



Army Staff Sergeant Returns to His Roots at Saint Viator

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Staff Sgt. Scott Strahammer spent time talking with students about his experience in Afghanistan. (Photo by Chris Santucci '12)

Staff Sgt. Scott Strahammer has faced roadside bombs and enemy fire while stationed in southern Afghanistan, just 30 miles from the Taliban stronghold in Kalihar. Yet, last week he found himself in front of something even more unnerving: a classroom of students.

“I can’t believe I’m so nervous,” Strahammer said as he gripped the podium in a first period American Literature class, in front of a class filled with juniors.

Strahammer returned to Saint Viator, where he graduated in 1997, to thank students personally for their cards, gifts and care packages sent to him and

his platoon over the holidays.

“It’s one of the nicest things I’ve ever received,” Strahammer said, wearing his Army fatigues and boots. “I read every single letter. It was a huge morale boost.”

Strahammer was a standout goalie on the Lions’ soccer team, and started on the 1996 team that placed third in the state. When he attended Azusa Pacific University near Los Angeles, he continued playing soccer, but he also dreamed of becoming a high school history teacher.

“But the events of 9/11 changed all that,” he told the students. “It hit me hard; I took it personally.”

Within days of the tragedy, he walked into an Army recruiting office, and nearly 10 years later he has completed two tours in Korea and now is in the midst of his first tour in Afghanistan.

Strahammer described his living conditions as living in a tent and constructing a base out of houses purchased from the Afghans. He also talked about the dangers, seeing as many as 60 soldiers from his platoon killed by roadside bombs in 70 days, including 13 killed by a car bomb in one day.

“That’s pretty tough,” he said.

Yet the challenge of his work still drives him, he said. Strahammer works in Army intelligence. He has a staff of interpreters who report to him as he listens to enemy communications and monitors insurgents’ Web sites.

Strahammer presented a PowerPoint presentation of photos from the Afghan countryside and his Army base there, while visiting with students during classes. He also talked to them informally during lunch periods.

Junior Frankie Perricone of Northbrook asked a lot of questions during Strahammer’s visit on everything from the rate of currency in Afghanistan to sports and recreation on the base.

“It was really interesting to hear how the events of 9/11 had changed him,” Perricone said, “and about his desire to be in the military.”

His classmate Alex Thomas of Arlington Heights agreed. They led the line of students leaving the classroom. Each one waited to shake Strahammer’s hand and give him a high five before giving him a parting message: “Thanks.”