from New York and we're all Yankee fans, let's just wear their symbol!" I'm sure this got presented to the patch-approver guys who said, "Um, that's the stupidest fucking idea anyone has every come to us with. We're not going to let you wear a baseball team patch. Try again you assholes." So the patch-planner guys went back to the bar for another think-n-drink session. After a few months of brainstorming they came up with a patch that was the Yankees symbol with some stars. An extra line was put in the NY of the Yankees symbol to make it NYD meant to mean "New York Division". For those of you who listened to punk in the '80s, it looks reminiscent of the Dead Kennedys symbol. And some stars were added to symbolize the constellation Orion. Nevermind the fact that O'Ryan, an Irish-American soldier, and Orion, a Greek mythological hunter, don't have shit in common other than the fact that their names are homophones.

Unquestionably the coolest unit patch in the Army is the Special Forces patch-- it's in the shape of an arrowhead to symbolize the Native Americans and their guerilla fighting style, there are lightning bolts to symbolize swiftness and power, and a sword to symbolize whatever swords symbolize (who really cares what swords symbolize, swords are cool!). Now that's a patch! For most my career I was in the 19th Special Force Group in Utah. This is the patch I moved to New York wearing. Then I had to start wear this kludge of a patch. And just as I was warming up to it, I learn about the whole O'Ryan-Orion non-connection thing which totally ruined it all for me. And now I am wearing the Orion patch in combat. Whatever. It's a dicked-up patch, but it's *my* patch.

When my battalion moved into our forward operations base here in Iraq, our battalion commander decided to change the name of the base from "Lion", the name that it had for a year, to "Orion". So it got changed. But here's the thing: no one was sure how to spell "Orion". Throughout the tactical operations center, every possible spelling could be found somewhere, including on official documents. So this sorta forced the issue to clear up what exactly the spelling was. It was recently decided (after a few months of apparent waffling) that the official spelling would be "O'Ryan". Um, isn't our brigade named "Orion" like the stars on our patch? And isn't our battalion callsign "Hunter" in honor of Orion the hunter, a moniker our BC adores to no end? (Is Orion really the hunter? I thought the constellation of the guy with the bow was the hunter, actually. Oh well.) And if anyone dies from our FOB, it will undoubtedly be renamed again and knowing our luck the new name will be something like "Rodion Romanivich Raskalnikov".

I want to shift gears now.

My platoon went into town with our company commander recently to perform a number of short tasks. I suppose I

lack the ability to take anything seriously because everything we do just seems so... well... funny. It's not to say that what we do isn't important, we do many good and sometimes necessary and important things, it's just sometimes when you stop and think about it and look at all the photographs, like I do everytime I write, I notice how humorous everything is. I started my day by going through the remains of an air defense artillery site we bombed, sifting through piles of unexploded ordnance, picking up explosive fuses to prevent someone from coming along and picking them up - they're explosive you know!

If you haven't noticed already, anytime I don't really have anything to write about I choose something random and specific and expound on it. Then I just present you a bunch of photos with wiseass comments. Today is one of those days.

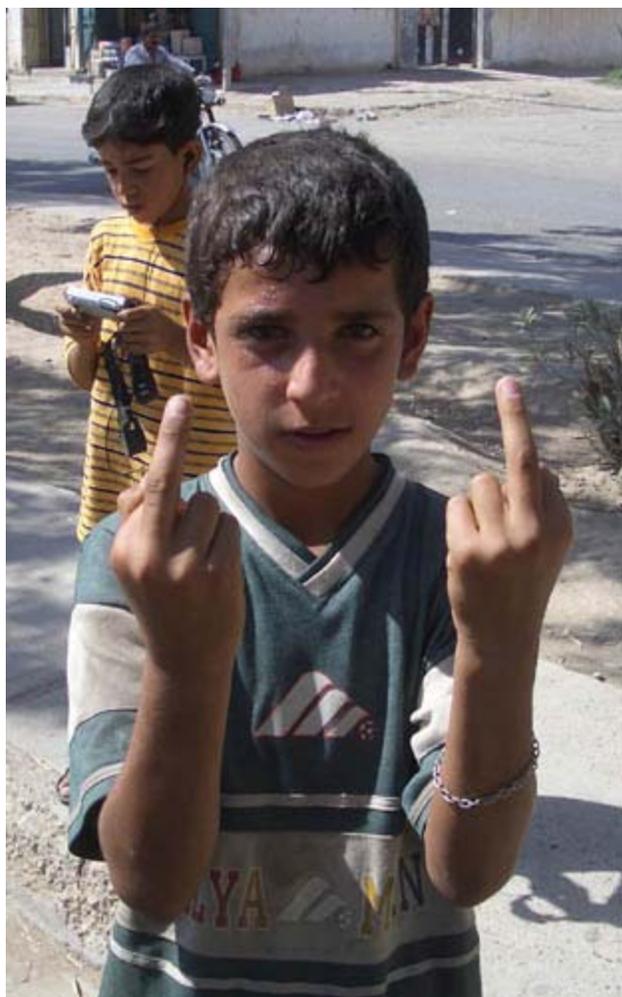
I suppose I should mention the Time article. (I wish I could be mentioning a *Times* article instead.) Since you are terribly sophisticated and would never normally read Time unless someone happened to leave a copy in the restore, let me be the first to tell you that they mentioned us. It was an article on blogs (dated June 21) and Just Another Soldier was the only one mentioned as a military blog. This is kind funny seeing as how technically there is no longer a blog for Just Another Soldier and how there are dozens of other milblogs. It was mentioned that I had wandered through one of Saddam's empty palaces. Um, I didn't do that, I wandered through Uday's non-empty palace. Close enough for mass media I suppose. But hey, who I am to bite the hand that feeds me, right? I seriously don't know why they mentioned us. I'm a horrible representation of milbloggers. But hey, who cares! We have fun here! If you want news about Iraq, congratulations, you've come to the wrong fucking place! If you are distrustful of the media and want to know exactly what's going on in Iraq, you'll have to pray for divine enlightenment, because only god knows what the hell is going on over here! But I can't really help you with that either because I don't believe in god, I think the phrase "There are no atheists in foxholes" is semantic proof that "god" is essentially a construct borne of necessity, and I regularly ridicule Christian doctrine. This is only natural because I am a recovering Mormon.

However, if you want to know how it *feels* to be a soldier in Iraq, to hear something honest and raw-- *that* I can help you with. There is so much to discuss! Urban warfare tactics! Killing civilians!!! MASTURBATION!!!

But hey, I'm a madman, a clown prince, a heretic. I am most likely out of my mind. I mean, seriously, what kind of an asshole joins the infantry? So rather than endure any more of the indigestible garbage I write, how 'bout we just look at some photos. The camera makes no moral judgments, right? Click the link for the photos.

<http://www.justanothersoldier.com/blog040617.htm>

By the way, an archive of all material will be available soon.



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