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Photo by Sam Arendt **Dan Peters is off on another motorbike odyssey**

Dan Peters is off on another motorbike odyssey Dan Peters of the Town of Cedarburg spent six months detonating bombs in Afghanistan, swept a Milwaukee watering hole for explosives for the Secret Service when President George W. Bush visited the city and was sent to Paris to help protect First Lady Laura Bush during his six years as a U.S. Air Force explosive ordnance disposal technician.

Following his discharge in January 2009, Peters traveled to New Zealand, Japan and China, where he decided to tour the country on motorbike.

He bought a 2003 Chinese motorbike for $200 in Yangshuo, paid another $100 to have a new

carburetor, engine, ignition and rear wheel installed and took off on a three-month, 6,200-mile ride that extended the length of China to Pakistan.

He dubbed it “Up the Dragon’s Arse,” posting his photos and experiences on the adventure rider forum and Facebook. A Cedarburg friend, Jacob Flomm, who was in the Air Force with him, joined Peters for part of the trip and a woman he met in New Zealand went to China and rode on the back of his bike for a time.

But mostly he traveled alone, depending on strangers he couldn’t communicate with to repair his bike, improvising parts from what they had on hand.

They often provided food and shelter to this strange American who was far off the tourist path and protected him in Peshawar, Pakistan.

Peters couldn’t bring his motorbike into Pakistan so he sold it at the border for $250. He let his dark beard and hair grow long, wore native Pakistani garb and gave the traditional Muslim greeting “Peace be with you.”

“The Pakistani people were very friendly,” he said. “The only place I had to keep my head down was near the borders of tribal area.”

He then flew from Pakistan to Germany to visit friends for a month.

On Thanksgiving Day, 2009, Peters walked unannounced into the home of his parents Thom and Rachelle.

“He walked in the door and said, ‘What’s for dinner?’” his mother Rachelle said. “He likes surprises.

“With Daniel, we’re never surprised at what he does. He’s been that way since he was a little kid.”

On Jan. 14, Peters, 26, plans to embark on another motorbike odyssey — this one to Tierra del Fuego at the southern tip of South America, a trip he expects will take seven months.

He bought a 1972 Suzuki motorcycle that he’s named Natasha on Craigslist and has been working on it, riding to and from classes to get used to winter riding.

The gas tank sprung a leak last week, so that will have to be replaced. He must also move the exhaust pipe so it doesn’t melt his saddlebags.

Peters hasn’t calculated the miles, but he’s laid out a route that will take him to Austin, Texas, where he has relatives and will enjoy the music before heading into Mexico.

This time, his parents will know where he is at all times, or at least where his bike is, through a tracker for his global positioning system.

"I wish I could implant it in him," his mother said. "When we didn't hear from him in China, we didn't know if he had fallen off a cliff or was in a Chinese prison."

He knew they would be worried, Peters said, but the Chinese government had shut down communication lines during student riots.
He has a helmet video camera to record his next trip and plans to make a documentary film of the people he meets and with whom he makes trades.

WHILE IN THE AIR FORCE, Dan Peters carried an M-4 rifle in the Baluchi Valley of Afghanistan (top photo). He and Chinese riders posed with their motorbikes in Sichuan, China (bottom, left photo). Peters also helped Tibetan women carry stones to build their first house, shown in the background. In Pakistan, Peters struck a similar pose as the merchant who made his hat (bottom, right photo). His journey through China convinced Peters that he wants to be a video and photojournalist. He took classes in integrated reporting, digital documentary, photography, Chinese and Spanish at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee last semester. Next year, he plans to learn Arabic. He's fairly fluent in German and Chinese.

"I would like to go back to Afghanistan with a camera instead of a gun," Peters said. "Ideally, I would like to be a photojournalist imbedded with the troops. I figure if I know a bunch of

languages and photography that will help me get a job."

Peters joined the Air Force while a senior at Cedarburg High School and entered after the day after graduating in 2003.

"Most people know what they want to do, but I didn't. Fuel truck driver and bomb squad were available, so I chose bomb squad," he said.

After learning how to disarm almost any weapon, whether explosive, chemical or nuclear, he was stationed at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia and assigned to the Secret Service. He was then sent to Korea for one year.

He re-enlisted for 18 months so he would be sent to Germany instead of the United States. From there he went to Afghanistan.

"I blew up a lot of bombs to keep them from blowing up other people," he said. "It was good to actually do your job. I was very lucky. Some of my friends didn't make it home."

Peters was awarded U.S. Army Commendation and Combat Action medals for his service in Afghanistan.

He told his father more about the danger than he did his mother. Peters had free satellite phone access and called his parents frequently.

Peters considered joining the Air Force Reserve, intending to return to the war zone, but decided to document the war through the lens of a camera.

"I'm happy he didn't join the Reserves," his mother said. "We're just happy that he was home for a year. This is the longest we've seen him since he graduated from high school."

Although he comes off as carefree, Peters said he's good at assessing situations and knows when to take precautions. He enjoys meeting diverse people and learning about them.

While traveling in Japan, he spent considerable time with a homeless family who slept under a bridge.

In China, he helped women carry stones for a house they were building after living in tents for years. The women carried the stones, while the men watched, Peters said.

At the Tibetan border, he gave a ride to a hitchhiking elderly Tibetan man, who then invited him to stay with his family. Four generations lived in one house divided by curtains.

Peters ate yak cheese, yak meat and yak milk.

"I ate whatever they gave me," he said.

His father said that openness and willingness to learn will open doors for his son.

“I think one of Dan’s strengths is he’s able to communicate even not knowing the language,” his father said.

Peters said he often befriends children first, playing Frisbee or Hacky Sack with them, and then the adults become curious.

Many had not seen a foreigner before, he said.

“What I discovered was the goodness of everyone if you come across sincere. If you’re flexible, everything works out,” Peters said.

“At one point I found myself with an infected arm wound, zero cash, an empty gas tank and hundreds of miles from the nearest ATM machine. I thought the journey was coming to an early end, but decided to try and make some friends at the police station. The next day I was back on my way with a small loan, cleaned wound, bunch of new friends and lessons learned.”

Peters’ father is a consultant for YMCA International and knows people in many of the countries his son will be traveling through, but Peters is seeking more contacts.

Peters will post weekly updates with photos and videos and can be contacted through his Web site www.DanTPeters.com . Glenn Curtiss Motorsports in West Bend is a sponsor and will host a welcome home bash when he returns. Peters’ progress can also be followed on www.GCMsports.com.