

FROM BASIC TO BAGHDAD

JB HOGAN

A Soldier Writes Home

Bright
Ideas
PRESS

Cheswold, DE

Dover responds to the terrorist attacks

By ERIN KOSNAC, JEFF BROWN
Staff Writers

As the horrors of Tuesday morning's terrorist attacks began to reach Dover, the city and the state of Delaware took their own precautions. Assuming the maximum level of security at Dover Air Force Base was among them.

Dover AFB spokesman TSgt. Mitch Gettle said the base had gone to ThreatCon Delta, the military's highest level of security. Only authorized Department of Defense identification card holders are being allowed on the base for the foreseeable future.

"Our main interest right now is to protect our resources and our people," Gettle said, adding the base has not received any specific threat to its security. The base is being proactive to guard against possible threats.

"We're in a very fluid environment right now," Gettle said, "Our leaders on base are doing everything that's necessary."

Gettle added the base mortuary, which normally handles large numbers of casualties after accidents or terrorist acts, has not been activated.

Conferring with state and federal public safety officials, Gov. Ruth Ann Minner ordered nonessential state employees to go home, schools to close and recommended businesses do the same.

"Though there has not been a threat to Delaware and there is no reason for panic, I want to take every precaution. This is a time when families should be together," Minner said in a press release Tuesday. "Every individual should be very aware of their surroundings at work, as they leave work if they do so, and at home. Again this is not a time for panic, but it is a time for caution."

All school districts and City of Dover offices closed in response to the national situation.

As the toll of this tragedy remained uncertain, Bishop Michael A. Saltarelli, bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Wilmington released a statement.

"...I call on the people of Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore to pray with me for the innocent victims of this attack and their families, for the American people and our leaders..."

09/11/2001

Letter from JB dated September 11, 2001

Dear Home,

They say that September 11 will live alongside December 7 in infamy. I have heard and overheard a lot. They say that there were more casualties today than at Pearl Harbor. I have heard that two huge towers that I saw not too long ago with some good friends are now a pile of rubble and bodies. I have heard that the army wing of the Pentagon was destroyed — but Generals Shelton and Shinseki were not present. That fortress that is the State Department is completely gone as far as I know. And the final slap was delivered when Camp David was hit. I don't even know what they mean by "hit." And the last thing I heard is that this is one of three planned strikes on the U.S.

We are only a few baby steps from declaring war. All we need

to do is find out who to declare war on. This is probably the scariest day of my life. I have heard all kinds of rumors: “If something goes down we’ll deploy three days after graduation.” “We may go on alert and they can send anyone here as long as they have qualified on their rifles.” “We know who did it.” “We’ll never know.” “Delta Force and the third Ranger battalion are already prepping.”

It’s like the whole world went crazy in a couple of hours. The last news we got was around 1300 — then the drill sergeants disappeared. I don’t know if anything else has gone down since then. I am anxiously awaiting mail and news for tonight but not really expecting it. We didn’t get mail yesterday either.

But all that and our training and PT and chow all seem really secondary right now. I’m sorry I can’t really think of anything to tell you about now. The specter of war looms, and all I know is that I want to get as much out of every piece of training that I can get. That may be what keeps me alive in a few weeks/months.

I don’t want you to worry about me though. I am in God’s hands and it is His choice where I go. And I promise you — I will come home from any combat I am sent to.

Please keep me, the victims, the president, and the nations at risk in prayer. PLEASE send some kind of condensed news reports as you can. I love you guys. See you soon.

~JB

Letter from JB dated September 12, 2001

Dear Home,

This letter is being written hours later. Everyone is in bed and I

September 12, 2001

Dear Hope,

...So, here's what's been going on. We had our five-mile Eagle run yesterday. Too easy - we had it done in 43:10. Wish we'd gone around 35:00 or less. But the entire company minus only 5 percent must pass the run so they keep it slow. Correction. That should read only 5 percent can fall out or go on sick call and not pass the run or the company does not graduate.

Tomorrow at 0345 we are stepping out for a quick eight-mile road march. Not a whole lot of fun. It's going to be all day buddy-team movement. Then the night infiltration course, which is crawling under live machine gun fire...

am guarding them. A good thief could be behind me though as I am concentrating more on this letter than on those numbskulls around me. Not my fault if they leave their lockers open anyway.

Today was really scary. Make no mistake. But one of the drills called a formation to dispel rumor — which really helped. Camp David was not hit. Nobody is deploying anywhere and training will continue as normal. However, America is in a serious state, and we are on a further news blackout. Training is going to be super serious. I just hope everyone can get that into their skulls.

So, here's what's been going on. We had our five-mile Eagle run yesterday. Too easy — we had it done in 43:10. Wish we'd gone around 35:00 or less. But the entire company minus only 5 percent must pass the run so they keep it slow. Correction. That should read only 5 percent can fall out or go on sick call and not pass the run or the company does not graduate.

Tomorrow at 0345 we are stepping out for a quick eight-mile road march. Not a whole lot of fun. It's going to be all day buddy-team movement. Then the night infiltration course, which is crawling under live machine gun fire. Then we bivouac and ride back here. I'm not real excited about tomorrow, but it'll probably make the week go by faster.

I am still concerned about the state of, well, everything right now. The drill sergeant said everything has changed overnight. Anything that happens — especially any statements the president issues would be really nice to read.

For the meantime I am okay. There's no reason to start worrying now. There may be a time to worry later, but there just as likely may not. Forget about the future until it happens.

Looking forward to hearing from you.
Tiredly,
~JB

Letter from JB dated September 15, 2001

Dear Home,

I received more letters from you on Thursday. We hadn't received mail in a while because of bivouacs and stuff. It was good to hear from you guys.

I'm still going to the Pentecostal service. It's better than nothing I guess. I really miss Grace, especially getting a message with some real depth.

Well, this is the unpleasant part. As you know, on the 11th a whole lot of bad stuff happened and the world totally changed. President Bush has said that he has declared war on terrorists and anyone who harbors or helps them. If we start deploying for war, the infantry goes. On October 12, I will be part of the infantry.

Don't start worrying now though. It is probably equally likely that I will not deploy or see any combat. [Author's Note: Ha! Ha Ha!] Also, they will not pull us out of basic or anything crazy like that. You can be sure that I am getting the training I need to survive and kill the enemy if I am called to do so.

Although I do want revenge, I'm not desirous of combat and war, and I do not hope for battle. Whatever comes, I will do my duty and be as prepared as I possibly can. President Bush has told everyone who wears a uniform to get ready. We are here getting ready. Don't worry about me. There are lots of us. Many may not

go. If we do all go, there will be tons of us. We have a great number of allies too. Heck, even Russia has said they'll cover our back on this one. So I'll be there with plenty of battle buddies.

Don't start worrying. [Editor's Note: I guess I have a certain reputation along those lines.] There is no need. I am perfectly safe and continuing to train. FTX is coming up in less than two weeks and I will learn tons there. In less than a month I'll be seeing you guys.

For now, war or no war, deployment or regular duty, it's all up in the air. Things will continue as normal. But start praying a lot. Please put me in the bulletin for prayer as well. Things may go totally smoothly but they could also go very bad very quickly. So pray.

By the way, for some reason we are watching a movie instead of using the phone. It's *Air Force One*. [Editor's Note: Interesting choice!] I'll write more later. Things are going well here. I love you all very much! See you in 27 days.

~JB

Email from Maggie dated October 8, 2001

Dear friends and family,

This letter from JB has been sitting on my desk for several days, unbeknownst to me, buried under a pile of papers. Bob, Tyler and I are leaving very early next Wednesday for graduation. If any of you that were thinking of going want to know our hotel info, please email us. We will be there Thursday for the family day ceremony and will stay through Sunday as long as he has leave. Thanks for all your prayers and letters! It has been an



"You said a night mission tonight, right guys?"

amazing thing to watch his growth through this process. God is good! We continue to covet your prayers for him during this next phase of training.

Blessings,
Maggie

 September 27, 2001

Dear Home,
Well, here is my last letter home before FTX. [Ed. Note: This is some sort of weeklong field exercise under very tough condi-

9/11/2001

45

tions.] We are stepping out at 0400 for our 15-mile road march. It is going to be an intense week. Let me say a few things before I start rambling about FTX. Don't send any more letters after October. 6. That should leave plenty of time for them to get here before graduation. After that wait for my new address. Please add one can of cashews and one bag of chocolate stuffed Oreos to the food list.

Have you made reservations at a hotel yet? I really hope you get a suite so that we can cook and stuff. [Editor's Note: We?] ...And have actual separate rooms. That really appeals to me now. One room with 55 guys really stinks after a while. A short while.

Well, let me tell you about FTX now. Wake up is at 0200. We step out at 0400. That day won't end until 0300. It's gonna be rough. The road march will be a little over 15 miles. Our rucks were way lighter than standard load when we packed the first time. However, that was only the first list. Our rucks are overflowing now. I don't think I could add a toothbrush if I wanted to. [Editor's Note: Does this mean he has NO toothbrush?]

Fourth Squad (my squad) was designated the special weapons squad — just like in a real unit. I got issued a rocket launcher.) I was kinda hoping for a SAW but I feel pretty cool being one of only two guys here who can do anything about a tank or a Bradley showing up. The other guy is my battle buddy — who is, with all intended affection, a total box of rocks — so it's pretty much up to me.

Okay, it's naptime. I'll write more tonight.

Our platoon is pretty well equipped this cycle. They are trying to make it as close to combat load as possible. We are packing four 240BS, six SAWS and six grenade launchers. We also have two huge radio systems, (the antenna sticks three feet out of the ruck!)

and one small radio per squad. Then we've got night vision scopes for all automatic weapons. We've got claymore mines and tons of ammo. We look much better than any other company going on FTX.

Hopefully we'll get mail one last time before we step out. It'd be nice to have some words from home in my head before I leave.

Anyway. On Wednesday we had our final PT test. It was about 38 degrees outside. Our uniform was a long sleeve shirt and shorts. It was absolutely horrible. I still managed to run 14:10 but I collapsed afterwards. I could hardly breathe! That's the second time my asthma has really interfered. It takes really cold air to do so. [Editor's Note: Please pray. Thirty-eight degrees is not nearly as cold as some places he may be sent!] I think I'll be okay though. As bad as it was, it wasn't like it used to be back home.

I did 79 sit-ups in two minutes. One hundred percent on the PT test is 78. I was pleased. I only did 43 push-ups. Forty-two is 60 percent and the cut-off for graduation, so that was close. I'll keep getting higher at my unit.

Well, so far it looks like my leave (the two days after graduation) is a go. Also, unless things get really ugly, I'll be home for Christmas. That would be nice. Maybe I can make it to the New Year's Eve party.

I've decided against ocs for now, partly because I want to fight when it's my time and partly because you can make more money in the long run if you go in with a higher NCO rank.

Ranger school is almost for sure not an option anymore. Lots of people are having it taken away. I will still get Airborne though. I was really hoping to call before FTX but it doesn't look good. Oh well. It is really close to graduation. Only six more training days.

Have you got up with Sue and Dwayne? I really hope Luke

comes down on the 12th. Let my friends know anyone is welcome to come — Mellora, Nicole, whoever can come. Relatives too!

~JB

Email from Maggie dated October 17, 2001

Hi All,

He did it! He really really did it! Just a note to let you know that Bob, Tyler, and I got back late last night from Ft. Benning, Georgia. We had a great time with JB. I'll give you a rundown of our days.

Thursday: After making our way through the security check where our truck was inspected, we followed the security checkpoints guarded by soldiers and barbed wire to JB's building. We then sat in a large classroom and listened to a lieutenant. Colonel explain a little about the last 14 weeks of training. They showed a video of some of the things the guys had done. (All guys — no women in the infantry!) He remarked that this overflowing roomful of parents and friends was the largest he'd had at a parent's day event. I'm sure everyone had the events of 9/11 on their minds.

Diane Gorman and her two sons, who are now stationed in Alabama, met us and were able to watch the ceremony with us. It was great having special friends to share it with!

Then we went outside and sat in bleachers as they began the "Turning Blue" ceremony. This is when they get the Infantryman's Blue Cord on their shoulder. Bob was able to place it there. He was the first to spot JB — standing tall in the back. I hardly recognized him. Then the soldiers were released on a pass

until 8 P.M. that night. It was so amazing to see him standing there in his uniform — taller, tanner, and more fit and serious than before.

On our way out of the barracks we had to stop at the PX so he could buy something. He hopped back in the car with a large bag of M&M's! (We hadn't brought any of the food on base because we were told they would be searching cars and we needed to make it as easy as possible by having an empty car — which we did!)

We went directly out to lunch at Macon Road Bar-b-Cue (Thanks Stephanie and Andy!) and enjoyed a big meal. From the time we picked him up until we brought him back, JB ate almost nonstop.) Then we went back to the hotel and he happily put on his “civvies” and began eagerly going through all the goodies from home. He was excited to see the homemade treats from Janice and Linda and he dug right into them. He opened his graduation presents — books from us, money, and a really cool knife from Me-Ma and George. Next on his list was a trip to Wal-Mart where he was able to pick out his birthday present from us. (A Game Boy Advance was his choice.)

Back at the hotel room we talked and he ate and we talked and he ate. Dinner was pizza delivered and then it was time to head back to the barracks.

Graduation on Friday was awesome. Dwayne and Susan Williams, great buddies for many years and surrogate parents to the boys, made the trip from Atlanta. We sat in the bleachers on the parade grounds and waited while the band played. Then we heard what sounded like a bunch of bombs going off. There were smoke bombs and flares, music blasts, and then a Bradley armored personal carrier (to me it was a tank) came roaring out of the woods. Out jumped a bunch of soldiers in combat uniforms

and weapons. They did maneuvers across the field, the Bradley roared across the field and did a wheelie, then they all jumped back in and went flying back into the woods. Way cool!

Then there were the speeches. The band played, and then the second Battalion marched onto the field and were officially graduated. They marched off to the side and we were allowed fifteen minutes with him. Next we sat and waited a really long time while JB was “outprocessed.” Turns out there is a waiting list for the waiting list for airborne school, and instead of going right there they have to hang out here in the barracks for a few more days. So all the stuff they packed up has to be put back.

Anyway, we then had JB until Sunday at 5:00 P.M. We spent a lot of time eating, meeting up with his friends and their families at, oddly enough, restaurants and malls with food courts. We also played lots of games with Sue and Dwayne, talking and eating some more. Unfortunately for the rest of us, only JB can manage to eat like that and not show it...We played Scrabble and Acquire and Masterpiece and talked and talked and ate some more. We also went to the Infantryman’s Museum on base, which the guys thought was really cool. I was having back and leg trouble and spent that time recouping, asleep in the truck. JB also managed to get some time in at a music store and a hobby shop. Sunday he wanted to go to church so we found a PCA church and went. The message was solid, but the music was, let’s say, really old fashioned. (To my GPC friends: after the youth group sang the one and only contemporary chorus while clapping in time to the music, the pastor did say he thought it was okay to clap!)

JB still has some regrets about joining but is very resigned to it and wants to make the best of it. He has definitely grown up

a lot — although in many ways he is just the same. (For instance, he called us tonight and asked if we'd seen his wallet!)

Many guys in his battalion were sent on to bases where they will be deployed to Korea or to “somewhere in Asia.” He and his friends and about two dozen other guys are going to airborne school first. After that he will find out where he will be stationed. He's pretty much decided not to go for Rangers. After hearing first hand what he's already been through I can't say I blame him. He just isn't a Ranger kind of guy. [Author's Note: There's a saying in the army: there are smart soldiers, and there are strong soldiers, and each of them can get the job done.] There are several specialties that appeal to him but unfortunately since he isn't going on to Rangers he is stuck with infantry for two years. After that he can try and change. I asked what his specialty was and he said, “11 Bravo.” That means straight-legged infantry. In other words, he is the infantry of the infantry, the grunt of the grunts. His specialty will be walking. But he figures God has him there for a purpose, and he is okay with that.

He called tonight since he was allowed to — he'd only had two phone passes the whole 14 weeks of training. (BTW, most only go 9 weeks, infantry however goes for 14.) He'd been limping the whole weekend we were with him and he went yesterday and had his leg checked out. Seems he's pulled a flexor muscle in his hip or something like that. They gave him orders to have no PT for a week. Normally that would be good, but he's already had no PT for one week and says he's getting out of shape. Two, tomorrow is the PT test to see if you can go on to airborne. If he doesn't take it, who knows how long he'll have to wait for another chance. So he plans on taking it and asks for prayer that he'll pass it and not further damage his leg.

If he passes tomorrow, he'll go to airborne holding for about a week and then will start airborne school (still at Ft. Benning). School lasts three weeks. After that he should know where he'll be assigned next. Then he's supposed to get two weeks to go to his hometown and work part-time with his recruiter. ("Thank you for finishing basic, here's your perk: two weeks of light duty while being at home.") Then he has 10 days leave coming. If all works out, he may get this time in December and be home for Christmas. That would be great!

After listening to the officers there, other soldiers, and JB himself, I realize the whole thing was a lot harder than I even dreamed. Bob and I are so thankful to each of you for your prayers, cards, letters, and encouragement both to him and to us during the last four months. The 10 pounds of mail he received really helped keep him going. He told us he received the second most mail of anyone of the 50 guys in his barracks!! He said it was the letters he looked forward to almost as much — and sometimes more than — chow time!

He has no address right now. When he does, I'll pass it on. But even though you can't write, please continue your prayers on his behalf. Spiritually, he is doing better, but he freely admits he isn't doing much Bible reading or having much prayer time. He knows he needs to but...So if you think of it, pray he continues to grow in the understanding and love of the Lord. Bob and I are sure it was prayer warriors that really made the difference these last months. We have seen such positive changes in our son and pray that God will continue to do a good work in him. Thank you all!

We'll let you know what happens with airborne school when

we know. Bob is going to scan in some graduation pictures and email them when he gets a chance.

P.S. I have to tell you — he did finally get boots — two weeks before graduation! They were a size 11. He wears an 8½. But right at the end they were allowed to exchange any uniforms for different sizes. (Most of the guys lost weight and needed smaller pants.) JB was the only one to exchange his boots. He said he didn't say a word, leaving the supply sergeant wondering....

~Maggie Hogan

Letter from JB dated January 8, 2002

Dear Everybody,

As you know I joined the army in June. I have completed basic training at Ft. Benning, Georgia, and have become a qualified infantryman. (I'm the man with the gun who ties up the loose ends after the air force is done with their special effects displays.)

After BCT I was training at the airborne school hoping to earn my Jump Wings and be qualified to hurtle my body out of an aircraft cruising 150 mph at 1250 feet, suspended by some canvas and a few bits of string. (This is worth promotion points — not to be confused with IQ points. We're jumping out of a perfectly good airplane here people!)

However, I developed shin splints, which progressed into two stress fractures in my right leg during the runs at the school. This made it impossible to complete the training. (It also hurt like

heck!) I was then shuffled over to worldwide holdover awaiting orders to anywhere in the world.

As irony would have it, I received orders to stay right here at Ft. Benning. I am assigned to a mechanized infantry unit, which means I'll be riding in the back of a BFV (Bradley fighting vehicle), hoping it doesn't stop. When it stops, you have to jump out and start shooting. Also, you have to do a ton of maintenance and mechanical work on it but it, also means you don't have to walk places.

I am looking forward to being fully healed and getting back to work. I am excited to finally start doing "real" army stuff. It should be fun.

Please continue to pray for me as I really have no idea what I'm getting into. Your letters have meant a lot to me and once I get an address and my computer I can resume correspondence with you. I look forward to hearing from everybody.

~JB

