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West Linn alum survives fighting in Iraq

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"We were in a town called An-Najaf in Iraq. We were taking fire from down the street that went west in an intersection we were at. We also had sniper fire from two other buildings and I was with two other snipers on a roof," Corbett Craig, 2002 WLHS graduate, said. "That was the time that I had my first three kills. It all comes down to the big saying, 'it's either you or them' and right now I'd rather it be them than me."

"You try to forget about it. If you think back upon it, it eats at you every day. If you forget about what all happened, then you'll get by," Craig said.

A year later, sitting in the newly remodeled Starbucks near the West Linn Public Library, Craig relaxed with a caramel Frappuccino and recounted the last four years, the end of his second tour of duty in Iraq, and his readjustment to civilian life.

Craig's experiences in Iraq, especially his connections with the people there, have made lasting impressions. "We had an interpreter who had three girls and two boys. He would come on our little base and bring us food, ice and sodas. We went over to his house once because he wanted my platoon to come over there and eat dinner

with them," Craig said. "The bad thing is that after we had left, the regime came in and killed everybody. Everybody that had talked to us and helped us out. His name was Azis."

Some memories of Craig's war experiences gave him hope and meaning. "First time we were over there, we went to a sheik's (mayor's) house and when we were there they had us come inside. They brought us ice cold water in the 135 degree heat. We had this armor that in itself weighed about 30-40 lbs and a helmet and weapons and the ammo on top of it. We were sitting on a couch and this little girl who was probably about two, maybe three, comes in and she sits down right next to me. She was the most adorable thing," Craig said. "I shared some of my water with her. I got some ice cream and I shared that with her. Then got a picture and then she looked at me, smiled, and ran off. It lets you know that there is actually still hope in the country."

Born in Portland, Ore. on March 2, 1984, Craig aspired to be a pilot after going to his first air show at age eight. "Besides the fact of being too tall, my test scores weren't high enough to become a pilot," Craig said. An interactive child, Craig played youth



West Linn graduate, Corbett Craig, sits with a young girl with whom he shared ice cream in Iraq. Craig joined the Army at age 17 and served two tours of duty in Iraq. Photo submitted by Corbett Craig

baseball, soccer and collected model airplanes. Craig's decision to join the Army was inspired by his grandfather who fought in WWII. His family supported him in his decision.

As a Radio Transmission Operator (RTO) in the Army, Craig initially joined the military to help pay for college and to explore different cultures.

"Some people have called me uncultured, but I highly disagree," Craig said. "I've seen 13 or 14 different cultures just by being in the countries I've been in through the Army."

Being involved was always something that came naturally to Craig. In high

school, Craig was involved in soccer, video news and enjoyed chemistry and math graduating with a 3.5 gpa.

"Corbett, in high school, was very intense, but polite and sweet. He was always confident in his abilities," Rebecca Farris, science teacher, said. Craig helped Farris with her biology classes his senior year as a student assistant.

After enlisting at age 17, Craig was sent after graduation to the 101st Division which specializes in infantry and air assault. It is there that he learned to rappel from helicopters. Basic training included boot camp and emotional training which lasted for about three

months. Soldiers are trained to not show compassion or emotion during the time of war according to Craig.

"When you get back (from a mission) and then something all of a sudden hits you and you're in your room, you know alone, you end up breaking down and someone comes and finds you, and you have about 30 seconds to straighten yourself back up," Craig said. As a soldier, you are taught not to have any regrets.

"If you falter, and start regretting things you've done in the past, it all just comes back and hits you. You become unsure of yourself and of what your job is," Craig said. "My greatest fear was that I wasn't going to come back and be able to see my two little sisters grow, or to start a family of my own."

On Feb. 28, 2003 Craig was deployed on his first tour of duty in Iraq at the age of 19. He was stationed in the Q-west base in a secured part of Iraq. A normal day for Craig's first deployment included meeting city leaders and asking them how their city needed help. The soldiers would then go on 2-3 hour patrol, gather information and do a second 2-3 hour patrol of the city and the neighboring areas. Soldiers in the Q-west base would get a total of 6-7 hours of sleep, depending on the terrorist activity in their area.

Students earn scholarships at CCC Skills Competition

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One hundred twenty-two students from West Linn competed in the 29th annual Clackamas Community College Regional Skills competition in 17 of 28 total areas of competition. Of those, 21 students placed in the top three, landing partial one-term scholarships to CCC. An awards ceremony is planned for place winners on March 19.

First place winners included: Dylan Stark, junior, for Writing; Chase Gray, junior, for Geography; Sydney James, junior, for French II; Caitlin Crane, junior, for

French IV; Gregory McMurtrie, freshman, for Spanish IV and Hillary Krippaehne, freshman, for Journalism.

Avi Levy, sophomore, and Eric Nesbit, senior, tied for first in Math Ind. VI. The Math Team II competition was won by Levy, Nesbit and William Letsou, senior.

Second place winners included: Patricia Frazier, senior, and Jessica Shih, senior, for Organic Chemistry; Cheng Tan, junior, and Brian Fuchs, senior, for Inorganic Chemistry; Margaret Hayertz, junior, for Writing; Janae Sporrer, sophomore, for French II; Sachie Hopkins, sophomore, and Hans Farnbach, sophomore,

for Math Ind. V.

Kevin Kirkemo, senior, Dylan Hinrichs, freshman, and Brienne Cochran, sophomore, each placed third in German IV, Math Ind. IV and French III, respectively.

Competitions began as early as 7:30 a.m. with the last finishing up at 2 p.m. Buses ran every hour on the hour back to the high school for students who were done with their competition.

"It was a wonderful experience and I will definitely sign up again next year," Krippaehne, freshman, said.

Three staff members, Julie Swanson, Lynn Pass and Jamie LeVeque, chaperoned

students. "Everyone was well behaved and appeared to get a lot out of the competition," Swanson said.

New this year were two additional areas of competition: Health Sciences and Video Broadcasting. With so many different areas of competition, many students participated in multiple competitions.

In addition to the skills competition, CCC was also host to a job fair which students were encouraged to attend.

"The competition is a great opportunity for students to experience a day on a college campus," Swanson said.

Soldier Alum Returns

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