

Tribal Vet Ready To Head Back To The Middle East

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tion battalion, which is a pretty good group to be with over there.

"People are happy when engineers show up," he said, "because we create shelter. That's the way they look at the engineers. Because we're engineers and security, we could build a bridge or do patrol convoy security or anything."

"When we were over there, we'd get RPG'd (rocket propelled grenade). We'd get bombed two three times a night. After a while, it's like, here we go again. Mosey over to the ditch."

"If you're going to get hit, your going to get hit."

"The noises, the smells, it's a different country than western Oregon. A lot different. It's intense, man. As morbid as this may sound, I enjoy it."

In August, Hostler earned a promotion to Staff Sergeant. In September, he got a call from "a First Sergeant for the 234th Engineers who asked if I wanted to be a squad leader in his company." Hostler jumped at the chance.

"Lee was in first platoon when I went over," he said. "I was in second. We have that working relationship. I was one of the first persons he called (for the new mission). He's a competent man. He's a good soldier. He's somebody I can trust. It took me about five seconds (to decide)."

Many things have changed since Hostler was last in Iraq.

Communication with home was always a big thing. "When I was there, you had to wait in line for three hours to make a 15-minute phone call. Now, they have cell phones, but you're still going to pay for it."

"When I was there, there were a whole bunch of things we could and couldn't do: rules of engagement. We couldn't go in the mosques, now you can; we could do a convoy without stopping; now, we have to stop for traffic laws; then: if you suspected an individual: bye bye. Now, we have to engage the individual, make sure they don't have anything on them. You can't arrest them. You can only hold them. The difference is distance, and if you have an individual with explosives, you have to ask a lot of questions. Then, you'd shoot first, and then ask questions. Now, it's the other way around."

"The thing is," he said, "we go by the Geneva Convention but they don't."

Back home, things are changing, too, but not all things.

"I don't react well to loud bangs, to people coming up behind me," he said. "That's about it. My eyes don't scan the room anymore. I don't sit with my back against the wall to face the front door. I don't worry about my weapon being at arm's length."

For all the difficulties, the danger, the dislocation, the emotional residue, Hostler is "a firm believer in what we're doing."

The service has treated him well. It suits him well. And whether the new assignment takes him to Iraq or Afghanistan or some point unknown, he is ready.

"When we got hit," he said, referring to the 9/11 attacks, "everybody was right up front. Now, they're second guessing them. Maybe they have that luxury. I'm trying to be consistent as a soldier in my beliefs."

He believes he'll be "going over as



Hostler, with the 52nd Engineers in Mosul, Iraq, where the unit built shelter for other GIs.

(part of) a security force that more than likely will be patrolling, looking for the bad guys, providing convoy security. Every soldier will have an M-9 (pistol) and an M-4 (an adjustable butt M-16 machine gun). They'll travel in heavily armored Humvees. It's going to be intense. I don't know where we're going - Iraq or Afghanistan. We're going to get together in January, February as a company." The company will pull troops from throughout the state.

"The orders are generally open," he said.

"It's natural for a human beings

disconnected from that, and think it may not affect them. Given that (in Iraq) women can't drive, can't vote, can't work, unless it's a teacher. A single man would work for a dollar a day just to eat. And you look at what the Taliban has done and Al Qaeda. They hide behind the religion to do what they wanted to really do, and that was control people by fear. I don't believe in that. I believe that everybody has an opportunity to win a million dollars and to lose a million dollars. It's up to you as an individual. But at least you have a shot.

"There are many more people in



Here, Hostler at work in the hustle of a city at war.

to not trust, but when they put their lives in your hands and you succeed, that creates immediate credibility. When we have soldiers that have been there and done that, you can relay that before hand. Your credibility has been established.

As things stand now, Hostler believes he will be in charge of 15 men, and that will include two team leaders. "It will be my charge to be 'professional, expedient, safe so every soldier comes back with his fingers and toes. You have to adhere to those men's cares and have men trust me as soldier, a leader, a person."

"It's going to be much harder in a leadership role," he said. "It's easier to follow."

"The message I would like to give is that we're so far from the war in the western US. A lot of people are

this world that believe that its not ok to do that - to vote, to drive, to work as women, even for you to write this in a newspaper for you to live in fear doing your job, that's not ok."

Hostler experienced great pride in being Indian in the service. "As a Native man," he said, "coming from Grand Ronde, I've met all walks of life, from rich to poor. I was in the Navy and did a lot of traveling there, and there's nothing more powerful than the respect you get when people find out that you're a Native American."

"Because I have a culture that I respect dearly and that I am part of, I can respect people that adhere to their culture and their religion. And for those people who wish to hide behind their religion and use it to hurt people, that is not ok."

"I remember one time, we were chasing these guys, and I know for a fact that they were going for this mosque and they did. We parked our rigs and tried to catch them but we couldn't because we knew that they knew it was a safe haven. Probably about a half hour after that, their clergy came out and asked what we were going to do with these people. We told them we were going to arrest them. And he told us the same thing he was going to tell them: not to bring their war to this place of worship. And I stood there. You could have blew me over with a feather. He's right. War has no room in a place of worship. He gave them to us. Those kind of people I respect. He had the motivation to come to us as soldiers with weapons and stand for something that he truly believes in. That demands respect. I don't care who you are."

"I don't know where I'm going, but I do know as a soldier I have to be ready. I need my land map, an ability to listen and speak with my fellow soldiers... whatever it takes to get back home."

"People would complain about a mission; and I would tell them, whatever it takes to get home to momma, I'm going to do it. Being physically fit, mentally, all those details of being a soldier."

"We're planning, we're talking, and then we're backing it up with action. Maybe that's why I enjoy being a soldier."

"I love my people, dearly. I pray for them everyday, that we may find a direction. But my fear is that they've been caught up in the world of business and detached themselves from who they are."

"When I realized I was going home, my first thought was I'm going back to Grand Ronde and the beauty that I see here, but to go as far as I went in hopes of preventing them from having to see what I've seen, to smell what I've smelled, to taste what I've tasted, to hear what I've heard, to feel what I've felt, and to be amongst my own kind, to be what I am instead of being a soldier. Maybe one day I will be able to be amongst my own kind and be allowed to be who I am."

He has been working for a heating and air conditioning company in Salem since he has been back.

And he has just re-enlisted for six more years. "At the end of that six years," he said, "I'll have 18 in. The military's been good to me." ■