BASRA, IRAQ—Major General Eddy M. Spurgin, commanding general for the 36th Infantry Division, is a very busy man. He is the commander in charge of United States military forces located among nine provinces in the southern region of Iraq and is responsible for the drawdown of over 8000 troops. He regularly meets with local tribal elders and government officials to assess their needs in the infrastructure stability of their towns and cities. He also works with military leaders within the Iraqi Security Forces verifying their mission readiness capabilities in anticipation of the absence of United States military assistance. He does all of this in his vast area of responsibility which is about the size of the state of Washington.

Sergeant First Class Merrion LaSonde-How long have you been in the Texas Army National Guard, sir?

Major General Eddy Spurgin- I have been in the Texas Army National Guard for 30 years now. I was commissioned in May of 1980 from Texas A&M University.

ML-What do you consider your hometown?

ES-I grew up in west Texas in a small town north of Abilene called Anson, Texas, but I currently live in Big Spring and that is where I call home.

ML-You attended A&M. What was your major course of study?

ES-My major was Agriculture specifically Animal Science.

ML-What did you intend to do with your degree?

ES-I had many options. My family farms and ranches in West Texas. I considered going back to farm, but I had made the decision that I wanted to work with farmers and ranchers so I went to work for the Natural Resources Conservations Service soon after I graduated from college. That is an agency within the United States Department of Agriculture that works directly with farmers and ranchers to help plan and implement soil and water conservation practices in their farming and ranching operations. We help them design, plan and install irrigation systems on their farms. We work with them on brush management; we design livestock pipelines and water storage facilities; and we administer a number of programs that provide cost share assistance to farmers and ranchers. That is what I do as a civilian.

ML-How has your civilian background assisted you here on your military mission in United States Division-South?

ES-The farming and ranching background that I have has been helpful here in southern Iraq. Most of the people earn a living here is through agriculture. There are some irrigation programs here that were implemented by the US through the Provincial Reconstruction Teams that we have helped the Iraqis install, specifically drip irrigation systems. We install those quite a bit in
Texas in my line of work so I am familiar with the process. The crops grown here are similar to crops in Texas, also. They grow a lot of wheat and barley and raise livestock. Going in, I was able to understand and appreciate the challenges Iraqi farmers deal with from day to day. I have had numerous opportunities to engage with local leaders who have a farming background also so it keeps the conversation going. We have a common ground which is very important whether you are working with military officers or farmers of members of the provincial government.

ML-What would you say was your fondest memory from college?

ES-The Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M. I began my college career there in 1975, was in the Corps of Cadets for four years and ultimately got my commission out of A&M. The great traditions at A&M are upheld by the entire university and the Corps of Cadets plays a big part in that. The friendships I formed while in the Corps of Cadets and the camaraderie and the traditions of being in the Corps of Cadets are some of the fondest memories that I will take with me.

ML-Did you always want to be a military general? Did you see all this in yourself?

ES-I never imagined that I would be a general officer or that I would command a division, but I had always had an interest in the military. I remember my dad took me to a movie at the Paramount Theater in Abilene, Texas when I was seven or eight years old. The movie was “The Longest Day” and it was about the Normandy Invasion. That was what sparked my interest in the military. I have enjoyed the military, the camaraderie, the planning and execution of operations. I have been extremely blessed. Coming from a small town and going to a big-time university like A&M was very intimidating. I would never have imagined back in 1975 as an 18-year-old kid that I would be in the place I am now. I will say that Texas A&M opened doors and offered opportunities for me and gave me the background I needed to get here and I have to thank the good Lord for blessing me. I think if you like what you do and have an interest in it you are going to do well. I have always worked with outstanding officers and non commissioned officers and Soldiers. I would not be where I am today were it not for their help, mentorship and hard work over my 30 year career. You also need to be willing to surround yourself with people who might be smarter than you are. You can’t allow yourself to be intimidated by them because those people can help you. They can certainly help make your career more rewarding. I give tribute to the people I have had the opportunity to work with and I look at this team we have here in Iraq. I look at the great team we put together over a year ago to prepare for this mission. It’s all about teamwork and empowering people to do their job. If you empower people to do their job they are going to excel and get the mission accomplished.

ML-Besides that day at the movies, is there another experience that you can point to that has solidified you as a leader?

ES-It would be very difficult to single out one person or event. All the people I have worked for; so many great leaders and mentors I have learned so much from; how to be a leader; how to set
the example and lead from the front. They have all had an impact on me and demonstrated to me what good leadership is. I also can’t leave out the great noncommissioned officers throughout my career, the great command sergeants major who have given great advice and counsel. The one common thread is you have to treat people with respect and value their opinion. You do that and you will get the best out of them.

ML- What’s next for you sir?

ES- I can’t think about that. All of my energy and focus is on our mission in USD-S. We have been here since January when we transferred authority from the 1st Infantry Division. All of my attention is on our advise, train and assist mission here with all the Iraqi Security Forces and the transition to the State Department here in Basrah. I will stay focused on the here and now and let tomorrow rest with the Lord.

ML- Any final message?

ES- I owe a lot to Texas A&M and the Corps of Cadets. The camaraderie and the friendships that I made and the values I learned and just all the great opportunities I have had over my military career to work with some great people. Being here in southern Iraq on this deployment is the opportunity of a lifetime. Our Soldiers are doing great work here and I am extremely proud of them. We will close out our mission here with honor and success.