

From Angus to Honor

Cattlemen go abroad to serve their country.

by Barb Baylor Anderson

Remote rural areas of the United States are a far cry from battlefields found in the Middle East. But, more than one young Angus enthusiast has traded in the everyday freedoms of farm life to join the military and help protect the pastures and loved ones at home.

Learning from Angus

Past National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) director Brandon Douglas, Douglas Livestock, Gentry, Ark., is one of those individuals. He wanted to join the Marines from the time he was in middle school, says his mom, Debbie. "I wanted him to become a veterinarian. Sure, horses and cattle can hurt you, but they don't carry guns," she notes.

Brandon is currently serving overseas, and communication is often a one-line, "Mom, I'm fine." But Debbie says that's enough. She knows Brandon learned many skills from being involved with the Arkansas Junior Angus Association and with the NJAA.

"He wanted to help others achieve their goals like so many NJAA directors helped him," she says. "The Angus business taught him about getting up early and tending to animal needs before your own, becoming a leader by setting a good example, having a sense of responsibility, building moral courage, having the inner strength to stand up for what is right, making good decisions without delay, demonstrating dependability so others can rely on you to do a job and do it well, and enthusiasm, initiative and knowledge of the job. These are the types of characteristics the Marine Corps looks for."

After high school, Brandon studied agriculture science at a junior college in Cheyenne, Wyo. He signed up for the Marine Corps' delayed entry program in January 2001 so he could finish school and his NJAA term. He was scheduled to enter boot camp in October, but Debbie says the terrorist attack on the United States Sept. 11, 2001, changed the outlook for Brandon.



"He called his recruiter and asked to enter the Marines right away, but the recruiter told him he would have to wait until October," she recalls. "Brandon has always had a great sense of honor and commitment for his country. In his room from around the age of 11, he had a huge American flag that took up one entire wall. He believed in the Pledge of Allegiance, including 'One nation under God' — it isn't just 31 words."

Brandon trained to become a helicopter mechanic in North Carolina, and was stationed in Okinawa, Japan. He earned his second MOS (military occupation service) as crew chief/door gunner on the CH 46 (a cargo helicopter) and also provides mechanics expertise. Brandon is assigned to HMM-265 Reinforced, which is the largest component of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit's Air Combat Element. Brandon is now in Iraq and hopes his fifth year can be stateside.

"Brandon has been all over Asia — Japan, the Philippines, Korea, Bali, East Timor, Guam, Hong Kong and Australia. He says he thought we had seen poverty here in the U.S., but other countries are so much worse off than we are," Debbie says. "He was in Japan for two years before he came home on leave in July 2004. He timed his leave so that he could go to the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS).



► Brandon trained as a helicopter mechanic and is now stationed in Iraq.



► Brandon timed his leave from Japan to visit the 2004 NJAS. Pictured are former NJAA director Amy Wolfrey (left) and Brandon.

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“As a parent, I can tell you I have great pride for what our troops are doing and enduring to protect our freedoms,” Debbie continues. “As a parent, I can also tell you that I pray continuously for the safety of our troops and my son.”

Brandon comes from a family of military service. His grandfather, Dick Douglas, was a staff sergeant and aerial gunner in the Army Air Corps during World War II, and Dick’s brother, staff sergeant Bob Douglas, died while serving in the Asiatic area during WWII. Brandon’s aunt, Rebecca Douglas, was in the Navy, and his grandfather, Gene Vaughn, was in the National Guard. Brandon

hopes to make sergeant in 2005.

“I have given thought to going to officer training and being a pilot, or I may finish my education, ranch and even try politics,” Brandon responded in a recent quick e-mail. “I miss most the everyday freedoms the rest of you enjoy.”

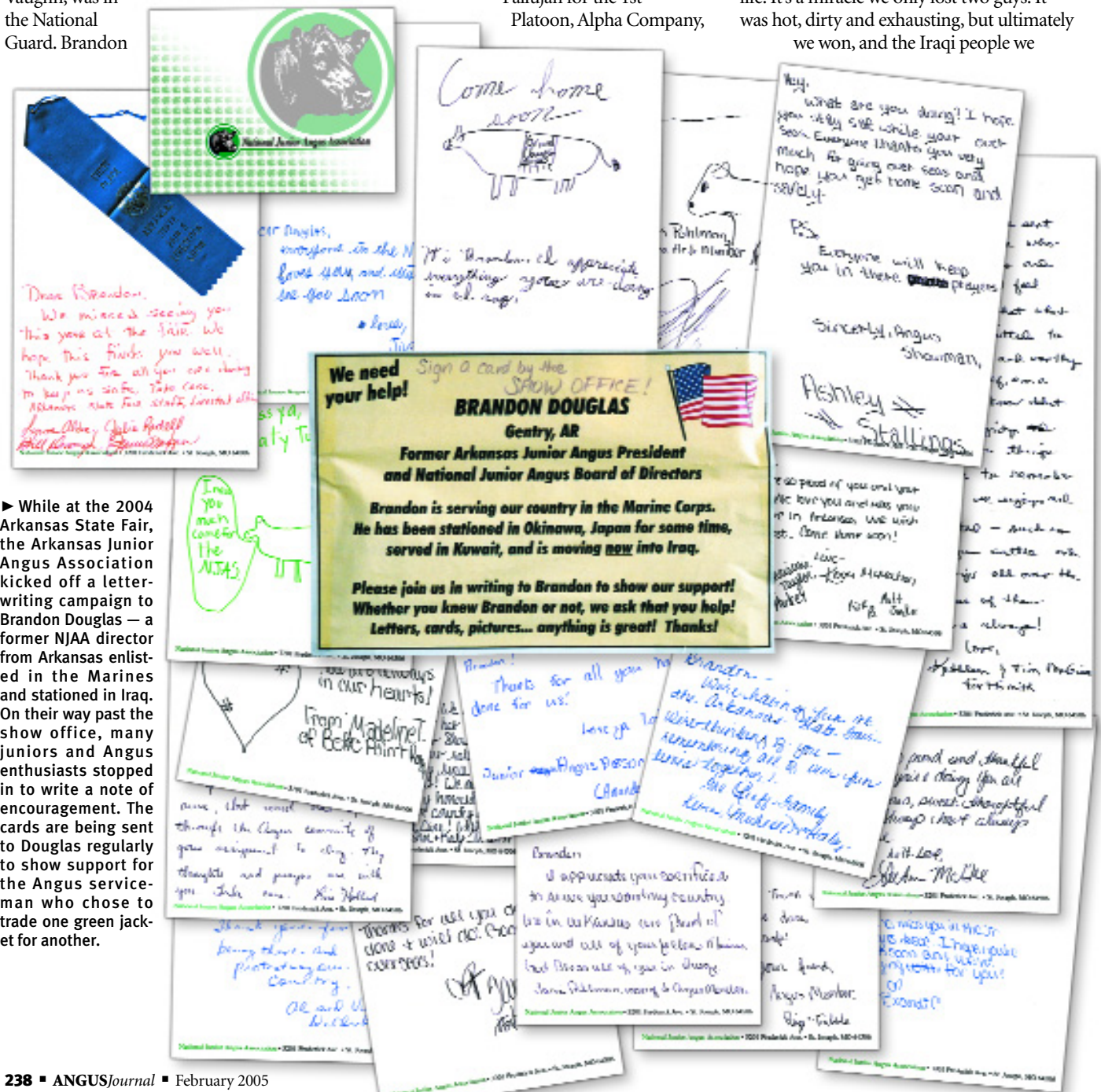
From California to Iraq

Dustin Medeiros, a West Point graduate, also misses the comforts of home. Medeiros now serves as an Army platoon leader for an armored Humvee patrol near Baghdad and as armored support for the invasion of

Fallujah for the 1st Platoon, Alpha Company,

2-12 Cavalry Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. He is a past California Junior Angus Association and NJAA member. His parents, Dave and Carol, operate a registered Angus herd near Denair, Calif.

“I spent all of August 2004 in Najaf fighting Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army in and around the Imam Ali Shrine and Cemetery,” he told loved ones and friends in an e-mail. “I doubt that I will ever experience anything approaching that level of fighting again. This is one of those things that I’m going to remember for my entire life. It’s a miracle we only lost two guys. It was hot, dirty and exhausting, but ultimately we won, and the Iraqi people we



► While at the 2004 Arkansas State Fair, the Arkansas Junior Angus Association kicked off a letter-writing campaign to Brandon Douglas — a former NJAA director from Arkansas enlisted in the Marines and stationed in Iraq. On their way past the show office, many juniors and Angus enthusiasts stopped in to write a note of encouragement. The cards are being sent to Douglas regularly to show support for the Angus serviceman who chose to trade one green jacket for another.

came into contact with at the end were very grateful.”

Dave says Dustin started talking about the military when he was about 12 years old. “He saved his money from showing his animals at the county fair, and purchased the Time Life book series on the Army,” Dave remembers. “Dustin became aware of West Point during high school. With only 10% of applicants accepted to West Point, Dustin made a huge accomplishment by getting accepted into the military institution.”

Dave says growing up on a ranch worked to Dustin’s advantage during the West Point application process. His ranch work ethic was viewed very positively, along with his grades, SAT scores and involvement in activities that included 4-H, NJAA and sports.

Dustin earned a computer science degree and the rank of 2nd Lieutenant with graduation. Dave notes some of Dustin’s favorite times came during training with the Army in various branches.

“During his senior year, Dustin was a team leader in a Cyber Defense Exercise, where West Point went into a competition with other schools and created a firewall defense with the NSA (National Security Agency),” he says. “While Dustin could have chosen a branch that was connected to the technical and computer area of the military, he branched Armor, knowing it would take him to the front lines of any conflict. Two weeks after officer training in Kentucky, he arrived in Fort Hood, Texas, was assigned a platoon, and preparations were under way to go to Iraq in January 2004.”

His group’s stay was extended until March as part of the pre-election buildup.

“Dustin tells us their stay was extended largely due to the fact that they are ‘awesome’ and well-experienced in combat,” Dave says. “While at home for a two-week leave this summer, his company moved out to Najaf two days before he was to return. He would have gotten on a plane that day to be with his platoon, not happy that they had moved without him. There is fierce loyalty within the company, and Dustin has a deep commitment to his men.”

Dustin believes the United States is very slowly, but surely, winning. “I’m talking about putting down the Iraqi resistance and building up their new government to the point that they can function on their own. If we can actually get a democratic foothold in the Middle East, we may have the first step to the real solution for fighting terrorism,” Dustin says. “I firmly believe now that unless

you are on the ground and outside the wire here on a daily basis, you cannot possibly comprehend how this culture works and how difficult the problems we face are. So is it worth it? I don’t know yet, but I think in the long run it will be.”

Dustin has four more years to serve in the Army to complete his commitment to West Point. Then he will decide whether to make the Army a career. “As parents, we feel support and comfort from all of the wonderful family and friends that pray and share our pride for what Dustin has chosen to do with his life. We pray daily for his safety, as well as for all of the troops who are serving to protect our freedom,” Dave says.

Rewarding results

While no longer on active duty, until recently Ray Ramberg, Nissen Angus, Chinook, Mont., served as an aviation machinist for the Navy. Since his return from overseas assignments last year, he has been working on his diesel degree at a local junior college and may return to the ranch following graduation.

“My senior year in high school, I decided to join the Navy and get a chance to see the world before I returned to the ranch. I was stationed in Washington, Florida and on the USS Teddy Roosevelt right after 9-11, as well as in Bahrain, France and the Caribbean,” he says. “I can say that being on the flight deck is a lot like halter-breaking a heifer. You have



► Growing up on a ranch gave Dustin Medeiros the skills and work ethic he needed to get into West Point.



► Ray Ramberg says being on the flight deck of a ship is like halter-breaking a heifer. “You have to remain alert and work hard to get the job done right,” he says.

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“You don’t meet many rural kids in the military, and you miss everything while you are away,” Ray continues. “You sacrifice certain freedoms serving your country, but if you join for the right reasons, it is a rewarding experience.”



How can you help?

Want to send a message or care package to Brandon or Dustin? Contact information is listed below for both servicemen. Dustin also lists the following items he likes to receive:

- Beef jerky, canned meat, summer sausage, pepperoni
- Packaged foods like ravioli that come in plastic containers
- Breadsticks and marinara sauce
- Chips and dip — specifically Tostitos Gold™ and hot salsa
- Coffee — the stronger, the better
- Magazines (guns, motorcycles, cars, hunting, men’s, computers, technology, *Time*, *Newsweek* and any others) and books
- Gillette Mach3 Turbo Razors
- Copenhagen Long Cut and cigars, which must be sealed in plastic

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