

December 10

Hello, and welcome to "My Last Tour." The purpose of this blog is primarily to communicate with my wife, Ellen, and the rest of my family and good friends. So if you're reading this at all it probably means you're one of the above. I also like the idea of sharing with the American public what goes on in the down-time of war. I've never done a blog before—I'm not quite sure where to start. Actually, I'm writing these words on the back of an army flier about common phrases in Arabic. Internet service is unreliable in Baghdad, so the plan is to mail this message to my wife and she'll post it up on the blog (isn't she great?)

Ellen says I should talk about myself for the "about" page, so here goes. My name is Dan and I'm a captain in the US Army. For the next 18 months I'll be working with an embedded team to train an arm of the Afghan National Army. The desert is dry, rocky, and sand is absolutely everywhere, in your sheets, in your toothbrush, stuck to the toilet paper... The Afghans we're training are young, but hard-working, and I look forward to learning more about their customs.

December 15

For the last week I've been doing nothing but planning, analyzing, coordinating, and preparing for these upcoming missions. Unfortunately, I can't talk much about the details.

The Afghans tell me the area we're in is inhabited with something they call camel-scorpions. Evidently, they're as big as mastiffs with jaws as big as your hand, and they're known to feast on camels after creeping up on them and slitting their bellies. Personally, I have a hard time believing this. There are many other legends, but I won't get into it now.

December 19

We were on our way back from a survey mission in the up-armored Humvee when we passed a strange structure. At first I thought it was just a dilapidated bridge or something, but what I thought was the bridge's colonnade turned out to be several openings in the side of a mountain. They were abandoned Soviet rocket silos. I'll take pictures next time we're out that way. The silos were empty, of course. The Afghans didn't seem thrilled that I wanted to stop and check them out, they grew up around this kind of stuff. Afghans are used to living with ghosts of Soviet occupation. I guess there's a reason they call Afghanistan the graveyard of empires.

December 25

Merry Christmas everyone! Ellen tells me our page hits have skyrocketed. I'm shocked, really, that people I don't even know are so interested. Not much to report today, nothing exciting going on here at camp. Lots of maps and waiting for intelligence. To my family and friends, I hope you are warm and safe.

January 5

Hi everyone! Dan doesn't seem to have an internet connection today, so in lieu of the normal posting, I just want to make a quick plug. You may or may not know that Dan's birthday is coming up soon. There's a website called Milblogging.com that rates and categorizes military blogs. They have an annual contest called the MILbloggies and I know Dan would love nothing better than to see My Last Tour.com on the top 100 list. Thanks everyone, for your support!

January 6

We went through a mountain pass today, and it just so happened that it had some historic significance. A small, bronze plaque in the ground said was the site of the bloodiest battle in Britain's history. On January 6, 1842, 16,000 British soldiers were retreating from the hills

because they knew they couldn't beat the Afghans. But on this dismal path they were ambushed by scores enemy forces. Most of the soldiers were slaughtered, and the ones who survived were trapped and eventually starved to death. Only one man, an army surgeon, escaped on horseback—but only because the Afghans wanted him to tell the tale of the massacre. My team thought it was a bad omen that we happened upon this place one hundred and sixty some-odd years later, to the day.

Before we'd got back to our Humvees it started raining on us. The rain smells like shit here.

January 15

It's Friday, and that means lobster. Again. As the internet as my witness, once I'm home I'll never eat lobster again.

We passed by the Soviet rocket silos again. And once again I forgot to take pictures. But this time I have a valid excuse. I was poking through some old crates with Russian letters on them, and out from under one of them came a tarantula-sized spider. At least I thought it was a spider at first. It was yellow-ish and hairy, with a bulbous tail capped with a needle-sized stinger. One of the young men in my team told me it was a camel-scorpion. I said I thought camel-scorpions were a myth and he said they're real, but nothing to worry about. So it wasn't until we were on our way back to camp that I realized I had two big whelps on the back of my hand. The scorpion got me pretty good. I described the scorpion to the medic, and he said he'd never heard of a camel-scorpion, but that if it was anything like the regular scorpions we see all the time the best thing to do was to ride the poison out. So I drew a hot bath and that's where I am right now. Since the internet is up today, I thought I'd write this email to Ellen and have her post it up. Scorpion toxins are known to cause hallucinations and delirium, so if this post is a little unfocused and sprawling then you'll know why.

January 31

Hi everyone! It's Ellen again. I haven't heard from Dan in a while, but I have some good news: My Last Tour.com made it into the MILbloggies top 100! Thanks to everyone who signed on and voted!

February 14

I don't even know how to start. I've been typing for an hour, I filled two pages with what I'm going through, but to spared you I deleted it. To all those who knew Dan, your words of encouragement have been much appreciated.

The blogging service will seal off login attempts for this site starting tomorrow, so you'll see no new entries after this post. I just want to say, for those of you who keep posting questions for Dan, please stop. I know it's confusing for some of you who, but this is now a dead blog.