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V CORPS PILOT-ARTIST CREATES COLORFUL LEGACY IN SOUTHWEST ASIA

By Sgt. Brandon Little

12th Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs Office

LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, Balad, Iraq -- Some people may look at the concrete blast walls around Logistics Support Area Anaconda and see no more than slabs of concrete. But for one officer with V Corps' 12th Combat Aviation Brigade those walls were a huge canvas; a place to create.



STAFF SGT DERRICK MIMS

1st Lt. William Conners, a UH-60 Black Hawk pilot with V Corps' 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation, focuses on details of a mural he is painting for his battalion on a concrete blast wall on Logistics Support Area Anaconda in Balad, Iraq.

When the brigade's 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation decided to put its personalized stamp on the base by adding a mural to those walls, it was that officer to whom they immediately turned -- 1st Lt. William Conners, a D Company 3-158th platoon leader and UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter pilot.

With a degree in art from Harvard, Conners isn't exactly a weekend

dabbler or subway spray-painter. He says some people are a little surprised about his decision to join the military after graduating from such a prestigious school.

“No matter where I go I get hassled a little,” said Conners. “They’ll pretend they have a Boston accent and say ‘you went to Haahvaahd, you must be wicked smaahd.’”

“I’ve always loved to draw ever since I can remember, and Harvard was just one of the many schools I applied to,” the Wolcott, N.Y., native said.

“My parents didn’t have a lot of money, but I was able to attend Harvard because their scholarships are based on financial need as much as merit or athletics,” said Conners. “I also had to work a summer job to pay the remainder of the tuition not covered by the scholarship.”

When he graduated, he says, his next move wasn’t really a difficult decision.

Conners was enrolled in Harvard's Reserve Officer Training Corps program his sophomore year of college, and he liked it so much he decided to sign an Army contract during his junior year.

“I always wanted to join the Army, because I feel that everyone should volunteer to protect and serve their country,” he said. “Plus, my father was drafted during Vietnam, and he always had plenty of great stories to tell.”

The lieutenant says art actually helped him choose his Army career path.

“Art transfers to aviation when it comes to spatial perception,” said Conners. “The two are very much alike when it comes to judging distance and depth perception.”

Still, Conners said he doesn’t plan to make the Army a career. His goal is to get a degree in education and teach art, but in the meantime he has had opportunities to flex his talent while in uniform.

“I didn’t exactly volunteer to paint the mural, but I’m happy to do it,” said Conners. “It also gives me a chance to do something different,



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A pair of 12th Combat Aviation Brigade helicopters comes to life in one of the murals 1st Lt. William Conners, a UH-60 Black Hawk pilot with the brigade's 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation, is painting on concrete blast walls on Logistics Support Area Anaconda in Balad, Iraq.

and that's OK, because it's something I enjoy doing."

Conners is also used to his art being viewed by thousands of people. He has won several Scholastic Art competitions and had some of his drawings published in Scholastic Arts Magazine, and he painted a similar mural for his battalion during the unit's stayover at Camp Buehring, Kuwait en route to Iraq.

The lieutenant's work here, ablaze with depictions of his brigade's combat-green helicopters beating their way through the southwest Asia sky, have provided a small but colorful legacy for the battalion.

"I'm very impressed with his first-class work," said 3-158th Command Sgt. Maj. Chad Cuomo. "His artwork has inspired the Soldiers of 'Task Force Storm' to be nothing but the best at what they do."



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