



Military service leads to help for veterans and more

BY CAROLE ROBINSON
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Ben Peterson grew up listening to war stories from his grandfather, who flew spy planes in World War II, and his father, who fought in Vietnam. His father also helped WWII Bataan Death March survivors tell their stories and find peace in their freedom, but his father also had anger issues, which made for an abusive home life.

“I was in ninth grade, about 14, when 911 happened,” Peterson said. “I knew then war is real.”

To get away from the abuse and to fight terrorists, Peterson joined the Army as soon as he graduated from high school. He was 17 and wanted to be a part of an elite special forces team. As luck would have it, there was an open spot in an elite block. He passed all the tests to enter the program, until it came to the color blind test.

“I didn’t know, until then, I was color blind,” Peterson said. “The only other positions open were admin (administrative) specialist and chaplain assistant.”

He asked, “Which one would I have a better chance of killing terrorists and being shot at?”

“I felt a calling in my life,” he said.

He chose chaplain assistant.

A chaplain assistant is a military assistant to the chaplain, who is a commissioned officer. The assistant provides security, logistical and technical support and assists with ministry issues such as death notices, suicides and marital issues among the ranks.

“It’s a very heavy burden,” he added

Peterson was sent to Ft. Jackson in South Carolina for Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training (AIT) for the chaplain assistant position.

“In AIT I learned the Army has never lost a chaplain in combat, except when a ship sank in World War II,” he said.

Peterson was deployed to Camp Anaconda in Iraq when he was 21. The Base was an Army and Air Force base located 2½ hours north of Baghdad.

F-19s continually flew in and out of the base 24 hours a day, Peterson said.

He flew on missions in helicopters, gunships, medical flights and on special missions,

“It was a fast-paced life,” he said. “We lost seven guys in my first week of combat.”

That night the Chaplain woke him, saying, “We have some fallen angels.”

A helicopter went down, killing seven.

“When you lose that many so early you have to navigate a lot,” Peterson said.

They spent days counseling soldiers. After the memorial service everyone “put the pain away” and went on with their work.



SUBMITTED

Ben Peterson, an Army assistant chaplain, in his sleeping quarters in Iraq

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We Salute our Veterans as Well as All Who Have Served our Country.



Resident, Richard Clifton, Retired U.S. Army Captain



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