

A voice silenced is heard again

Messages Capt. Timothy Moshier sent before his death in Iraq continue to be a source of comfort for his family

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GUILDERLAND -- At 5:30 a.m., with the Baghdad sun rising and most of the Army still asleep, Capt. Timothy J. Moshier would jump out of bed, slip on sandals and walk across the base for a shower.

Moshier enjoyed his early routine in Iraq because on quiet mornings he could hear the faint but distinctive rhythms of Arabic music and the city's morning call to prayers.

"I like that part of my morning, because it's still and peaceful, and I know that stillness is not going to play a part in the rest of my day," Moshier explained.

The scenario is an excerpt from two detailed e-mails Moshier, who grew up in Bethlehem, sent home to close family and friends during the months leading up to his April 2006 death in Yusufiyah, Iraq.

In the messages, the helicopter pilot describes his complex journey with the military to Iraq, the many duties he is assigned and an aching to return to his wife, Katie, and infant daughter, Natalie.

But the West Point graduate also writes eloquently about the diverse and sometimes desperate sights and sounds of Iraq, and of Baghdad's teeming neighborhoods from his vantage point above.

The tone of the letters is casual but explanatory. Katie recently shared them and the emotions they still generate a year after her husband and another pilot were shot down by enemy fire.

"I have read them and re-read them, and when you see his words in print, you can hear his voice," said Katie, 27, from her home in Guilderland.

Natalie turns 2 years old in June.

Moshier died in Iraq at age 25 while conducting a combat air patrol on April 1, 2006.

He had communicated with Katie just about every day while deployed. But he wrote two long e-mails about his everyday duties and feelings -- one from Kuwait in December 2005 and a subsequent one in January 2006 from where he was stationed in Taji, Iraq.

They show an almost artistic side to the young Bethlehem pilot and are now part of an online Newsweek project of e-mails from the war zone.

One missive was about what he saw while providing support for grounded units: "There are settlements here and there, mostly one-story buildings with flat roofs that just look like shoe boxes with windows. Many of the homes don't even have roofs, just some thatch covering a corner of a walled-in square. Piles of manure are stacked behind the house, and a clothesline with brightly colored fabrics is strung from a corner of the house to the fence post. Some people look up at us as we fly by, others just ignore us."

Moshier wrote a year ago January that Iraqi marketplaces "look like landfills, just shanty towns where goods are sold. The poorer districts are just tent cities. Even downtown, along the Tigris river, the wealthy homes have been abandoned. Many of them bear the scars of war."

He writes appreciatively of large and ornate mosques and boys playing soccer on dirt fields. He speaks of small military victories. But he also frets about his family, and the difficulty in determining who the enemy is.

"The immensity of the mission we have over here is apparent. In a place where the enemy wears no uniforms, how am I to pick out the good guys from the bad?"

The Army captain had a good sense of humor, even at the keyboard.

Prior to reaching Iraq, he tells of being shocked at the price of bratwurst in Frankfurt, Germany, and catching an upper respiratory infection known as "Kuwaiti Crud" in Kuwait.

"Basically it's a sore throat, combined with a nasty sinus infection, sometimes accompanied by explosive diarrhea. I managed to avoid the latter, but I had both of the former in spades," Moshier says.

After a tough plane landing in Balad, Iraq, he flew to Taji in a Chinook helicopter.

"I didn't like not being in control of where we were going and what we were doing. I wasn't really scared, but there was that knowledge in the back of my mind, that I was definitely in range of any bad guy down on the ground who wanted to take a shot at us," he wrote.

He described the Taji base as first-rate with lots of food, even cheesecake and a Baskin Robbins store. But the base was mortared regularly, and Moshier lived in a room protected by sandbags.

In one e-mail, he details aircraft maneuvers on New Year's Eve in Iraq. "Not a bad way to close out 2005, I thought," he wrote.

Moshier loved to read and was a devout Catholic, so it was appropriate that the one-year anniversary of his death fell on Palm Sunday, Katie said.

The Moshier family, Katie, Natalie and others attended church services that morning, followed by a trip to Moshier's graveside in the Bethlehem Cemetery.

"It was a nice day for reflection," Katie said.

Moshier's friend, Geoff Decker, has organized a 5K run/walk for April 28 in his memory. The event will raise money for charity.

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