



Two Metal Bracelets

An Interview with Alex Taus

By Alec Griffith

Alexander Taus had more of a view of the world than most seven-year-olds. At this young age, Alex and his family moved to Singapore, where he grew up for a while and got a sense of what it was like to live life with limited freedoms. He moved to Arizona six or seven years later, went to high school, and was even a student of Mrs. Hatch. Two years after he completed high school, he joined the Army.

Alex shipped out to basic training on his birthday, August 8, 2007. Because he was an infantryman, he said that there were many room-clearing drills and a lot of marksmanship training. After basic training he was sent on a hometown recruiting program, where he talked to possible recruits about his experience in basic training and tried to get them to enlist in the Army. After that Alex was shipped to Fort Lewis, Washington, and then off to Iraq.

Alex was stationed in Baqubah, Diyala province, Iraq. When asked how to spell Baqubah, he responded: "B-A-Q-U-B-A-H is the Americanized spelling; there's some apostrophes, parentheses, and exclamation points in the real spelling." Alex was an 11 Bravo infantryman for the 520 Stryker unit. He started out as the driver since it was tradition that the new guy would drive until another new guy came along. After becoming a driver, he started carrying ammunition and spotting for a 240 Bravo machine gun. Next he became an RTO [Radio Telecommunications Officer] for his entire platoon. It was his job to keep track of millions of dollars' worth of communications equipment; Alex even had a security clearance because he was often working with classified information. He holds pride in the fact that he never let communications down as long as he was an RTO.

During his time as an RTO, he found out that he was going to be personal security for Lieutenant Colonel Metz and his MTT [Military Transition Team] team. But, Alex had to switch jobs with a guy on his team to teach the man how to operate the communications equipment. While he was teaching the man, he took the man's job and operated an M203 grenade launcher. Alex then left for his Christmas leave. When he returned, he was reassigned to his MTT team and started to get settled in. It was the MTT team's job to help transition the Iraqis into no longer having the American soldiers there. They were training the police and Iraqi army to defend themselves. Alex mentioned that they would teach the Iraqis basic policing skills and

even bring in the MPs from the base to do training exercises. He was personal security for Metz and his team and when the Lieutenant Colonel was not wearing body armor, Taus was required to wear his. Alex said that even at base, when most of the other soldiers were relaxing with their body armor off, he was still required to wear his.

As most people do in the Army, Alex made friends. Two of his closest friends were Sergeant Israel O'Brien and Corporal Chris Yauch. Sergeant O'Brien was Alex's commanding officer and good friend when Alex was removed from his platoon. Israel, or Izzie, "was one of those guys that it didn't matter who you were, he'd talk to you. If you had a question he'd help you to the best of his ability." Corporal Yauch was a great friend of Alex that had been with him since they had gotten off the plane in Atlanta. Chris "Boo Boo" Yauch "was always smiling, never complained about anything even when the BS got real thick. He was always the jokester, always making people laugh, pissing people off on purpose; that was his thing to do."

Chris and Sergeant O'Brien were heading an operation to find a cache of weapons. They were standing toward the middle of the street so their squads could easily see them. A car came along the road they were traveling down when the man inside detonated himself and the car. The explosion was enough to kill Sergeant O'Brien and Corporal Yauch and wound six or seven others. Originally Sergeant O'Brien was announced as MIA [Missing in Action] because they could find no remains or artifacts from him. For about two hours, the entire region was put on alert to look for the Sergeant, but they eventually called it off because they concluded he was vaporized instantly by the explosion.

Alex was then asked to carry Corporal Yauch's casket onto the big C-17 that was going to take him back to the States. After the casket was loaded, Alex and many of Corporal Yauch's and Sergeant O'Brien's friends piled onto the back of the plane and said their final goodbyes to their friends. Alex Taus now wears two metal bracelets in honor of his fallen comrades. Written on them are the names of Corporal Chris "Boo Boo" Yauch and Sergeant Israel O'Brien. Alex claims, "I get in fights with people in the airport all the time" when he refuses to remove his bracelets while going through security. Never having lost someone close to me, I can't even begin to imagine the pain he must have been going through, and is probably still going through

About a month after his friends' deaths, Alex started packing for home. He said it was hectic getting out of Iraq because of the number of soldiers trying to leave. His flight was delayed for a total of two weeks. When he was finally stateside he spent some time hanging out with other members of his platoon before he finally checked out of that base. He now works in Fort Carson, Colorado. Alex is ready to go back if needed because he feels that "military service is what makes those freedoms happen in America today."

Hearing and writing his story has really helped me think about what I can do with my life and all the twists and turns it could take.

Alec Griffith is a senior at Cactus Shadows High School in Cave Creek and has been in Veterans Heritage Project for four years. He has completed four interviews for the Project and served as Vice President during his junior year. Alec traveled to Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg his freshman year to visit Battle of the Bulge sites and Patton's grave; last year he toured Korea with four other VHP students. He has undertaken responsibility for press releases and is a strong leader in the program.

Alexander Ryan Taus was born on August 8, 1987, in Peoria, Illinois. He enlisted in the Army in 2007 and went to serve in Kuwait and Baqubah, Iraq. He switched from job to job in his unit, starting as a

rifleman, moving to an RTO, a Radio Telecommunications Officer. He eventually ended up working as personal security for a MTT team--Military Transition Team--which he said "felt good to say that I was protecting someone." After a few years of service, he lost two of his friends to an explosion and got the honor of carrying his friend's casket onto the plane. He currently resides in Colorado Springs, Colorado.