

women, and they had never had bank accounts. They didn't have ID cards. It was really sort of unbelievable," Erica said. "And I was able to get involved with an orphanage and was able to do all of that outreach. I think it was the best part of my whole career."

Last summer, her service in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan included assisting in the delivery of more than 4,500 textbooks by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to Nangarhar University.

She and other members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also paid a visit to some displaced Afghan boys and provided them with much needed school supplies, toys and treats during "operation backpack drop," last May at the all-boys Ostad Khalil Ullah Khalili Orphans Education Center located in Kabul.

Each boy received a new backpack filled with pens, paper, pencils, notebooks, crayons, erasers, rulers, sharpeners, toys, a puzzle and candy.

Judging from a photo taken during the backpack drop, Erica quickly became friends with many of the boys there. It was especially meaningful, she said, to visit the young orphans on Mothers Day.

She was awarded her second Bronze Star last October for her 10 months of service in Afghanistan. She also received the Afghanistan Campaign Medal and the NATO Medal. The award citation states she received the awards "for exceptional meritorious service as chief of the capacity building a team and executive officer while deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. She also orchestrated a successful internship program between Afghan Engineers and the District. Major Iverson's distinctive accomplishments reflect great credit upon herself, the United States Army Corps of Engineers and the United States Army."

"Sitting in high school, I never would have imagined all that would occur after I joined the military," Erica said.

Her most recent military experience, including her recent stint in Afghanistan, didn't offer a clue of what eventually was awaiting her as she continued her military career.

"When I came back from Afghanistan, I was slotted to go to basically a desk job," Erica said. "I had worked at that job for four days, and I got a phone call. The person on the phone said, 'We want you to come to work as a speechwriter.' And in 24 hours, I was the speechwriter for the top general in the Army,

Gen. Raymond T. Odierno."

In late February, Erica was in Ft. Lauderdale, FL, hunkered down in a hotel surrounded by Secret Service agents. "I'm looking out my hotel room right now and trying to write a speech for tomorrow morning. I'm sitting here in Ft. Lauderdale working for the Army's top general. It's very surreal. Everything that he (the general) says are my words."

She may still be a long way from Vermillion. But Erica's determination and ambition have her serving the U.S. Army – and the nation – in ways she never could have studied pre-med rather than English at Creighton University.

She also found herself in some highly unique situations lately.

"I went to the State of the Union address with a member of Congress," Erica said.

She was the special guest of U.S. Rep. Grace Napolitano of California. President Barack Obama had encouraged members of Congress to bring Iraq veterans to the speech as their guest in honor of the end of the U.S. combat operations in that country.

"To sit there, and to be at the State of the Union, and to realize that he was my boss in the front row – it was really a turning point. It was pivotal for me," Erica said. "I was able to realize that at one point, I was ready to cut and run, to do my four years and that would have been it."

"And today, I'm writing Congressional testimony for the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army," she said. "Things have pretty much come full circle, and to be at this point fairly early in my career is pretty exciting."

She is certain that the Vermillion community has helped make it all possible. It's the little things that have counted the most over the years. The CARE packages from home, that everyone in her platoon would long for. The fact that every time Erica returns home for R&R and steps into a Vermillion tavern, there's a cold beer waiting for her – sometimes purchased by someone who doesn't know her personally, but knows she's a veteran.

"My family has kept me humble, and people from this town – people I didn't know – would send me packages when I was in Iraq," Erica said. "The support from family and the town is amazing."

■ by David Lias
Vermillion Plain Talk



The best choice for urologic care

is accepting new patients

Serving patients in Yankton, Vermillion, Norfolk, Creighton, Plainview and Neligh.



Dr. Hathaway with Lewis and Clark Urology specializes in medical and surgical treatment of problems dealing with the kidneys, bladder, prostate, incontinence, male sexual dysfunction and most other urologic conditions. Vasectomy and circumcision consultations welcome.

CALL TODAY FOR AN APPOINTMENT

No referral necessary

(605) 260-0182

www.lewisandclarkurology.com