

Band of Soldiers rocks

By MAJ Laura Kenney

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — Begin with a strong riff of rock, add seasoned leadership and friendship tested under fire, blend in some hip-hop and a touch of wry humor, fold in sweat, blood, fear and salt from the Iraqi desert, throw in rhythmic, pointed rap and finish with lyrics red, white, blue and OD green, and you get ... Lucid Dissent.

Lucid Dissent is the name of a band formed of four Soldiers, who, serving together in Iraq during OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, created a musical combination that is now earning acclaim locally — for their unique sound, but, more importantly, for their distinctive message. Two, CPT Chris Wolfe and CPT Dave Childress, belong to the 1st Space Brigade, U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/U.S. Army Forces Strategic Command, another, CPT Luis Castellanos, hails from the 100th Missile Defense Brigade (Ground-based Midcourse Defense), and the fourth, Geoff Burgess, has traded in his BDUs and captain's bars for civilian clothes.

The group is gaining popularity in this area and in Denver, has been interviewed on local television channels, played at Vail Ski Resort, had numerous other gigs, and is scheduled to be part of a large benefit for Soldiers in July. They have one CD out, a Web site — www.luciddissent.com — and a growing fan base; even a T-shirt.

The four men, all ranging in age from 26 to 27, and all West Point graduates, served together in Iraq with the 1st Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, out of Fort Carson, Colo. Each was an executive officer for various line units within the squadron. Arriving over-

seas in April 2003, their initial six-month tour turned into a yearlong deployment. They were primarily stationed along the Syrian border, in the province of Al Anbar, which included the hotbeds of Fallujah and Al Qa'im. Their missions varied from day to day — combat patrols aimed at putting down insurgents, civil affairs-type assignments such as helping to rebuild hospitals and schools, and training Iraqis who would become future leaders of a civil defense corps.

Their primary message and their band's thought-provoking name are based on the same premise.

"The mainstream media pretty much present what we consider a skewed version of what's happening over there," said Burgess. "We don't, in our songs, sugarcoat things — we experienced a wide range of emotions, we had Soldiers die and others get horribly wounded — but there is so much good getting absolutely no recognition whatsoever. We think that the jobs our Soldiers, Airmen, Marines and Sailors are doing around the world, sacrificing their own freedoms to earn or preserve them for others, is a story worth telling. We do so in many of our songs."

Lucid, meaning clear thinking, and dissent, as in differing from the mainstream, characterizes more than their music.

"We," said Childress, looking at each band member as he spoke to ensure he was talking for them all, "joined the military, went to West Point, and were proud to serve in Iraq. We did this because we wanted to serve something greater than ourselves. We think that holds true for pretty much everyone serving in the military — which speaks to the integrity of these fighting men and

The members of Lucid Dissent, front left; CPT Dave Childress, SMDC/ARSTRAT, 1st Space Brigade S-3 , front right; CPT Chris Wolfe, SMDC/ARSTRAT, 1st Space Brigade S-3, top left; former CPT Geoff Burgess, civilian now working with Pulte Homes in Colorado Springs, Colo., and top right, CPT Luis Castellanos, 100th Missile Defense Brigade (Ground-based Midcourse Defense). *Photo by SFC Dennis Beebe*





women. These people should be recognized as America's role models; we're not talking about ourselves, but about the larger whole. If we can, individually and through our music, influence for the greater good, then that's a good thing."

Apparently, they're already reaching some of those goals, as the following excerpt from a fan's e-mail attests.

"My friend's daughter told me about your band. I listened to a bit, wondering if my 12-year-old son would enjoy your music (I think he will!). I worried about the lyrics, but you incredibly included them on the Web site! No more worries. I think what you guys are doing is absolutely fantastic! This Army wife is proud of you: you stand up for what you believe in, you've found a way to express your creative side, AND you're finding a way to give back. You guys are terrific ... I only hope my son grows up to be a little like you!"

Not that, idealism and enthusiasm aside, these combat tested young vets are saintly and only play to do good. Far from it ... making music is a passion for each one, and the original making of it was a form of escape from the hostile and sometimes fearsome landscape of Iraq.

Burgess already knew how to play drums and piano, but neither offered portability when it came to deploying to a hostile fire zone, so he brought with him a guitar that he planned to learn to play. In August of that year, all four officers found themselves, after a squad-

ron reorganization move, at Base Camp Tiger. They started jamming together as a release valve, a way to let off steam after a demanding and sometimes dangerous day.

"You'd get shot at while driving in a convoy to get supplies, so playing music during some rare down time was an escape, a release," said Wolfe.

The other three already knew how to play guitar, and Childress had his own mailed to him from home. Castellanos and Wolfe grew tired of sharing, and paid some contractors with more mobility to purchase guitars for them during a trip to Baghdad.

The wry humor portion of the group's mix, of a decidedly morbid and soldierly bent, is noticeable in the names the two gave their guitars. They named them Uday and Qusay, after deposed dictator Saddam Hussein's sons, who were killed during the conflict.

The group originally just played music they all knew and had grown up with. They mostly played in Burgess' office, set up in a blown-out train station. It was also conveniently located next to a Morale, Welfare and Recreation office, so they often had what equated to a ready-made audience.

Soon, however, they began writing their own songs, expressing the sometimes warring feelings of anger, patriotism and fear engendered by their dangerous occupations. The following is excerpted from a song called "These eyes."

CPT Dave Childress, former CPT Geoff Burgess, CPT Luis Castellanos, and CPT Chris Wolfe, members of Lucid Dissent performed at a farewell concert for the Soldiers of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, in a hangar at Butts Army Air Field on Fort Carson, Colo. The band members had been with the 3rd ACR during its first deployment and wanted to perform for their friends, peers, Soldiers and officers before they headed back to Iraq this last April.

Photo by SFC Dennis Beebe



*I've shed my blood and tears, pushed aside my
screaming fears
A fallen brother in my arms, takes his last
breath
Virtue in his heart remains, all my innocence
now stained
Rage consumes me, darkness looms, could I've
done more
I just can't close my eyes I won't
Turn from this tearing at my soul
Stand by and watch this storm take hold
Take a look through these eyes
A blackened silence, the folding of our flag
Lone pair of empty boots, behind a sharpened
blade
The lasting memories of sacrifices made
Never forgotten, a child of the brave*

The idea of actually forming a “real” group, going professional, didn’t take root until the group was in the redeployment phase. They had relocated again, to Kuwait, and, while relaxing at a well set up MWR facility nicknamed the Marble Palace, the soon-to-be band had an epiphany.

“The place had electric guitars, drums, a good sound system. Geoff (Burgess) casually said, ‘Hey, I can play drums,’ and we were like, cool, okay, play. He picked up the sticks, and ... went to town. We were blown away, literally, our jaws dropped, he was so tremendous. People were pouring in the doors to see who and what was playing. The three

of us just kind of looked at each other, and we knew then we could take this thing further,” said Childress.

Castellanos is the lead singer, but the other members of the band also sing, and take turns at lead. Wolfe does most of the rapping and plays bass. All four also write. Burgess plays drums, and Childress and Castellanos play guitar.

They came up with the name Lucid Dissent in a brainstorming session.

“Dave (Childress) and I were kicking around words to go with ‘lucid’... we knew we wanted that in there... then, one of us said ‘dissent,’ and it clicked for all of us,” said Castellanos.

After returning stateside in April 2004, the group, as part of their squadron, took block leave for a month, then returned to both military life, and the pursuit of dreams of musical glory.

“Using our ‘Baghdad Savings Plan’ (reference to no place to spend the tax-free money one earns in a hazardous duty zone) we were able to buy top-notch equipment for our band, from sound systems to instruments. Things took off after that,” said Wolfe.

Burgess left the military, although he remains in the Individual Ready Reserve, and is considering joining the Active Reserve. He found a local job in construction management, enabling him to continue work with the band. The other three secured military positions within the 1st Space Brigade and the new Missile Defense Brigade, both based locally.

“We’ve been blessed, our commands are very support-

Tip of the Sphere



CPT Chris Wolfe, left, and then CPT Geoff Burgess practice during some down time while deployed to Iraq with the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in support of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM. Photo by CPT Dave Childress

ive of our musical aspirations. We just played for our old regiment's farewell party; they're going back to Iraq soon, so it felt right to be part of that ceremony," said Castellanos.

The band has written and played more than their trademark songs about war, loyalty and loss. They have love ballads, fun songs, etc.

"We have dark stuff, happy stuff, depends on the mood we were in at the time," said Childress. "In Iraq, if we happened to be separated, and inspiration struck, we'd be sending musical files via e-mail. Chris (Wolfe) got in this creative streak while on a different mission for awhile, and he was burning up the wires."

What does the future hold?

"It would be great if we became rich and famous with this, but a part of our philosophy and goals is to influence people for good through our music, so to whatever extent we do that, we feel successful," said Burgess. "And no matter what, we enjoy what we do."

Lucid Dissent also contributes a significant portion of proceeds to Soldier-affiliated charities as a way of giving back. They focus on organizations that help soldiers and families affected by the Global War on Terror.

As to the hero label some of their fans put on them,

and the role model image they want to project? The band rejects the concept that they, particularly, are heroes, but ...

Castellanos was awarded the Soldiers Medal for risking his own life twice in attempts to save Soldiers from drowning. Burgess received the Purple Heart after being wounded in combat operations and the Bronze Star for valor. Wolfe was awarded the Bronze Star for excellence in performance of duty in a combat environment. Childress earned a Bronze Star for valor in his efforts at subduing violent insurgents.

All four band members served with honor and distinction at a dangerous time in their nation's history. All four figuratively or literally wear the American flag on their sleeve ...

And in their music.

MAJ Laura Kenney is an Active Guard Reservist serving as the public affairs officer for the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/U.S. Army Forces Strategic Command's 100th Missile Defense Brigade in Colorado Springs, Colo. She served five years active duty as an enlisted journalist with Air Defense Command in Germany. As a commissioned Reserve officer, she performed public affairs in the Gulf War theater, and served as deputy public affairs officer for the American sector in Kosovo in 2001.



Clockwise from top left, CPT Dave Childress, CPT Luis Castellanos, former CPT Geoff Burgess, and CPT Chris Wolfe, members of Lucid Dissent show their stuff at a recent concert. *Photo by SFC Dennis Beebe*

