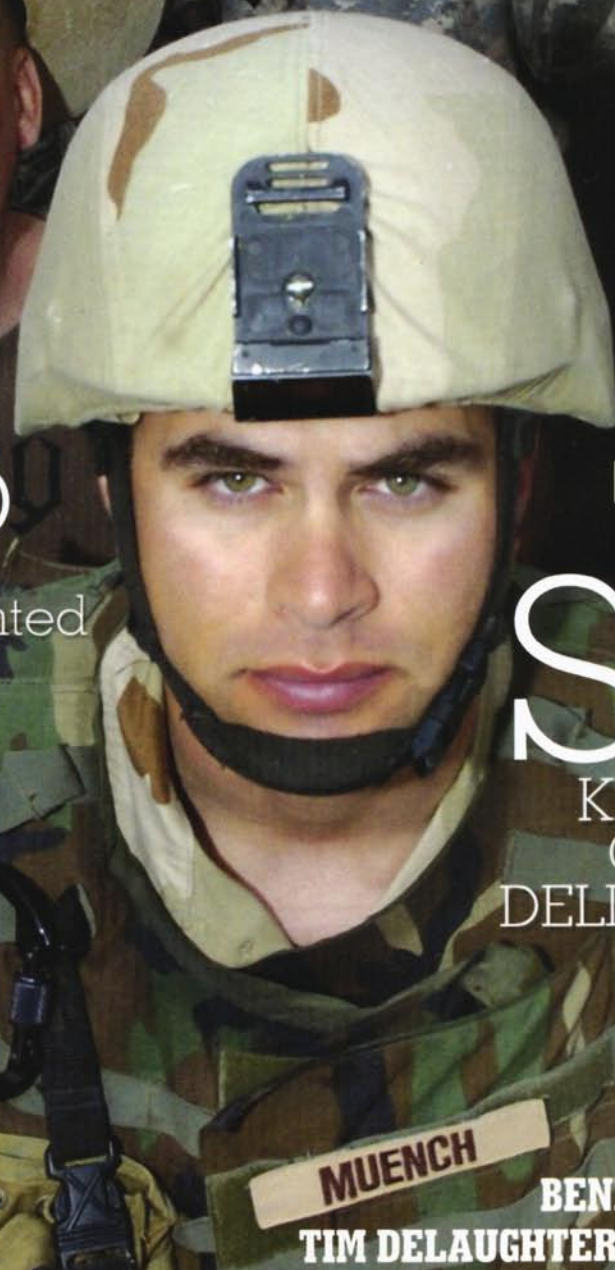


TEXAS MUSIC

Inside the music of Texas

Summer 2007/ Issue 31
www.txmusic.com



LOST & FOUND

Johnny Bush gets reacquainted with his voice

OPERATION Texas Storm

KEVIN FOWLER AND CHARLIE ROBISON DELIVER TEXAS MUSIC TO THE TROOPS



BEND STUDIO ★ GURF MORLIX ★
TIM DELAUGHTER OF THE POLYPHONIC SPREE



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46 Iraq & Roll: Texas music and the troops

BY STEWART RAMSER

Country music good ol' boys—Charlie Robison and Kevin Fowler brave oh-six-hundred wake-up calls, fire warnings and several stomach-churning combat-roll landings to bring a slice of home to our men and women on the front lines of the Iraq War. Texas Music takes you backstage on their Downrange Road House Tour.



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28 Q&A: Tim DeLaughter of the Polyphonic Spree

BY ALEC HANLEY BEMIS

To hell with Hollywood. All the Polyphonic Spree frontman and his 23-or-so-member band needed was the divine hand of the Thin White Duke ... and a wardrobe change.

IN LATE January, Jimmy Perkins, manager for Charlie Robison and Kevin Fowler, called me and said he had a spot to join him, Robison, Fowler and their bands on a trip to entertain the troops in Iraq in March. I think my first response was similar to most others' when first told about the idea: "Huh?" After he explained a little more, I might have said something like, "You gotta be crazy." But then, after asking a few more questions and thinking about it a little bit, I realized this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. So, after receiving five inoculations, I headed off to Iraq just two days after our annual Reader Appreciation Party held March 16 at Scholz Garten in Austin.

Outside of a "Letter from the Publisher" here and there, I haven't contributed content to the magazine that I founded nearly eight years ago. However, this was an assignment that I couldn't outsource to our capable writers — I wanted to experience this trip first-hand.

This is a not a story about the war per se, so if you're looking for hard analysis on the status of the conflict, you can turn to myriad mainstream media. This is a story about being on the road with two of the most popular Texas country artists around. For me, it was kind of like the movie *Almost Famous* ... on steroids.

My initial orientation to the military environment involved spending one night as a guest at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs quite a few years ago. The highly structured environment of the military certainly requires a different mentality and a different lifestyle.

The dedication of the troops is inspiring, but there is a complacency toward the war in America. It's easy for people to go about their everyday lives and not think about the sacrifice of American men and women serving overseas, and if this story acts as a catalyst for a few people to become more involved, and perhaps contribute time, money or resources, I would consider it a success. We mention a few ways citizens can contribute at the end of the story. As Charlie Robison says, "If y'all went over there and saw what they're doing, you'd care a whole lot more about what they get from us when they come home."

I personally had mixed feelings when I left to come home. Although I've been to the Middle East before (Israel, Egypt, West Bank), nothing could prepare me for what I saw on this trip — and that's stuck with me as I've settled

back into work, safe at home in Austin. Over there, it's a complex situation that may or may not be deteriorating (depending on whom you ask), but the troops are confident it can be turned around. I was very impressed with the men and women we met, and on behalf of Texas Music's staff, I thank them for their service. I'd also like to thank Captain Trevor Garrett and

Captain Katrina Damiani, who accompanied our group on the trip, and Melissa Welch of Armed Forces Entertainment.

Sincerely,

Stewart C. Ramser
Stewart C. Ramser
Publisher, Texas Music



ALL IN THE FAMILY: (Clockwise from top left) Kevin Fowler shows some love for our caretaker in Iraq, Katrina Damiani; Robison (with his son's name, Gus, tattooed on his arm) greets Sgt. Yahira Ulloa of California while in Kirkuk; Our traveling posse in Balad with Damiani, Tiffany Castleberry (blue jumpsuit) and Trevor Garrett (far right).

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: STEWART RAMSER, STEWART RAMSER, STEWART RAMSER



READY, AIM, ... SAY CHEESE: (From left) Cody Woodruff, Gordon Muench, Fowler and Juan F. Jimenez plan the photo shoot while Robison is off trying to get the Humvee started.

Take cover!

GOING TO the show in Kirkuk, I knew that we needed to find a photographer and soldiers for our photo shoot. It was at sound check that I found Gordon Muench (Air Force) and Cody Woodruff (Army), who didn't know each other, but who had both shown up as Texas music fans from the Austin area.

I spent the night of the show in Kirkuk considering the photo-shoot options. We had a location scouted out — a row of housing trailers which were sandbagged to the roof. I was able to recruit an Army photographer, Specialist Juan F. Jimenez from Miami, Fla., for the shoot. The only catch was lighting — at sunrise it was going to be tough, but we had luckily arranged for someone with access to a generator to show up.

The plan was to wake up at 0600 (6:00 a.m. for you civilian folks), do the photo shoot by 0700, and then catch a ride to the airport. Only when we got back to camp, we found out that first call was now at 0500 and that we had to be gone before 0600. The photo shoot seemed doomed. But, luckily, our military cover guys were early, and they were able to convoy with us to the airport. Charlie Robison showed up wearing all camouflage, which made the photos look like there were three military guys and Kevin Fowler. Robison's bags were already packed and were off somewhere being put on a pallet for the next flight, so he borrowed manager Jimmy Perkins' shirt halfway through the shoot. Taking photos fast and furiously, we were able to get the shots that we needed.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

This letter was sent to military officials (and to Texas Music) after our stop in Kirkuk.

1st Sgt,
I'm proud to say that in spite of a rigorous work schedule in SF, we had a good showing (from all sectors/BDOC/staff, etc.) at the Kevin Fowler/Charlie Robison concert last night! Not being a country music aficionado myself, I had never heard of these guys before this week. However, since most of my guys are from Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, a lot of them were actually big fans! The guys put on a great show — very talented. I was thankful that the bands stayed after and signed autographs, gave out T-shirts, etc. But wait — there's more ...

A journalist from *Texas Music* approached several military members from Texas and asked if they would participate in a photo shoot with the musicians for next month's magazine cover. Several of my "Gators" woke up at 0430 this morning and went down to the flight line. TSgt Muench was selected as the AF military member — probably due to his rugged good looks (although I don't see it personally), and they selected one Army rep as well. Several of the Gators were interviewed and spent personal time with the band, all under the supervision of Army protocol officer (Capt Garrett). The magazine is due out in July and they are going to send a box over.

This was a great morale booster — a real shot in the arm for our troops. We got a lot of good souvenirs and photos to remember it by.

JAMES E. MCDONALD

Capt, USAF

*Commander, Security Forces Gator Sector
506th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron
Kirkuk Regional Air Base, Iraq*

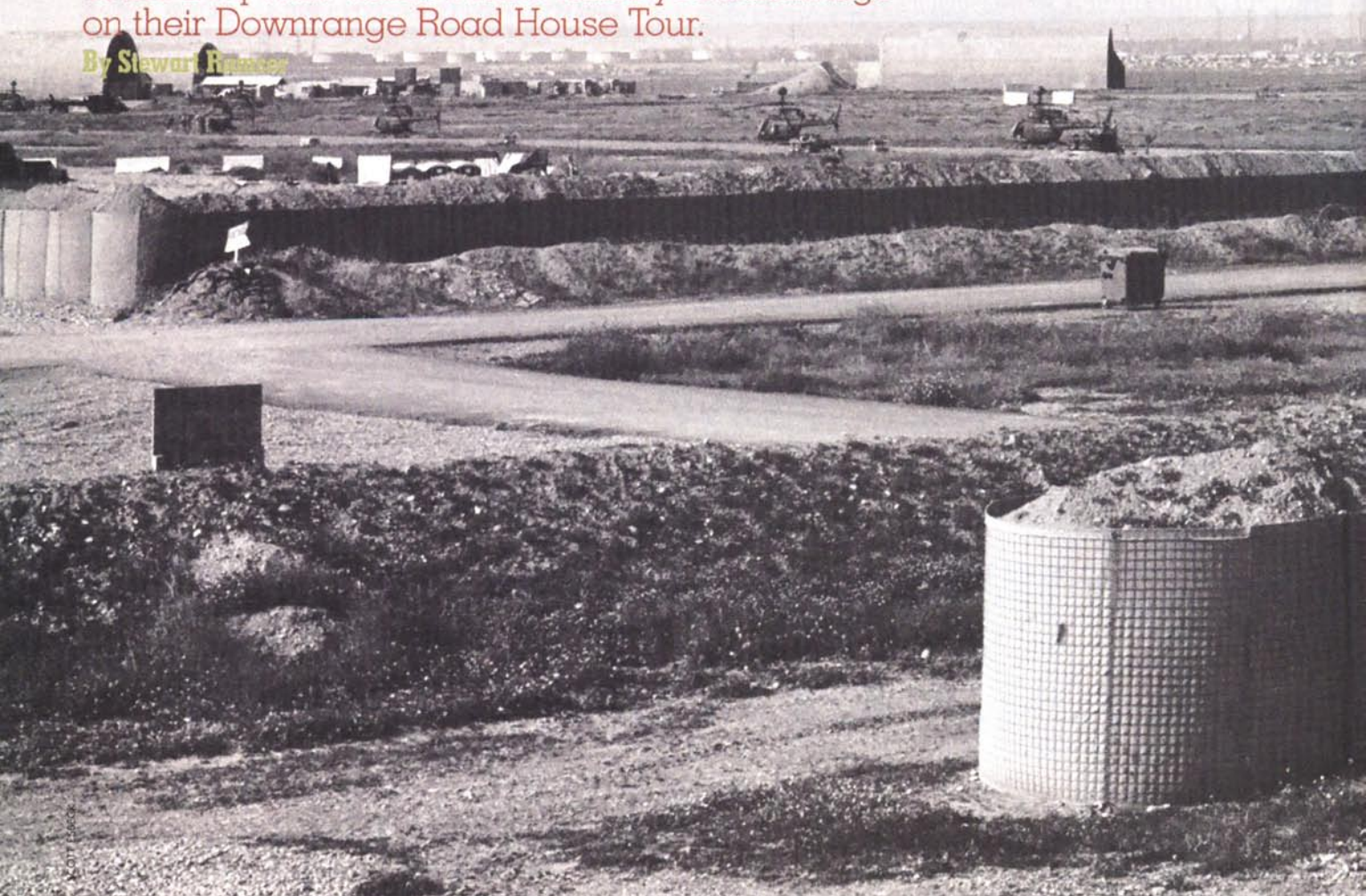
"Capt. Mac" is pictured between Robison and Fowler.



Iraq &

Country music good ol' boys **CHARLIE ROBISON** and **KEVIN FOWLER** brave oh-six-hundred wake-up calls, incoming fire warnings and several stomach-churning combat-roll landings to bring a slice of home to our men and women on the front lines of the Iraq War. *Texas Music* takes you backstage on their Downrange Road House Tour.

By Stewart Ranses

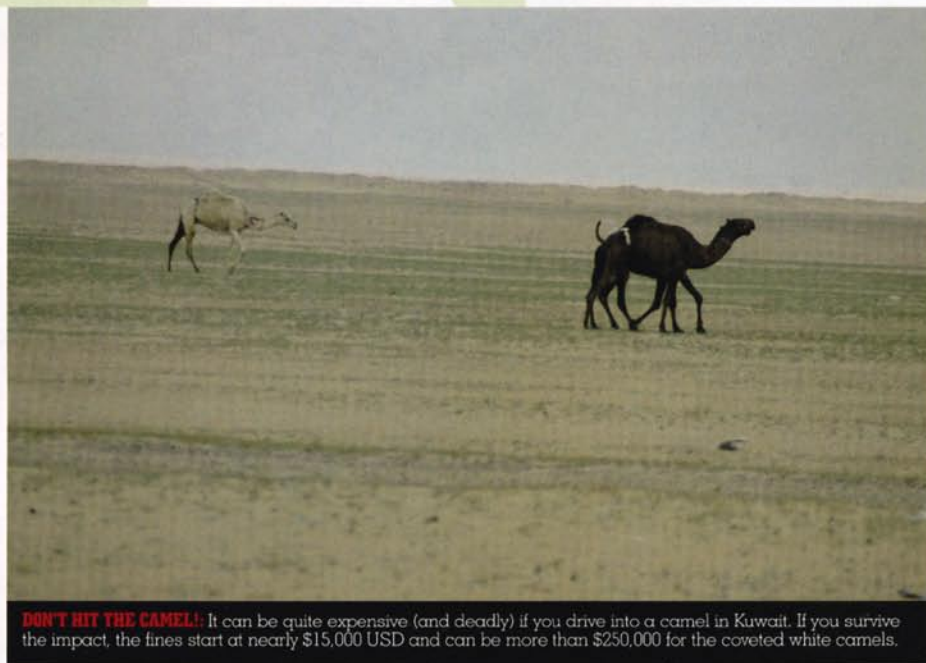


Roll



MARCH 22, 2007

NO ROLLER COASTER IN THE WORLD CAN PREPARE YOUR GUTS FOR THE RIDE INTO ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS PLACES ON EARTH: BAGHDAD, IRAQ. MILITARY PROTOCOL CALLS FOR A COMBAT-ROLL LANDING. IN OTHER WORDS, FLY HIGH, ABOVE THE REACH OF SMALL-ARMS FIRE, AND THEN SPIRAL DOWNWARD QUICKLY TO LAND.



DON'T HIT THE CAMEL! It can be quite expensive (and deadly) if you drive into a camel in Kuwait. If you survive the impact, the fines start at nearly \$15,000 USD and can be more than \$250,000 for the coveted white camels.

It's hard to tell whether we are actually spinning or just bouncing around, but the effect is the same. Any feelings of nausea are compounded by the weight of the gear we wear — approximately 40 pounds of camouflage, bullet-proof protection, including a flak jacket and a helmet.

Our C-130 military transport plane, which could be mistaken for a giant, flying vegetable can, is the workhorse of the Air Force fleet. It carries just about anything and everything the military has to transport, from ammunition and machinery to wounded soldiers. Today it is equipped with a bunch of good ol' boys from Texas — Charlie Robison; Kevin Fowler; their manager, Jimmy Perkins; Robison's road manager, Lee Winright, his bassist, Scott Esbeck, and his guitarist, Kevin Carroll; Fowler's fiddler, Chris Whitten, and his pedal-steel guitar player, Arty Passes; manager/drummer John Owens; five sound guys from the Kuwaiti company Coaxial; and yours truly, publisher of *Texas Music* — and our 9,480 pounds of equipment and luggage. An American flag is attached to the roof of the back of the plane, where an airman peers out of one of the few windows for any unusual activity.

We've been anticipating this day for several months, and our collective feeling is more excitement than apprehension — although you wouldn't know it by looking at our stone-faced crew. For our group, this is just a music tour, not a tour of duty. And while this mission of bringing a "slice of home" to the troops may appear downscaled from the heyday of Bob Hope-led USO events that you've seen on TV, its impact on both the troops and us will turn out equally rewarding, as the Downrange Road House Tour 2007, sponsored by Armed Forces Entertainment, spreads cheer and boosts morale throughout the Middle East.

MY HOMETOWN

"We play this song last every single night, no matter where we are — South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Oklahoma, California and, of course, the great state of Texas. Every night we send this song out to y'all, our fighting men and women overseas here in the Middle East, and everyone gives you a big hand. So it's a great pleasure to be able to come over here and play it for you in person. Thank you for having us!" — CHARLIE ROBISON



WE ARE DEFINITELY NOT IN TEXAS ANYMORE. (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) Thankfully, there are no extra-baggage charges. With all our sound equipment, instruments and personal luggage, we needed a fork-lift to transfer our three pallets of cargo on and off the C-130s each day; Robison and Fowler cross the tarmac at Baghdad International Airport; our motley crew definitely stood out when visiting the bases in Iraq. Here, the group waits for its morning ride to the airport.

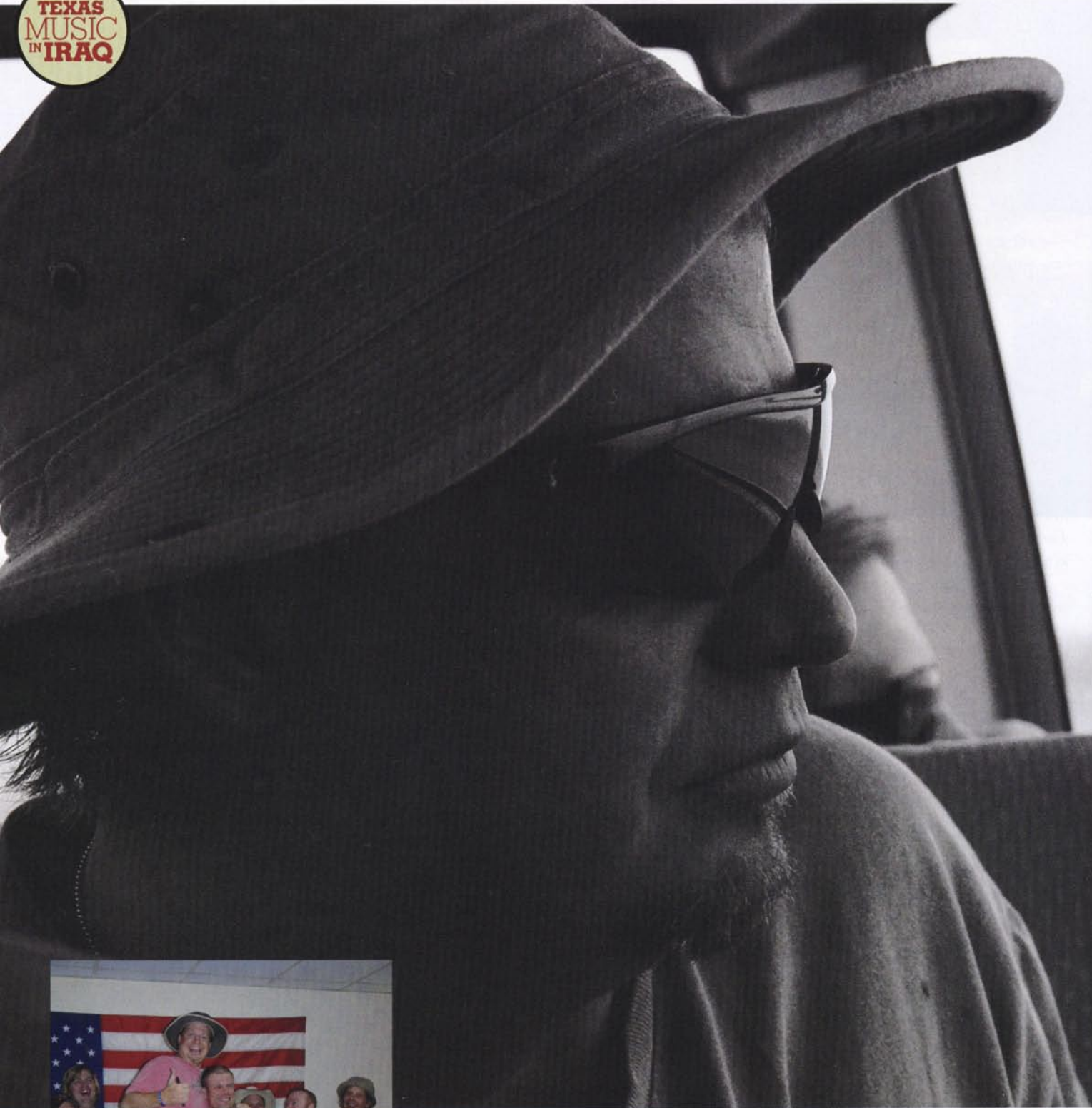


**TEXAS MUSIC
IN IRAQ**
TRAVEL TIP

**Take care of any
medical conditions
before you leave:**

Although the medical care provided to troops may be the best in the world, it would behoove you not to have to fit in a dentist appointment while touring through a war zone. This tip was submitted by fiddler Chris Whitten, who was in some serious pain but obtained antibiotics to tide him over until he got back home.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JIMMY PERKINS; JIMMY PERKINS; ARTY PASSES



REALITY CHECK: THIS PAGE (TOP) Charlie Robison and the rest of the musicians and supporting cast gain an eye-opening, behind-the-scenes experience of the Iraq War; THIS PAGE (BOTTOM) Sgt. Craig Kirby (from Ohio) shows off by lifting Robison with one arm at Camp Buehring. OPPOSITE PAGE (TOP): It was in Al Asad that the group meets a 6-year-old Iraqi girl, Nabaa, who was hit by 762-caliber sniper fire while playing in her neighborhood. United States military personnel accompanied local Iraqi police when her mother called in the emergency, and the girl was brought in to the field hospital. The hospital commander showed us the bullet that went into her chest. She's recovering nicely. OPPOSITE PAGE (BOTTOM): The military hospital in Balad is one of the best equipped in the world (especially for major trauma patients); helicopters fly in two at a time to the landing strip — one with the wounded and the other for military support. The troops are wheeled in under the 30-foot American flag (Hero's Highway). The hospital commander notes that the sight of the flag will hopefully give the wounded soldiers (if they're conscious) a feeling that they are safe and going to be taken care of. Within seconds the injured are inspected and can be in surgery within a short minute or two. Several pairs of helicopters arrived during our hospital visit.

FROM TOP: SCOTT ESBECK, STEWART RAMSER



FROM TOP: STEWART RAMSER, STEWART RAMSER

THE CREW

NAME: Arty Passes ↓
HOMETOWN: Austin
IRAQ ASSIGNMENT: Pedal steel
INSIDE INFORMATION: Passes, 52, has been in the music biz for 32 years. He was on the road with Fowler for more than 160 shows during the past year.



NAME: Charlie Robison ↓
HOMETOWN: Bandera
ASSIGNMENT: Band leader
INSIDE INFORMATION: Charlie Robison is the second artist to be featured more than once on the cover of *Texas Music* magazine — the first time in the spring of 2001. (The other artist? Willie Nelson, of course.)



NAME: Jimmy Perkins ↓
HOMETOWN: Bandera
ASSIGNMENT: Manager
INSIDE INFORMATION: In the music biz since 1985, Perkins has also managed Bruce Robison, and he now runs his own label, Sustain.



NAME: Chris Whitten ↑
HOMETOWN: Lawton, Okla.
ASSIGNMENT: Fiddler
INSIDE INFORMATION: Whitten started playing fiddle at age 9 (he's now 26), and he started touring with Vince Gill at 15.



NAME: John Owens ↑
HOMETOWN: San Antonio
ASSIGNMENT: Drummer
INSIDE INFORMATION: Owens celebrated his 40th birthday while in Al Asad, Iraq, where a cake was presented to him in between Robison's and Fowler's sets.



NAME: Kevin Carroll ↑
HOMETOWN: Austin
ASSIGNMENT: Guitarist
INSIDE INFORMATION: Carroll's new solo album, *Tourmaline*, is just out, and kevincarroll.net has all the lies he's too shy to talk about.



NAME: Kevin Fowler ↑
HOMETOWN: Austin
ASSIGNMENT: Band leader
INSIDE INFORMATION: Fowler was previously in the Austin hair-metal band Dangerous Toys. When not onstage, you can find him hunting, sometimes with fellow Texan, Boston Red Sox pitcher Josh Beckett.



NAME: Lee Winnright ↑
HOMETOWN: Bandera
ASSIGNMENT: Sound engineer
INSIDE INFORMATION: Winnright's first gig was with Robert Earl Keen. He's been working with Charlie Robison for approximately 10 years.



NAME: Scott Esbeck ↑
HOMETOWN: Austin
ASSIGNMENT: Bassist
INSIDE INFORMATION: Esbeck played the last note of the last show of the last tour by the Replacements on July 4, 1991, in Chicago.

NAME: Coaxial ←
HOMETOWN: Kuwait City, Kuwait
ASSIGNMENT: Tour sound, lighting and production
MEET THE GANG: (From left) James Franco, Shiekh Arif Batsha, Donald Dimaya, Lord Jacob Castillo and Akbar Batsha.

Landing on the tarmac and riding to the dfac (mess hall), it quickly becomes evident that we're not in Kansas anymore — or Texas, for that matter. Sure, the music from the Armed Forces Radio Network could be playing anywhere in the U.S., with songs ranging from Marcy Playground's "Sex and Candy" to Iron Butterfly's "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vita" to Carrie Underwood's "Don't Forget to Remember Me." However, the commercial planes on the other side of the airport are one of the few signs of life outside a base that we will see on our trip.

At all our stops, and especially in Baghdad, we see the behind-the-scenes of the Iraq War — military transportation of all kinds, troops from all the services and CHUs (containerized housing units) as far as the eye can see.

Billions of dollars of infrastructure set up in the middle of a desert. All the bases we visit, from Buehring (Kuwait) to Baghdad to Kirkuk to Al Asad to Balad, are 10- to 40-square-mile compounds protected by walls and wires. The bases we visit in Iraq are considered forward operating bases (or FOBs), which is to say that we are relatively close to the action; however, we are kept "inside the wire" throughout our entire journey.

Our journey starts four years and two days after the start of the Iraq War. Each member of our crew had to get the support of their spouses and family members to make this trip, including Charlie Robison, whose wife, Emily, is a member

LINGO

MWR: morale, welfare and recreation

Hot: not just used to describe the weather, but also whether an area has a lot of enemy activity

FOB: forward operating base

dfac: dining facility

the wire: the boundary separating the base from the general public. We did not venture outside the wire

DVQ: distinguished visitors quarters

the billeting: lodging

TCN: third country national

the big voice: the loud speaker at the base that will call out any important instructions, e.g., incoming fire

PX or BX: post exchange (Army) / base exchange (Air Force)

Downrange: in the line of fire

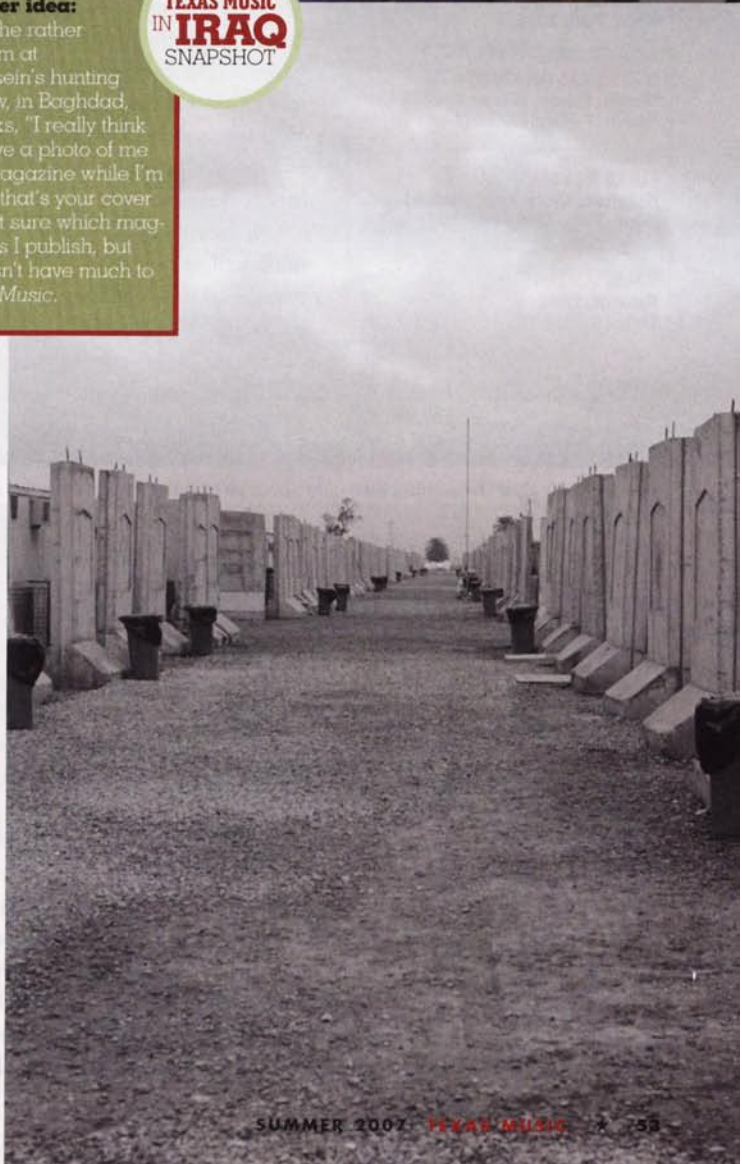
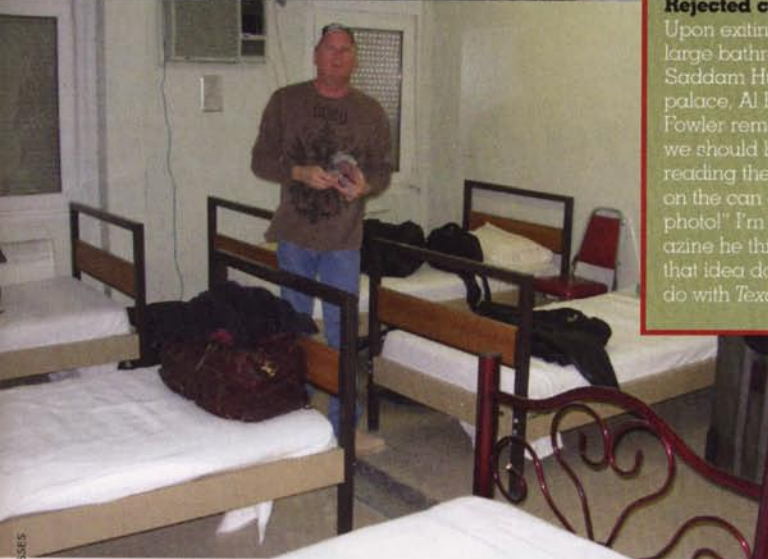
A DIFFERENT KIND OF TOUR: OPPOSITE PAGE, (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) Robison and Fowler meet with all the troops after the show; behind the concrete barriers, which help protect against incoming fire, are the housing units where troops are staying in Baghdad; Robison (left), Fowler (center) and Jimmy Perkins (right) deliver a care package to Lance Corporal Travis Johnson in the Al Asad hospital; The rooms in Al Asad sleep eight, comfortably. Fowler packs up for a trip to the community shower.



Rejected cover idea:

Upon exiting the rather large bathroom at Saddam Hussein's hunting palace, Al Faw, in Baghdad, Fowler remarks, "I really think we should have a photo of me reading the magazine while I'm on the can — that's your cover photo!" I'm not sure which magazine he thinks I publish, but that idea doesn't have much to do with *Texas Music*.

TEXAS MUSIC
IN IRAQ
SNAPSHOT



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: STEWART FAWCETT; SCOTT ESHE OF STEWART FAWCETT; ARTY PASLES

of the Dixie Chicks. The Chicks' public comments about the President, particularly those by lead singer Natalie Maines', created a bit of a backlash in the country music community, however, Charlie Robison wants to visit the troops simply because he feels like it's the right thing to do. Robison, whose grandfather was a WWII vet and a Pearl

Harbor survivor, says, "Right now I feel like it's the U.S. Armed Forces against the enemy, when it should be the whole United States involved. Nothing against those who slap a 'We Support the Troops' sticker on the bumper, but it needs to be a whole lot more than that."

Meanwhile, Fowler says he's wanted to do something like this after several years of receiving e-mails from troops in Iraq as well as fans' flags that have flown over U.S. bases around the world. He certainly didn't want to do it for the adventure. "I'm kind of scared," he admits. "But I'm sure we'll be taken care of!"

OTHER VISITING ARTISTS

Kevin Fowler and Charlie Robison weren't the first Lone Star artists to take their tunes to the troops, and they surely won't be the last. Here are a few other Texas acts who have answered the call to entertain at bases throughout the world. Artists looking to follow suit can find out how by visiting www.armedforcesentertainment.com or uso.org.

BONNIE BISHOP
Australia, Japan
Feb. 28-March 9, 2007

CHRIS CAGLE
Korea
June 29-July 4, 2007

DROWNING POOL
Germany, Iraq, Kuwait
Sept. 7-16, 2006

LOST IMMIGRANTS
Guam, Japan, Korea
April 17-May 12, 2007

ELIDA REYNA
Belgium, Germany, Netherlands
Sept. 1-12, 2006

PAUL WALL
Kuwait, Iraq
Feb. 19-25, 2007

as if he'd written them himself. "I've had a somber week," Norton later says. "But to know that I was going to come here tonight, I was excited. It helped me relax. I noticed that even people that maybe didn't even know Kevin and Charlie, they still had a good time. I think it helps lift spirits a lot. It's good to know that these musicians care about us and they want to come out here and see what's going on and show their support and love, and we show that right back.

"Before the concert, I sat right here and talked to Charlie about Texas and football," Norton continues. "It was just that little piece of home that maybe I was missing. There's a line in a Kid Rock song, 'Maybe I've been gone for way too long/Maybe I forgot the things I miss,' and that rings true. To have something like this, especially something that is so close to my heart, it was great to have."

Throughout the tour, Robison, Fowler and their band members spend time getting to know the troops. Robison and Fowler are in their element, and they spend as long as it takes to sign every autograph and take every photo. While many are aware of the tumult that the conflict is causing back home, the troops whom they speak with are excited to be able to get their minds off the war. It's just something about the music that bridges the divide.

"When we're playing onstage, I feel like it makes a difference," Robison says. "Whether you are for or against the war, in order to make an informed decision and live in a country like the U.S., you have to take part in the process, and this is a part of that ... and not just waving a flag, not knowing what the hell you are talking about or saying [the war] is wrong. It is your duty as an American to find out as much as you can and participate, whether that is through elections or taking care of the troops. Just saying you support the troops is a chicken-shit way to do it. Actually do it, and make it real."

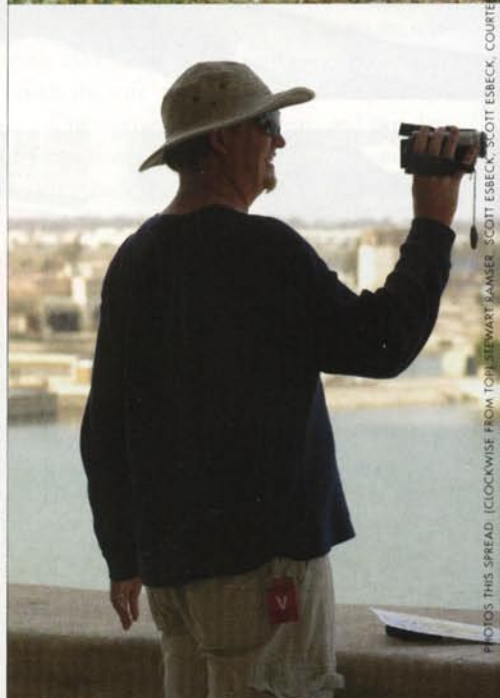
The next morning around 5:30 a.m., the large, burnt-orange sun rises between the concrete pillars protecting the housing units, creating a dramatic pink, red and orange sky. It is one of the more

For both the artists and the troops at their shows, it's all about the music. For some troops, it is an unbelievable opportunity to get up close to a couple of their favorite Texas country acts; others are attracted simply by the commotion.

The evening's weather at Camp Liberty in Baghdad, down from the 80s to the 60s, is tourist-bureau perfect. A crescent moon has risen behind the stage, which is set up in a community-style courtyard area complete with a basketball court and large tent full of computers hooked up to the Internet that also serves as a movie room. The 300 or so in attendance for the Baghdad performance (the second show of the tour, but the first in Iraq) are enthusiastic and, in spite of being far, far away from home, Robison and Fowler's music brings them back there, if only temporarily.

"There is not an element of politics at all [in our trip]," Jimmy Perkins points out. "It's about showing our faith in the troops and to show that people from home care enough to get on a plane and fly 7,500 miles to get over there to say, 'Hey, good job, and we appreciate what you're doing.' The politicians will cloud the whole issue with politics, but we're just here to do music."

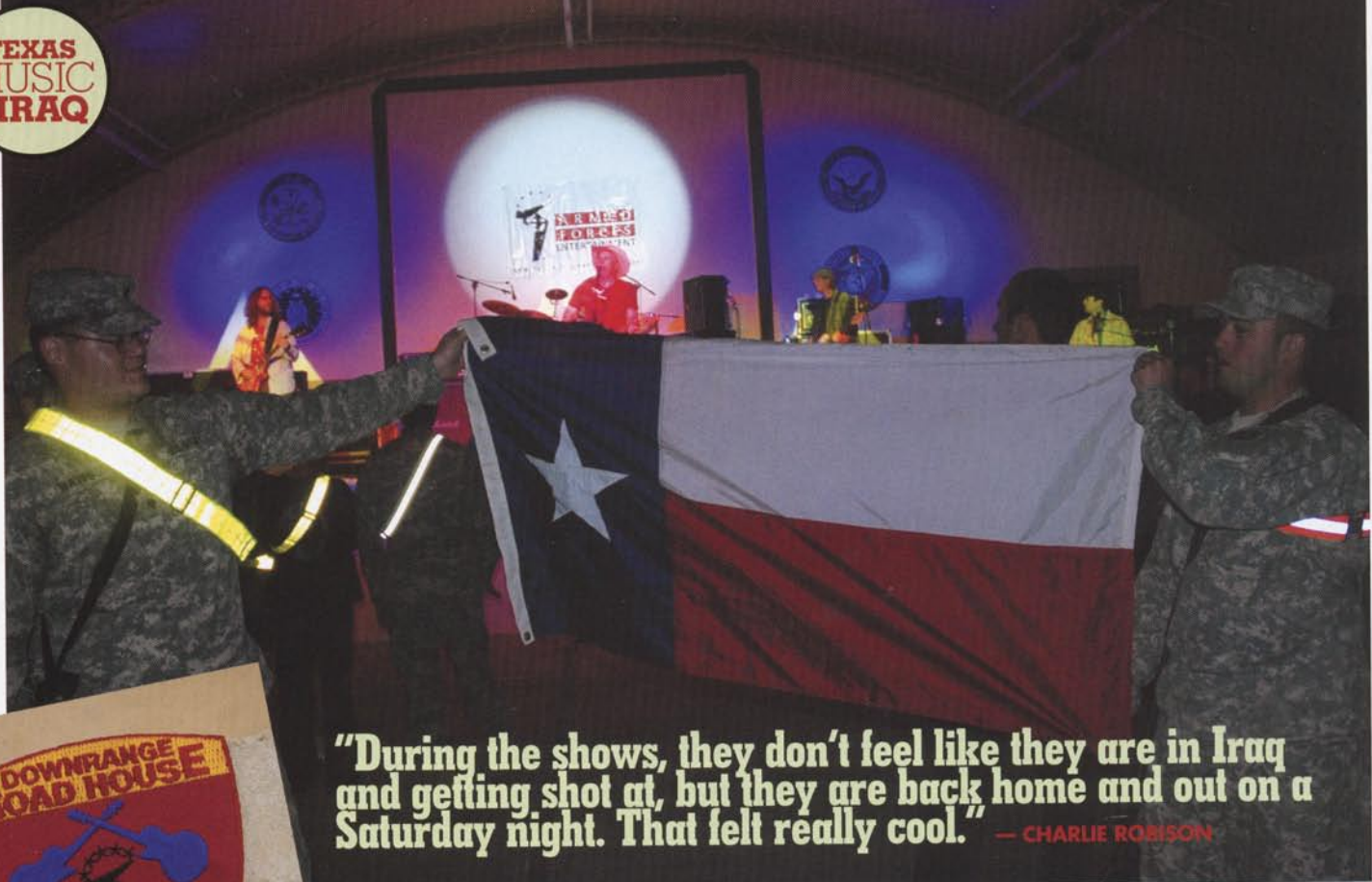
At the end of Robison's set, he asks Specialist Eric Norton from Keller, Texas, to join him onstage. Norton, whose brigade lost two soldiers that week, had sought Robison out before the show with a special request. Robison obliges, and Norton closes the set by singing the lyrics to "My Hometown"



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) STEWART JAMSER; SCOTT ESBECK; SCOTT ESBECK; COURTESY OF THE U.S. ARMY; STEWART JAMSER



BAGHDAD BOUND: Our first stop in Iraq is the capital city, and the following photos were taken at Al-Faw, one of the late Saddam Hussein's "hunting" palaces. Al-Faw presently serves as office space for the coalition forces. There is some extravagance: a large, man-made lake; a 20-stall bathroom; a handful of several-thousand-square-foot guest homes on the perimeter of the complex. However, we're told that the dictator had only been to the palace a handful of times and, in actuality, much of the construction was done on the cheap. **CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** A view from the palace; "Saddam bass" feeding (Saddam bass are a rather large breed of bass that Hussein was said to have had scientists create); a large, albeit plastic, chandelier; Arty poses on the chair that Yasser Arafat gave to Hussein; Robison captures the visit on camera.



"During the shows, they don't feel like they are in Iraq and getting shot at, but they are back home and out on a Saturday night. That felt really cool." — CHARLIE ROBISON



FROM TOP: STEWART RAMSER, STEWART RAMSER, ARTY PASSES



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: SCOTT ESBECK, MARK BELL, STEWART BANSER, MARK BELL

FOR THE LOVE OF THE MUSIC: OPPOSITE PAGE (FROM TOP): Specialist Aaron Watts from New Braunfels and Private Jason Douglas (Georgia) show off the Lone Star flag at Camp Buehring, Kuwait; Scott Esbeck and Kevin Fowler prepare for the Baghdad gig. THIS PAGE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): (from left) Fowler, Kevin Carroll and Robison's first show is in Kuwait. The handprints of the troops who built the stage are imprinted on the wall; (from left) Carroll, Chris Whitten and Fowler entertain the troops with the Charlie Daniels' song "The Devil Went Down to Georgia" (Robison's and Fowler's sidemen played with both artists); Fowler's set list; two-stepping was common at the Iraq shows, and some troops in Al Asad even broke out with some line dancing.

100% TEXAN
 SPEAK OF THE DEVIL
 SENDATA MAS FINA
 LORD LOVES
 DEVIL WENT DOWN TO GEORGIA
 BEER BAIT AMMO
 FAT BOTTOM

FAVORITE TEXAS MUSIC MEMORIES

"I played Kevin Fowler's 'Hard Man to Love' for my wife after we got married."
— PFC. TITO JUAREZ JR.,
HOUSTON, U.S. MARINE CORPS ↓



"Roger Creager's *Live Across Texas* pulled me through my first deployment last year after my father died."
— LCPL. WADE R. DIXON, SHEPHERD, U.S. MARINE CORPS ↓



"The South By Southwest festival, and seeing Eric Johnson play all over Texas."
— 1ST LT. SCOTT PARSONS, SAN ANTONIO, U.S. ARMY ↓



"Listening to George Strait live at the Astrodome, the last show played there ..."
— SPC. BRYAN ZALKOVSKY, TEMPLE, U.S. ARMY ↓



"Listening to Robert Earl Keen play the 'Road Goes on Forever' in College Station, Texas. That's Texas country!" — CPT. CARRIE ALLEN, AUSTIN, U.S. ARMY ↓



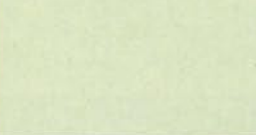
"I loved ... going every year to the Margarita and Salsa Festival [in Waco]. I can't wait to see Charlie Robison and Kevin Fowler again later this year."
— SPC. JUSTIN JERNIGAN, WACO, U.S. ARMY ↓



"My favorite Texas music memory was Darryl Worley playing for the troops at the Alamodome in San Antonio ..."
— SGT. EMILY C. WARREN, FORT HOOD, U.S. ARMY ↓



"Every Wednesday I spent at Cedar Street [in Austin] watching the Spazmatics, an '80s cover band. That's probably what I miss most ..."
— SPC. JEANA M. POTEET, AUSTIN, U.S. ARMY →



"Growing up in Houston, I've been going to the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo since I could walk ... I missed it this year for the first time, but if I am home next year, I will be there at least every weekend!" — 1ST LT. PETER STEWART, HOUSTON, U.S. ARMY ↓



"Being from San Angelo, I miss going to the stock show and rodeo and watching numerous country artists perform live..." — SGT. JESSE CAJAS, SAN ANGELO, U.S. ARMY ↓



"I moved to Tennessee right before high school, and all I listened to was Texas music. It brought me back home. Now I listen to it in Iraq."
— SGT. JUSTIN N. LEFAN, COLLEGE STATION, U.S. MARINE CORPS ↓



remarkable sunrises I've ever seen, and it's one of the lasting images of our tour — a pleasant reminder of Mother Nature's presence amidst the chaos of military personnel scurrying about on their missions and helicopters flying overhead.

MILES & MILES OF ... WAR

"One of the striking things to someone unfamiliar with the environment is the sheer enormity of everything. You can try to imagine what it's like to build a camp with 40,000 people in it, but you really can't grasp it until you go. The everyday logistics — the garbage, water, food, the number of places for people to sleep — is mind-boggling."

— SCOTT ESBECK

EACH DAY is regimented and usually starts with a first call around 6:00 a.m., or "oh six hundred." We gather our bags, get breakfast and a coffee from Green Beans and head to the airfield, where we wait for our C-130 to arrive. The process of waiting for the flight and then loading our luggage on the plane can take an hour or two. A short flight (roughly an hour to neighboring bases) and a combat roll later, and we land in another strange place with new terrain.

There are some paved roads at the various bases, but in many cases we bounce around on dirt and gravel in our 20-passenger mini-buses that take us to and from our respective base camps. After we check in at billeting it's about time for chow again at the mess hall. In the afternoon, there are sound checks, visits to the PX (think: mini Wal-Mart), additional Green Beans stops and, in a couple of cases, trips to military hospitals.

"The common thread among all the soldiers that we spoke with who were wounded — rather than wanting to go home, they would prefer to go back to their unit," Perkins notes after one such visit to a multi-national forces hospital. "The wounded soldiers didn't want to get on the plane to Germany because they knew that was going home. That was poignant to see those guys injured and still on fire for the commitment that they have to one another. It's the kind of thing you read about and see in shows such as *Band of Brothers*. To experience that firsthand in a conversation with a 19-year-old Marine who is completely invincible in his own mind makes you believe he is, because he's so confident and ready to go back to duty.

"The most poignant part of that whole thing was the next day when we were getting on

"... no matter where you go anywhere in the freakin' world, you find military people, you'll find Texas people, and you just tell 'em you're from Texas and then everyone gets along. You find guys from other states, and they're all like, 'That Texas crap.' But us Texas boys always get along." — CODY WOODRUFF, AUSTIN

a plane to go to Balad, and here come the wounded warriors, the same guys getting on our flight. That was a great privilege to have that happen and be able to see a couple of those guys again and wish them the best."

In recent years, troop morale has increased as infrastructure improvements kick in. Almost all the troops now reside in trailers, rather than tents. The food situation has also improved. Much to our surprise, there is a decent buffet-style selection that we agree is better than Luby's. The one exception are the enchiladas in Kirkuk, causing Scott Esbeck to opine, "that's understandable — I never eat enchiladas north of Balad." For those who want something a little different, the bases have a small selection of American fast food, including Subway and Burger King. Some of the mess halls are the size of football fields, and there are usually large-screen TVs where you can catch *SportsCenter* in the morning or a movie in the afternoon (*Forrest Gump*, *What Women Want* and *Driving Miss Daisy* are all showing during our stay).

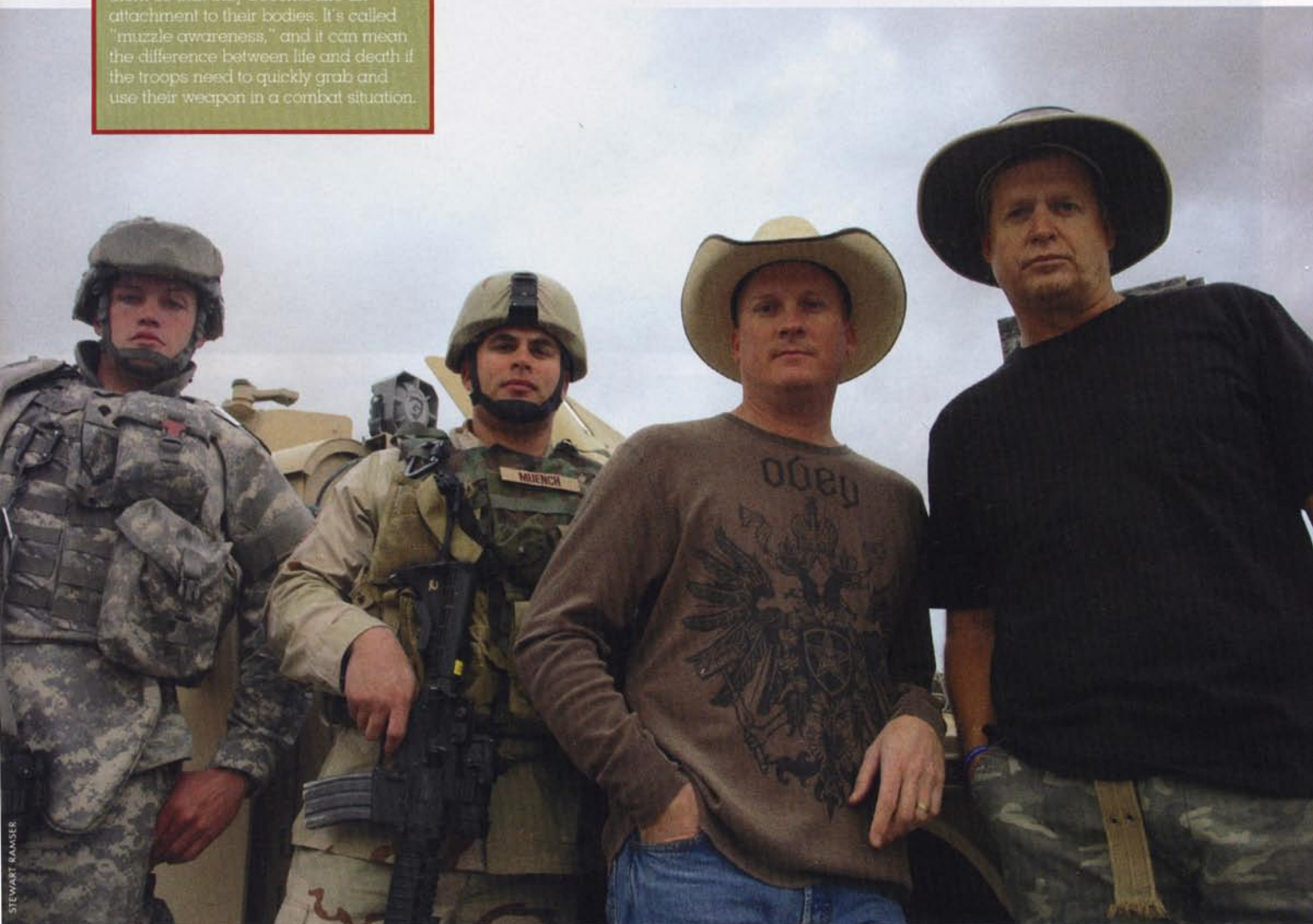
Troops spend their downtime playing cards, working out, playing sports, e-mailing home and performing military duties. One military member likens the operations at the bases to one big ant farm. We meet troops who are cooks, pilots, "talk-bitches" (i.e., communications liaisons), police officers and base security. There's no doubt that many troops are in life-or-death situations, and acts of courage occur on a daily basis. But these harrowing times are often preceded and followed by some boredom. In fact, one Army captain says, "I kind of look at this base like a new girlfriend. At first, it's like, 'Oh wow, we can do this and we can do that!' And, after a while, it's like, 'Yeah, it's the same old thing.'"

**TEXAS MUSIC
IN IRAQ
SNAPSHOT**

It's not just for show:

Pictures with troops feature an inordinate amount of guns.

That's because they are required to carry the weapons with them so that they become like an attachment to their bodies. It's called "muzzle awareness," and it can mean the difference between life and death if the troops need to quickly grab and use their weapon in a combat situation.

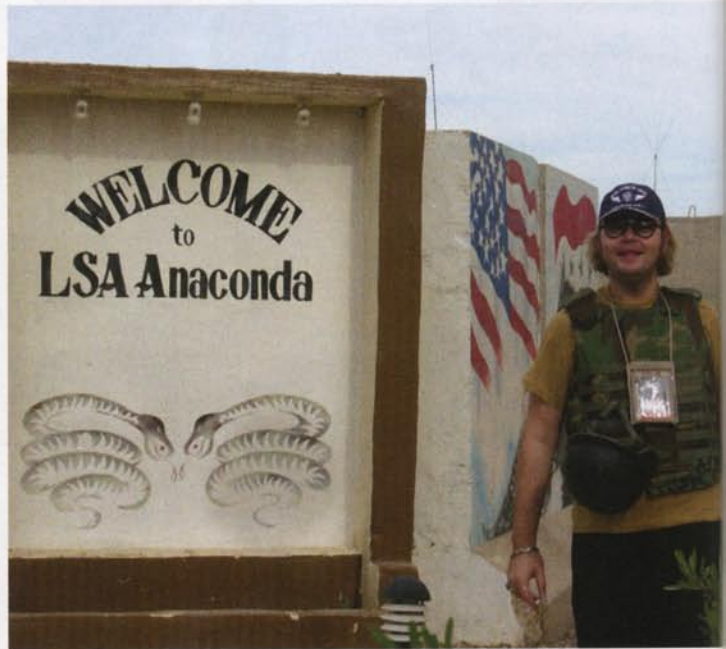
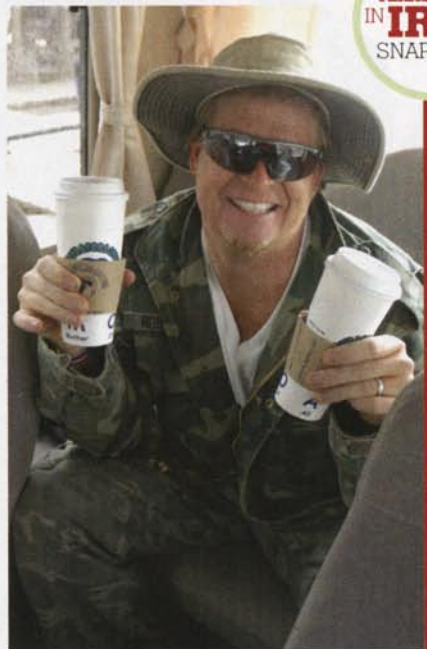




TEXAS MUSIC
IN **IRAQ**
SNAPSHOT

**Watch out,
Starbucks, here
comes Green**

Beans: It started in Saudi Arabia with one location a little more than 10 years ago, and today Green Beans serves coffee to military personnel in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Kuwait, Qatar, Uzbekistan and Djibouti, Africa. In March Green Beans opened its first state-side location in Fairfield, Calif. It plans to open another 10 locations in the United States this year. Robison and several others double-listed cups of Green Beans throughout Iraq.





GOOD MORNING, IRAQ: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT : Baghdad sunrise, March 23, 2007; MWR representatives put up posters around the base to promote the Robison/Fowler tour; Robison shares the stage with Eric Norton from Keller, Texas; "And the crowd goes crazy": Fowler gets 'em going at Camp Buehring in Kuwait. The stage in Kuwait was the most equipped for a rocking Texas country performance. At the FOBs, the performances took place on a much smaller stage (Baghdad), a trailer bed (Kirkuk) and two indoor theaters (Balad and Al Asad); Fiddler Chris Whitten stands outside the DVQ in Camp Anaconda, Balad, Iraq. In the background is one of the many concrete barriers. The barriers are painted as a way to add a little color to the surroundings and also to show which battalions have been present; Charlie and his Green Beans. As Scott Esbeck noted during the trip, "My former experience with the military was in playing in bands in Germany in the '80s, and at that time it was non-war. We had 100,000 troops in West Germany, and the guys would be drunk as fast as you can. Now, we're here in Iraq, there's no alcohol, we're in a war theater, we got all these 18-, 19-, 20-year-old kids with hormones raging, stone-cold sober, hopped up on Green Beans coffee — we're a killing machine."

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): SCOTT ESBECK, ARTY PASSES, COURTESY ERIC NORTON, STEWART RAMSER, ARTY PASSES, STEWART RAMSER

IT'S YOUR TURN TO SERVE

You don't have to travel all the way to the war zone to show your support for the troops. Here's a few other ways you can help.

AMERICA SUPPORTS YOU

From clothes drives to fundraisers, America Supports You is a Department of Defense-sponsored organization that spotlights stateside activities benefiting the Armed Forces.
www.americasupportsyou.org

ANY SOLDIER

Any Soldier is an independently run organization that provides people the opportunity to make direct contributions to individual soldiers. It started as a grassroots family effort to help a son who was stationed in Iraq.
www.anysoldier.com

ARMED FORCES ENTERTAINMENT (AFE)

Armed Forces Entertainment is the official Department of Defense agency for providing entertainment to U.S. military personnel overseas. AFE sponsored Charlie Robison and Kevin Fowler's Downrange Road House Tour.
www.armedforcesentertainment.com

COALITION TO SALUTE AMERICA'S HEROES

The mission of the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes is to help U.S. military personnel resume a normal, productive life after service through initiatives like job assistance and counseling.
www.saluteheroes.org

INTREPID FALLEN HEROES FUND

The Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund has donated close to \$60 million to families of military personnel lost or severely injured during service. In January, the Fund opened a world-class rehabilitation center at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio.
www.fallenheroesfund.org

NEAR BEER, BAIT & AMMO

"The troops are us. They are the guys who live next door to us. They are our sons, daughters, brothers, sisters and parents. They are us with uniforms on who happen to be doing this job, and they are great people — warm, accommodating and appreciative that we are here." — ARTY PASSES

AT SOME BASES, there are Iraqi and/or Turkish bazaars for American troops to acquire souvenirs to send home without having to leave the base. For the most part, the offerings are cheap trinkets and a healthy selection of counterfeited American movies. At every base, there's a PX (or BX, depending on which service you are in). Tuesdays are big at the PX because that's the day new movies are released. One can also find basic essentials there, like clothing, toiletries, magazines (including some men's magazines) and near beer (alcohol is not permitted). It is at our stop in Kirkuk that a soldier informs us that if you drink 60 near beers in an hour, you can get a buzz. Translation: there's not a whole lot of drinkin' goin' on.

Keep in mind Robison and Fowler's shows are usually rollicking good times fueled by booze. "It'll be interesting because I'm not any fun unless you're drunk," Fowler admits before the trip.

Of course, the two make up for the absence

of the usual alcohol-charged raucousness with the raucousness of their Texas-themed songs — and ample mentions of the Lone Star State are always good for a round of "hell yeahs" from the crowd. Among the hits are Robison's sexually charged "Love Means Never Having to Say You're Hungry" and "You're Not the Best" (written by brother Bruce); Fowler's version of the Charlie Daniels Band's "The Devil Went Down to Georgia"; and joint renditions of the Rolling Stones' "Dead Flowers," Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Fortunate Son" and Georgia Satellites' "Keep Your Hands to Yourself."

We are told that when the soldiers are in uniform (and they almost all are), they are used to acting in a more subdued way. Also, some of them are new and/or young, and they don't necessarily want to stand out. Still, there's your fair share of two-stepping and even some line dancing. And there's also always a guy or two who brings a Texas flag — and without any prompting they would at some point (often during Fowler's "100% Texan") stand in front of the stage and proudly hold the flag while the cameras flashed.

"The show is a little bit of a way to do something different around here," says Capt. James "Mac" McDonald, who's been in the military for 20 years. "After a while, it's like you do the same thing day after day. You eat the same food, you see the same people. And a concert, it



lifts spirits.”

Cody Woodruff, who went to Dripping Springs High School outside Austin and has been in the military for three years, is on his second tour. “I’m a 31 Bravo MP [based in Kirkuk] ... and back home we are cops on base in Ft. Riley, Kan. I grew up going to the Midnight Rodeo [in Austin] and listening to Kevin and Charlie, and when I heard they were coming here, it was a big boost, and it’s the second time I’ve seen them play in a hell-hole. The first time was when I was stationed in Kansas, and they went to Longhorns [bar] in Manhattan.

“I think the Texas boys run the military,” he continues, “because we make up a majority of the military, and no matter where you go anywhere in the freakin’ world you find military people, you’ll find Texas people, and you just tell ‘em you’re from Texas and then everyone gets along. You find guys from other states, and they’re all like, ‘That Texas crap.’ But us Texas boys always get along.”

TO IRAQ AND BACK

IT IS DURING our final stop in Iraq, near Balad, that we receive the only incoming fire warnings of the entire trip, including one just a couple of songs into Robison’s set. A yellow warning light flashes in the corner of the auditorium and the “big voice” comes on to notify personnel of the risk. Only Robison’s band is playing louder than the big voice, and if you don’t know what the flashing light means, you won’t know what is going on. No matter — none of the troops in the audience seem too concerned. They want to see the show.

There were other sobering reminders throughout the trip of the reality that these troops live in. One in particular was at the Balad field hospital, where a steady stream of wounded troops with unspeakable injuries arrived during our visit and, like ABC News’ Bob Woodruff, they are all transported along “Hero’s Highway,” the path from the helicopter landing area to the trauma center.

It was at our first base visit, along the Kuwait-Iraq border that the base commander said they’d tried to make the experience at the base as nice as possible since some troops may not have the chance to go back home.

On the plane ride back to the U.S., Robison and Fowler expound on the significance of their trip. “The tour started out like *Gilligan’s Island* ... a few of us on this nice, quick tour, but it became much more than that,” Robison says. “It is truly a life-changing experience.” When asked if he would go back, Robison quickly responds, “Sure, let’s turn the plane around.”

Fowler says, “I thought I’d go over and get some idea as to what our country should do, but

the truth is that I’m more confused than ever. It’s a far more difficult situation to figure out than I thought originally.”

It cost approximately \$150,000 for the whole Downrange Road House Tour, including nearly \$50,000 for transportation to Kuwait, a small per diem paid to each crew member and production expenses. But that’s a small price to pay to entertain those who risk their lives for our country’s mission.

Our group spent much of the trip mingling with and getting to know the troops, and the effort was more than repaid by the feedback the crew received in return. Not surprisingly, the musicians’ highlight of the tour was seeing the troops enjoy themselves.

Robison’s guitarist Kevin Carroll immediately said yes when asked to go on the trip. “It was a gut reaction, because there is a different need for what we do musically. Rather than playing for a bunch of drunk people in a bar — granted, they need it, too — but it’s different with people risking their lives and so far away from home and so isolated. To give them music made me feel like I could give something useful.”

“During the shows, they don’t feel like they are in Iraq and getting shot at, but they are back home and out on a Saturday night,” Robison says. “That felt really cool. Being in that atmos-

phere is something that was surreal — hearing weapons being fired, medical helicopters overhead, talking to guys who had just gotten off patrol, meeting soldiers who had lost friends and talking to the troops about the history of the conflict.”

Fowler adds, “The point of the tour was to bring a taste of home. What the troops look forward to doing when they get home is going out to Texas music shows, drinking beer and chasing girls — normal stuff. And we were able to bring a little bit of that, except for the beer and girls. I guarantee when I get home I will feel guilty sitting around the house and by the pool, drinking beer, and those guys are over there fighting a war.”

It was a powerful journey, and we met some extraordinary people from all walks of life. We were just spectators, and can still only imagine what it’s like to be over there on 12- to 15-month tours of duty. The tour was both humbling and inspirational, an adventure that reinforced our crew’s respect for the troops. The goal of the Downrange Road House Tour was simply to entertain the troops, and that mission was accomplished. It was more than entertainment, though, as it has long-term impact for us and, hopefully, many of the men and women at the shows — a unique display of the power of music. **X**

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