



The Old Ironsides Report



Saturday, December 27, 2003

Random 'any soldier' letter leads to marriage

Story by Spc. Shauna McRoberts, 1AD PAO

BAGHDAD, Iraq – It was late November of 1990 and the build-up of troops, equipment and supplies for the first Persian Gulf War had begun.

Capt. Mark Olinger, a logistics officer, was serving with the 528th Support Battalion, U.S. Army Special Operations Task Force, at the King Fahd International Airport in eastern Saudi Arabia.

During his time in Desert Storm, Olinger often visited Saudi Arabia's King Khalid Military City. During one visit for a planning conference, Olinger happened to grab a letter out of a stack of "Any Soldier Mail."

"I grabbed it because I liked the handwriting," said Olinger, now a lieutenant colonel serving in Iraq as the 1st Armored Division's logistics officer (G4). "And it was different; it was addressed with purple ink."

The letter was from Sandy Martin, a middle school choir teacher from Quilan, Texas. Little did Olinger know that this particular letter would change the rest of his life.

"My dad was in the Army and my mom's dad was in the Army," said Sandy. "It was just our patriotic duty to be supportive (of the troops)."

Olinger called it a "standard, patriotic" letter and said he wrote back a few days later with "the normal response: thank you for your support."

Within the next few weeks, Olinger had received another letter from Sandy and the two continued to correspond throughout the rest of the deployment.

"Her letters were nice and upbeat," said Olinger. "But there wasn't really a special connection."

However, when Olinger redeployed to Fort Bragg, N.C., in March 1991, Sandy extended an invitation for Olinger to visit her in Texas.

"Something intrigued me, probably something in one of her letters," said Olinger, who took her up on the offer to visit.

"I was excited to meet him," said Sandy. "But not because there had ever been anything romantic in our letters. We were a little too mature for that."

"I was looking forward to seeing her," said Olinger. "I even sent her flowers at school."

The two met during in early May of 1991. Olinger, on block leave, drove from North Carolina to Texas to see Sandy before flying to his home state of California. "It was love at first sight, however silly that sounds," said Sandy. "It was just a chemical reaction. It struck me that I was just so comfortable to be around him from the start, and knowing already from our letters that we shared so



Lt. Col. Mark Olinger, 1st Armored Division logistics officer, and his wife Sandy pose for a picture in April 2003, before Olinger deployed to Iraq. The couple met through "Any Soldier Mail" during the first Persian Gulf War. Courtesy photo.

many of the same beliefs and priorities in life made everything so easy."

"Right away we clicked," added Olinger.

The two spent several days together, dining at restaurants, visiting the Dallas fairgrounds and meeting Sandy's parents.

"The days were very fun and very relaxing," said Olinger. "They were good times."

Eventually, Olinger headed to California, but the two kept in touch by telephone while he was home on leave.

"I couldn't eat a thing the whole two weeks he was gone," said Sandy.

When Olinger returned to Sandy's house he proposed. "I felt like she was the one," he said.

Sandy accepted the proposal and six months later they were married. The Olingers celebrated their 12th wedding anniversary this December.

"During Desert Storm I wrote 12 letters and ended up with six pen pals and one husband," joked Sandy.

"We'd barely known each other a year and most of that time together was spent apart, but I have no regrets," said Olinger. "The two best things I've done in my life are joining the Army and marry Sandy."

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News...

Iran Quake Kills 4,000, State TV Says

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) - An earthquake devastated the southeastern Iranian city of Bam on Friday, leveling more than half the city's houses and its historic mud-brick fortress.

More than 4,000 people were killed and 30,000 injured, Iranian state television said. Legislator Hasan Khoshrou said the death toll could rise as high as 10,000, an estimate based on a helicopter flights showing about 60 percent of Bam's houses had been destroyed.

U.S. Quarantines Calves From Diseased Cow

WASHINGTON (AP) - U.S. officials have quarantined two calves from the Washington cow with mad cow disease, even though transmission of the disease from mother to calf is considered unlikely.

One calf is at the same dairy near Mabton, Wash., that was the final home of the stricken Holstein cow, said Dr. Ronald DeHaven, the Agriculture Department's chief veterinarian. The other calf is at a bull calf feeding operation in Sunnyside, Wash., DeHaven said.

Crews Search for Calif. Mudslide Victims

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. (AP) - Rescue crews slogged past fallen trees and boulders Friday in a search for at least 10 people missing at a youth camp after a mudslide, triggered by heavy rain, swept through forested foothills recently scorched by wildfire.

More than a dozen others were rescued. Traveling by foot because a road bridge was washed out, one team climbed up the steep terrain and another descended it in an effort to reach the Saint Sophia Camp in Waterman Canyon, just north of San Bernardino.

Rescuers Search for Benin Crash Survivors

COTONOU, Benin (AP) - Rescue teams searched waters off the West African nation of Benin on Friday in a desperate hunt for survivors of a plane crash that killed at least 111 people, the health minister said. The Boeing 727 crashed on takeoff Thursday, scattering debris into the Atlantic Ocean just 500 yards from the airport. On Friday, the bulk of the destroyed aircraft still lay in the water.

Israel Promises Retaliation for Bombing

JERUSALEM (AP) - Israel will target and kill Palestinian militants in retaliation for a suicide bombing that killed four Israelis, senior security sources said Friday. Leaders of Hamas, however, will be exempt from such strikes because the group has halted its attacks, the sources said.

Thursday's suicide bombing came minutes after an Israeli air strike in Gaza killed three Islamic Jihad militants and two civilians. The violence came after a relatively calm period and threatened tentative steps to renew peace talks.

Meanwhile back in the States...

'Naked Elves' Spreading Holiday Cheer

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) -- The Naked Elves are Alabama's newest holiday rage.

What began as a practical joke has evolved into an odd yuletide tradition: Grown men wearing red boxer shorts, Santa hats and lighted suspenders as they travel around Birmingham singing off-key carols.

Garnering fans in two counties, the Naked Elves have entertained at nearly 30 apartments, restaurants and homes with their slightly warped version of Christmas cheer.

Dozens of families got a visit from the men leading up to Christmas.

"It's so much fun to see their faces, especially when they don't know we are coming," said David Bryar, the head elf.

Five years ago, four guys gathered on the lawn of Neal Phillips' house clad only in boxers to tease Phillips' wife Sarah. Belting out an off-key version of traditional Christmas carols, the men stood nearly naked in the December night with nothing but their holiday spirit. And with that, a tradition was born.

Stealing from house to house Monday night, the men quietly parked and sneaked across the lawn of a home near Alabaster. Standing in a line, a designated elf delivered a quick push of the doorknob before rushing back to reclaim his place in line.

As the family came to the door, the caroling began. The Naked Elves delivered a rushed version of "Jingle Bells" that quickly evolved into "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." In less than a minute the elves were done, scampering to vehicles parked beneath a large tree.

The downside, of course, is the cold.

"The worst was one night when it was 21 degrees," said elf Kyle Belcher. "That was a long night because all we got on is all you see here. Not much at all."

Chaplain's thought for the day...

"No God, No Potatoes"

It's been said that in the former Soviet Union the peasant farmers often enjoyed telling a humorous story to lighten their dreary lives.

It seems that one day a government official came to a farmer and inquired about the year's potato crop. "Oh, it was wonderful," the farmer replied slyly. "It was so big it reached up to the very foot of God."

The commissar's countenance quickly changed. With a scowl, he said, "But comrade, this is a communist state and we are atheists. You must not forget: there is no God!"

"Ah, that's my point," the farmer replied. "No God—no potatoes!"

Yes, whether we believe it or not, God is the source of all things (Psalm 136:25).

God is the first link in our life's chain of events.

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myafn.net TV SCHEDULES: SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2003				As of: Friday, December 26, 2003 9:55:32 PM		
Start Time	SPORTS	ATLANTIC	SPECTRUM	PACIFIC	NEWS	Start Time
0	COLLEGE GAMEDAY		THE LIFE OF MAMMALS			0
0.021		HEADLINE NEWS			HEADLINE NEWS	0.021
0.042	COLLEGE FOOTBALL - 2003 MOTOR CITY BOWL: BOWLING GREEN VS NORTHWESTERN	TONIGHT SHOW WITH JAY LENO	BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER : - LISTENING TO FEAR	BEAR IN THE BIG BLUE HOUSE (YR. 6) : - BIG BLUE HOME OF THE BRAVE	LESTER HOLT LIVE	0.042
0.063				FRANKLIN : - FRANKLIN AND THE BUS PATROL/FRANKLIN AND WO		0.063
0.083		THE LATE SHOW WITH DAVID LETTERMAN	IRON CHEF : - TURKEY/MICHIBA VS FURUSHYOU HIROSHI	ROCKET POWER : - BEACH BOYZ AND GIRL/ X-TREME IDEAS	HEADLINE NEWS	0.083
0.104				THE FAIRLY ODDPARENTS	NBC NIGHTLY NEWS	0.104
0.125		MISSION: MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE	THE VIEW	YU-GI-OHI (TV-7): - TRIAL BY RED EYES	ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT	0.125
0.146				THE PROUD FAMILY : - HMMM...TASTES LIKE	CBS EVENING NEWS	0.146
0.167			LIVING BETTER WITH CARRIE WIATT	IN THE MIX: VOICES FROM IRAQ	THE NEWSHOUR	0.167
0.188	COLLEGE FOOTBALL - 2003 INSIGHT BOWL: VIRGINIA TECH VS CALIFORNIA		HOMES WITH STYLE : - THE HAMPTONS WITH METROPOLITAN HOMES	THE BEST OF : - TRUCK STOPS		0.188
0.208		TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS	WHILE YOU WERE OUT	TRADING SPACES FAMILY : - LOUISVILLE: LANTERN LIGHT PARKWAY	HANNITY & COLMES	0.208
0.25			THE AMAZING RACE : - ITS LIKE ADAM BUILDING HIS FIRST HOUSE!	HEADLINE NEWS	THE NEWS WITH BRIAN WILLIAMS	0.25
0.271				NBA - MINNESOTA TIMBERWOLVES @ PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS		0.271
0.292		HEADLINE NEWS	GILMORE GIRLS : - I SOLEMNLY SWEAR		BET NIGHTLY NEWS	0.292
0.313		ESPNEWS			NIGHTLY BUSINESS REPORT	0.313
0.333	SPORTSCENTER	HEADLINE NEWS	THE DIVISION : - SECRETS AND LIES		LARRY KING LIVE	0.333
0.354		HEADLINE NEWS				0.354
0.375	NFL TOTAL ACCESS	BEAR IN THE BIG BLUE HOUSE (YR. 6) : - BIG BLUE HOME OF THE BRAVE	SARAH, PLAIN & TALL: TALL: WINTER'S END	NBA FASTBREAK	NEWSNIGHT WITH AARON BROWN	0.375
0.396		FRANKLIN : - FRANKLIN AND THE BUS PATROL/FRANKLIN AND WO		WWE RAW!		0.396
0.417	ESPNEWS	ROCKET POWER : - BEACH BOYZ AND GIRL/ X-TREME IDEAS			PAULA ZAHN NOW	0.417
0.438	ESPNEWS	THE FAIRLY ODDPARENTS		NAVY/MARINE CORPS NEWS		0.438
0.458	NBA - NEW JERSEY NETS @ DETROIT PISTONS	YU-GI-OHI (TV-7): - TRIAL BY RED EYES	THE VIEW	ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT	NIGHTLINE	0.458
0.479		THE PROUD FAMILY : - HMMM...TASTES LIKE			AIR FORCE TV NEWS	0.479
0.5		TRADING SPACES FAMILY : - LOUISVILLE: LANTERN LIGHT PARKWAY	LIVING BETTER WITH CARRIE WIATT	HEADLINE NEWS	HARDBALL WITH CHRIS MATTHEWS	0.5
0.521			HOMES WITH STYLE : - THE HAMPTONS WITH METROPOLITAN HOMES	ESPNEWS		0.521
0.542		IN THE MIX: VOICES FROM IRAQ	WHILE YOU WERE OUT	ONE ON ONE : - THE TEST	THE O'REILLY FACTOR	0.542
0.563	SPORTSCENTER	THE BEST OF : - TRUCK STOPS		ACCORDING TO JIM : - MORAL DILEMMA		0.563
0.583		ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT	THE AMAZING RACE : - ITS LIKE ADAM BUILDING HIS FIRST HOUSE!	THE PRACTICE : - CHOIRBOYS	DATELINE NBC	0.583
0.604	NHL - COLORADO AVALANCHE @ ST. LOUIS BLUES					0.604
0.625		WWE RAW!	GILMORE GIRLS : - I SOLEMNLY SWEAR	LAW & ORDER: SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT : - DESPERATE	CNN SATURDAY MORNING	0.625
0.667		ONE ON ONE : - THE TEST	THE DIVISION : - SECRETS AND LIES	HEADLINE NEWS	20/20	0.667
0.688		ACCORDING TO JIM : - MORAL DILEMMA		SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE (03'-04') : - THE BEST OF WILL FERELLE 2		0.688
0.708	INSIDE THE NFL	THE PRACTICE : - CHOIRBOYS	SARAH, PLAIN & TALL: TALL: WINTER'S END		SATURDAY TODAY	0.708
0.75	SPORTSCENTER	LAW & ORDER: SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT : - DESPERATE		LIVE IN HOLLYWOOD		0.75
0.792		HEADLINE NEWS	THE VIEW	COLLEGE FOOTBALL - 2003 CONTINENTAL TIRE BOWL: PITTSBURGH VS VIRGINIA	WALL STREET JOURNAL	0.792
0.813	NFL COUNTDOWN	NAVY/MARINE CORPS NEWS			AMERICA'S BLACK FORUM	0.813
0.833	COLLEGE BASKETBALL - CUSA: MISSOURI VS MEMPHIS	ESPNEWS	LIVING BETTER WITH CARRIE WIATT		NEWS FROM CNN	0.833
0.854		THE NFL TODAY	HOMES WITH STYLE : - THE HAMPTONS WITH METROPOLITAN HOMES			0.854
0.875			WHILE YOU WERE OUT		DATELINE NBC	0.875
0.896		NFL - BUFFALO BILLS @ NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS				0.896
0.917	ESPNEWS		THE AMAZING RACE : - ITS LIKE ADAM BUILDING HIS FIRST HOUSE!		HEADLINE NEWS	0.917
0.938	COLLEGE FOOTBALL - 2003 INSIGHT BOWL: VIRGINIA TECH VS CALIFORNIA			ESPNEWS	AIR FORCE TV NEWS	0.938
0.958			GILMORE GIRLS : - I SOLEMNLY SWEAR	HEADLINE NEWS	20/20	0.958
0.979				HOUR OF POWER - THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS		0.979

December 27, 1942

Germans form the Smolensk Committee to enlist Soviet soldiers

On this day, the German military begins enlisting Soviet POWs in the battle against Russia. General Andrei Vlasov, a captured Soviet war hero turned anticommunist, was made commander of the renegade Soviet troops.

Vlasov had been a military man since 1919, when, at age 19, he was drafted into the new "Red" Army to fight in the Russian Civil War. After joining the Communist Party in 1930, he became a Soviet military adviser to China's Chiang Kai-shek. Returning to Russia in 1939, Vlasov was given the 4th Armored Corps to command. He distinguished himself in the defense of Kiev and Moscow against the German invaders, even winning the Order of Lenin in 1941, and later the Order of the Red Banner as commanding general of the 20th Army.

Then came the defense of Leningrad in 1942. The Germans were overwhelming the Soviet forces at the front, and Stalin would not allow Vlasov to retreat to a more favorable position. His army was battered, and he was taken prisoner by the Germans along with many of his men.

Back in Germany, Vlasov became disgusted with Stalin and communist ideology, which he had come to believe was a more sinister threat to the world than Nazism. He began broadcasting anti-Soviet propaganda and formed--with Nazi permission, of course--the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia. Its goal: to overthrow Joseph Stalin and defeat communism.

The German "Smolensk Committee" began persuading more and more captured Russians, Ukrainians, Cossacks, and other Soviet anti-Stalinists to join the German war effort. These now-pro-German Soviets were finally formed into a 50,000-man army, the Russian Liberation division, and fought toward the end of the war, with Vlasov at their command.

Tens of thousands ending up turning back against the Germans, then finally surrendering to the Americans--rather than the advancing Soviets--when the German cause was lost. The Americans, under secret terms of the Yalta Agreement signed in February, repatriated all captured Soviet soldiers--even against their will. Vlasov was among those returned to Stalin.

He was hanged, along with his comrades in arms.