

Drones Preparing to Swarm (Photo by DARPA)

## Letters Home, Battlefield 2047

Lt. Col. Kelly McCoy, U.S. Army

he 2047 Defense of Istanbul was arguably where twenty-first-century warfare matured to its horrendous potential. The capability for rapid global deployment on a major scale matched to technological

advancements in neuro-communications, artificial intelligence (AI), and autonomous robotic systems. Man and machine could throw fire and power across the globe for quick, yet brutal battles in unprecedentedly shortened timeframes. For the first time the Fifth Eye System, an AI system with enterprise access capable of monitoring, censoring, and synthesizing metadata captured the human

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perspective of military operations. The Fifth Eye System gave commanders an inside view of how their units understood orders, signaled areas of potential priority concerns they may have in the field, and highlighted where operational challenges/opportunities might arise.

The following series of letters were largely made possible by the National Defense Authorization Act of 2046, which mandated all communications from Department of Defense personnel, regardless of professional or personal correspondence, be sent through the Fifth Eye System. This series was also made possible by the Freedom of Data Act of 2033 and the efforts of Sen. Maisy Biden and Rep. Zora McCoy.

The following excerpts are a collection of censored morale, welfare, and recreation messages from Capt. Jonnie V. Smith, Troop Commander for Alpha Troop (Maneuver), 4th Squadron, 13th Rapid Response Battle Group (RRBG). Smith's messages are unique as they cover a significant portion of the Defense of Istanbul.

The first message begins in September 2047, when the 13th RRBG began their mobilization tour at the Southern Mobilization and Forward Staging Deployment Site. The purpose of units on mobilization tours at the time was to deploy on/order anywhere around the globe, within twelve hours, to deter or respond to adversarial aggression; if deterrence fails, orders dictate that the unit will secure and consolidate gains in concurrence with standing guidance for the strategic vision of the region.

ALL COMMUNICATIONS MONITORED AND CENSURED BY FIFTH EYE SYSTEM

Sam

The first was spent running through drills—getting familiar with the physical space after playing around with the synthetic trainer for the . It is crazy how physical composition—the touch, smell, and general atmosphere of the real space—changes the actions I have to take. I know this place, it is exactly as we have trained. My brain knows what exactly needs to happen in every detail—but adds true weight and the machine smell of the deployment bays. It took a couple of tries to transfer the training to action with the same results. Having everything still packed up did make it easier to roll through the repetitions; however, by the end of it, the Sisyphus jokes were no longer funny. When we were finally told to cease drills we jumped straight into maintenance and training—finalizing our requirements to be fully mission capable.

Tomorrow we go . It will be a good break from running through simulations and hearing good old AIDA provide

recommendations back to me. I need a break from her voice. If it weren't for her female voice, I imagine I'd have a hard time realizing which one is my voice and which one is AIDA... and please do not be jealous. What I said still stands—I am no Luddite, and you know I am no cyb-freak.

I miss you and Jerry beyond belief. While the days have been busy, my heart sinks every time I remember we

have to go.
Embarrassingly enough, my roommate told me that
I've been talking in my sleep—
asking you and Jerry questions. How was Jerry been?
Has he been good for you?

Have you talked to your father at all? The news is about all we get to see here. Swing Riot 4.0 is really heating up between the Luddites, socials, and libs. I still don't understand how a poor lib can make ends meet today, but I can see why a lib would snub their nose when Luddites hack in and destroy servers. Regardless, solid pay for good hard work is a great idea, but it was experience like your father's that created

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the algorithms of automation. Wish he could be part of the group that sees this as a dividend that should pay out rather than a pox that has been put on the land.

I am sure you've also seen the news about Wagner's [Russian mercenaries] increased activity in Turkey. I am certain the brass are uncomfortable with it being so close to the capitol. If we get pulled, I imagine it will be to there. The forward battle group in and the rest of EA3DAN have set conditions nicely in the won't make any moves. However, isn't a fool. He knows EA3DAN is the only thing standing in his way from fracturing the entire continent. I still don't understand why he wants to destroy order so bad, but his private military keeps popping up and replacing governments from towns to capitols. Taking Istanbul would be a quick and decisive win for him.

I am sorry I mention this. It's been on my mind—but I don't want you to worry. I really believe that there will be no jump on this rotation. Even for a deterrence exercise...

but those are much better

than the real thing right?

I cannot thank you enough for carrying the weight you carry. At night when I go to sleep it's the same question in my head—why am I here? Is this worth it? A year away from you and Jerry—for what? For a country ripping itself apart over greed and stupidity? For an idea that seems to be on life support? In the end I often concede, there is no present alternative. I am thankful we have work, we have money and food, and we also have a country—despite how screwed up it may be—that is founded on this idea that very few today seem to believe in anymore.

I love you. I miss you. Jonnie.

END MESSAGE
TRANSMITTAL 092136232047
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## ALL COMMUNICATIONS MONITORED AND CENSURED BY FIFTH EYE SYSTEM

Brad.

Considering you had just gotten back from when I left for Florida—I figured you would want to
know how the fight has gone. I've been in
. The entry was not what we thought—it was
brutal. I imagine notifications are likely still arriving with
the most dreadful ping and automated prescription. Some
things should not be left to soulless voices, but I have no
idea how else they would do something on this scale.
When things started, we were set to launch for a show
of force. Brig. Gen. (BG) was directed to insert
the battle group as part of a larger effort
to demonstrate that we could fill out
battle groups in a matter
of days. However, anticipated
us and the show of force quickly changed to forced entry
even before we left Florida.
We were lucky. Our squadron
this is probably what saved us. When the first wave took
off it must have triggered
. We were in our boxes loaded into the rocket
when the first I remember it
feeling distant but immense.
We took
off .
We took off  Whatever was going on was huge.
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Did you hear about your old troop commander , we were in our modular deployment sets and going over a final mission brief from BG Bradford. He was the and ran his Thanks to AIDA, It is unreal the level of planning we do in straight into a trap after failing to such short time. I wouldn't be surprised if he had discounted We knew it was going to be hot when we arrived. what I remember of your stories definitely had from the operational support pad to our employment Luddite tendencies—maybe even a closet human purist. zones allowed for final back briefs and monitoring of what While it is totally possible that became corrupted—our own saved us—after having bounced back we were coming into. At one point we and forth Just like you told me, we survived because we received orders to conduct an , I could easily see others who would itself—it was only with the help of worked with we found the broken chain proving the order was counterlose patience and junk it. feit. We knew in the absence of specific comms, we were to How are things back home? We are constantly on digital monitor for changes but plan for our original mission and black outs and gray outs. We barely get access fight per regional strategic vision. The brass at EA3DAN I have no idea what the response has been would expect us to arrive on our objective. Two hours out from our objective, the squadron . While I'd rather be home with Sam and punched out the . They Jerry, I am glad that, in being here, I am still alive and holdsurvived long enough to give us a clear picture of the ing my sanity ... I have the chance to make things better objective area—with —our tactical and hopefully bring home my team. were set, and I could feel the sickness of excitement well up Please check on Sam and Jerry. Tell them I love them. inside of me. Our entry point was . Everything we Your brother, Jonnie. END MESSAGE had trained for. Planned for. It came to a head. TRANSMITTAL 100043232047 After we dropped in, I had a newfound respect for our SECURED BY VOICE CODE; RECIPIENT unmanned systems. At one point, two counterreconnais-VOICE RECOGNITION REQUIRED sance swarms, one ours and the other each other. At first, they were literally dancing. It was as if MONITORED AND CENSORED BY FIFTH EYE SYSTEM (4P BFOCK OULS they were equally testing each other's approach and . It was a sight to see. Over the roof tops there MAY BE SUBMITTED TO UNBLOCK) were hundreds of bots, squaring off against each other. One side must have finally discovered a weakness and it liter-ally rained these six inch diameter recon bots for the next EURO-ASIAN-ARAB-AMERICAN DEFENSE ALLAINCE NETWORK - EA3DN minute. One of vehicles got caught under the -COMMUNICATION deluge. At the objective area we came in and bore straight into BRADLEY.R.SMITH.04. HHC/2/W-MFSD - RECIPIENT an enemy defense position that had a were protecting. The training we had worked so hard for JONNIE.V.SMITH.O3.A/4/13RRBG paid off as my troop split up and guided po-**VOICE CODE VALIDATED** sitions into an over watch for ALL COMMUNICATIONS MONITORED ANDWe caught with their pants down—they had no idea what CENSURED BY FIFTH EYE SYSTEM happened. We secured Jonnie, I think we killed more robots than humans—by a Sam and Jerry are doing well. I hope you are doing the certain definition we had to have. But as squadron consame. I talked with Sam last night. Jerry was busy building bots that I am assuming, based on the noises, were battling solidated gains all we found in the rubble was really each other once complete. It's amazing what a four-year-old recovery systems supposedly had gathered up though I never saw them today can do in terms of recognizing programming design actually do this. They had cleaned up after themselves, and dynamics. Makes Dad's Legos look prehistoric.

Sitting in

continues to change

is driving me mad. Our alert status

providing us little opportunity to figure out what we had

actually achieved other than getting them out of the city.

we have not been told to punch over to you guys. I am told that we have to keep in check or risk a loss of gains in the .

From your letter, I can't imagine what you have been going through. The scale of everything is beyond what anyone has experienced. I wish I could provide some brotherly advice—but at this point it will be me coming to you. Nonetheless, your letter forced me to sit down and organize my notes from what I learned during my short tenure in at and observations during my

o When the fight starts—always remember the bots are for shaping. They are never decisive. Bots will kill bots. Man will kill bots. Some bots will get lucky and kill men. In the end, the bots will be dead and war will come to its natural state—man will kill man. If you assume the bots will be decisive, prepare to fail.

is of some use:

o Trust your instincts and always ask why ... until it's time to kill someone—then it's purely symbiotic artificial intuition. AIDA is amazing, but she will never have your instincts. This is why the enemy is targeting you. They want to get inside your understanding and affect your instincts. If they can get you to question AIDA, to get you to question yourself, to put you in a state of paralysis—where your soldiers don't trust you, your commander doesn't trust you, and you do not trust your ability to make decisions—that's where the enemy has won.

To this end, everything is hackable. Your thoughts, when you are plugged in, they are never yours alone. AIDA will be manipulated, directly or indirectly. The screens in front of you show the data they are given—it is never the ground truth. There is always something that can be corrupted in the path of data and information. Constructing your understanding of the battlefield has to be made objectively, with a clear chain on how you got there. When the links start to not make sense then you have to ask, "Is my understanding off? What does my enemy want me to think? How can I verify this inaccuracy?"

o When the time comes it will be fast and lethal. You will have no choice but to act or die. It will be a crap shoot, but it is pretty consistent—those who get painted often failed to act ... to effectively respond to changing conditions. This is something that is pretty clear you know by now.

o When in doubt, go naked. In my the opposing force commander said that the number one way to wipe out just about any unit from platoon to battle group is its dependence on systems. Given time and effort, any system you run will emit. With emission comes a

signature. With a signature comes a location. Sure it's a needle in a stack of needles, but the needle that stays consistent will be culled out. Juke and dive. Be a needle and then be the air, only to reemerge as a needle in different stack of needles.

I hope this is of some use. I'd appreciate your thoughts on how to make this better. Send Mom a message. She wants to hear from you.

END MESSAGE
TRANSMITTAL 101530262047
SECURED BY VOICE CODE; RECIPIENT
VOICE RECOGNITION REQUIRED
MONITORED AND CENSORED BY FIFTH
EYE SYSTEM (8 BLOCK OUTS - FOIA

MAY BE SUBMITTED TO UNBLOCK)

Dear Sam,

I am sorry messages have been so sporadic. This last week has been hectic. That video of the soldiers talking about has created an unreal backlash.

We've protecting the refugee areas is forcing all units to undergo to ensure no one is carrying and to identify any sympathies with the Constantinople movement. I have to admit, it sure feels like something else is going on.

I don't believe those were our soldiers ... that video seemed too well scripted and placed. Sure they talked like us, but I have never heard anyone utter let alone have spray paint and graffiti hate-based messages. Even stranger was how quick the graffiti came up after the video went viral. I heard the tagging was in line with let alone have being done there have only been ...

In the few weeks we have been here, they've gone from defenders of the city against the occupiers who don't understand why we're here. It really isn't

their fault, when we treat them It is frustrating, though, that there is To me it's clear—though we talk of globalization, the elements that brought order to civilization are being broken into corporate and tribal interests generating needless friction from the absence of institutions that were designed to introduce order. EA3DAN is the last stand for global cohesion and liberal order. Every other option out there is based on something other than these ideals, and realist or not, they are only good for a few. We held a where I laid this out after being asked I feel a better response would have been to say look at ... but then I am sure someone would ask the have to do with the what does vicious circle of illogical discussions. To make matters worse, the friction back home, while gone . With such a minimal feed of on what is going on whether libertarian or socialist (the luddites are lost)—their perspectives have seemed to only run deeper I thought this fight would unite us, Your messages arrive in batches—Fifth Eye goes through them. I am glad that things are going as good as they can. Hopefully we will be allowed video calls before then. I miss your voice. I miss your face. I miss Jerry's laugh and excitement ...

END MESSAGE
TRANSMITTAL 112332142047
SECURED BY VOICE CODE; RECIPIENT
VOICE RECOGNITION REQUIRED
MONITORED AND CENSORED BY FIFTH
EYE SYSTEM (27 BLOCK OUTS - FOIA
MAY BE SUBMITTED TO UNBLOCK)

VALIDATED
ALL COMMUNICATIONS MONITORED AND
CENSORED BY FIFTH EYE SYSTEM
LAST TESTAMENT
AIDA UPLOAD//030435172048//
ADD-ON//
ORIGINALCONTENT//101938012047
NEURAL TRANSMISSION: AUTHORIZATION
JONNIE V SMITH

.... No time ... I am sorry ... You Jerry my reason ... I hold to that ... Please remember ... Find the goodness. MEMORY FLASH: <<Sam-Jerry-First-Protect>> MEMORY FLASH: << Jerry-Laugh-Gleam-Live>> MEMORY FLASH: <<Father-Fish-River-Pride>> MEMORY FLASH: << Mother-Books-Patience-Smart>> MEMORY FLASH: <<Friends-Laughter-Lunch-Joy>> MEMORY FLASH: <<Brad-Fight-Win-Success>> MEMORY FLASH: <<Sam-Night-Talk-Love>> MEMORY FLASH: <<Sam-Jerry-First-Pro000>> MEMORY FLASH: <<0000-Laugh-Gleam-Live>> MEMORY FLASH: <<Sam-Jerry-0000-0000>> MEMORY FLASH: <<0000-000-0000-Live>> END NEURAL TRANSMISSION. ORIGINAL CONTENT WITHOLD END MESSAGE // INITIATE NOTIFICATION HOLD TRANSMITTAL POST NOTIFICATION SECURED BY VOICE CODE; RECIPIENT VOICE RECOGNITION REQUIRED MONITORED AND CENSORED BY FIFTH EYE SYSTEM (2 BLOCK OUTS - FOIA MAY BE SUBMITTED TO UNBLOCK)

## **Author Note:**

"Letters Home, Battlefield 2047" is provided in two versions: the first is a censored version with redacted items blacked out using the notional application of AI software programming. The second is an uncensored version with redaction markouts removed. Comparing the two versions enables the reader to evaluate the impact of potential bias in the application of AI censorship, highlighting how such censorship may alter the perspective of the recipient. Removing the redacted marks applied by the censor allows a new and more human perspective to unfold in the chain of messages.