



## Theta Chi Hands Extend to the World

# Sacrifice for a Greater Cause

By Rob Lytle (Zeta Lambda/Westminster '97)

**Editor's Note:** *The following email is being published with the consent of the author, Rob Lytle (Zeta Lambda/Westminster '97). Just as our cover story demonstrates a real life application of Theta Chi's "helping hand" philosophy, so, the uplifting message in this email demonstrates how a soldier was able to incorporate that same philosophy into a generally dismal real life situation to enrich both his own life and the lives of those around him.*

20 October 2006

Brothers,

I'm just writing to touch base and wish you well. I returned from my deployment a couple of months ago and have been playing catch up with my life, my wife, my daughter and the fraternity.

I want to share a little with you about this deployment.

I came off my orders after demobilizing in the middle of June. This tour has truly been both a character building and a trying experience. I had just turned 31 and, for the first time in my life, I felt weathered and old. I guess that's because I was exhausted. I was the main Point of Contact responsible for coordinating the movement and helping prepare and move troops in and out of the Area of Responsibility/Afghani Theatre.

I can't disclose numbers over e-mail, but our rotation moved more than double in our first month what our predecessors did in their monthly average. In one particular week, we moved more troops than the prior group had moved in two months.



Col. Randy A. Kee, Wing Commander, Brother Lytle, and CSSgt Phillip M. Cherry at the induction ceremony for the Mission Hacker Hall of Fame inaugural class of which Brother Lytle is a member.

I had my first full day off after being there 31 days, and, believe me, working a month straight in sub-zero weather wears you out. Until our replacements arrived, we averaged about four days a month off. My typical day began at 4:30 a.m. and went until 8:00 p.m. After that I tried to go to the gym, eat dinner, and then go to bed. We averaged 12–15 hour days every day, but I did about a week straight of 20-hour shifts (4a.m. to midnight) when it was about 20 below zero and snowing. Not only the hours, but the cold, too, really takes a toll on your system. Luckily, the weather broke in mid-March, all of the snow melted, spring came and went, and the temps were in the 80s. It snowed on Palm Sunday and was 100 degrees on Easter. When I got there, it was 20 below with a foot of snow on the ground. I guess that I had become acclimated to the weather after a few weeks when I thought 30–40 degrees was warm.

The place I was stationed was definitely different, and for the first time I think that I've really understood sacrifice for a greater cause. I had missed more than half of my daughter's life, as well as many of her firsts—rolling over, crawling, sitting up by herself, standing up while holding on to something, and her first word. My wife had been working with her and she's also started to use sign language. But that small sacrifice I made, and that several more like me are still making, is so she and my wife can be safe. So my family, my friends, my brothers, like you, can be safe.

With all of the troops coming through there, one of the most rewarding things was when we were able to send them back home to the States or to Europe. With every one we put on that aircraft home, I felt a great sense of joy and accomplishment. But, unfortunately, most positives have a negative. For all of the troops that we were sending home, we were sending at least one replacement troop down range, and, unfortunately, statistics and the media show that there are casualties and injuries from war. I bear a sense of responsibility for the soldiers, Marines, sailors and airmen that I sent into theatre and that



Tent City, Afghanistan, Winter 2005

fall into that group. Even though I was just doing my job, I'm sure that I will feel guilty for some time, but it's a tough reality of war, one I have to face and one that I push back. It could have been worse, and I could have been closer to harm's way, but we were safer where I was stationed and I was thankful for that every day.

My family, friends, mentors, co-workers, brothers, fraternity, etc. are the reason I could not wait to be home, but all of you are the biggest reason that I wanted to be there, too. I was, and am, willing to do what it takes so all of you can be safe at home and so my daughter's/our children's generation doesn't have to be there in 18 to 20 years. If needed again, I will proudly serve.

Throughout the monotony of the groundhog days we lived there, we looked forward to a few general things: getting an e-mail from home and getting mail. We were, also, authorized two beers a night (more presently than the chapter!). For the first two months, I focused on studying and passing a test in my free time.

In addition to supporting Operation Enduring Freedom, I wanted to make a difference while deployed. Theta Chi's philosophy is to live by the "Helping Hand" and that is what I try to do. I joined an outreach society and we went out to the local community on our days off. I visited a children's cancer center and a children's heart ward. We got to play and interact with the kids. We played games, put together puzzles and just played. It was amazing how little they had. They're in the clinic for at least a year with their family.

After my first visit, I made the choice to do something. These kids needed toys, games, etc., as well as clothes and toiletries, so I contacted family members and my co-workers, and I had



Heart surgery recipients sponsored by Brother Lytle.

over 25 boxes arrive there for the children. I also made an effort to see how I would do as a philanthropist and I raised enough money to sponsor heart surgeries for three children (two little girls, ages 5 and 6, and one child to be determined).

I am proud of what I accomplished over there as I have proven to myself that if I set my mind to something, I can accomplish it. The "Helping Hand" can take place at any time and any place. We need to strive to make a difference and extend the "Helping Hand" to all who seek it always, even in harder times. More importantly, enjoy life. Seeing young soldiers, men the same age or younger than myself, die so we can live free, puts things in perspective.

Since my return home, I have thoroughly enjoyed watching my daughter grow and watch-

ing her develop from a baby to a little girl. My wife and I have also started to expand my family with the addition of my son (due today, 2/27/07). I have been appointed to the title of Marketing Manager in my civilian job. After 12 years, the Air Force Reserves still remains a key part of my life, and I have been selected for the Deserving Airmen Commissioning Program. I am currently waiting for my date to attend Officer's Training School/bootcamp to earn my commission as a Second Lieutenant.

Although I decided to transfer my Alumni Corporation presidential duties to a new brother last fall, I was asked and happily accepted the role to remain on the board as an advisory member and mentor, as well as a Chapter Adviser

I have shared and encouraged my chapter brothers that we, as a brotherhood, can continue to make a difference in giving back to the chapter that has given to us. Our Board has taken a significant dent out of our mortgage, so if we work together as brothers, we can own our chapter house. Once it's paid off, we can start doing more chapter house improvements, have more/better alumni events, start a scholarship fund, and, most importantly, start a trust or other type of fund should something ever happen to the fraternity or chapter. With all of that said, I hope that we've made a difference with our fraternity and chapter over the last six years.

It has truly been a privilege and an honor working with all of you.

Love and respect all brothers!  
Fraternally,

Rob Lytle