

# Monday Morning Updates: From Bosnia to the Moon

*Letters home track Minnesota Guard unit*

**By Hal Gorder**

Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 151st Field Artillery, Minnesota Army National Guard—650 strong from such cities as Montevideo, Marshall, Olivia and Morris—were called into federal service on 16 April 2009. They were deployed to Kuwait on a mission to provide convoy security operations into and out of Iraq. This entailed the use of gunships (Up-Armored Humvees and Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) Armored Vehicles) to escort civilian semi-trucks and military convoys taking equipment and gear into Iraq, and also bringing equipment and property out of Iraq.

I sent a letter home, via email, every Monday morning after we deployed. I called it “The Monday Morning Updates,” and each one described personal impressions and happenings in my unit, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1-151 FA. I was HHB’s First Sergeant. The letters began at Ft. Hood, TX, where we stayed for two and a half months to train and prepare, and continued throughout our time at Camp Buehring, Kuwait. Every Tuesday

Story continues on next page



(left to right): MSG Stacey Gustafson (HHB’s Executive Officer), 1SG Hal Gorder (HHB First Sergeant), SFC James Holdeman from the state of Virginia (Public Affairs); and CPT Steve Hall (HQ’s Commander).

## Points of Interest

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## ALLIES

I got requests from those who just read the update to add their names to my distribution list.

It soon became clear that the letters were being well received and eventually the distribution list became quite large. When I returned home, I was informed in an optimistic tone that I should put these letters and pictures into book form and submit for publication. So as a well-trained, well-conditioned soldier, I did as I was told. In this and the next issue of *Allies* are excerpts from my upcoming book, “Monday Morning Updates: From Bosnia to the Moon.”

*01 July 2009, Camp Buehring, Kuwait:*

Good Morning to All...MarHaba, from...I think it's from the Moon.

We flew out of Ft. Hood on a sultry, sticky Monday afternoon after sitting and waiting for the manifest to prove that we were indeed worthy and had therefore earned the right to vacate Texas. After the almost three full months of residence and fiery hoops through which we leapt, we netted that honor. So we said our goodbyes, ‘Aufwiedersehen,’ and boarded the plane to take us away from there as quickly as possible. We found ourselves on the longest day we had ever seen in the past three months...one that lasted over 24 hours and took us through Maine, to Germany and then, I think instead of flying out east towards Kuwait, I do believe that that jumbo 767 went straight up.

And we landed on the Moon. Based on the topography I saw from the small airliner window as we came in for a landing at 0200 hours in the morning, I do believe that we are on that sphere. It could be Mars, except for the lack of reddish hues...so I find myself thinking that we have arrived...on the Moon...and tomorrow I am on a journey to locate the Sea of Tranquility.

However, as I stepped from the plane, I never in my life thought that the Moon would have been so hot and arid...but it was.

In reality, I guess we *are* in Kuwait, where the winds blow and the dust devils grow, and where the endless rows of concrete barriers and berms of sand indicate that this is a manmade Forward Operating Base (FOB), called Camp Buehring. For the past three days, I was told that there have been dust storms to rival the very best of blizzards in North Dakota—except that these ‘white-outs’ (tan-outs?) actually hurt. I could refinish a coffee table using grit imbedded in my forehead.

We toured our new surroundings in the blazing heat while constantly being peppered by the winds and blowing debris. We discovered a KFC and Starbuck's, as well as the typical PX found on every Army post.

It has been blowing like this for three days, but that is something of a rarity according to the soldiers we are going to replace. Hopefully we have seen the worst. I could have brought an iron bed frame here and left it outside, turning it occasionally, and I really believe that the past few days would have sand blasted the old paint off of it for me, and I would be ready to prime and paint it again.

As I type this MMU for you, I gaze at the concrete barriers that are everywhere and the large housing units that we are occupying, and I have to reassure myself that we are *not* on the Moon, but in Kuwait. I guess the concrete barriers and the constant roar of the many generators that provide our electricity attest to that.

We have met our counterparts, a friendly group from Hawaii who are ecstatic that we are here (and I will have that same feeling in about eight months, I am certain). We are learning from them how to continue the missions that have been continuing here for the past several years. We are getting into our groove and



During morning formation, First Sergeant Gorder, right, salutes Capt. Hall, the HQ commander at Camp Buehring.

learning how to do our jobs, and we will develop our own little ruts of life here on the Moon...I mean, Camp Buehring; and then we will say goodbye to those soldiers who have served their country well. It is time for them to go home to their families and friends, as we will ourselves before too long.

Until then...enjoy the pictures and I will talk to you all soon.

*05 July 2009, Camp Buehring, Kuwait:*

Good Morning to All...MarHaba...from the Moon.

Well, more days have passed us by like the fine grains of sand and silt that blow past our faces here on the Moon. The winds are relentless and constant. They may not blow 30 mph every day, but they are always there, and so is that inexorable fine sand. One really tiny grain skirted by my eyeball the other day and I was happy when it did not make full contact, until the second and third cousins arrived, with their nieces and nephews, twice and thrice removed, and then they did make contact...and now I need to irrigate my eye...again.

The temperatures hover in the 116 to 119 degrees area. Come mid-day, say around 1030 hrs to 1530 hrs (10:30 am – 3:30 pm), you feel as if you are two feet away from the sun as you walk from one work area to another. Man, it just bakes you! The little red springy thing in my side has popped out more than once already. And then I have to go to the Food Service section and they re-set it. They called me a turkey? I still don't know why.

The power was out in the whole battalion area on Wednesday. It ceased to exist around 0800 hrs (8:00 am) and then it was sporadic, at best, for the rest of the day. As the temperatures reached the Holy Shit! stage, we could have baked apple pies in the confines of our rooms by merely setting the pie pans on our beds. When the day ended and it was time for my shower, I remembered that I couldn't because we still lacked the electricity to pump the water.

Did I say it was warm? You can't even open the small window and let in a tepid breeze. So I laid there on my back with a small pool of sweat growing in the slight crevice of my chest when at 2300 hrs (11:00 pm) the A/C came on—for ten minutes. For the rest of the night it would come on for 10-15 minutes, and then die again. It was a long night.

We finally had a new 16-valve Cat Diesel generator set-up Thursday to replace the old one. The thing is gargantuan. Anyway, we are praying that it will do the job it was designed to do until we get put on the grid from the power plant. Then we should be in a solid state of electricity.

Guess what? There are birds here on the Moon. Not many...but there are birds. They resemble a sparrow. I see them on the ground and soaring in the thick air and I often wonder what they eat to survive. There is no vegetation here. Maybe they eat the sand mites or small flying insects that intermingle with the grains of sand that constantly fill the air here on the Moon. I have seen no other living creature...yet. No dogs, cats, nothing.

Maybe we are the only living things occupying this section of the Moon; just us...and the birds.

Our Commander, CPT Hall, the XO (Executive Officer) MSG Gustafson and the Supply Guy, SGT Naab, all drove to Arifjan (Air-If-John), another FOB about one and a half hours away yesterday to get ready for the Change of Responsibility in property, etc. The drive, according to CPT Hall, was so flat and desolate that you literally could stop the vehicle, let your dog out and then watch the dog run away from you...for three days.

I walked to the PX on Friday at about 1345 hrs (1:45 pm), and I thought that I may melt right into the sand and never be seen again. I had to buy soap. And then on the return trip, I feared for the shape the soap would be in once I returned to my room. I stopped at the movie theater to get some water. Yes, we have a huge tent that houses a theater. Nice and cool in there, good seating, popcorn machine, and lousy movies. Next month, the selection looks better.

OK... I had a little popcorn, too.

Next time I will go earlier in the day or in the shadows of dusk.

We are finally getting internet installed in our rooms for those who wish to pay for it, so I will be able to webcam my lovely wife, Kamilla, and that will be pretty cool. Until next week, I have a quote that really rings true; "The only thing harder than being a Soldier, is being married to a Soldier," So when you sit back and think about our soldiers serving over here, remember that most of them have someone at home,

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someone who is waiting and worrying about their soldier.

And to be honest, I figure that is pretty tough.

Ma'a as salama

Hal

*To be continued next issue.*



The front gate at Camp Buehring in Kuwait.

## MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MINNESOTA - Application for New or Renewed Membership

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If you have had military experience, in which branch of service? Check all that apply:

US Army  US Navy  US Marine Corps  US Air Force  US Coast Guard

Other Highest rank achieved \_\_\_\_\_ Circle one: Active Former Retired

### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

#### Individual/Household

Regular (\$25/yr.)

Sustaining (\$50/yr.)

Life (\$350. May be paid in four installments of \$90 each. Tell us if you want this option.)

#### Organization

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#### Corporate

Regular (\$1,000)

Sustaining (\$3,000)

Individual memberships are annual except Life memberships. All contributions of \$500 or more in a single year and all Life memberships are recognized on a plaque in the museum lobby.

### PROCEDURE

**Pay by check or credit card:** Download this form and mail with your check (payable to the Military Historical Society of Minnesota) to Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345. You can also mail this form without payment and follow up by calling the museum at 320-632-7374 with your credit card information. **Pay on-**

**line:** GiveMN.org is a simple, secure way to become a member by paying online. Go to [www.givemn.razoo.com/story/Military-Historical-Society-Of-Minnesota](http://www.givemn.razoo.com/story/Military-Historical-Society-Of-Minnesota) and follow the prompts.

**Your membership is fully tax deductible. We salute and thank you for your support!**

## Curator's Notes By Doug Bekke

Our job is to preserve the artifacts and the stories that together make the histories of the Minnesotans who served the State and the Nation in all branches of the service, but we have been forced to become more selective in the donations we take into the collection because of the sheer volume of artifacts that are offered. In order to preserve a more complete record of Minnesotans service, there are many things that we are still seeking for the collection. Sometimes donors contact us offering things that we would never have thought to look for because we never imagined they were out there. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you would like to make a donation. Sometimes what may seem common is, in fact, rare and has a great story to tell. We hope, however, that you won't be offended if we turn down your donation. We simply can't take everything. But please call and make the offer. You may have just the thing we need to tell a compelling Minnesota military story.



Some of the past months' donations include:

From the family of Donald Mix, a WWII Navy veteran, a U.S. National flag off the cruiser *USS Minneapolis*, which he somehow obtained and brought home after the war. This came complete with a nice history and photos of his service in the United States and in Asia. Mr. Mix's two grandsons are serving in the Army and have finished a total of 5 tours in the Middle East. Many thanks to the Mix family for its service to the nation. I hope the grandsons follow in their grandfather's footsteps and will each write a nice history of their service for their family—and that they will send a copy to the museum.

Ken and Diane Synker donated a very nice WW I, 13th Marine Regiment uniform along with some photos of the Marine who wore it and a brief statement on his life and service.

Mrs. Ellen La Bounta donated items from her late husband LTC Gerald La Bounta, from St. Paul, who served from WWII through the Vietnam era. This collection includes exceptional documentation of LTC La Bounta's training, deployment, and time as a POW in WWII, his extensive combat in Korea, documented with his actual combat maps, and where as a young Lieutenant he earned a Silver Star. Many other photographs and documents detailing his service were included in the collection. Mrs. La Bounta also donated her husband's fine collection of German and Japanese edged weapons and war souvenirs.

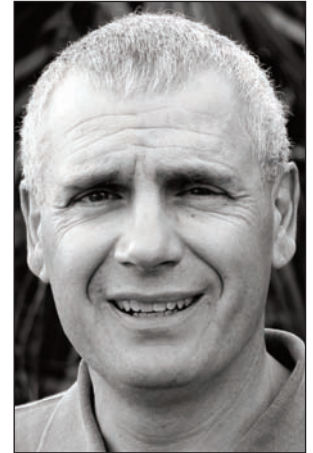
Keith Olson of Little Falls donated a relative's uniform from WWII. The soldier had served in the 99th Infantry Battalion. This is an important uniform because it represents a small unit, composed largely of Minnesotans, formed in 1942 at Camp Ripley to carry out special operations in Norway deep behind German lines. The 99th was the only combat unit formed at Camp Ripley during the war. It went on to train at Ft. Snelling and at Camp Hale, CO before serving in combat in Northern Europe and in the occupation of Norway. Very importantly, the uniform comes with excellent documentation about the veteran and his service, much of it written by the veteran.

James Stoker donated a wonderful collection of period books on WWI and a few from the Spanish American War. These were mostly histories of Minnesota Counties, units, or various aspects of the war. We are extremely happy to add them to our library.

You will notice from my comments that documentation is an important factor in deciding if we will accept a donation. Sometimes a piece will stand on its own as a representative example of something, but it is always better when the history of the item is documented. Basically that means who used it, or how, when, and where it was acquired. For items tied to a particular veteran, it is best to also receive photos, documents, letters, oral or written histories, and anything else recounting the story behind the artifact. Too often we find pieces in the collection that have lost their story. Maybe we never received the story or maybe it was never written and remains in someone's memory, but it is lost to us. Sometimes we are lucky and can track down the donor and get the story/documentation, but with the passage of time and our limited staff, this is often difficult.

## Director's Update

By Jeff Thielen



The Minnesota Military Museum has seen a huge increase of volunteers since our first volunteer training day on April 28. There have even been days when volunteers outnumber staff 2 to 1 and green shirted volunteers make it difficult to move around the office. A total of seventeen people attended the training and our total volunteer count is just under 40 people. The morning's agenda revolved around why history matters, how to connect with visitors, and possible opportunities for volunteers, including "front of the house" and "behind the scenes" jobs. Following lunch with troops in the Transient Mess, everyone got a full-blown tour of exhibit areas and work/storage areas, and then spent a couple more hours in breakout sessions for those interested in becoming tour guides and docents, doing living history presentations, helping in the gift shop, making dog tags, or working hands-on with artifacts in the collection. Assisting in the training was Melissa Peterson of the Lindbergh Interpretive Center, Curator Doug Bekke, Docent Craig Johnson, Administrator Sandy Erickson, Museum Assistant Kathy Marty, and retired Executive Director Dave Hanson, who all passed on their expertise to eager ears.

Since the beginning of 2012 our volunteers have put in over 1,000 hours working in all parts of the museum. Curator Doug Bekke continues to have a strong core of volunteers who assist with the backlog of projects. Several volunteers assist us by greeting visitors at the door and helping in the store during busy times. We have volunteers who are leading tours for individuals and groups and some even dress up in period uniforms. School groups in May were impressed and amazed when they were given presentations by docents dressed in Civil War attire. Other volunteers have been tackling the accumulating stacks of donated books in the library with the goal of organizing to be able to do some limited lending with a portion of the collection.

I am also happy to report that our volunteer program has a number of Saint Cloud State University students volunteering time at the museum. Two of them are working on 200 hour Internships. Interns are volunteers who have been given specific tasks and goals by their academic advisors. We have worked with these volunteers to create a unique learning experience for them.

Organizing, training, and managing all of these volunteers takes a little extra time on the part of museum staff, but we have all seen the value and contributions they have made to the museum. My hat is off to all of our great volunteers, and I want to thank them for the great work they are doing.

On another note, the museum recently completed a three-day facilities planning process with Camp Ripley headquarters staff. The plan was to develop a long range plan for Area 1 and the museum. The meeting was facilitated by the Facilities Management Office (FMO) of Camp Ripley. The discussions helped both the museum and Camp Ripley to define current and long term needs.

To support their mission, Camp Ripley headquarters staff came to the meeting with ideas they would like to see happen in Area 1. The FMO staff was instrumental in comparing requirements to find overlap and then suggesting cooperative proposals in which both parties can meet their mission.

It may be premature to divulge too many details of what the final plan for Area 1 will be, as the plan has yet to be approved by Adjutant General and the Board of Directors has yet to see what has been proposed. What I will say about the proposed plan is that both Camp Ripley and the Military Historical Society of Minnesota will be extremely proud of the finished product when all stages of the plan are finally implemented. Stay tuned for a more detailed explanation along with a map in a future newsletter.

Lastly, if it has been awhile since you have visited the museum, I encourage you to get a group together and come visit. If you need a bus for all the friends you want to bring with you, I will help to arrange for that to happen. Recently, we had an excited visitor who shared with me that he could not wait to tell all his Bocce Ball league buddies what a great place this was. Half jokingly, I offered to set up a bus trip. A couple weeks later, he called me back and said he had 30-40 people who were interested in making the trip. I coordinated with a metro area bus company and we now have had our first Bocce Ball league tour.

## Memorials, (April 1 through June 30)

### Given by:

Charles & Norma Extrand  
 Doug Bekke  
 James and Sandra Erickson  
 Jack Johnson  
 Nick Ostapenko  
 Betty Masoner  
 Betty Masoner  
 Betty Masoner  
 Neill Carter  
 Art Ludwig  
 Richard and Betty Hayes  
 Kenneth J. Slipka  
 194<sup>th</sup> Tank Regiment Assn.  
 Richard and Betty Hayes  
 Charles & Norma Extrand  
 Richard and Betty Hayes  
 Art Ludwig  
 194<sup>th</sup> Tank Regiment Assn.  
 James Nygaard  
 Margaret Fletcher  
 Kenneth J. Slipka  
 Allan Meixner  
 Joseph Kazek  
 Richard and Betty Hayes  
 Lyle C. Doerr  
 Raymond H. Lunde  
 Jack and Judy Johnson  
 Richard and Betty Hayes  
 James Nygaard  
 Charles & Norma Extrand

### In Memory of:

COL Patrick Kidder  
 Merl Fletcher  
 Merl Fletcher  
 Merl Fletcher  
 Merl Fletcher  
 Merl Fletcher  
 David Kaupp  
 Raymond E. Bakkum  
 LTC (Ret.) Lester Pearson  
 LTC (Ret.) Lester Pearson  
 LTC (Ret.) Lester Pearson  
 LTC (Ret.) Lester Pearson  
 LTC (Ret.) Lester Pearson  
 SGT (Ret.) Ronald Newman  
 MSG (Ret.) Clifford Bock  
 MSG (Ret.) Clifford Bock  
 MSG (Ret.) Clifford Bock  
 MSG (Ret.) Clifford Bock  
 Randy Becker  
 Robert Tretter  
 MG (Ret.) Robert Blevins  
 MG (Ret.) Robert Blevins  
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 MG (Ret.) Robert Blevins  
 MG (Ret.) Robert Blevins  
 MG (Ret.) Robert Blevins  
 MG (Ret.) Robert Blevins  
 SGT (Ret.) Ronald L. Newman  
 Randy Becker  
 Maxine Russell

## Wheelchair Needed

Do you have a gently used wheelchair that you would be willing to donate?

We need one for use by museum visitors. Call Sandy Erickson at 320-616-6050 or email [connect@mmilitary-museum.org](mailto:connect@mmilitary-museum.org)

## Contributions Honor Roll (April 1 through June 31, 2012)

**Renewing Members:** David Adamson ▪ Ronald Andreen ▪ Louis Bode ▪ Newell Chester ▪ Margaret Fletcher ▪ Joe Forberg ▪ Hal Gorder ▪ Douglas Jenniges ▪ Donald Jensen ▪ Earl Jensen ▪ Doug Johnson ▪ Joseph Kazek ▪ Robert Keppel ▪ Walter Kosel ▪ Howard Larsen ▪ Tim Meininger ▪ Allan Meixner ▪ James Nygaard ▪ Keith Silbernack ▪ John Sisterman ▪ Kenneth Swanson ▪ Edward Weismann

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**Donations:** Sounder Andrews ▪ Elizabeth Beckman ▪ Bob Boone ▪ Michelle Brown ▪ Thomas Chial ▪ Joe Chrzaszcz ▪ Mary Coleman ▪ Tristan Conrad ▪ Crow Wing Power Community Trust ▪ Lyle C. Doerr ▪ Fraternal Order of Eagles #3208, Minneapolis ▪ Don Eddy ▪ Elk River Lions Club ▪ Sue Elliot ▪ Falls Furniture ▪ Jerry and Annette Fedor ▪ Leroy Freeman ▪ Paul Gallimore ▪ Darrell Gray ▪ Mia Grosso ▪ Joshua Gugse ▪ Darrell Harmer ▪ Rick Harriman ▪ Mary Howard ▪ Neil Jensen ▪ Jack Johnson ▪ Terry Jones ▪ Steven Jongquist ▪ Dennis Kaiser ▪ Larry Kasten ▪ Dorene Kline ▪ Diane Klinkhammer ▪ Brad Laager ▪ Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic ▪ Randall-Cushing Lions Club ▪ Little Falls Exchange Club ▪ Wally Lind ▪ Thomas Martin ▪ Terry McClain ▪ Mid-Minnesota Federal Credit Union, Little Falls ▪ Minnesota Rakkasans ▪ Jan Nelson ▪ Gerald Neuenfeldt ▪ David Peterson ▪ Marcus Peterson ▪ Tim Peterson ▪ Malade Plocher ▪ Aidan Poriatowski ▪ Ken Rice ▪ Alauna Schroeder ▪ Don Schutz ▪ Susan Shelton ▪ Staples Lions Club ▪ Mary Stevens ▪ Barb Stoffel ▪ Janice Stratte ▪ Jon Stratte ▪ David and Anita Strauss ▪ Ken Streiff ▪ Becky Swelland ▪ Roger Ulen ▪ Andrea Valentine ▪ Brooke Vogt ▪ Kenneth Vogt ▪ Tori Vogt ▪ Steve Wenzel ▪ Michele Ziegler

**ALLIES**

**Allies** is published for the members and friends of the Minnesota Military Museum.

Nicholas Ostapenko, **President**  
Jeff Thielen, **Executive Director**  
Doug Bekke, **Curator**  
Leland P. Smith, **Archivist**  
Sandy Erickson, **Administrator**  
Al Zdon, **Editor**

The **Military Historical Society of Minnesota** is a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organization, registered with the federal and state governments. Donations are tax deductible.

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**Little Falls MN 56345-4173**

## **In Memoriam**

We are sad to note the death of MG (Ret.) Robert L. Blevins, Bloomington, who passed away June 19. He was 83. General Blevins commanded the old 47th Infantry Division and was a steadfast supporter of the museum.

He served from 1946 to 1988, and was a member of the Fort Benning Officer's Candidate School Hall of Fame.

He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Ginger. He had eight children and many grandchildren.

He served as president of the Military Historical Society of Minnesota from 1991-95. A fine soldier and true gentleman, he will be missed by all who knew and worked with him.

## **Artifact Donations (April 1 through June 30, 2012)**

**Uniforms:** Buckle, belt ▪ Cap, garrison (4) ▪ Coat, USAF (2) ▪ Coat, USMC ▪ Jacket, Eisenhower ▪ Overcoat, USA (3) ▪ Shirt (2) ▪ Tie ▪ Trousers (3) ▪

**Equipment:** Box, ammunition ▪ Helmet, US ▪ Stove, USA field portable ▪

**Miscellaneous:** Armband ▪ Books ▪ DVD ▪ Eagle insignia (2) ▪ EMs ▪ Flag (4) ▪ FMs ▪ Kit, shaving ▪ Magazines ▪ Maps ▪ Papers ▪ Pendant (2) ▪ Photographs ▪ Pin, lapel (2) ▪ Poster ▪ Scrapbook ▪ Sheet Music ▪ Spoons (2) ▪ TMs ▪ Victory Garden sign

**Weapons and related items:** Bayonet, Japanese ▪ Dagger ▪ Knives ▪ Machete ▪ Sword

## **Artifact Donation Honor Roll (April 1 through June 30, 2012)**

*The museum gratefully acknowledges donations of artifacts from the following:*

Jon C. Anderson ▪ Gerald Dircks ▪ Jim Erickson ▪ Leroy Grams ▪ Nola Johnson ▪ Ellen LaBolinta ▪ Robert Mix ▪ Mike Mordorski ▪ Kathryn Scherling ▪ Bea Schmidt ▪ Harold Schmidt ▪ Linda Sedall ▪ Diane Senkyr ▪ Gail Spiese ▪ James Stoker ▪ Eran Young