



News Release

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May 2, 2008
NR08051

Six years and two tours in Iraq later, proud NMCC student and soldier to earn degree

Aroostook County - In September 2002, when Scott Morgan of New Sweden first began taking classes in the electrical construction and maintenance program at Northern Maine Community College, the national average price for gasoline was \$1.42 a gallon. As he completes his associate degree and prepares for graduation on May 17, the price locally hovers around \$3.75.

The stark difference is symbolic in terms of the dramatic changes in Morgan's own life since he first began on the path toward his college degree six years ago. A long journey to what is traditionally a two-year degree, the 28-year-old NMCC student, husband, father of two, and squad leader in the 488th Military Police Company, took a couple of detours along the way – namely two tours serving his country in Iraq.

Morgan was able to complete his freshman year in 2002-2003 without interruption. In the fall of 2003 he completed the first semester of his senior year. With graduation in sight, plans changed in January of 2004 when he and his fellow soldiers in the Maine Army National Guard 152nd Field Artillery Unit were deployed to Iraq for a mission that would forever change his life.

“I was located at Abu Ghraib just after the news of the prisoner abuse made international headlines. My duty was custody and control of the Iraqis interned. We pretty much made sure they were safe and did not escape,” said Morgan. “It was a difficult time for us in Abu (as we called it). My unit took hundreds of mortar rounds in retaliation for the detainee abuse. We were on constant alert. We were engaged by small fire often.”

According to Morgan, a close eye was also being kept on the soldiers assigned to the prison. During his tour at Abu Ghraib numerous media agencies and dignitaries visited the prison, and he recalls his unit was “under the watchful eye of the Army to ensure that the previous abuse never happened again.”

In February of 2005, Morgan returned home too late to enroll in his final semester. He was able to register for some classes in the fall of 2005, but since courses in the trade and technical occupations majors at NMCC run sequentially, the program specific classes in electrical construction he needed to graduate would not be offered until the spring semester. So he instead enrolled part-time and picked up a job working for R.L. Todd and Sons Electrical Contractors.

“I enrolled in the spring semester of 2006 ready to graduate that May, but I wasn’t able to complete the semester as we were deployed halfway through March as part of the Security Force 2 Unit,” said Morgan.

This time, Morgan served as a team leader and often times acted as squad leader in his new assignment with the 488th Military Police Company. Initially stationed at Camp Navistar in Northern Kuwait – less than a mile from the Iraq border, Morgan and his unit ran convoy operations throughout Iraq.

“I had a chance to go all the way to Mosul, which is one of the northernmost cities in Iraq. Eventually my unit moved to Camp Virginia Kuwait and we ran our convoy operations from there,” said Morgan.

Returning from his second tour in July of last year, Morgan re-enrolled for classes in the fall of 2007, and this spring is finally able to complete the courses necessary to graduate with a degree in electrical construction and maintenance.

“The toughest part was coming back to school,” said Morgan. “Not only was I a changed man, I struggled to relearn everything I had forgotten. So, at times I felt behind all of my peers academically, but I think I made a good adjustment.”

Morgan’s instructors certainly agree that he has not only adjusted, but has excelled in his studies. At the annual NMCC Student Honors and Awards Ceremony on May 1, he was honored with the academic achievement award for the electrical construction and maintenance program.

“I have noticed a tremendous change in maturity and attitude in Scott since his first two attempts at the program. Scott is very serious and focused with respect to his studies and has become the go-to-guy for many of his class mates who may need extra help with certain lab activities. He has a positive attitude, which he passes on to his classmates, making him a real asset for me in the classroom,” said Chuck Kelley, NMCC electrical construction and maintenance instructor. “It is for these reasons and his willingness to put his education on hold not once, but twice in order to serve our country that Scott has been recognized with an academic achievement award.”

Aside from his studies, Morgan’s other focus has been on his family. His wife Amanda and the couple’s two sons, eight-year-old Brandon and six-year-old Bryce, are both happy that their husband and father is home and safe, and that he will, at last, graduate from college.

“This has been extremely tough on them,” said Morgan of the family’s experience over past several years. “Both of my boys were young and couldn’t understand why daddy had to go away. I told them ‘I had to help fight the bad guys to make the world a little safer for them’. My wife stayed strong. She refused to fail. I would say it was tougher for her than it was for me. My family is the most important thing in my life.”

It is for that very reason that Morgan will put his family first on one of the most important days of his life. On May 17, when members of the NMCC class of 2008 are awarded their degrees during commencement exercises at 10:00 a.m. in the College gymnasium, Morgan will be in Bar Harbor with his wife attending a marriage enrichment seminar hosted by the National Guard.

“I can’t say ‘thank you’ enough to everyone who helped along the way through this long process. It took a lot of patience and time. I know everyone was concerned for my well-being,” said Morgan. “Without the people who helped me along the way and my family in my absence, I could not have done what I did.”

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Northern Maine Community College student Scott Morgan works in the electrical construction and maintenance lab at NMCC in one of his last classes before graduation. Morgan will earn his degree after six years and two tours in Iraq.



Northern Maine Community College electrical construction and maintenance instructor Chuck Kelley (right) works with student Scott Morgan in the electrical construction and maintenance lab at NMCC recently.



Northern Maine Community College student Scott Morgan (left) receives the 2008 Academic Achievement Award for the electrical construction and maintenance program at NMCC from instructor Chuck Kelley at the recent NMCC Annual Student Honors and Awards Ceremony.