

What you didn't know ...

Charlie came by the office waving a printed copy of an e-mail he received during the night from Iraq. "This is what I've been talking about," he said in his typical loud voice. "Old School Army. We need more of that around here."

Charlie is hard-of-hearing from 30 years of enlisted service in the Army around guns, so most of us around the office have learned to tolerate his disturbingly loud voice. Still on this morning, as is the case for most mornings, his big booming voice interrupted my quiet room. I jumped and Charlie scolded me for being too jumpy. I scolded him for sneaking up on a guy. Then he planted the page in the center of my desk, folded his arms across his chest and sat down to await my response.

I read the letter. It was from a colonel in Iraq telling Charlie that she was proud of him as a parent. Charlie is a retired Army command sergeant major. Charlie's eldest son, a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, is a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force who had just completed a tour in Iraq working for the colonel who wrote the letter. It was only a couple sentences long and it really didn't say much more than telling a parent his son had contributed to a very complicated war effort. "Despite what you may hear in the media (about Iraq), we are making a difference. I may be too optimistic about it, but I really think we are and I know that you are proud your son is part of it."

"So when does he come home?" I asked Charlie. "Should be home in a few weeks," he said in as quiet a voice as any parent would use in that moment to show the relief only a parent could know. "I'm sending him an airplane ticket from my frequent flyer miles. His mom will be happy to see him home from the war." And it ended like that. Charlie with all the bravado his manhood, pride and poor hearing could muster was reduced to a quiet father reflecting on kind words about his son from a colonel he did not know commenting on a war he did not know. I am sure no words could adequately describe how he felt — or feels — about the e-mail saying his son was coming home safe and that he had made a great contribution.

A moment later Charlie was his old self snatching the letter off my desk and walking out the door.

As he left, I thought of my own daughter. She too graduated from the Air Force Academy, only for her it was a few short months ago. We sat in the football stadium as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld shook the hand of each of the nearly 900 graduating cadets. The night before, I had the privilege with her mother to swear her in as a second lieutenant. My take on Rumsfeld's words: These new lieutenants would be involved in a very difficult and long fight against terrorists and it would take courage for each of them to stand up with creative solutions which may go against the grain of narrow-minded thinking.

This isn't too far from the efforts of our Army friends involved in Space — not that they are up against opposition, but that they bring an outside-the-box capability. Today, six Soldiers from the 1st Space Brigade lined up in front of the American flag for a group photo. They head off soon to Iraq to bring their Space contributions to the fight. We all, like Charlie, will have our quiet moments for these friends and their contributions.

— Michael L. Howard
Editor in Chief