

RECORD REVIEW

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‘If you worry about whether you are going to die or not, you’re probably going to end up dead.’
— Cpl. Mike Boscia

ABBY LUBY PHOTO

Corporal Mike Boscia on leave last month at his Bedford Village home

Bedford’s Mike Boscia shows Marine pride in Iraq service

By ABBY LUBY

Mike Boscia grew up in Bedford Village and always wanted a job in public service. He graduated from Fox Lane High School in 1998 and has been a volunteer firefighter for the Bedford Village Fire Department since 2002. After trying his hand at academics for a couple of years, Cpl. Boscia was enticed to join the Marines after talking to Navy ROTC cadets at a Dave Matthews concert. “They told me the Marines always go first,” he said. “They are always in front of all the other military guys in the chow line, in the gym, they get off the ship first. Other Army or Navy infantry have to get out of the way when the Marines come running down the corridor. Whatever is going on, the Marines get to do it first.”

A week later, in March 2002, Cpl. Boscia was in the Marine recruiting office. A week after that he enlisted, and six months later he went to boot camp. “Boot camp was intense,” said Cpl. Boscia. “Looking back on it, it was one big gigglefest. If you were to go to Parris Island to see the stuff they are doing there is, for me, very funny. Training takes place in a ‘squad bay,’ which is a big concrete room. You move all the beds to one side, and they come and dump buckets of water and laundry detergent all over the floor, and kids are washing the floor like that. The kids run back and forth with towels to move the water and the soap around. That’s hilarious to watch, but when I was doing it, I hated it. The Marine Corps teaches things at a most basic level, through repetition, pain, and discomfort.”

Cpl. Boscia said that Marine training conditions you, both mentally and physically, to have a visceral reaction to “screwing up.”

“If you apply that theory across the board, it’s important to get it right the first time or else people will end up dead. You also learn the fundamentals of rifle marksmanship, close order drill, about military law, the Marine Corps history,” he said. “When it comes down to it, you can train a soldier to think like a Marine, but that soldier still doesn’t have the Marine Corps culture, which is what really sets us apart from the other services.”

After boot camp, Cpl. Boscia came home for 10 days. He went down to Camp Geiger — part of Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, N.C. — for three weeks. He received Marine combat training, and learned about machine guns, how to fire grenade launchers, to patrol and dig defensive positions. “Our platoon commander kept telling us to pay attention because we might be going to Iraq,” said Cpl. Boscia. “We were becoming a provisional rifle company, which defends positions and assaults objectives. He told us, ‘If you don’t do this stuff, you are going to end up dead or you are going to kill somebody else.’”

Cpl. Boscia earned the rank of corporal with the job title “nuclear biological chemical defense chief.”

“I am responsible for warehousing and maintenance for my unit’s gear,” he said. “All the suits, boots, gloves, gas masks, protection gear have to work,” he said. “Chemicals to decontaminate people have to work. There are thousands of pieces of gear. It’s a \$3.5 million account.”

Cpl. Boscia trains the men in his unit how to use the gear. “I also train them how to identify, survive, and then remediate threats from weapons of mass destruction,” he said.

The mission of the Marine Corps rifle squad, said Cpl. Boscia, is to locate, close in on, and destroy the enemy by fire, and maneuver and repel the enemy’s assault by fire and close combat. “In a nutshell, the infantry finds them and blows them up,” he said. “The military is a big sharp stick, and the infantry, combat arms, and defensive weaponry are the sharp end of that pointy stick, and the ground troops are literally on the tip of the spear.”

Just a year ago, Cpl. Boscia’s unit arrived in Falluja. He explained that the normal deployment rotation cycle is seven months out and seven months back.

“Normally, combat units deploy on a two-year cycle, six months out and six months back — six months on the base doing other jobs, six months of school time like machine gun school, or, for me, it would be hazmat classes or learn how to drive a Fox vehicle,” he said, referring to a specialized military vehicle. “After that you do a six-month workup, preparing to deploy, and then you deploy for six months.”

Because there aren’t enough infantry battalions to keep the original deployment cycle of two years, Cpl. Boscia said the infantry is spending seven months at home and seven months in Iraq. In April of last year, Falluja was in the news because of the torture and murder of American contractors. “We’re the ones that made Falluja a hot spot,” said Cpl. Boscia. “We were there for the initial assault back in April — that was operation Vigilant Resolve. Not more than five days after that we were in the city assaulting through — you just don’t do that to Americans.”

Describing what it was like in Falluja, Cpl. Boscia said, “Imagine Main Street in Mount Kisco, with everything that’s supposed to be inside the homes are outside. Imagine cars on top of buildings, trash in the streets — sort of like you took all the buildings and had them vomit out their contents — that’s what a lot of Iraq looks like, just a mess.”

As part of his training, Cpl. Boscia said he had to take a class on improvised explosive devices, or IEDs. “Those are the roadside bombs, and they told us that sometimes the IEDs are put in plastic bags and placed by the roadside,” he said. “I wondered just how many plastic bags near the road could there really be? One day we came around this corner at the crest of the hill and there was a sea of plastic bags just blowing around, and I thought ‘uh-oh.’”

It’s very hard to describe what it’s like being in Iraq and being shot at, said Cpl. Boscia.

“Put yourself in front of a really nice entertainment system, a big TV, SurroundSound, huge projection screen. Watch battle scenes from movies like ‘We Were Soldiers,’ ‘Black Hawk Down,’ or ‘Saving Private Ryan,’ and sit real, real close to the screen. Jack the volume all the way up. As stuff is blowing up, you are shaking because the bass is so powerful, have someone throw clouds of dirt at you — that’s what being in combat in Iraq is like. As long as you are not being hit, it’s just like being in a movie. It’s surreal.”

Cpl. Boscia said he has, in part, a fatalistic view about the war. “I’m not going to see the one who gets me; what’s the point in worrying about it. That’s not going to protect me any better. I just go about my day. I’m vigilant, I’m observant, but I’m not going to see a land mine that I drive over — it’s going to be boom and that’s it. If you worry about whether you are going to die or not, you’re probably going to end up dead. It’s either going to happen or it’s not, I’ll either get shot

today or I won't, I'm going to get blown up today or I won't — I'll either go home in one piece or I won't."

While Cpl. Boscia was home in Bedford, Iraq held its first elections.

He likened the elections to the first baby steps in setting up a democracy.

"It's the beginning of their own democratically elected government, not some hodgepodge mess that we've handed them," he said. "The military will probably be there for at least another two to three years while Iraqis are getting their own government together."

He said that right now, the country does not have the security apparatus they need. "You can't just walk in and say 'Here's democracy, bye. You got to show them how it works, how to do it. There's still parts of that country that need to be pacified. The government has to know how to come down on those people. Eventually Iraq will get to that point, where you can't just go running around shooting off mortars and putting bombs on the side of the road. That's why people don't shoot off mortars and put bombs on the side of the road in America, because they know they are going to get caught. The repercussions aren't worth it."

Despite the fact that the U.S. didn't find any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, Cpl. Boscia said that going to war in Iraq makes sense for many other reasons.

"We are there for economic reasons," he said "They've got oil; we need oil. They have a bad government, we don't like that government, so we are going to remove that government and help them build something that is a lot more like us because it's going to benefit us. What's so wrong about that? We are the big kid on the block. We can do that."