

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

As I had thought it took about a week for us to get settled. Everything I have heard about the Mobilization and Forward Staging Deployment Site has mostly been accurate. It is simultaneously huge and disparate. Last night, we finally caught our first chance to breathe—we took that opportunity to smoke cigars from our deployment bay's observation tower. I could see regimental deployment bays and their defenses etched out to the very ends of the space coast skyline. Still, it is hard to imagine the entire battle group is all here—we only see our own squadron as the entire regiment is on 24 hour rotation for everything from training to planning and eating to sleeping.

The first 48 hours was spent running through deployment drills—getting familiar with the physical space after playing around with the synthetic trainer for the last six months. 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 into briefing mode. It will be a good break from running maneuver solutions through simulations and hearing good old AIDA provide efficiency and effectiveness 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 eight more months to go.

Embarrassingly enough, my roommate Carl 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?

Lt. Col. Kelly McCoy is the Strategy Chair in the Security Studies Program at the Naval Post Graduat School. His experience includes serving as an engagement strategist at

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 Poland and the rest of EA3DAN have set conditions nicely in the North, Russia won't make any moves. However, Vladosky 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... maybe 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
SECURD BY VOICE CODE; RECIPIENT
VOICE RECOGNITION REQUIRED
MONITORED AND CENSORED BY FIFTH
EYE SYSTEM (17 BLOCK OUTS - FOIA
MAY BE SUBMITTED TO UNBLOCK)

ALL COMMUNICATIONS MONITORED AND CENSURED BY FIFTH EYE SYSTEM

Brad.

Considering you had just gotten back from EA3DEN HQ when I left for Florida—I figured you would want to know how the fight has gone. I've been in Istanbul for about two weeks. 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)Bradford was directed to insert the battle group east of Istanbul as part of a larger effort to demonstrate that we could fill out the entire regional division with its full contingent of battle groups in a matter of days. However, Vladosky and his Wagners anticipated us and the show of force quickly changed to forced entry ... even before we left Florida.

We were lucky. Our squadron was the second wave – this is probably what saved us. When the first wave took off it must have triggered Wagner to launch countermeasures and try to prevent the entire battle group from getting out. We were in our boxes loaded into the rocket when the first explosions could be felt – I remember it feeling distant but immense. They had to of hit another deployment bay – hopefully one of the decoys. We took off right after that explosion. Digitally naked - I couldn't see, but the engineers' internal comm channel was hectic. Whatever was going on was huge.

About an hour later we touched down in the operational support zone off of Sicily. Just as we trained, we unloaded our boxes and transitioned to the launch pad for modular connections and final deployment. Throughout this time, we could hear and feel the deep impulses of high energy lasers followed by reverberations of rockets blowing in the sky. If it wasn't for our synthetic training environment desensitization of what to expect, I believe we would have missed our timelines in transitioning to the fight. We were getting pounded, but the defenses were holding just as we needed. Those in my squadron were glad to be alive—but with every pulse, crack, and explosion our blood boiled just a little bit more. We were angry and ready to fight.

Not able to take out our rocket when we landed, or when we offloaded, I learned that they adjusted their focus to Istanbul—trying to prevent the Division HQ from executing command and control. They had no idea how late they were. We had our mission and strategic regional vision verified before we left Florida. It had been six hours from

when we left Florida, we were in our modular deployment sets and going over a final mission brief from BG Bradford. Thanks to AIDA, It is unreal the level of planning we do in such short time.

We knew it was going to be hot when we arrived. Four hours from the operational support pad to our employment zones allowed for final back briefs and monitoring of what we were coming into. However, comms out of the capitol were inconsistent and untrustworthy. At one point we received orders to conduct an entry operation on EA3DAN headquarters itself—it was only with the help of AIDA that we found the broken chain proving the order was counterfeit. We knew in the absence of specific comms, we were to monitor for changes but plan for our original mission and fight per regional strategic vision. The brass at EA3DAN would expect us to arrive on our objective.

Two hours out from our objective, the squadron punched out the autonomous reconnaissance troop. They survived long enough to give us a clear picture of the objective area—with an hour left—our tactical solutions were set, and I could feel the sickness of excitement well up inside of me. Our entry point was contested. Everything we had trained for. Planned for. It came to a head.

After we dropped in, I had a newfound respect for our unmanned systems. At one point, two counterreconnaissance swarms, one ours and the other Wagner's, discovered each other. At first, they were literally dancing. It was as if they were equally testing each other's approach and counter algorithms. It was a sight to see. Over the roof tops there were hundreds of bots, squaring off against each other. One side must have finally discovered a weakness and it literally rained these six inch diameter recon bots for the next minute. One of blue platoon's vehicles got caught under the deluge. We had to scrap it.

At the objective area we came in and bore straight into an enemy defense position that had a jamming unit they were protecting. The training we had worked so hard for paid off as my troop split up and guided two un-manned positions into an over watch for the naked infantry. We caught the Wagners with their pants down—they had no idea what happened. We secured a treasure trove of digital details.

I think we killed more robots than humans—by a certain definition we had to have. But as squadron consolidated gains all we found in the rubble was really just us. Wagner recovery systems supposedly had gathered up their personnel and systems ... though I never saw them actually do this. They had cleaned up after themselves, providing us little opportunity to figure out what we had actually achieved other than getting them out of the city.

Did you hear about your old troop commander Baker? He was the 2nd Squadron Commander and ran his squadron straight into a trap after failing to identify false orders. I wouldn't be surprised if he had discounted AIDA—from what I remember of your stories Baker definitely had Luddite tendencies—maybe even a closet human purist. While it is totally possible that AIDA became corrupted—our own AIDA saved us—after having bounced back and forth with false orders before identifying the block chain issues. Just like you told me, we survived because we worked with AIDA, I could easily see others who would lose patience and junk it.

How are things back home? We are constantly on digital black outs and gray outs. We barely get access to local feeds. I have no idea what the response has been—but imagine that with whoever hit the coast – the war is on and there is no stopping that. While I'd rather be home with Sam and Jerry, I am glad that, in being here, I am still alive and holding my sanity ... I have the chance to make things better and hopefully bring home my team.

Please check on Sam and Jerry. Tell them I love them. Your brother, Jonnie.

END MESSAGE
TRANSMITTAL 100043232047
SECURATION PEROPORT
VOICE RECOPION NO CONSTRUCT
MONITOR AND CENSORD BY FIFTH
EYE SYSTEM (46 BLOCK OUTS - FOIA
MAY BE SUBMITTED TO UNBLOCK)

Jonnie,

Sam and Jerry are doing well. I hope you are doing the same. I talked with Sam last night. Jerry was busy building bots that I am assuming, based on the noises, were battling each other once complete. It's amazing what a four-year-old today can do in terms of recognizing programming design and dynamics. Makes Dad's Legos look prehistoric.

Sitting in the desert is driving me mad. Our alert status continues to change on what seems to be every day if not

hour, yet we have not been told to punch over to you guys. I am told that we have to keep the Far East in check or risk a loss of gains in the South China Sea.

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 Training and Education at EA3DEN HQ and observations during my Combat Training Center deployment. I hope it is of some use:

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.

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 CTC rotation 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 (A 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 Constantinople has created an unreal backlash. We've gone from protecting the refugee areas to containing them. Making matters worse, BG Bradford is forcing all units to undergo pre-combat patrol inspections to ensure no one is carrying spray paint and automatic post-patrol debriefings 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, their video diagnostics were the same, but I have never heard anyone utter "bring Constantinople back"...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 our patrols—but if it's being done there have only been two isolated instances.

Making matters worse is how this is impacting the soldiers. In the few weeks we have been here, they've gone from defenders of the city against the Wags to the disgruntle occupiers who don't understand why we're here. It really isn't

their fault, when we treat them with suspicion and the people they encounter on patrols are only treating them worse.

It is frustrating, though, that there is confusion on why we are here. 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 troop forum, where I laid this out after being asked why we are still here. I feel a better response would have been to say look at the Space Coast ... but then I am sure someone would ask what does Istanbul have to do with the Space Coast? It's a vicious circle of illogical discussions.

To make matters worse, the friction back home, while gone in the first weeks of the fight, have returned and appear to be getting worse. With such a minimal feed of information on what is going on back home, some of the soldiers have started to extrapolate and catastrophize their positions—whether libertarian or socialist (the luddites are lost)—their perspectives have seemed to only run deeper with more under breathed passive-aggressive comments that are getting tempers to flare. I thought this fight would unite us, but being starved of our information we are left to our imaginations.

Information starvation comes in terms of your communications to me as well. Your messages arrive in batches—Fifth Eye goes through them. I am hoping that the only changes are the censored content and that it is not changing your content. If it isn't I am glad that things are going as good as they can. I don't know when I will be home – definitely not before Christmas. 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

Signal was compromised. Somethings wrong. Lost connection. Can't see...We are here, but where are they... MEDEVAC can't see me 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.