

Troops in Iraq UPDATE

Interview with Fox News Live Correspondent Col. Oliver L. North

Last January, *Monthly* ran an article regarding local Marines deploying to Iraq (“Heading Out”), with the assistance of Captain Donald Caetano, a Marine stationed at the Marine Corps Air Station in Beaufort. Media Supervisor Captain Caetano offered to maintain correspondence with *Monthly*, while in Iraq, to keep us apprised of activities overseas. By sharing impactful photos and interesting personal accounts, he has afforded us a privileged, first-person perspective of the challenges, accomplishments, hopes and bravery shared by our troops and the Iraqi people during their unwavering quest for democracy.

In May, Captain Caetano reported that he had the honor of escorting Fox News Live correspondent Colonel Oliver North and his news team around Fallujah so that they could cover the day-to-day experiences of our dedicated soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines who are battling terrorists and striving to stay alive.

While *Monthly* represents readers with varying political viewpoints, we felt that an unexpected (and thrilling) opportunity to speak with Colonel North, a nationally syndicated columnist, and obtain some factual insight regarding our efforts in Iraq, would be both beneficial and interesting for our readers and supportive of our troops. Particularly this month as we celebrate the Fourth of July; Independence Day.

HHM: First, I would like to thank you very much for agreeing to an interview with *Hilton Head Monthly*. We are very excited to enjoy this unique opportunity and understand that you were sent on assignment to Iraq this past May. Was this your first visit to Iraq?

ON: This was my sixth, actually. I was embedded during the first phase of the war and have been back out there five times since.

HHM: What can you tell us about what your mission entailed, what you hoped to accomplish?

ON: I work for Fox News Live and we have a new documentary coming out this weekend (June 26, 8 p.m. EST).^{*} It's the first documentary we've done on military operations in Iraq and the situation over there.

HHM: Can you describe some of the conditions or people you encountered in Fallujah, tell us about the morale of our troops?

ON: It's not a totally safe city, as the documentary will show, but it's a much more tranquil setting today than it was six months ago. I think this is in large part because there are Iraqis who are well-trained, confident and courageous.

HHM: Were the conditions you witnessed as you anticipated they would be? How do they match or conflict with media reports?

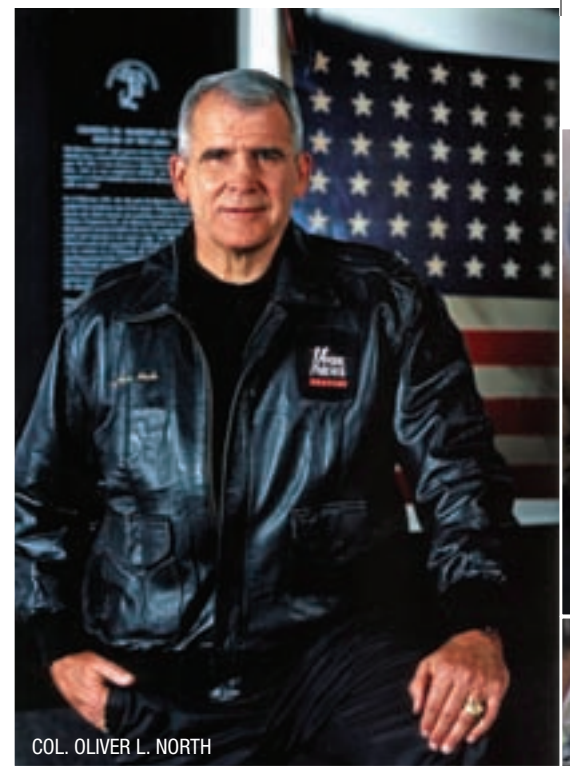
ON: I think overall it's getting better. One of the things you're not seeing now is these head-to-head engagements where the terrorists will duke it out with our Army rifle company...It's no longer the kind of thing, in my experience there, where you see a lot of unified troops of Iraqis lining up to have a gun fight with Americans.

In places where Iraqi military and police have reasserted authority, there's much more helpful information from the Iraqi people – intelligence, if you will – and it's much more likely you're gonna find people who will provide information about terrorists. The Iraqi government is now reasserting control. I think it's much more likely that you're gonna find a happier, more productive, certainly more peaceful, Iraqi people.

HHM: There's been a lot in the media about pulling our troops out... How do you think that, for the most part, our media sources representing this view** affects troops' efforts?

ON: The worst thing you could ever do is to tell the opponents of democracy that the Americans are leaving. Quite honestly, the Iraqis are not yet ready to take responsibility for their total security...it's coming. Putting a date on withdrawal would be just an invitation to absolute disaster and bending over to the forces that do not want a democracy in that part of the world to succeed – a major victory on their part.

HHM: What is your opinion regarding the *Newsweek* incident involving questionable reports of the US mishandling/abusing the Koran



COL. OLIVER L. NORTH

PHOTO COURTESY FOX NEWS

[at “Gitmo,” Guantanamo Bay, Cuba?]

ON: I've given *Newsweek* more publicity than they deserve. One of the things that I think we all have to be careful of is separating fact from fiction. There's an awful lot of fiction out there...If you go to townhall.com, click on that column [regarding Gitmo] and it deals with exactly that problem.

HHM: What do think about comparisons made of Gitmo to a gulag or concentration camp by Senator Dick Durbin, or media reports about recruitment numbers being down?

ON: It's unconscionable that somebody like Durbin would say what he did. He's like Jane Fonda without the tummy tuck and the face lift. That kind of thing [Durbin's comments] is incredibly demoralizing to the troops over there.

In spite of some of the reports you've seen, I've never seen morale higher, the reenlistment rate among U.S. Marine units that are over there [in Iraq] is, in almost every case, off the charts in a positive direction. They have a purpose and a sense of mission unlike military forces in any other part of the world. It's a remarkable tribute to these kids that, in spite of people like Durbin, they still go into it every single day. I'm not trying to pick bones among the various services, but the Marine Corps has done a remarkable job of recruiting extraordinary young men and women who are serving out there today.

HHM: What do say when you hear someone say that the United States should not be in Iraq, that we have no business there?

ON: We're the only “Super Power” on the planet, we don't have any choice about it. If you think we



Left: A Marine comforts an Iraqi mother while providing her child with medical care.
Left below: A young Iraqi boy lights up at the sight of his new soccer ball.



PHOTOS BY CPL CHRISTI PRICKETT, USMC, IRAQ

it in the Peace Corps, but people ought to give something back to this remarkable country of ours.

HHM: What do you envision taking place in Iraq during the next two-three years? Do you anticipate a long road ahead in terms of the Iraqi people standing on their own feet?

ON: I think you're going to see a decided downturn in violence. We've got a referendum coming up October 15 and we've got a new election for new government in December. I think you're going to see Iraqis stepping up to the plate in increasing numbers [after the election]. I think the Iraqi people are fed up with foreign terrorists coming into the country and killing – the casualties for Iraqis is horrific. Yes, a lot of Americans have been hurt and killed out there, but Iraqis are the number one target. I think you're going to look two years from today and see a decreased level in violence and an autonomous government that's looking after its own people.

HHM: What is the most important thing you think our readers should know regarding our efforts in Iraq and how would you suggest all Americans equip themselves to better understand what's going on over there?

ON: Watch more Fox News! (we laugh) I think what everybody ought to know is that this is a very important cause. It's about the support of the concept, the idea of freedom...we're the only country on earth that will send its sons and daughters around the globe – not for gold, or colonial conquest, or oil – simply to advance an idea. And that's because it makes us safer. It gives us better opportunities in this country. And it advances the kind of freedoms that we enjoy... I think once you have this democracy working it's going to change the whole climate in that part of the world [including Iran] and that's going to be good for us.

HHM: Do you have any plans to return to Iraq in the near future?

ON: We'd like to go back out there to cover the

October referendum and then again in December to cover the elections for the new government.

HHM: What do you think readers would be most surprised to know about you in terms of unusual hobbies, favorite foods, musical interests, etc.?

ON: I'm a country & western fan – Charlie Daniels and I are good friends. Sean Hannity and I are going to do a big concert on July 8. I have a foundation, Freedom Alliance, with a scholarship fund that helps kids who've lost a parent in the line of duty.

HHM: Any final thought with which you'd like to leave our readers?

ON: They [Troops] understand that there's a job that needs to be done over there and they want to see it through. There are guys, even those who have lost limbs, who say the only reason this wouldn't be worth it is if we didn't finish the job.

Just keep these young Americans in your prayers because they're remarkably brave, they're extraordinary young people...no military, anywhere, has been better than this one. We ought to be thankful that we have young people willing to serve.

HHM: Amen. Thank you Col. North and God bless our troops. □

*Col. North is a combat-decorated Marine (retired), a #1 best-selling author, the founder of a small business, an inventor with three U.S. patents, a syndicated columnist, the founder and honorary chairman of Freedom Alliance, and host of "War Stories" on Fox News channel; yet he considers being a husband and father of four his most critical role. Due to space constraints, an extended interview will be available at hiltonheadmonthly.com and via our E-news. Readers can also find more information at foxnews.com, townhall.com, and freedomalliance.org. – which lists info regarding the July 8 concert. *Check foxnews.com for additional broadcast times. **Many Marines stated that they find most media reports to be "negative," or unsupportive of their positive efforts and achievements.*

can live in a little isolated pocket, you're wrong – 9/11 proves that...This country has spread democracy and the hope of freedom all over this planet. My father fought in World War II to do that, my brothers and I fought in Vietnam...this [Iraq] is the next place where we need democracy...

What's going to change everything is [Iraqi] women having the right to vote and doing so. And if you can't be inspired by watching those women walking out of an election back in January and waving an ink-stained finger around, then those people are missing something – let me put it politely.

HHM: Do people ask you how you'd feel about having your own children involved in the military?

ON: Yeah. I put my 25 years in...Quite frankly I think it's an obligation. I don't want to see us return to the draft. There's a decided downturn in quality when you do that. You wouldn't, for example, be able to insist on a high school diploma as a mandatory minimum, and you wouldn't be able to be as selective as we are today. Nonetheless, I think there's an obligation of every young person to have to serve this country. You don't have to do it in the Marine Corps, you can do