

— OPERATION — IRAQI FREEDOM THE SECOND GULF WAR

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On January 29, 2002, President George W. Bush, in his State of the Union address, named Iraq as part of the axis of evil that threatened world peace. Inspection teams had been in Iraq looking for weapons of mass destruction but failed to find the expected large caches of such weapons. One theory for the failure was that Iraqi officials were successfully hiding the weapons by moving them from one place to another, just ahead of the inspectors. The United States was so convinced of their existence that they convinced the United Nations Security Council to publish Resolution 144 in October 2002. This resolution held Iraq in material breach of previous resolutions that stated that Iraq was to be inspected and existing weapons of mass destruction were to be destroyed. Inspections continued, but no weapons were found. In March 2003, Britain submitted March 17, 2003, as the deadline for Iraqi compliance with inspectors looking for weapons of mass destruction. When compliance with inspections did not become a reality, the United States issued

a forty-eight-hour ultimatum for the leadership of the Iraqi regime to leave Iraq. Hussein and his administration did not leave Iraq, and on March 19, 2003, United States special operations forces began to enter Iraq. The air attack on Iraq and the push of U.S. ground forces into that country ended twenty-six days later, on April 14, 2003. U.S. forces remain in Iraq at this printing.

CHARLOTTA LEADER

My name is Captain Charlotta Leader. I am a nurse in the United States Air Force. Currently, I am stationed at Spangdahlem Air Force Base, Germany. This week I will be deployed to an unnamed location in Southwest Asia for three to six months in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, providing medical services for our troops in the desert.

Deployments are not new to me. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve my country in whatever capacity I can. As a reservist, I was called up as a medical-surgical nurse at Nocton

Hall, England, during Operation Desert Storm. When obstetrical nurses were needed at Lakenheath Air Force Base in England, I went to help the staff there. This was during the ground war of that campaign. In 1995, I spent three months in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, providing health care for the Cuban and Haitian migrants during Operation Sea Signal.

As a single mother of four, there have definitely been sacrifices, especially by my children. But this time will be the hardest sacrifice of all. My youngest son will be returning from his mission next month and our reunion will be postponed for the better part of this coming year.

My son's name is Nathan Leader. He has been serving in the New Jersey Morristown Mission. He watched the Twin Towers fall on September 11 and wrote, "Mom, I had front row seats to the beginning of World War III." Nathan is a young man not entirely unaccustomed to tragedies. During his high school years, our town and our home flooded, mountains of snow caused roofs to cave in, and the extent of forest fire damage set records. Through it all he has been strong and optimistic, but the towers definitely shook him up. Thankfully, the Lord protected him and the other missionaries of the New York and New Jersey Missions.

After returning from my humanitarian services in Cuba, I incorporated a segment of my journal into my Relief Society lesson about the celestial kingdom and exaltation. Some sisters thought I should have my story published. I will share it now.

I went to Guantanamo [Gitmo] Bay, Cuba, this summer in support of a humanitarian mission to give medical aid to the migrant Cuban population en route to the United States. When I arrived, there were approximately twenty thousand migrants. When I left, that number had been reduced to just fewer than fourteen thousand people. I was assigned to work as an emergency room nurse at Camp Buckley and to do triage in Echo, Foxtrot, and Golf villages.

I loved the sunshine, warm weather, and going to the beaches after each duty day to look for seashells. I was privileged to live and work with some wonderful people. But I also had a very sobering experience while in Cuba that caused me to take stock of my life and where I was going. I think that this particular spiritual living lesson has been evolving in my head all summer. I hope you can see the analogy that I'm trying to make.

Guantanamo Bay is the oldest military post outside of the United States. It encompasses forty-five square miles of Cuba, including the bay. Guard towers and armed military personnel, both United States Marines and Cuban infantry, surround it. In addition, the border is surrounded with concertina wire and mine fields. If you wander too far out in the bay, the coast guard will escort you back to the naval base.

In 1994 all the American spouses and children were sent back to the United States for their safety due to the large number of migrants pouring into Gitmo as they tried to escape Cuba. There were homes, but no families; playgrounds and an elementary school, but no children.

I missed the children. Two out of the three months I was there, I never saw a child. The few Cuban children that were left were in different camps than the one I attended. (On my return trip back home, we landed in Jacksonville, Florida. I saw children waiting for their military fathers. It brought tears to my eyes as they reached through the chain link fence trying to touch their fathers' fingers and hands.)

Many of the Cuban migrants were hard-working people who displayed a great deal of patience and endurance as they waited their turn to go to the United States. But some of them had never been exposed to the concept of God and His teachings. They did not seem to know how to live the Ten Commandments.

During my first few weeks there, I was unable to locate anyone from the Church. I inquired at the base chapel, asking if anyone knew about services for The Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints. I was told that the little group that had met together had left. Wrong information. I later discovered that the most senior-ranking chaplain on base was a Latter-day Saint army colonel from Utah. I appreciated his insight and direction. He was in contact with the Kingston Jamaica Mission president, whose goal it was to visit our small group that met each Sunday on a regular basis. Special permission had to be granted by the base officials for him to come to Gitmo.

As a military person you speak in terms of “day in” and “day out.” When it was time for the air force nurses to leave, we all wanted to leave together.

So how does all of this relate to exaltation and the celestial kingdom? Just like Guantanamo Bay, once assigned to the telestial or terrestrial kingdoms, you won’t be able to leave. There will be no family structure as we know it, and there will be no children to watch grow and develop. It’s hard to imagine a world without children. People in the telestial kingdom will not be accustomed to obeying God’s commandments. That sweet spirit that comes in the presence of righteous living will not be there or on the faces of those who live there. Like the Kingston Jamaica Mission president, who could not freely come to Guantanamo Bay, Jesus and Heavenly Father will not be able to visit members of the telestial kingdom because the people there will not be able to behold Their presence. Only Christ can visit those who dwell in their terrestrial kingdom.

In this world, which we know is after a telestial order, we speak of birthdays and the day we die—kind of like our “day in” and “day out” of Guantanamo Bay. And if we have developed strong relationships, I think we wanted to come into this world with friends, and I think we want to exit with friends and family.

I know that these experiences are not unique to me. Many have had similar situations in their lives. It’s just that this experience helped me get a little better focus on what the celestial kingdom is all about. It may be a beautiful place, beyond anything that we can imagine, but what

is most important is who will be there. There will be families and children, our heavenly parents, and our Savior—and I want to be there with my family, too.

It is a privilege and honor to serve my country. My father was a member of the American forces in Europe during World War II. I feel blessed to walk where he walked and see some of the same German countryside that he saw. Because of the increased fighting in Afghanistan this past week, I believe I may be busy during my deployment down south. I pray I will do my job well, as my father did before me.

I was part of the 320th Expeditionary Medical Support Group in a classified location in the desert. We received and treated military troops and contract civilians at an air evac hub. Most of our patients arrived at night via C-130s. Those who needed more definitive care were stabilized and sent on to Landstuhl, Germany.

Two things really impressed me about this experience. First, most of our American soldiers did not complain when they arrived from Afghanistan or Pakistan. They were extremely grateful for everything that we did for them or gave them: cold water, hot meals, showers, clean clothes, and air conditioning. As I settled one young man on a narrow medical cot one night, he remarked how good his bed felt. I never thought of our cots as feeling very comfortable. Curious, I asked him where he had been sleeping. He replied that he and his unit had been sleeping on rocks for two months. He was so very tired, as were many of the troops that came to us.

The second thing that impressed me was the outpouring of supportive letters, cards, and food items that we received from the citizens of the United States. Many grade-school children wrote to us, thanking us for what we were doing. I am grateful to the teachers who are trying to instill patriotism in the next generation of Americans. Living in Germany at the time of September 11, I did not fully comprehend the spark of liberty and freedom that was ignited that day. What a legacy to live up to!

JARED SCOTT

During a period of two weeks during the winter of 2003, our inpatient ward at Naval Medical Center San Diego took care of over 150 recruits from the Marine Corps Recruiting Depot (MCRD) in San Diego, California. These recruits had developed pneumonia. Our work began when three recruits were transferred to the ICU after their pneumonia turned into empyema and pleural effusion. After those first three recruits, the MCRD began screening all of their recruits for pneumonia.

Multiple factors make such epidemics possible. Along with the physical, mental, and emotional stress of boot camp, the close quarters allow virulent strains to spread quickly. Recruits are never alone: they eat, sleep, drink, run, and study together. They go to the dentist together and have medical examinations together. All of these risk factors also support the spread of infectious GI disease. Breakouts are common.

It took four days to screen all of the recruits. Thousands of throat cultures, blood cultures, and x-rays were processed. The laboratory and radiology departments of our hospital received two weeks' worth of work in four days, and they performed well.

I was going off shift when the director of nursing service determined to turn our med-surg ward into a recruit pneumonia ward. We transferred all of our regular patients off the ward. At 1800 hours the recruits started pouring in. We admitted forty patients that night to our floor. All were eighteen- to twenty-year-old young men with pneumonia contracted while at MCRD. That same day the surgery ward was also converted into a pneumonia ward. I stayed until midnight.

I volunteered to stay a few extra hours to help track the admission process. Working with the ward clerk under my direction, we processed physician orders for forty new admissions. The six phones available were just barely enough to coordinate services with all the various hospital departments.

Recruits were still expected to act like recruits. They have to be told everything to do and are not to speak unless spoken to. On one occasion, a recruit did not go to the bathroom all day because he had not been told to do so. As our caregiver numbers became low, we had able recruits change their own linens and empty their own trash. If I took time to empty trash, a recruit might not get his IV antibiotics before my day was over.

Sunday morning, as the pneumonia ward began to adjust to the routine and marines began to be discharged, we were informed that a recruit had died from complications of pneumonia. Many staff had worked relentlessly to save him from the disease. Everything possible was done to save him. The nurses grew solemn. A young, strong, capable, healthy servant of our country lay motionless. He never made it to the battlefield. Never fought an enemy. His mom and dad were no doubt proud that he had volunteered to serve his country as we were waging a terrible conflict in Afghanistan with rumors of a conflict in Iraq. I don't know his name. Probably never will. Like the many hundreds of thousands that gave their lives down through the centuries for our country, this young recruit stands as testimony to the Savior's teaching, "Greater love hath no man than this, than a man lay down his life for his friends."

I have been with many people near death and stood close as others left this world. On many occasions, death is a relief from pain and struggle caused by years of disease. This case was different. Death was not a relief for this young recruit, but a wall. He had been struggling to create his dreams and live his passions and was stopped short. He had given his life for us.

We decided not to tell the marines that one of their shipmates would not be returning to MCRD with them. For good or bad, we did not feel right that it should come from us. It did not take long for them to hear the news. A shipmate had died from the same disease for which they were being treated. They took it in stride. At least they

didn't show that it bothered them. They were strong. It was an honor to care for them.

Death is just a doorway. Time that these young men miss out on will be given to them in an ever better place. Time continues. Their lives

will continue. I take comfort in knowing that even as lives here are cut short, there is a far better life beyond this veil of sorrow. Those who give their lives for others have felt as the Savior felt and will feel the joy of love that He felt.