



» Private First Class  
**JESSE BANCROFT, 23**

**Jesse:** “[Seeing my wife] was amazing. I was a little nervous. But we didn’t change at all, so it all worked out good. We’re renewing our vows—our families didn’t get to see us get married the first time, because we did it down here in the courthouse.”

**Rachel, his wife:** “We only got three days in our new house before he had to deploy. I am so ready for Jesse to come home to stay.”

*Bancroft (with Rachel, 22, a tattoo artist) will complete his service in January 2011.*

» Lance Corporal  
**COURTNEY DANIELS, 24**

“When we first made contact with the enemy, I remember hitting the ground for cover and saying my daughter’s name. That’s what got me through firefights. She’s a child, she’s innocent, it was calling on her, something like that. I kept a journal. Before we knew what Marjah would be like I wrote, ‘We spend portions of hours dreaming of the unimaginable with ultimate reluctance. . . . The nonexistence of your entire body dissolved into a mist of pink matter.’ I was a bit afraid there, you could say. Then I wrote, ‘I’m missing my daughter like crazy. . . . I love her like no woman ever before, and the solace she gives me can’t be prescribed over the counter.’”

*Daniels (below, just before he shipped out) with wife Komeiko and 19-month-old daughter Leila.*



» The War in Afghanistan

# COMING HOME

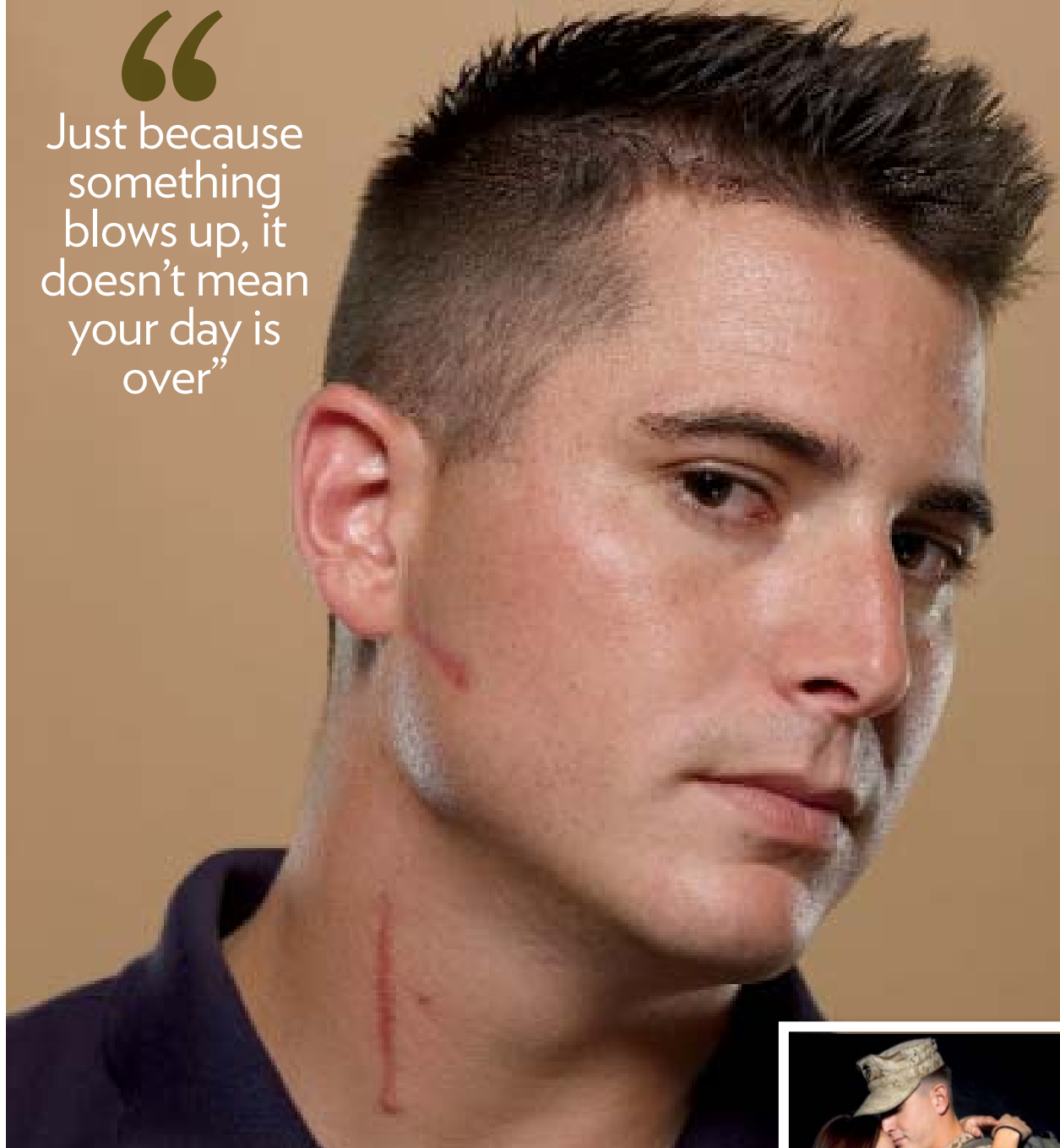
IN DECEMBER, PEOPLE MET A GROUP OF MARINES FROM CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C., JUST HOURS BEFORE THEY LEFT FOR HELMAND PROVINCE. NOW, AFTER A SEVEN-MONTH TOUR IN WHICH THEY SAW COMBAT AND LOST FRIENDS, SOME OF THE SAME MEMBERS OF THE 1ST BATTALION, SIXTH MARINES, TALK ABOUT LOVE AND DEATH, HOW WAR CHANGED THEM, AND THEIR THOUGHTS ON REDEPLOYING

By **ALEXANDRA ROCKEY FLEMING** | Photographed July, 2010 at Camp Lejeune, N.C., by **SARAH A. FRIEDMAN**



“

Just because  
something  
blows up, it  
doesn't mean  
your day is  
over”



»» *Corporal*  
**BRETT SANDERS, 24**

“The Afghan National Army integrated with us. There were 15 Marines in my squad and 5 Afghan soldiers. [On March 7] we were doing a census, to know who was living where, what they were doing. I was at a house, and the Afghan soldiers were inside. I was outside with some kids. All of a sudden I was standing in a cloud of dust. On TV [an explosion] is always a mass of fireballs. But when you're in one, one second everything is fine, the next everything is ringing. But just because something blows up, it doesn't mean your day is over—maybe my guys had gotten it worse. I pulled out the radio, and it was covered in blood. I thought, 'I am obviously not okay!' I crawled into a ditch. I couldn't walk. My guys patched me up. At some point your adrenalin wears off and you're not Superman anymore.”



*Sanders was injured in March, flown to Germany and then to the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. In October he will marry his fiancée, Lacey Jewell (above). He plans to stay in the Marines.*



»» *Lance Corporal*  
**MICHAEL STRANGE, 20**

“The worst part? The fighting. The not fighting. The hours of doing nothing. A lot of card games—spades or rummy. Or people are making ridiculous bets: ‘Man, I killed 15 flies, and I’ll give you \$700 if you eat them.’ Six months later the guy’s like, ‘Man, I’ll do it for five bucks.’ Five and a half months in Marjah, you start doing anything if it’ll make you laugh.”

»» *Lance Corporal*  
**JEFFERY RICE, 20**

**Jeffrey:** “I feel older. More mature. I had thought about going to college and playing football and stuff but decided to join the Marine Corps, and I'm glad I did. It's hard to explain. Keeping in touch with [my fiancée] Maria was kind of rough. The plan was, as soon as I got back, she was going to move down here, we were going to get a house. But I talked to all my buddies and had seven months of clear thinking to do, and she talked to some people, and we decided that we can still be engaged, but we want to take things slow so no one regrets anything later. We're going to wait until my four years are up in 2012.”

**Diane Berg, Jeffrey's mom:** “He knows I've got surprises planned. When Jeff gets home [to Chicago] July 30, he's throwing out the first pitch at a Cubs game. I wrote to them and asked, and they said yes. I wish I could do this for all the guys. In my mind, they're all heroes.”



INSETS: HENRY LEUTWYLER/STEVE RUARK/AP





December 2009

»» *Lance Corporal*  
**RYAN WEHSE, 24**

"I'm a lot skinnier now. I lost about 20 lbs. We're constantly working with lots of gear on, and it's really hot. I'll be home [in Plymouth, Wisc.] Aug. 1. I'll hug my mom and dad, see my friends. My old room is still there, they haven't changed it much. There's old high school pictures, Green Bay Packers stuff, my diploma. What did I miss the most? Christmas. Birthdays. Fishing, hunting, going to the movies. With all the Marines that were lost, I would tell people here, 'Don't take anything for granted.'"



December 2009

»»  
**THE  
FALLEN**



*As of July 31, nine Marines from the 950-man 1st Battalion, Sixth Marines have been killed in Afghanistan this year. Above: Transferring the casket of Cpl. Jonathan D. Porto*

**Lance Corporal**  
Kielin Dunn, 19, Va.

**Sergeant**  
Daniel Angus, 28, Fla.

**Lance Corporal**  
Zachary Smith, 19, N.Y.

**Corporal**  
Jonathan Porto, 26, Fla.

**First Lieutenant**  
Brandon Barrett, 27, Ind.

**Lance Corporal**  
Philip Clark, 19, Fla.

**Lance Corporal**  
Anthony Dilisio, 20, Mich.

**Corporal**  
Nicolas Parada-Rodriguez, 29, Va.

**Sergeant**  
Joshua Desforages, 23, Mass.

»» *Sergeant*  
**DAVID BLEA, 26**

**David:** "It started out like a normal day. One of the squads got ambushed from about 50 meters away. I was sleeping at the time. Once I heard the gunfire, I got up. I pushed my squad to help with the medevac. A Marine had been shot in the back, just underneath his armor. His breathing stopped, and we started CPR. We plugged the bullet hole and put a pressure dressing on the exit wound. We worked on him for 15 minutes until we realized he wasn't with us anymore. I can tell you the exact minute—8:03—when I watched his eyes gloss over. You can actually see the life leave. Once everything calms down, you start thinking about the family and friends. It's the cost of the job we do. You play it over and over in your head: 'Is there something different I could have done? Could I have gotten there a little quicker?' It doesn't ever go away."

**Rose, his wife:** "I feel like I can breathe. I'm not afraid to answer the doorbell anymore. We decided that this was the time to have a baby. I feel like we've matured enough."

**David:** "We're working on it."

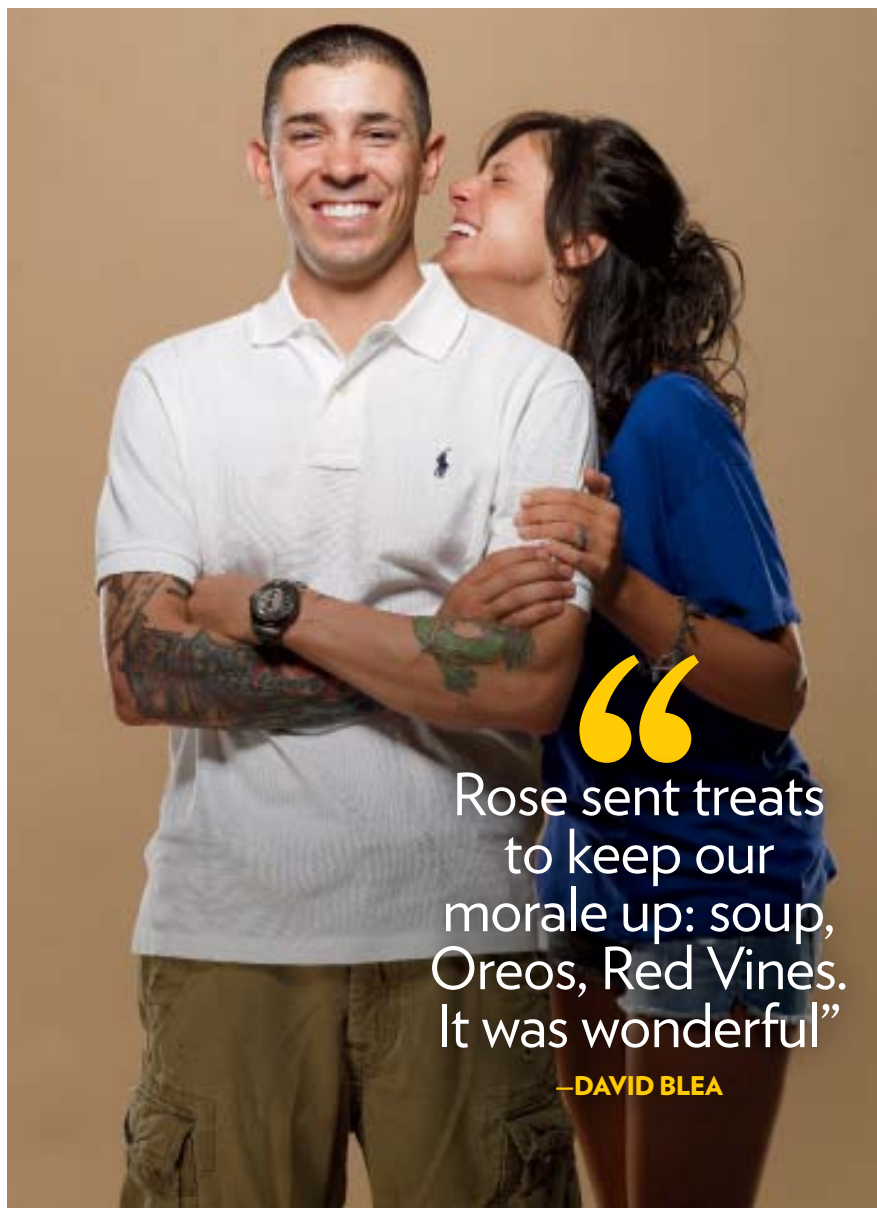
*Blea (with Rose) served three tours in Iraq. This was his first in Afghanistan.*

»» *1st Lieutenant*  
**AARON MACLEAN, 29**

"When that picture [right] was taken, I was concerned with one thing: getting my guys doing what we had to do and back safe. I left with 37. Two we weren't able to bring back. Five were hurt. Thirty came back with me today. That feeling, bringing those 30 back, is one of the best feelings in the world. There's very little that competes with it besides seeing [my wife] Liz standing there. The first thing I wanted to do was kiss my wife. That's already taken care of. Then just relax. Relaxing for me is not worrying that I'm going to lose someone I care for very deeply in the next 24 hours."



December 2009



“  
Rose sent treats to keep our morale up: soup, Oreos, Red Vines. It was wonderful”

—DAVID BLEA





*Paquette, LaMont and Schuler, December 2009*

»» *Lance Corporal*  
**JOSHUA SCHULER, 20**

**(left):** "You had to pay attention to everything. Like, if the kids weren't there that day, there was probably an ambush waiting to happen. I loved interacting with the Afghans, especially kids. I'd always carry candy with me on patrol. One was very helpful. He would try to let us know if anyone was saying anything bad, if it was Taliban-related."

»» *Lance Corporal*  
**KHANRAD LAMONT, 20**

**(center):** "I'd never been that far from home, never even left the country before. Day one was my first firefight. On the second day of combat I was on a rooftop. I didn't know what happened at first. I felt it, then I heard it. I got shot through my left shoulder and it came out my chest. One shot. It barely missed my heart. I was focused on trying to control my breathing and not go into shock. I thought, 'I can't freak out. If I panic, it'll make everyone else's job harder.' [Coming back early] was bittersweet: Yeah, I wanted to be home, but I didn't come home with my guys. I couldn't enjoy myself knowing they were still there. I'm ready to go again."

*LaMont was wounded in February and spent 11 days in several hospitals. He plans to redeploy in early 2012.*

»» *Lance Corporal*  
**SAMUEL PAQUETTE, 20**

**(right):** "LaMont, in our squad he was my closest buddy. We just kinda clicked. We didn't like stupid things. Then he got shot, and I lost my mind—I didn't know what was going on. He had blood all over his flak jacket. I took his [name] patch off his flak and kept it in my pocket doing patrols, ambushes. I wanted to cry when he got hit, but I just couldn't. It was that missing link in the squad. Schuler and I goof around. We were going through the hard times, laughing. LaMont and Schuler understand me."