

AS THE WAR ENDS

Student relates Gulf experiences

John Rudy
Capital Times Staff

Jon Hathaway, a Penn State Harrisburg criminal justice student, is back in school after seeing active duty in the Middle East earlier this year. His unit returned to the States just hours before the allied forces began their air assault on Iraqi fortifications.

"We came back just before the outbreak," said Hathaway, 25, a staff sergeant in the 193rd Special Operations Group based in Middletown. He and other members of the 193rd left for Saudi Arabia on Dec. 10 and returned Jan. 13.

Hathaway said that morale in Saudi Arabia was high. "The only reason morale even dipped down was that people wanted to actually do the job they were trained to do - 'We're here to fight a war. Let us do what we're paid to do,'" he said, quoting his fellow soldiers.

"When you're over there you have a mind-set that this is the real stuff," Hathaway said. "You know, watch your back, keep your eyes open, check your buddies, that kind of thing."

There was no fighting at that time,



Jon Hathaway

Photo by John Rudy

but the troops knew there would be a confrontation.

"We did not know when the invasion was to begin," Hathaway said. "We thought there'd be a pre-emptive strike at some point. The Iraqis had that capability, whether it was through a

missile launch, an air attack, or terrorist activity, which was primal to my position. That's what I was there to ensure against. And if it did happen, it would not seriously degrade our mission readiness.

"My role, as an advisor, was to look at the defenses of our personnel areas to avoid what happened in Beirut, where a truck bomb was driven up to the U.S. barracks and blown up.

"Personnel are primary targets over there and I was sent to alert them to any weak security areas, to tell our people how to tell a bad guy from a good guy.

"We went over there to make sure our people and our toys were taken care of properly and to make sure everything was bottom line prior to the outbreak of hostilities. We went to protect our own interests - Air National Guard assets involved in special operations," he said.

Citing security reasons, Hathaway said he could not say exactly where he was stationed, only that he was in Eastern Saudi Arabia near the Persian Gulf. He also could not say how many members of the 193rd were there with him. "I can only say it was more than five and less than 100," he said.

"We knew exactly how long we'd be over there," he said. "It worked out perfectly for me because I was on Christmas break from college. It was finals week and I just took my exams early.

"I spoke to my instructors and explained the situation. They took time out of their schedules to help. I dealt on a personal level with my professors and they were really receptive to it," he said.

Hathaway said his family knew he would be going to the Gulf.

"They knew I volunteered to do it and that I'd rather go during Christmas break than miss any school by going over in the springtime or in the middle of a semester," he said. "This was a really good opportunity and I decided to jump at it."

Hathaway is currently on standby and could again be rotated back to the Middle East, but the war's having ended makes that unlikely unless hostilities again break out in the region. "I'm glad it's over," he said.

Hathaway was on active duty in the Air Force for seven years, until March 1990, and joined the Guard in April. He plans to graduate in May 1992.

Vietnam veteran describes postwar combat stress

T.J. Brightman
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"We were over Hanoi, and I can still hear the sound of the SAM [surface-to-air missile] being fired and then there was this orange smoke all around the aircraft. The plane bumped and jerked and we saw the smoke across our wings. We had taken a direct hit the belly and lost the hydraulics making it real tough to move the stick. I radioed ahead that we had been hit and were coming home, and luckily we encountered no enemy attack."

It might sound like "Top Gun," but it's not. Secondary education major Bill

Woodworth, a former weapons assistance officer in Vietnam, was describing just one of the 227 missions he flew as a "back-seater" aboard an F-4 in Cambodia, South and North Vietnam, and Laos.

Woodworth said he did not experience post combat stress upon his return home as many Vietnam veterans did. According to one Penn State professor, however, the chance for the same high numbers of troops in the Gulf War facing similar stresses is less. But, he adds, some are still "vulnerable."

Thomas G. Bowers, assistant professor of psychology, said that

although the war was quick with few American casualties, many troops who fought or witnessed heavy Iraqi casualties could suffer post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

He added though that one of the ways to moderate PTSD is through the family and social support that many of the returning troops have been receiving.

"Traumatic stress is any stress really outside the range of the usual human experience," Bowers said. "Typically this happens during war time, as a result of being under enemy fire or heavy bombardment by planes or infantry personnel."

When Bill Woodworth flew his last mission and returned in December of 1972 he found that many Americans did not want to talk about the war, including his family. He said that he found himself denying to his family and friends that he was a different person.

"You change in a lot of ways you don't even realize," he said. "You find yourself living for the moment and putting a priority on things."

He also missed the guys in his unit.

"They have been your family, and you feel cut off knowing that you're no longer a part of the unit," he said. "Coming home is like culture shock."

Woodworth said that the experience of coming home is also stressful for the immediate family. He said that nearly 95 percent of the guys in his unit who were married got divorced, including him.

"I'm impressed with the programs I'm seeing to help the wives of returning servicemen better understand their husbands once they come home," he said. "I don't think people really thought about what went through peoples minds in Vietnam."

Bowers said that due to the rotation-of-duty system the Vietnam veteran did not have the opportunity to freely discuss his experiences as the troops in the Gulf did. Bowers praised the idea of debriefing teams that help soldiers in the current crisis openly talk about their experiences before coming home.

"The sadness of having a buddy blown to death beside you in a foxhole was in some cases not an option for the Vietnam veteran to openly discuss with his comrades," Bowers said.

U.S. military strategies praised

Jeff Berrigan
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The military strategies of the United States that spelled eventual defeat for Saddam Hussein and his troops went "pretty much by the book," said Dana Sadarananda, a Military History professor at Penn State Harrisburg.

"Hitting strategic targets, cutting off lines of communication, and denying the enemy air space was the proper way to go about it," he said.

The unexpected success of the ground war was a key aspect to the United States victory as well.

After the results of the first two

days of ground warfare "it became obvious that the war would not last another week," said Sadarananda.

"Politically the reason we were so successful was because we were able to gain widespread support from the United Nations. Militarily, once we had the political support, the military outcome was not in question," he said.

When asked why the Iraqi army seemed to just give up Sadarananda said, "over a period of time a state of demoralization came over the Iraqi army. They just did not have their heart in the fight. This became evident after interrogating the Iraqi deserters and POW's."

Sadarananda was full of praise in

regard to the durability of United States military weapons.

"The Congressional naysayers didn't have any idea what they were talking about. The proof is in the pudding," he said. "They performed flawlessly."

He called the Patriot missile "a phenomenal success" and said "its success rate was higher than anticipated."

In response to why Hussein did not use chemical warfare Sadarananda was blunt. "We pounded his artillery with the idea of denying the use of chemical weapons. Over a period of time he realized there was more to lose than gain by using them," he said.

"If he had used them he realized that we would have responded in kind," said Sadarananda.