

RULON DAVIS

Mt. San Antonio College

Communication/Football

Nominated by: Evans Roderick

Rulon Davis describes himself as “a very young man who did the best he could in intolerable conditions, and came away a different person”. Those “intolerable conditions” refer to the time that he spent as a United States Marine who had been deployed to serve on the front lines in Iraq. In the fall of 2003 he was concentrating on his football career at Mt. San Antonio College and he was honored with the Most Improved athlete award as a result of his efforts. He had enlisted in the Marine Corp Reserves two years earlier because of an earlier positive experience with military school. He hadn't really considered the larger implications of that decision until he received a phone call on December 5, 2003, informing him that his unit was being activated for potential deployment to the Middle East. Rulon felt momentarily paralyzed as the news washed over him. His thoughts raced from concerns about his family, the disruption to his life as he knew it, and to whether or not he could survive in a war zone, but he knew that he had no choice. He reported that he was proud to represent his country but that he truly had no clue what lie ahead for him.

He spent several weeks in preparation at Camp Pendleton and then found himself on a plane headed for what seemed a million miles from home in every conceivable way. His first impression was that of incredible and oppressive heat that hit the soldiers like a slap in the face as the door to the plane swung open on the ground in Iraq. He spoke of sand storms, of having little or no water, of being isolated due to the erratic availability of the phone center, and of facing an elusive enemy of insurgents that could attack from any direction with no advance notice. He was expected to become a “killing machine” but nothing had prepared him psychologically for that reality. He prayed nightly for strength as many of his fellow soldiers met their death, but he eventually became convinced that he was not going to survive this ordeal. What followed were the symptoms that often accompany extremely stressful experiences; insomnia, hallucinations, anxiety attacks, and loss of appetite. One day he found himself reaching for a box of sleeping pills and he tried to overdose in order to escape the horror that had become his daily routine. Fortunately, one of his fellow soldiers noticed in time to save him and Rulon was evacuated to a hospital in Baghdad and eventually sent for treatment in both Germany and San Diego. Having survived the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder he now reports that he “is more in tune with life than ever before” and in particular that he notices “the little things and appreciates them, like having toilet paper in the bathroom, having water to take a shower with, . . . having freedom of movement and studying to improve my life”. He has dedicated his life to honoring the memory of his dear friend, Lt. Colonel Greene, who was shot in the neck and lost his life in the line of duty in Iraq. He plans to wear a green patch on the back of his football helmet to honor his dead friend and he hopes to teach his teammates about both the value of their freedom as well as the incredible opportunity that it is to participate in intercollegiate athletics.