

# What makes a top-notch soldier?

MUSCATINE, Iowa - It doesn't seem that long ago when I first wrote about a former third-grade student of mine on his way to serve in Iraq as part of the U.S. Air Force.

Pat Gray, 20, flew out in August 2003 for his first overseas deployment. He left a wife and twin babies in Alaska as well a small

army of worried friends and relatives in Muscatine.

But Pat is back in the good ol' U.S. now, so these last two weeks were a time of R & R, as they say in the Air Force.

Everyone was thankful to find him stationed

would have told you that he seemed too quiet or too peaceful to be a future soldier. The

biggest battle I remember him fighting was over some soccer scuffle where he was sure certain people were not following the rules, therefore ruining the game for all. He responded verbally and then in writing, giving me detailed ways we could correct the problem and condemn/correct those most responsible. Looking back, he was probably right.

But last Friday, as I watched him talk, I realized the teaching torch had been handed to him now. He patiently answered questions about the food, the weather, and mostly, the danger. He entertained his audience with stories of spiders crawling on faces during the night while reassuring everyone that a lot of good things were happening in Iraq all the time. He thanked

well as those from his own country making their own sacrifices. He was a living example that no man should be too busy to take time to share their best with society's youngest. He was humble, proud and grateful for the many thoughts and blessings that had been sent his way.

In the end, the kids promised to keep writing, everyone posed for some group shots and life went back to its regular schedule. The kids bounced their way to recess and Pat was hungry for another American fast food fix. Soon Airman 1st Class Patrick Gray will be on his way back to Alaska with his young family and there will be more airport tears and bittersweet hugs.

In the meantime, 19 more little third-grade minds now have a clearer picture of a local hero who took time to give them a first-hand view of the world.



**The Good News**  
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