

An interesting appeal from Eric Leach, new husband of our old buddy Tanya Bricking Leach. She's still in Hawaii. He's in Afghanistan, flying helicopters for the Army.

From [eric.f.leach@us.army.mil](mailto:eric.f.leach@us.army.mil)  
Sent Saturday, June 5, 2004 6:17 pm

-----  
Hello everyone. The Internet connection is running really slow, so forgive the mass e-mail. Things here are fine. It has gotten to be pretty hot. 115 today. July is the hot month, yeah!!!!!!!!!!!! I can't wait.

I have been pretty busy flying. I am getting to know the area fairly well. At times, I miss being on the ground though. I had some pretty memorable experiences during the first gulf war in Iraq. This is proving to be no less memorable.

As I fly across this nation, I have learned to respect the citizens of this rugged land. I fly pretty low, and at times, very fast. I often run up on people before they know what is coming. Good for me, and could be bad for them. The other day, I was flying in this profile, when I hopped over a stone wall, only to come face to face with a young boy of maybe 7. While I was well above his head, 30 ft or so, he seemed to think I was close enough to sling a rock at me. He was a pretty good shot, but I was better, and avoided both him and the rock. At first, I thought... Why that little..... and then I remembered throwing rocks at the train that ran thru Lake Worth. I wasn't trying to derail it, I was just being a kid. As was this young man.

Our ground troop (Alpha troop) has been conducting patrols in the local area. Meeting village elders, making nice with everyone. Well, at every stop, the children would come running up to the vehicles, excited, looking for the guys to give them something, anything. Most of the guys carry candy, so they began passing it out.

One child noticed the Platoon Sergeant writing something in his notebook. This little child, a boy of maybe 10 walked up to the platoon sergeant and held out his hand. In it was the candy he had been given. The Platoon sergeant looked at the boy and shrugged his shoulders as if to say, "What is wrong?" The boy pointed to the

hand he was holding the pen in. He grabbed the platoon sergeant's other hand and gave him back the candy in exchange for the pen. The platoon sergeant, surprised, refused the candy, and gave him the pen.

The young boy ran over to the other children and they all looked at and took turns holding pen. The platoon sergeant called over the interpreter, and asked him what the deal was with the pen. He replied that while the Taliban were in charge, pens and paper were forbidden. This was done to keep the general population ignorant, and them in power. The local man told the platoon sergeant that a pen was worth more than most things for two reasons. First, a child can only go to school if they provide their own supplies. Pens, paper, etc.

Secondly, and to me most importantly, it represents freedom. Freedom from oppression. Freedom to experience life thru education. This child, was at that moment, the wealthiest person on the face of the planet.

Amazing what we take for granted. A pen. One quill from a bird's wing started our nation upon the road to freedom. That road was a rocky and bumpy one indeed. But over the generations, it as been paved by men and women willing to make the ultimate sacrifice. This nation I believe is on the same bumpy, rocky road. But slowly, over time it will prevail. Freedom will ring here. I think all the people need is a pen.

So, this is what I am asking. Send pens & paper. I assure you that the children of Afghanistan will do more with those two items than I have since I have been here. I will have to work on that.

Thanks again for everything you all have done for me.

Eric

-----  
- If you want to send pens and paper, or just say hi to Eric, you can send the package to:  
Eric Leach  
Task Force Saber  
C Troop - 3/4 Cavalry  
APO AE 09355