

Reporting from Wainwright, Alberta

October 12, 2005

Hi everyone,

Just wanted to let you know I have survived the first few days. In fact, we haven't been 'embedded' with a unit yet, so I have not experienced life in the field per se. That will happen in the second week.

You know how we have this image of the army as running like clockwork, 0800 hours, etc? Well, it is the most bureaucratic, hierarchic, complex, frustrating organization I have encountered, and it has been very difficult to get things done efficiently. We often spend 2 hours a day just trying to figure out which 'tasks' or exercises are happening THAT DAY that might be interesting for us to shoot, never mind finding out the day before or planning a couple of days ahead.

We are getting interesting footage but some days are not very productive. All the cliches apply - soldiers running, dropping to the ground, cradling their weapons, handling ammo, etc. I have ridden in a LAV (light armour vehicle) and climbed on top of one too (we shot an interview up there). (Note to self: I have to get a photo of myself up there.)

My general impression is that this training site is like a giant summer camp for big boys who like to play with guns, trucks and tanks. Except they play in real life, or at least in a reasonable facsimile of a strange alternative reality. Most of these guys are chomping at the bit to be deployed to Afghanistan. They will only find out which units get to go in November, which means some of them have been training for a year or more, in vain.

On the positive side, the weather has been amazing so far. Sunny every day, and warmer than normal for these parts. It is often -4 or so when we leave around 7:30 AM (excuse me, 0730 hours) but by 1400 in the afternoon, it is 12-16 degrees, always sunny, nary a cloud in the sky.

All in all, we've met some really nice people and most guys are really accommodating, once we find out who is the right guy to talk to.

"Major Fuck-Up? No, but Lieutenant Fuck-Up will be happy to see you..."

Aside from a few Public Affairs Officers, I have seen maybe 5 women in the field over 5 days (out of maybe 4000 people). Not too many girls in combat trades. Thank goodness...

This is Corporal Nardella reporting from a safe distance away from the live fire exercise.

At ease.

PART II – THE DIARY

Random thoughts:

October 14

On two separate days so far on this trip, I have seen more deer than women. (Yes, including one in the headlights.)

October 15 – early

Oh my god, the real, full-fledged brigade training exercise starts today. We really have to get there before the “attack”. Let’s leave the hotel at 0415 hours to make sure we can get to the “objective” before 0500 hours, and then wait and shiver for three hours to witness... absolutely nothing, because they changed their “plan” when they didn’t see any “enemy soldiers” there.

October 15 – later

As I lay quietly in a trench, for seven more hours of waiting – time flies when you’re in the Army – I think to myself: How long would it take ME to find the “enemy” in the countryside? For crying out loud, just go looking where the BRIGHT BLUE porta-potties have been set up in advance.

NOTE to self: start-up business idea – porta-potties in camouflage colours.

October 16

Language is funny.

Like, for instance, when a Major tells you at 1000 hours under a bright blue sun-filled sky, "Oh yes, we're looking into getting you guys set up with a tent", does that mean:

A) you video people are mere weakling civilians, so we have a nice tent that we're heating up as we speak, which you will be able to take possession of at a reasonable time, say 1700 hours.

B) I'm sorry you have to live with us in these inhuman conditions, and the best I can do is to provide you with a gargantuan 10-man tent that a few soldiers will help you put up, whenever they have a spare minute.

C) I will be disappearing around 2100 hours without having found you said-tent, and you will need to look up my adjutant, who doesn't know you, and beg him to provide you with any tent whatsoever, which you will then need to set up in the dark at 2330 hours, on a patch of rugged terrain in the woods where you are absolutely forbidden to turn on any

light, lest you tip off the "enemies" of our position, with only the bitter wind and the moon as your guiding light.

When an Army Public Affairs Officer is speaking, the answer is C.

October 17

For the first time in my life, when I woke up this morning, I wiped tiny little icicles out of my eyes.

October 18

Newsflash: War is boring. *

*NOTE: of course, this remark is meant in the most light-hearted, humorous way, not at all in a gratuitously flippant, insensitive way.

October 18 – later

Cows are very stupid animals.

October 18 – even later

You know, rations aren't half-bad, unless you have to eat them three times a day for weeks on end. When else am I going to try Hungarian Ghoulish?

October 19 – early

For the first time in my life, I slept in a van. (I recommend it – it's flat, it cuts off the wind better than a tent, and the steering wheel doesn't snore.)

October 19 – later

Language is funny, part II:

In the following sentence, can you identify which words are people, places or organizations, boys & girls?

Sample Army sentence:

CFJSR is in touch with CFIOG POC at HQ and 2 EW will help production company WRT request by MWO, reference BTE 05 and provide pers through 1 Sigs Sqn.

October 20

While we were waiting today (only 3 hours – things are looking up), we played tic-tac-toe in the dust on the hood of our van. The design goes nicely with the acronym we

chose for ourselves, which now adorns the side of our van. We are officially TOW (Tired of Waiting). Which is, in fact, just the polite version of what we actually are, namely POW.

October 23

Okay, enough of this nonsense. Last couple of days of shooting in Edmonton: cancelled.

Good things about coming home:

- * Mom's food.
- * TV channel grid is back to normal.
- * no need to find creative new contorsions to hold myself up off the toilet seat.

Ah, yes, it's good to be back.

Corporal Nardella, on leave.

Indefinitely.