

Serving with pride

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Two months ago, he re-enlisted for four more years.

"War makes you appreciate life better because one minute you're with your friends and a few minutes later they could be killed," said the young soldier. "Being over in Iraq makes you grow up a lot faster (because war) is a lot of responsibility."

At 21, Dennis portrays a confidence of a much older man. His handshake is firm and his eyes look directly into yours as he talks. He has seen, perhaps too much, yet, his semblance is of a gentle, caring man.

Last week, he spent time at his childhood home on Barrel Road. He enjoyed a long awaited barbecue (one of his favorite things to do) with family and friends before returning to his home base in Colorado and preparing to depart to Iraq for another year.

"My family is the most important thing to me," said Dennis, who is the middle child in a family of six. "They don't like when I have to leave, but they're all very proud of me."

While home, Dennis said he enjoys simple things; eating steak, playing with his oldest nephew (and getting to know the two new ones that were born while he has been gone), spending time with his family and taking snapshots with each of them, visiting with old friends and telling the stories of his experiences.

Dennis said he goes to schools, churches and other venues as much as he can to tell the stories of soldiers who have died.

"I've experienced firsthand the cost of freedom," he said. "I tell the stories because I want the people of this country to know what my friends died for. I want people to know they didn't die in vain. The way I see it is, if I die, I want my friends to tell my story."

Coming from a military family — his grandfather served in World War II, his father served in Special Forces for 20 years, his older brother served in the Air Force, as well as six uncles on his mother side who served in various branches — Dennis grew up with the goal of becoming a soldier.

When he was in grade six, his parents, Jean and Darnell Moore, took Dennis to West Point Academy, where his

father was teaching at the time. Dennis was fascinated with the school and said he wanted to attend, his mother said.

By the time he was in his junior year in high school, Dennis had been accepted to West Point ... but then the events of Sept. 11 happened.

"He just wanted to go to fight even though he was too young," said Jean. "We talked him into finishing school



Dennis Moore, (second from left) takes a break with his 'brothers' of war in Iraq.

COURTESY PHOTO

and the day after Christmas in 2002, he announced he was joining the Army."

Dennis left two months after graduating from Oakmont High School.

While in Iraq, he said his emotions changed from day-to-day. On one hand, he would get upset seeing his friends being killed. On the other hand, he would feel compassion seeing Iraqi children looking for scraps of food.

Dennis said his love for his family and for his country gives him courage to face his challenges in Iraq. He said whenever he calls his mother she reassures him with words of hope and faith.

Almost two years ago, he wrote a letter to the young people attending Overlook Middle School and Oakmont High School exhorting the young men and women to love and respect one another; to be kind and treat their fellowmen with fairness; and overall to take pride of their country, its people and its soldiers.

Dennis is a person who cares for his fellowmen. He said he likes to inspire people, to encourage and help them in any way he can, even people in other countries.

His girlfriend, Courtney M. Paddock, said one of the things that attracted her to Dennis the first time she met him was the love he exudes.

"He is a people person. He is out to serve others and not himself," she said.

Everyone in his family is proud of him. At times, tears well-up in his parents' eyes when they talk about their son and his dedication to serving his country.

His father said he is proud of Dennis, but chokes at the thought of seeing him go off to war. And no matter how many times his mother has seen loved ones go to war, she is still not used to that moment of separation.

"It's hard no matter how many times you've been through it," she said. "None of us want war, but we do want freedom and in order to keep peace in this land and try to help others have peace in their land, it costs because freedom is not free."

For Dennis, helping the Iraqi people regain control of their country is important. Fighting to maintain peace is too.

"I think everyone is entitled to their opinion, but (people who are against the war) they haven't been there and seen their friends die in front of their eyes. We have a mission and it is clear; to help the Iraqi people prepare to take over their country, but they are still taking baby steps and if we pull out now, we have wasted our time and our friends have died in vain. I respect our President and do what he asks us to do and take pride on that too."

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