



Photos by Al Schaben

Clockwise from far left: Villwok and his twin brother, Jim, say goodbye at 1012th headquarters in Fremont. Villwok spends a quiet moment holding his rosary while packing gear for Saudi Arabia. A soldier shaves Villwok's head in preparation for another climate. Villwok takes a final look back before boarding a 747 bound for Saudi Arabia. During a combat exercise at Fort Riley, Villwok rushes between buildings.



Reserves

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time passes slowly.

"About the only thing we usually do for entertainment is listen to our Walkman, write letters," Villwok says. "We get excited if there's a short line for chow."

Villwok and other soldiers in the barracks discuss the food. Roast beef, hamburgers, soups and salads, rice and potatoes. Not bad, but it's the same stuff, over and over. Pretty soon, he says, his diet may consist of dehydrated T-rations. That's what frontline soldiers are getting in Saudi Arabia.

"It makes dorm food look like you're eating a nice candlelight dinner," he says.

Villwok and Tichota first became friends in seventh grade. "We were both smaller kids," Villwok said, so they banded together from the start.

Along with another friend — a Marine Corps lance corporal currently stationed at a base in Saudi Arabia — Villwok

border — they did the usual things that teen-age friends do: baseball games, the cross country team, double dates, fishing trips to Minnesota, jobs at Godfather's Pizza.

"All the good stuff," Villwok said.

At UNL, they continued doing things together. Both are sophomore criminal justice majors. They had many of the same classes. They worked together for the Office of Campus Recreation and they played intramural football. Villwok was president of their dorm floor.

But until this year, the two best friends never had roomed together.

"I guess being roommates was bad luck," Villwok said. "They say it doesn't work."

Villwok and Tichota don't see each other much anymore. They're in different platoons, separate barracks. They don't talk much about school, either — except to plan when they will return.

"It looks like summer school unless something bigger happens," Tichota says. "Unless there's a war, they can't keep us long."

Reserves can be activated for "90 days or release by proper authority," Tichota quotes from Army policy. The 1012th has completed one-third of those 90 days. But its tour of duty can be extended with one day's warning.

Villwok says he was relieved when his unit finally was called up. After all, Reserves had been put on alert since the beginning of the semester, when the president authorized upgrading some units to active duty. If the unit had been passed over, Villwok says, he would have had a lot of catching up to do for his classes.

"It was probably my hardest semester I've been through and it was only six weeks long," he says.

"School may seem tough at the time and then you get put in a different situation. Getting up at 9 to study is not as tough as (getting up) at 5," Tichota says.

Before graduating from Fremont's Archbishop Bergan High School, Villwok says, he and Tichota faced many of the same choices that other seniors deal with: getting a job, going to college or

joining the Army.

His mother wanted him to go to college; his father wanted him to join the Army for a few years. So he took his parents' advice and did both. He visited an Army recruiter during the spring of 1988, while still a senior. A few days later he was a reservist. Tichota, 17 at the time, had to be talked into it, but eventually followed his friend's lead.

A couple months later, Villwok was at Fort Dix, N.J., for boot camp. After a few more months of training at Fort Lee, Va., he came to UNL for his freshman year of college.

Since then, he has earned more than \$10,000 for college because of his commitment to the Army.

In return, he owes six years of military service. That meant training one weekend a month and two weeks every summer. It meant that up to Oct. 9, that's the day Tichota's squad leader called. He told them the unit had been activated.

Villwok and Tichota had waited half a semester for the news. It's no wonder they remember exactly what they were doing.

It was midafternoon; Tichota and

Villwok had just returned to their room on the 10th floor of Schramm Hall. Villwok had a premonition.

"When I got back from class, I put my dog tags on . . ." Villwok says. "About 20 minutes later we got the call."

Shortly after the call, Tichota's girlfriend called him during the day. The first time she had done so all year. Somehow, she knew, Tichota says.

Villwok says he knew the night before. He stayed up until 3 a.m. writing a paper for his English composition class. He poured out his thoughts:

"The thought of going over to Saudi Arabia doesn't bother me; I am trained for war and feel that I am capable of handling the situation. . . . I have been waiting every day for the call to come and I would be shipped off. Over 40 days so far but only friends and wrong numbers have been on the line. . . . If the call comes the waiting will be over. The school work keeps piling up and every effort that I have been giving to hit the books leads me to think, 'for what?' With all of these questions I haven't been able to study. . . . All that I can pray for is

that something happens quick . . . be it putting on the green uniform or playing catch-up in this crazy semester that I am trying to endure."

"I didn't want to write it," Villwok says, "because I knew it would be for nothing."

When the call came, Tichota was in a neighbor's room looking over some homework before getting ready to go to work at the Office of Campus Recreation.

Instead of going to work that night, he and Villwok — both staff assistants for intramural sports — returned their equipment and said goodbye to their co-workers.

"They couldn't believe it," Villwok says. "They thought we were kidding."

Then he and Tichota started getting ready for a different job. They were in Lincoln for only a few more hours that night, taking care of essential business; their parents took furniture home to Fremont later.

At midnight Oct. 11, they were at headquarters of the 1012th in Fremont, active soldiers in the U.S. Army.

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