IT MIGHT BE THE MOST DANGEROUS JOB in the world. Spc. Michael Ritchey, a member of the Missouri National Guard and Operation Enduring Freedom, conducts route clearance missions in Afghanistan.

Ritchey was deployed in August with the 1138th Engineer Company after spending 29 days training at Camp Crowder and Camp Clark for pre-mobilization training where he learned necessary skills for deployment such as weapons qualifications, route clearance operations and tactics, battle drills and warrior tasks.

Ritchey, a combat engineer, has been with the Missouri Army National Guard for six years and has already been deployed twice, in 2009 to 2010. For his most recent deployment, he waived his two-year stabilization time between deployments and extended his contract with the Missouri National Guard to go with the 1138th Engineer Company.

“I’m ready to go back,” Ritchey told a reporter for MoGuard.com. “I like what I do and I’d rather do this than anything else.”

Ritchey, who is pursuing an Architectural Studies degree, is scheduled to return to Columbia this spring, where he lives with his wife, Nicole, and their 1-year-old daughter, Kaylee. In the meantime, Architectural Studies faculty and students keep Ritchey and his family in their thoughts. ”Before we left for winter break, the Architectural Studies student organizations collected donations so that we could send him a care package, as well as something for his wife and daughter,” says Hannah Ryman, an Architectural Studies student who met Ritchey in the computer lab, where he would often show his classmates the latest photos of Kaylee.

“Unfortunately with the way his deployments fell I only got to know Michael for a year,” Ryman says, “but I’m glad I got the opportunity to know such a great guy willing to make such a sacrifice!”

Architectural Studies department chair Ruth Tofle agrees. “Michael Ritchey brings honor to Architectural Studies, the University of Missouri and to our country,” she says. “We know Michael has a very dangerous job within the military and his friends are determined to give ongoing support and also to welcome him back home with the glory he deserves.”