

Student Returns from Iraq

JCCC student Jacob McDaniel is nothing if not ambitious. After 11 months and 26 days in Iraq, the Kansas National Guard E-5

Sergeant was eager to return to JCCC, where he is enrolled in 18 hours for the spring 2007 semester. His educational goal is to complete a degree in graphic design and certificates in desktop publishing and Web design.

After his tour in Iraq, McDaniel says he has learned not to take so much for granted.

“You learn to appreciate the little things – like being able to drive your car and not be shot at,” McDaniel said.

McDaniel first attended JCCC from August 2003 to August 2005, during which time he had a full time job at Target and part-time job as a graphic designer for the Campus Ledger in spring semester 2005. In September 2005, his 2/137th Infantry, Charlie Company, was deployed to Iraq.

In November 2005, McDaniel was stationed in Baghdad on a secret mission. After his initial eight weeks, he was moved south of Baghdad, working 12 hours a day, seven days a week out of a palace that had belonged to one of Saddam Hussein’s wives. He was then assigned to “presence patrol” in an effort to make Iraqi residents feel secure by searching for bombs, weapons and

terrorists. His work also included humanitarian efforts like repairing bridges and helping locals with crops.

But in the midst of conflict, McDaniel had what he calls his “getaway point” – two university classes. McDaniel didn’t have the software to take the JCCC advanced Photoshop class he wanted, so he enrolled in *Introduction to Business Management* and *Introduction to Marketing* through Grantham University’s online degree program, recognized by the U.S. military. McDaniel says he was the only soldier in his company to take a class during deployment. Other soldiers used their time for computer games and magazines

“Classes kept my mind off my job,” McDaniel said.

McDaniel remained physically fit wearing 75 pounds of gear on patrol and mentally fit earning A grades in both classes.

At times when McDaniel was studying, explosions and gun fire detonated around his barrack.

“It wasn’t friendly fire,” he said.

McDaniel maximized his free time in Iraq. Besides studying for classes, he researched the idea of creating his own clothing company and instructed himself on Macromedia Flash software. He even had a part-time job for a U.S. company creating flash animation for use as an interactive teaching tool for insurance companies.

“It’s a chore,” McDaniel said of taking classes while stationed in Iraq. “You have to be self-motivated.”

And McDaniel is motivated. His goal is to work for a design firm and still have time to work on free-lance projects. He likes the versatility that being a graphic designer offers and wants to do it all – print, Web, clothes, etc.

“I don’t wish my experience in Iraq on anybody. What can I say? It’s war,” McDaniel said.

McDaniel, however, does tout his experience with the Kansas National Guard and recommends enlistment as a way to pay for school and achieve career goals.

