

North Fulton Marine returns from war

21-year-old serves two tours in Iraq

By **MARTHA CIPOLLA**
martha@northfulton.com

Lance Cpl. Joao Pereira finished his second tour of duty in Iraq one month ago. At 21, Pereira has already completed three tours: one in Haiti and two in Iraq.

Pereira will not be sent to Iraq again unless something drastic happens. Instead, he will spend the remainder of his military service at the armory on Camp Lejeune in North Carolina.

Pereira enlisted in the Marine Corps just a few months after his 2003 graduation from Milton High School.

"I wanted to challenge myself and do something I didn't think I could do. I wanted to do something different," he said.

The life of a soldier in Iraq is active, dangerous and not a little bit dirty. During his first visit to Iraq, he was stationed in the "middle of nowhere," near Falusia.

"It was sleepless nights, not

being able to eat, only taking a shower once a week," Pereira said.

The rare showers were much needed, as summer temperatures in Iraq can break 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The combination of heat, sweat and desert sand may have been distracting, but the patrols commanded soldiers' attention. He and his platoon patrolled often, but were never badly hit, he said.

His first tour in Iraq was cut short when he was run over in a truck accident, which broke his ribs and punctured his right lung. After recovering stateside, he said he did not mind returning to the front, but it was hard on his family.

He was stationed at Camp Ramadi, a small base, for his second Iraq tour, which was a little easier than the first – patrols two times a day and showers every other day (depending on the availability of water). Despite the hardships, Pereira still feels going to

Iraq was the right thing to do.

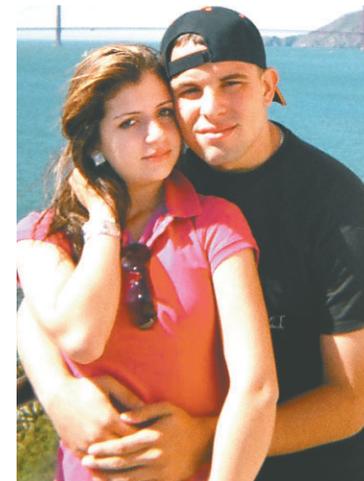
"I don't think the war is bad. I think it was necessary to get Saddam out of there," he said.

His family has been supportive of him throughout his military experience. That family includes his parents and two older brothers, as well as his wife, Claudia. They married in February, and it was tough for them to be separated by both an ocean and a war.

"I got worried about him being there. Even though he was safer this time, it's still Iraq. Anything can happen over there," Claudia said.

Though Pereira does not have to return to Iraq, other soldiers do. Some of those men and women will spend their holidays on foreign soil, missing out on the festive meals and brightly wrapped presents. With those soldiers in mind, Joao and Claudia are collecting donations for care packages, an activity Claudia began while Joao was still overseas.

"Whenever we get enough donations, we make boxes and we send them to one of the companies



SPECIAL/Herald

Pereira and his wife, Claudia, visit San Francisco while he is on leave from the military.

over there. I was doing it for his company when he was deployed," Claudia said.

Some good items to send to soldiers are shaving equipment, non-perishable food, baby wipes, powdered Kool-Aid and Gatorade, socks and letters – especially letters.

"It's really important to get letters. It's really good for morale," Pereira said.

To donate to Joao and Claudia's care packages, or to find out where to send packages, call 910-353-4737 or e-mail baiano11@hotmail.com.



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Pereira cleans his M249 SAW while posted in Ramadi, Iraq.

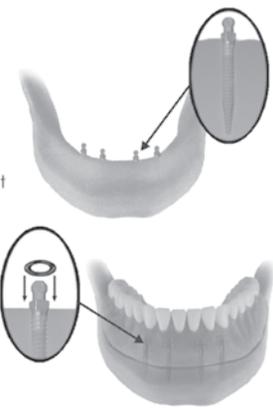
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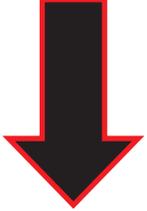


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