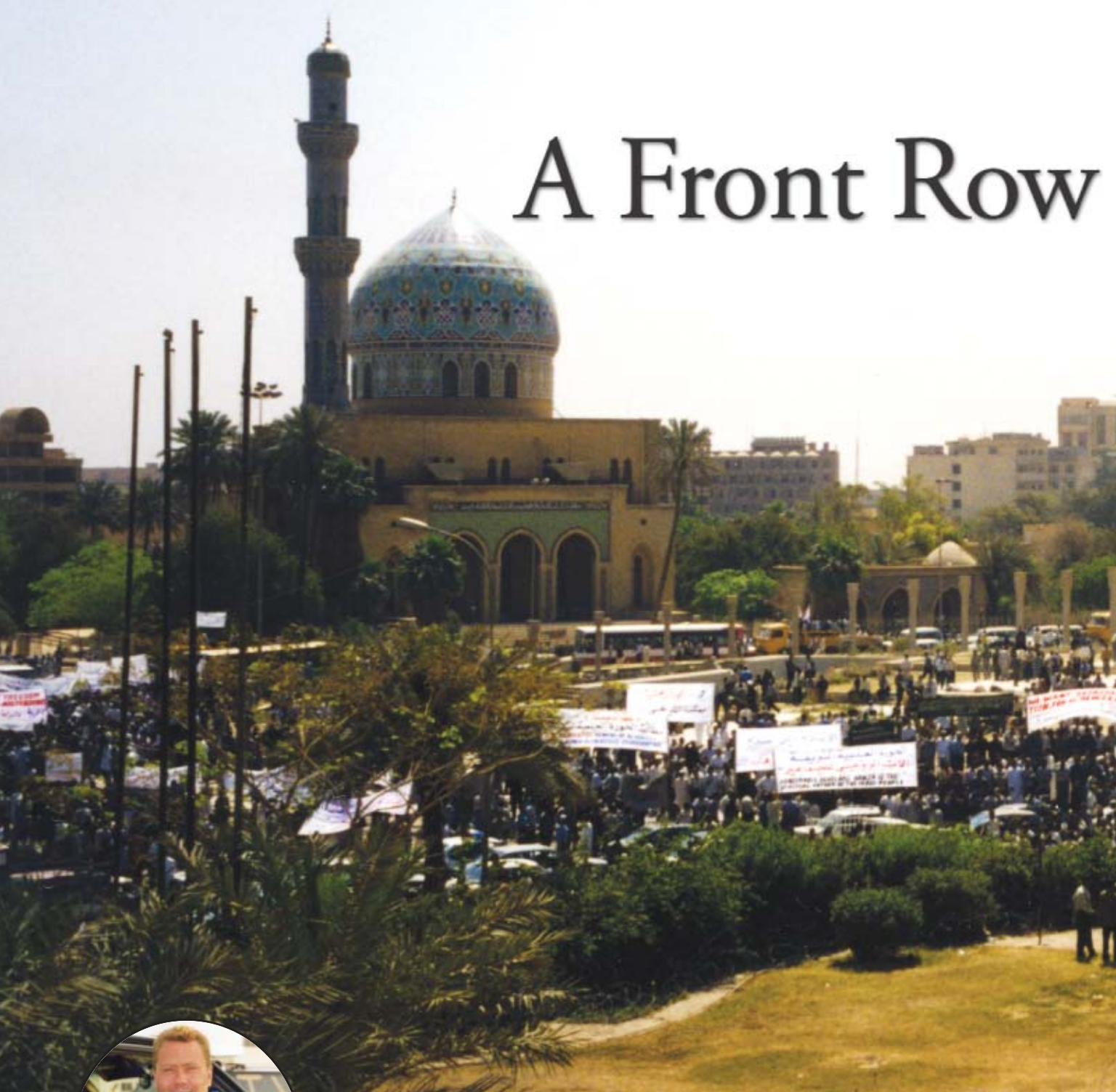


A Front Row



John Truitt '85 BS likes to be in the thick of things. As a photographer for CBS News, he hasn't been disappointed. He has witnessed and recorded many of the major news events that have shaped contemporary history—from wars, uprisings, and national tragedies, to a few good-old-fashioned happy endings.

Despite his rise as a successful network news photographer, a career in photography was not his original goal. Truitt has always had a passion for news and grew up wanting to be a reporter. After holding several jobs as a reporter and news editor, he opted for a career as a cameraman because he said it offered more job stability. Looking at stories through a lens, however, has not dulled his journalistic instincts; it seems only to have sharpened his eye for finding a good story.

Seat to History

Interview by KAREN WALLINGFORD '02 MA

Photography by JOHN TRUITT '85 BS



“I’m a journalist,” he said. “I just happen to carry a camera.”

One of his more recent assignments for CBS News was covering the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was in Iraq from April-June 2003 and then again for a brief period in December 2003.

I had a chance to talk to Truitt in November 2004. In addition to sharing some of the images he captured in the early days of major combat, he shared his reflections

on how he got to this point in his career, his experiences in Iraq, and his insights about the future of the country.

Pictured above: A large crowd of Shiites gather on Saddam Hussein’s former parade grounds in Baghdad to hold a demonstration. Truitt shot this image from the Palestine Hotel, where most Western journalists were lodged.

Inset photo: Truitt dons his flak jacket, one of the precautionary items supplied to journalists. Much of the time, though, he chose not to wear his protective gear, saying it made him feel like more of a target.



U.S. armored vehicles roll along the famed Iraqi parade route. The Hands of Victory monument, built in duplicate, mark the entrances to a parade ground constructed to commemorate Iraq's supposed victory in the Iran-Iraq war. Each triumphal arch consists of a pair of hands holding 140-foot crossed swords. The swords were cast from the melted-down guns of fallen Iraqi soldiers.

What ignited your interest in journalism?

I don't know. I was a janitor at Channel 6 in Marquette when I was 15 years old. I got fired from every fast food restaurant in Marquette, and that was the one place that didn't fire me. I actually love the news, and I love having a front row seat to history. So that's why I kept it up.

What made you decide to attend NMU?

I grew up in Marquette, so all I wanted to do was to be in a warm weather-climate. I applied to ridiculous places like Pepperdine, Miami University, and the University of Hawaii. When all of my friends got the giant packet of information from Michigan State and University of Michigan, and I got a tiny little 3x5 card that just said, "No. Sorry," I was crushed, but in hindsight, I think I got a much better education than anyone who has gone to any of the larger universities.

What faculty members inspired you?

You know, I eked my way through high school, and I graduated from Northern with honors. It's because my education was fostered by the people who provided it. People like Bill Buccalo (Communications and Performance Studies, retired), Barry Knight (History, retired), and Louise Bourgault (Communications and Performance Studies).

What do you remember about each of them?

Dr. Buccalo is like a member of my family. Every time I come back to Marquette, I go see him and his wife. He's just a super guy. He has knowledge of broadcasting that reaches back decades. And he knows the way broadcasting should be. Dr. Buccalo doesn't see broadcasting as a money-making endeavor. He sees it as a public concern, and a public trust, and a public utility. I've taken the tenets of journalism from what I learned from him. It's not just to make a buck, it's to inform and to educate.

Barry Knight has always been one of my favorite, favorite instructors at that entire university. He portrayed history as a current event. He portrayed history as if it were news because history and journalism go hand in hand. He was very inspirational to me.

And Louise... Louise really shared my wanderlust and my interest in international affairs. She really opened a window to international events and how broadcasting plays out in other countries.

How did your career develop?

I graduated in December of '85 and went to Kalamazoo, Michigan, at WWMT-TV, and then I went to be the bureau chief of their Grand Rapids office. From there, I moved to Philadelphia and was chief editor for FOX televi-

sion in Philadelphia. Then I went to the Discovery Channel in Philadelphia, where I was the director of photography for a travel show. For about 3 1/2 years, we traveled to 56 countries doing shows about festivals and crazy things.

I left there and went back to Chicago and worked at WBBM-TV, and then I went to CBS News. I started at CBS in 1997.

What kind of stories have you covered for CBS?

Well, 9/11. I was at ground zero for a month and a half. We were there when it happened. The 2004 presidential campaign, the 2000 presidential campaign, every hurricane you can imagine. I covered the miners who were trapped in Pennsylvania. I was working a camera when they pulled the miners out. I covered the first Gulf War with FOX in Philadelphia. I covered Kosovo with BBM in Chicago. I was in Panama covering Noriega. And the most important thing is the Iraq war that I just was at.

Did you volunteer for that assignment?

Absolutely.

Why?

It's where the action is. It's what's going on. We had to go to hostile environment training in Virginia for two weeks and learn how to deal with things like nerve gas and hostile takeovers and being kidnapped. We were trained by former Royal Marines.

Did the training you received adequately prepare you for what you actually experienced?

Not really. I mean, there was a lot of gunfire. There were people with guns everywhere. I found that the most important thing was to just smile and not be threatening. Common sense will keep you alive in Iraq. Being a cowboy will get you killed. The guy who drove me in, from Iman, Jordan, he was killed. He had his head cut off. He was a friend of mine.



The Iraqi Olympic headquarters was one of the first buildings blasted by U.S.-led warplanes and missiles. Saddam's son, Odai, who was the head of the Iraqi National Olympic Committee, was said to have run a torture center in the building for athletes whose performance failed to meet his expectations.



While in Iraq, Truitt played soccer in the street outside his hotel with Abas (center) before complications from an eye infection left the boy blind. The two tanks in this picture served as the goal for their game.

How horrifying.

It's awful. But it happens.

How did your family feel about your assignment?

My parents didn't know I was there at first. I told them I was in Germany. But after a while I told them. It was scary for them. It's much scarier to look at Iraq from the United States point of view. But when you're there you're not afraid because you're there. It's like once you've been through something you're not afraid of it anymore. People are always more afraid of the unknown. And Iraq seems so far away.

Were you embedded?

No. We were completely independent.

How did you decide what to cover?

Whatever came our way. Whatever intelligence we gathered or heard about, if we deemed it as newsworthy, we covered it.

What was it like to cover a war zone?

Some things were gruesome. I was the first person to shoot the storming of Saddam's son's house where we found human bones in a lion's cage. And then the mass graves in Babylon, I was the first Western journalist to go there and report on that. We were there when they

pulled Saddam's statue down. And we were at Saddam's palace and got to see his gold toilet. Crazy stuff.

But the one thing, if I were to really get one message across, is about the people of Iraq. I've been to a few places in the world. And I think some of the Iraqis that I've met, and most of the Iraqi people are some of the nicest people I've ever come across. They're incredibly warm, very friendly, very quick to smile. I was there during a time when there was a lot of hope and a lot of faith in the future. But they were suffering under a great deal of hardship.

Beyond just the war?

Oh yeah. We found several stories of how kids go without proper medical care. A friend of mine's kid—beautiful little girl—she was 11 months old, and she had an infection in her mouth from teething. She died because she couldn't get antibiotics. Another little boy I know—I used to play soccer with him in the street in front of the hotel—he went blind because he had an eye infection.

We went to a lot of orphanages. I saw a lot of displaced kids because their parents were killed or rounded up by Saddam. A very bleak place, but with people who have heart. Wonderful, gorgeous people. They had a great deal of hope. I think their hope is waning now.

In what way?

I put it like this: It's like going to a dentist and having him drill and get rid of cavity in your tooth, but he doesn't fill it in. This is what we've done in Iraq, I think. We got rid of an evil dictator, but we haven't patched the hole yet.

Where there times when you were in imminent danger?

You mean like when a guy runs out from behind an alleyway and points an AK-47 at my head?

How did you deal with that?

I just smiled at him. I pointed the camera at him. He didn't want to hurt me. We were there right after the war started, and he had never seen a Western journalist. All he wanted to do was show me his new gun. He fired it off.

How has your experience in Iraq changed the way you look at your profession and your life?

It basically made me realize that people are people. No matter where you go in this world—whether it's in Mandarin China, Viet Nam, Africa, Iraq—people want the same thing out of life. They want to be happy. They want to be free, and they want to be free of an evil dictator. How it's changed me is that I could never ever judge another human being as long as I live.

What do you think of the situation in Iraq currently?

I'm very close with a lot of people who are still there, and it's just getting worse. The reconstruction is wonderful, but the country and the people can't progress until they have their own free elections and get to govern themselves. They have to make sure that it's a democracy before anything.

You know the three colors of the Iraqi flag represent the three striations of the culture—the rural Shiites, the urban Sunni's, and the Kurds up to the north. They are politically bound together, but socially and philosophically, they're so different. I don't think they'll ever have one unified country. It's a mess.

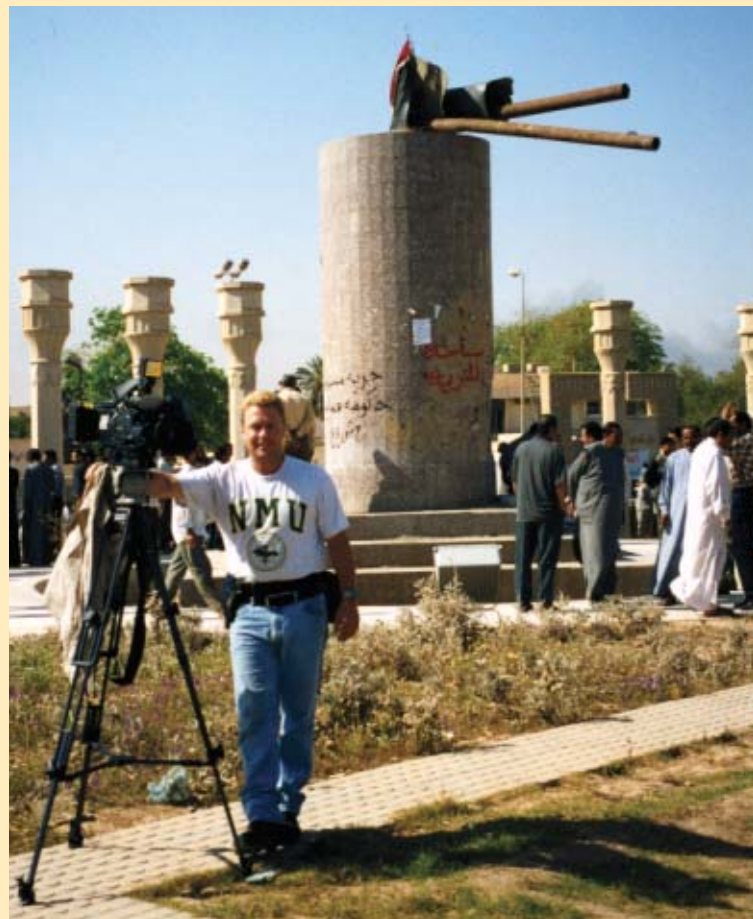
Would you go back into a war zone?

Sure. It's what I do. You gotta have the front row seat to history. And with that comes a tremendous amount of responsibility. It's an absolute honor to be able to photograph world events that shape our lives. It's not a privilege; it's nothing more than an honor.

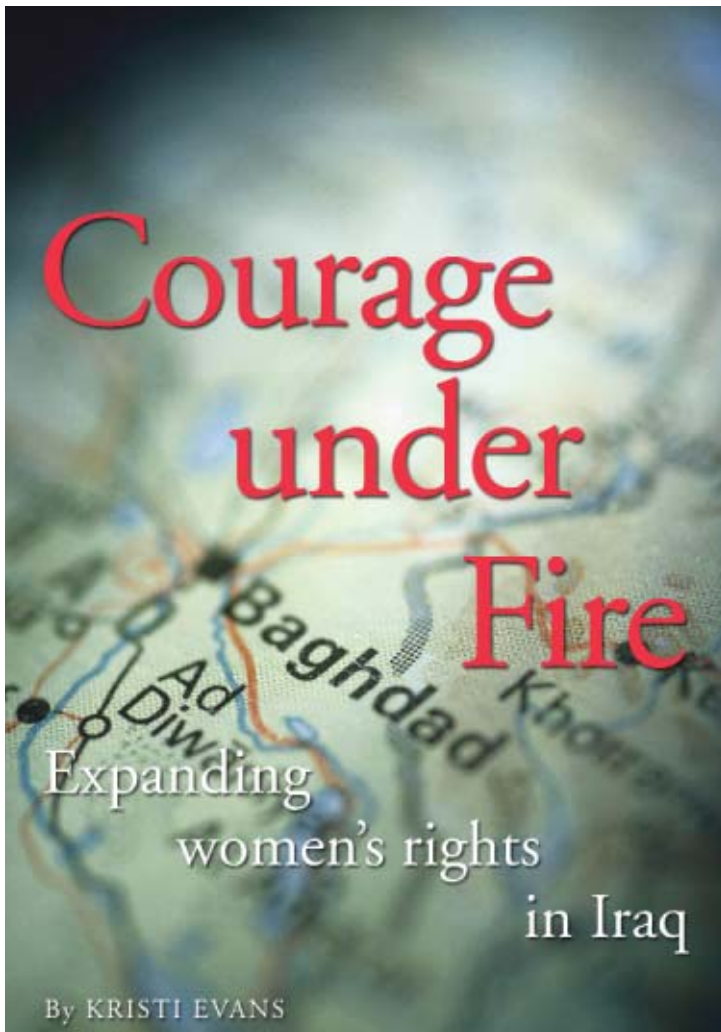
What role did your NMU education play in your success?

There are opportunities that exist where you least expect them. There are places to learn and things to listen to if you would just take the time to look around and exploit opportunities that might not be blatant. Because in my profession, academic learning is a very minimal part of the education process. It's more hands on, so the more you can actually do, the better off you'll be.

At Northern, we're able to do that. As a freshman, I was able to work at WBKX (now WUPX) on the air and at WNMU. At Michigan State, I would have been stuck in a lecture hall. So Northern afforded me the opportunity to apply my trade early on, and actually have experience, rather than read about it in a book. I found my niche at NMU, and I liked it. ■



Truitt poses in front of the pedestal which used to support the 40-foot bronze statue of Saddam Hussein in central Baghdad's Al-Firdos Square shortly after a U.S. Marine armored recovery vehicle helped topple the monument. Photograph courtesy of CBS News.



Many Iraqi women are risking their lives in order to take a role in the country's new government. The top photo shows Kristi Gruizenga with the director of the Assyrian Christian Women's Union, Ban Jamil Katto, and her daughter. The bottom photo shows Gruizenga with Fatima, a member of the Baghdad City Council.

Danger managed to penetrate the heavily fortified Baghdad Green Zone just days before **Kristi Gruizenga '99 BS** was scheduled to leave Iraq. She was at a café having lunch with a friend when a suicide bomb detonated nearby.

"It happened so fast I don't remember hearing a boom," she recalled. "In the time it takes to blink, I went from sitting in a chair to lying on the ground. I have a lot of bad burns and deep shrapnel wounds on my legs. My arms and face were also cut up. My right eardrum was 70 percent ruptured, and I will need surgery to get my hearing back."

Moments earlier, another bomb blast within the zone killed four American security workers. They were friends of Gruizenga's. She later learned the men were in the process of buying a gift for her going-away party that evening.

At the time of the bombing, Gruizenga was at the end of her nine-month tour in Iraq as a foreign services specialist with the U.S. State Department. She worked with the Coalition Provisional Authority and was responsible for implementing human rights and democracy projects that focused on women's issues.

She said she is humbled by the courage of Iraqi women who are eager to play a more active role in the new government, even at the risk of losing favor with their families or becoming a target for terrorists. Some of those Gruizenga assisted were among the first to offer support as she lay physically and emotionally wounded.

"After the explosion, a group of them came to see me," she said. "They told me how much I had helped them and how brave I was. I couldn't accept that because, for me, it was just a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. But they put themselves out there every day knowing they could be killed. That takes a lot more bravery."

When she began her tour in February 2004, Gruizenga initially helped with grant-writing requests to secure funding for programs ranging from language, sewing, and cosmetology classes to a women's shelter. The latter is not only a refuge for victims of abuse; it protects women who have been raped and risk retaliation from family members for "shaming" them.

"There are a lot of highly motivated, well-educated, and ambitious Iraqi women who want to see their country do well and want to take some ownership of that," she said. "They were treated like second-class citizens under Saddam, but now they see an opportunity for change. But there are still challenges. Some of the Islamic fundamentalists in positions of power are opposed to female involvement, and the Ministry of the Interior is requiring women to have permission from their father, husband, or brother in order to receive a passport."

Gruizenga also served as an adviser to a Kurdish woman who was the Minister of State for Women's Affairs. She said it was a positive step that such a position was created by the interim Iraqi government, but because there were individuals within the government who perceived it as "somewhat of a joke," Gruizenga tried to help gain legiti-

macy for the organization and obtain funding for programs. Several initiatives were geared toward the elections slated for January—from educating women on how to vote and what to expect come election day to encouraging them to run for office.

"It was a mixed response," she explained. "Most women thought it was a great idea, but they were very hesitant to get involved. They didn't know how their families would approve of taking a visible role in the new government. It was also a security issue. Outspoken, educated women leaders were targeted by the terrorists. The last thing the terrorists want are strong women. Because of that, some were inclined to back off and not be too high profile."

Energized by those who wanted to forge ahead as active participants, Gruizenga nominated a few Iraqi women to travel to Washington, D.C., for various training programs. One was able to observe the U.S. elections so that she could share her observations with Iraqis and help with the balloting in her own country.

"I think we made a lot of progress there," she added. "Even if there weren't measurable results, I think the Iraqi women seeing American professional women doing the type of work we were doing to help them may have inspired them to do the same. There's certainly much more left to be done. I just don't know if it can happen at this point because the security situation has made it difficult."

Back in February, Gruizenga could travel around Baghdad with an Iraqi driver to interact with civilians in their homes. When the insurgency escalated two months

later, she was confined to the Green Zone around Saddam Hussein's former palace. Her capacity for outreach was severely limited.

"It's frustrating because you can't build a democracy from inside your office in the Green Zone. If you leave, there's a risk you'll be shot or kidnapped. Working in the presidential palace was interesting, but very depressing. It had beautiful crystal chandeliers and golden doors, but you realize how much money was wasted on the fancy décor while most residents suffered in poverty. It was like a Third World country in many ways. We were able to leave the zone sometimes, but it was with a convoy of armored vehicles and tanks and lots of security guards."

Gruizenga was recuperating at her parents' Kalamazoo home when interviewed by phone in November. She was planning to make a delayed return to Kiev, Ukraine, where she was stationed prior to volunteering for duty in Iraq. In June, she will begin her next assignment at The Hague in the Netherlands.

No matter where her job takes her, Gruizenga will never forget the Iraqi women she befriended. Despite the traumatic ending—which could have easily spawned bitterness and regret—Gruizenga remains upbeat. She still considers Iraq the experience of a lifetime.

"I was exposed to a culture I will never be able to experience again in that way—a whole new society built after years of oppression. Experiencing it first hand taught me so much about how good we have it in the United States. It also taught me about the human spirit and how strong people can be in the face of adversity." ■



Bombs to Building Blocks

Laying the foundation for a new generation

By KRISTI EVANS



Major Paul Phillips never questioned the necessity or value of the U.S. military presence in Iraq. But if he had any doubts about his personal contributions to the reconstruction efforts, they were quickly erased the moment a \$30,000 bounty was placed on his head.

“Most officers had bounties on their heads because the insurgents realized we were the money men, and if they took us out, the money might stop flowing toward measures to help people or improve things,” he said. “It was kind of disheartening until you found out others were in the same boat.”

Phillips (pictured above, center) had recently been hired as a professor in the military science department at NMU when his Green Bay-based 432nd Civil Affairs Battalion was deployed in March 2003. They spent 14 months in Iraq. The first six were in Diwanyah, about 100 miles south of Baghdad. Phillips said the time flew by with few problems. But when they moved to Al Qaim, a mile from the Syrian border, the pace slowed and the situation worsened.

“Reporters and others have called it ‘The Wild West’ because it was like something out of the 1800s, with bandits, thugs, thieves, and smugglers,” he explained. “We called it the main rat line between the Syrian border and Fallujah and Baghdad. That’s where the insurgents funneled through. We were attacked every two or three days. Fortunately, I didn’t lose anyone.”

Phillips’ responsibilities during the combat phase were to keep Iraqi civilians away from the battlefield, provide humanitarian assistance for those displaced to refugee camps, and offer guidance to commanders regarding cultural matters.

During the reconstruction period, the duties shifted. One of the biggest missions was to oversee the renovation of schools, which Phillips described as dilapidated.

“Saddam did not put much money into education,” he said. “We brought in new desks and chalkboards. We provided supplies because most students didn’t have much. We also replaced the textbooks because they were inaccurate, outdated, and glorified Saddam. It was amazing some of the things you would see in elementary and nursery schools. There were murals on the walls and drawings by young students that showed war, bombs blowing up, people dying (pictured at left). They were teaching these kids to hate from the get-go. We removed the propaganda and made the schools more proper learning environments.”

A fellow officer, who was an elementary school principal in Wisconsin, took the lead in training teachers and setting up administrative systems. Phillips said Iraqi children were not required to attend school previously, and many opted out in favor of trying to raise money for their poor families. When his battalion left, he said attendance had climbed to about 80 percent.

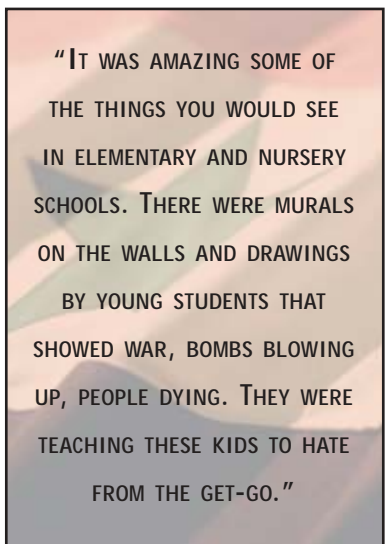
Phillips and his battalion were also charged with establishing city and provincial councils, bringing in bankers to help with the country’s financial systems, training new police forces, and arranging for contractors to fix power plants and water sanitation facilities.

“Before, sewage was flowing down the streets, and kids were playing in it,” he said. “Now, we’re trying to fix sewage treatment facilities and getting rid of garbage.

“Electricity is coming back on

line,” he added. “Saddam kept most of the power for himself and his followers. Baghdad was consuming 60 percent of available electricity originally. Saddam would rotate power to the rest of his country, but would use it as a tool to control his people. Now we’ve made it more equitable so Baghdad gets only 27 percent.”

Phillips contends that the media-filtered view of Iraq tilts toward the negative and too often ignores the positive signs of progress.



“Their economy is up, which you can tell by the number of imports coming in—cars, cell phones, and other products,” he said. “Salaries have improved from \$17 per month for a family when we got there to about \$400 per month. The Iraqis can communicate with the outside world through telephone service and Internet access. In a town I was in, the child mortality rate due to dysentery was about 30 per month. We came in and fixed a couple of pumps for about \$2,000 and dropped the mortality rate to three per month.”

Phillips said Iraqi citizens, particularly the Shia in the south, have

been responsive to the coalition efforts, even holding public demonstrations expressing thanks.

“In the Sunni region near the Syrian border, I think they are glad we’re there, but they only express it privately. They are fearful of showing any public support because they could end up dead. There were 30 murders in 30 days toward the end of my tour in one town. Apparently they were people showing support for the coalition forces. The Shia are trying to take power, and the Sunnis don’t want to give it up. The United States is in it for the long haul now because if we left there would be a major civil war.”

Phillips is able to share some of his “eye-opening” experiences with the cadets in the NMU Wildcat Battalion. He said anyone serving in the military these days is likely to spend at least some time in either Iraq or Afghanistan, so they should be prepared for modern facets of war such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs)—roadside bombs—and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs). “I wish I had training on those before I left because I had my share of encounters with both.”

He left for Iraq with lofty ambitions of facilitating substantial and immediate change, but Phillips said he received a reality check near the Syrian border.

“Things were tougher than I thought they would be, and people weren’t reacting the way we wanted them to. Sometimes you wanted to beat your head against the wall. But then you look back and see that you did make at least some little changes, which combined with others to create bigger change. I’m proud of what we accomplished, but there’s still a lot to do.” ■