

again during the State of the Union address. Below is Sergeant Brookins' note disclosing his revelation of why he was there.

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"PATRIOT IN AFGHANISTAN"

It was a Thursday afternoon. We had just received 22 port-a-lets at the (Afghanistan) Palace Garrison, and I had assembled the Afghanistan soldiers together for a class on proper hygiene and use of the port-a-lets...because they were not used to something like this. I wanted to teach them to keep them clean and sanitary while their latrines were being renovated. After I had finished the class I saw a soldier writing on the port-a-lets.

I went up to the soldier and yelled "Hey you!" with an authoritative voice.

He looked at me and laughed. That made me angrier. I had the translator tell me what the laughing man had written.

He told me it said, "Please keep the toilets clean." I felt like I was one foot tall. I got my composure back and called the soldier back over; I apologized to the soldier. He offered me his hand and we shook hands. I told him that I needed his help. In broken English he said, "How can I help you?" I told him that I would bring some paper to put signs up saying, "Please keep the toilets clean."

Well, the next morning I brought the paper to him and he made the signs. That afternoon, I helped him put them up. While we were putting up the signs I asked him why he had joined the new Afghanistan National Army. He told me that he had joined for the memory of his brother and for his family.

He said, "My brother was wounded fighting the Taliban, then tortured and shot to death. The Taliban left his body where he was executed (in the public Stadium in Kabul) and would not let us get my brother's body for three days." I was moved by what he said.

He continued, "I want a better life for my family, and I want to build a free Afghanistan. I want my son to have a better life and to have the freedom to make his own decisions; and not to be dictated how to live his life."

He emotionally stated, "I want freedom for my three little brothers. I don't need the money the Army pays me because I am a business man. I have my own carpet store and it is the only one in the town I come from."

"Which province do you come from?" I asked.

He answered, "Herat is where my family live and I live."

I realized I was speaking to a true patriot—a man who had joined

the military because he is trying to do his part to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan.

I was moved by his story. I had only been in Afghanistan for a month, and was not expecting to hear a story such as this. I knew that I had a mission to help build an NCO (noncommissioned officers) core, and had told myself I wouldn't get emotionally involved. But I realized that I was talking to a true patriot. I understood that a big part of why I was in Afghanistan was the same reasons he volunteered for the Army. I was there to help him accomplish his hope to have a strong military and a better (free) Afghanistan.

Being in Afghanistan makes me realize how we take our freedoms for granted in the United States, and that people are giving up their lives to have just a fraction of the freedoms we take for granted. I came over here to help Afghanistan have freedom and stability, and talking to one soldier made me realize how lucky I am to have been born in the United States of America. I am honored to have met such a person.

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Sergeant Brookins was touched by the Afghanistan soldier and his desire for peace and freedom. I, too, was captured by

