

THE FAR REACH OF FAMILY

At any level of competitive football, from the high school ranks to the professionals in the NFL, a coach expects his players to find time to work out during the offseason.

For Thiel offensive lineman David Mossa, that task was a little more difficult this past summer. For one month at least, his focus was more on personal development—family, culture and history—rather than physical.

Mossa, a senior captain and three-year starter for the Tomcats, took a trip that few other college student-athletes have taken when he visited family in Israel in June. The time he spent there was both a learning experience and an attempt to catch up with a large family.

The trip was planned so he, his father and his brother could visit the grave of his grandmother, who had passed away the previous year. While a death in the family is never enjoyable, sometimes it has a way of bringing the rest of family together, in this case from all over the globe. Even the village where his family lives has a familial atmosphere. At weddings, for example, Mossa said most of the town would

attend. The event could literally last all day and night.

His historical sightseeing ranged from a mesmerizing view of the Dead Sea—the lowest elevation on the earth's surface—to the city of Jericho, widely believed to be the oldest inhabited city in the world.

For the most part, the trip was one Mossa will never forget and a place he plans on going to again.

He was able to see family members he hadn't seen since his last trip to Israel eight years ago. Unlike his time spent there at a younger age, he says he was able to take more in this time around, learning more



along the way, including some Arabic. And, in typical offensive lineman fashion, he notes "the food was amazing."

But at other times, it was downright frustrating, an eye opener that the United States isn't the only place where security is a top priority that, at times, makes the lives of innocent bystanders a tad more inconvenient as a tradeoff for safety.

Mossa had already planned on crossing the border into Jordan to visit even more family members, but the trip was moved up a week due to an unexpected death of one of his many cousins. Leaving Israel was fairly easy, but trying to get back in proved to be more stressful.

"When we tried to get back into Israel, they said something went wrong with our security checks," Mossa said. "We ended up going back into Jordan that night and when we returned the next day, we still had to wait six or seven hours before they let us in."

The problem at the border wasn't the only time Mossa was stopped and questioned, but he says he never felt like he was in danger. It also clearly had no effect on his overall view of the visit.

"I would love to live over there if it wasn't for my family over here that I would miss too much," Mossa said. "But, I definitely hope to make the trip again soon."

For the record and to the relief of Tomcat coach Kurt Reiser, not that he would have doubted one of the most reliable players during his tenure at Thiel, Mossa did find a way to stay in shape while being nearly 6,000 miles from the College's campus.

"I was worried I wouldn't be able to work out," Mossa said. "Before I went over I called my cousin and found out a gym had just opened up in the village."

—Matt Jackson

Photos below (l to right): The city of Ramallah, a Palestinian city in the central West Bank; Mossa with his father, Sam, cousin Abdul Atta, brother, Derek, and cousin Mohammed Atta outside a market that leads to the Dome of the Rock; an altar inside Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity, the oldest church in the Holy Land still in use; and the outside of a mosque in Jerusalem.

