

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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When duty calls

Activated for military duty, students leave classes, families and friends

By Erica York
THE BATTALION

After weeks of waiting in a California military camp, Marine Cpl. Howard Wood, a Texas A&M student, is anxious to join in combat in the Iraqi theatre.

Speaking from his Camp Pendleton, Calif. Marine Corps base, Wood said his camp's morale has remained high as the war in Iraq enters its third week.

"The majority of us feel bad that the Marines are over there and we're not," he said. "We think we should be over there fighting next to our brothers in arms."

Wood, a junior animal science major, has already been told once that he would be deployed, but nothing happened and the waiting game began again.

"We could be told tomorrow that we're leaving, but in the meantime we're doing our jobs and filling in other jobs," he said.

Being away from family and friends is difficult, but worth the cause, he said. His father, a Vietnam veteran, and his mother both support their son and his fellow troops, but Wood said his mother is unhappy at the prospect of seeing her son head overseas.

For Wood, being stationed in California means he is untold miles away from his family as well as his fiancée, a senior journalism major at A&M.

"We were supposed to be married in July, but that was put on hold," he said. "After I get back, our plan is to get married and for me to finish school."

Wood's uncertain schedule means he and his fiancée must postpone their initial plans.

"She will pretty much have to wait until I get

back to begin a career so that we can decide where we will live and start a life as newlyweds," he said. "So really, both of our lives are on hold until either the war is over, or until they send me home, whatever comes first."

Other troops have suffered distance gaps between their families. A Marine activated with Wood's unit had to leave his newborn baby and wife when he was activated for duty.

"We've been trained for (situations like that)," he said. "We signed up for this, and we're willing and ready. Whatever happens, we're ready for it."

The streets of Camp Pendleton, the largest Marine base, have gradually emptied of soldiers, tanks and vehicles, Wood said. The base typically has 45,000 troops, but that number has rapidly fallen, he said.

When he was deployed, Wood was forced to withdraw from A&M, but the University has been supportive of his recent call to duty. Wood said he will resume classes when he returns from military duty.

"The school has been great about it," he said. "I got full reimbursement except for parking tickets."

Joining Wood at Camp Pendleton is fellow Aggie Arthur Solomon, a senior recreation parks and tourism science major, who says he is enjoying his time

in California.

"Of course I miss my friends and family, but it's like a paid vacation from school, I guess," said Solomon, a sergeant in the Marine Corps. "Out here in California it's beautiful just doing what we signed up to do. I love it."

Solomon said he is prepared to go overseas, though he doesn't know when or if he will be deployed.

"Yesterday, our commanding officer told us to keep our bags packed because we never know when we're going to be called over there," he said.

"We were supposed to be married in July, but that was put on hold. After I get back, our plan is to get married and for me to finish school."

— Corporal Howard Wood
junior animal science major



SHENA BAUSCH • THE BATTALION

(From left): Corporal Howard Wood (junior animal science major), Corporal Mark Wester and Lance Corporal Steve Valdez train for military duty at a Marine Corps base in Camp Pendleton, California.

As Solomon waits for possible deployment, he said he is busy repairing small arms as a technician.

"I repair pistols, rifles, everything besides the big cannons, for the infantry," he said. "A lot of the weapons we're repairing may be sent overseas, so that's motivation to do a good job."

Other students, such as Chris Abshier, are forced to wait and wonder if a loved one will be deployed. Abshier's girlfriend, a flight medic in the Army Reserves, has seen most of her unit deployed and is waiting to find out if she will join them.

"(Her unit) will be gone for six months to two years," said Abshier, a senior journalism major. "We don't know if she's going to end up having to go or not. It's kind of a day-by-day thing."

Abshier said communication with the paramedics who have already been deployed is very limited.

"We usually get an e-mail or a call once a month but they don't really say anything,"

Abshier said. "They can't tell us any numbers, and they can't tell us any specifics on what they're doing on a daily basis."

Kris Anderson, a junior history major in the Army Reserves, said it would be several months before he will be sent overseas if he is called to duty.

"The war could be over by the time I got sent over there because I would have to go through several months of training to prepare," Anderson said. "I know some people who got activated but they just had to go and provide things like extra security for bases and airports."

Anderson said his chances of being deployed are slim, but he would be up to the challenge.

"I would have no problems with being deployed," Anderson said. "I really don't have to worry about it. But, if I got deployed it wouldn't upset me too much. I think it would be a good adventure."

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Saturday, April 12, 2003



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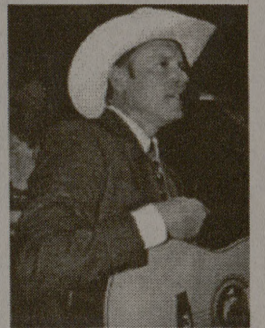
The Gilchrist-Southerland residence is located at 100 Throckmorton Street across from the Sanders Corps of Cadets Center.

Light refreshments will be served at both homes

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