

August 31, 2006

Dear Friends and Family,

I hope this letter finds you all in good health and great spirits. This letter begins in the middle August and it's been a few weeks since I last wrote. As you know, I work for the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), and part of my job is to understand what units are doing and then help other units with the information that I've gathered. For now, much of my focus has been on Provincial Reconstruction Teams, which are combination military and civilian organizations helping with governance and economics at the provincial level. A province is somewhat like a state in the US. In my last letter, I wrote to you about the province of Ninewa, which is a province in northern Iraq.



So, what have I been up to? After the last trip, it was good to get back to my hooch (the place where I sleep). I got up the next morning with aches all over from traveling. Traveling in a war zone is not exactly the most comfortable—you end up sleeping in tents and catching a few minutes of sleep on uncomfortable military aircraft. As I start to get settled into Camp Victory, I get a call telling me that I need to get down to the International Zone to get ready for the next trip. So...I pack my ruck-sack with my sleeping bag, some extra clothes, and catch a

helicopter flight from Camp Victory to the International Zone (IZ) where the US Embassy is located. It is the beginning of another trip.

While at the US Embassy, I stop by the medical clinic and get my second anthrax shot, which is



second in a series of six. The bad news is that this kind of shot burns under your skin. The good news is that they were giving the shots away for free! (sorry, poor humor). Before heading out of the IZ, we stop by and do a little "sight seeing." We took photos at the Cross Sabers then went to see the Tomb of the Unknown Iraqi soldier. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is a large circular monument, located near the cross sabers and some of the more well-known Baghdad hotels.



We took few photos with the local Iraqi soldiers that were guarding the monument.

I meet my group at the helipad with my gear and get ready to go. In our group, it is Lt. Col. Pickett, Navy Commander McGonnigil, Major Scheid, and two gentlemen from the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Pat and Bob. We board the US Army Blackhawk helicopter and fly north to Logistic Support Area (LSA) Anaconda located in Balad. We get some dinner at the local dining facility (DFAC); I take a shower, and try to get some sleep. We stay in transient tents and try to get some sleep, but not much since our wake up time is 0200 so we can get to the air strip at 0300.



The next “morning,” I wake up at 0200, and it is Monday, August 14, 2006. Today is Michael’s 15th Birthday; the second birthday of Michael’s that I’ve missed in a row. Last year, I was in Fort Bliss, Texas, this year, I’m still in the desert. It is days like this that I miss home the most.

We get to the passenger terminal and as it turns out our flight is rescheduled for 0500, so we wait at the PAX (passenger) terminal. Our flight is ready and we board the Sherpa airplane. It is still dark as we take off and we stop by Base Camp

Speicher and the Mosel Airfield on the way to our target destination, of Kirkuk, which is located in the northern region of Iraq. Kirkuk is a deeply mixed province, where much of the population in the province is Kurdish, as well as Turkmen, Arabic, and Assyrian. We land at the Kirkuk Regional Air Field (KRAB) deplane, and convoy on to the Forward Operating Base (FOB) Warrior.

It was a smooth flight, which I’m thankful for. We get picked up by our host and stop by to get a snack for breakfast, then dropped off at the “KBR Hotel,” which is somewhat austere and appears to be an old Iraqi motel. But hey, the rooms have air conditioning, a bed, and a TEVIVISION! I call Michael to wish him a happy birthday—I get him on Maria’s cell phone on the way to Gilroy for his work’s company picnic, which happens to be on his birthday. Thank you technology!



After a somewhat uneventful night, I wake up the next morning, and now its August 15, 2006--Maria's Birthday today... Yes, second year in a row for Maria as well--Not a good trend. And again, its days like this that I miss home the most. My mind is focused on what is in front of me, but my heart is at home. I am thankful to have Maria in my life.



This day, we convoy into the city of Kirkuk where we meet with the Provincial Council (their legislature). The interesting thing here is they spent 90 minutes debating whether to form a new committee for public service and complaints—it reminds me how we sometimes go on and on discussing somewhat minor topics back home. I guess no matter where you go some things are the same.

After the meeting, my interpreter takes me to meet with Ms. Parween Mohammed Amim, the Education Committee Chair, who is a member of the Kurdish Democratic Party. We discuss the issue of transfer students from one college in Iraq to another. While I was in the meeting, the rest of the group started looking for me and thought they were missing Lieutenant Colonel. Hmm... This caused a minor emergency (since kidnappings are not uncommon). Well, they found me and things settled down.

The big event was lunch with the Governor of Kirkuk, Mr. Abdulrahman Mustafa, a very cordial individual who by trade is an attorney. We got to hear a lot about the thoughts that were on his mind. We also got to eat some great Kurdish food, which included lamb meat (of course). We then convoyed to the Regional Embassy Office (REO) to meet with the other Department of State employees. We had dinner at the REO, which was good, then got a ride



from the Personal Security Detail (PSD), which are civilian contractors, back to the FOB. Once back at the KBR Hotel, I was able to call Maria and wished her a happy birthday. Often times, it is hard to make calls out of Iraq since most of Iraq does not have electricity for much of the day, but for the last two days, someone was on my side.

The next day, I wake up (still in Kirkuk on the FOB) at 0530 and went out for a morning run. It was still dark, but at least it was a bit cooler (probably around 85-90 degrees—the northern region of Iraq is somewhat cooler, but it still gets very hot when the sun comes out). We fly out of Kirkuk on the Sherpa, which was not a smooth ride. We flew very low to the ground (when you can wave back to the kids waving up at you—and see their smiling faces—you know you are low).



Iraq is a desert—a very hot desert, where you could not imagine anything living in these harsh conditions. Yet, I remember growing up and learning about the land between two rivers, the Tigris River and Euphrates River. As I fly over the Tigris, I can now see why it was called back then, the Fertile Crescent. By the time we got to Balad, everyone looked a little queasy. The whole flight, I tried to focus on breathing. Breathe Garrett...Breathe...Back at Balad, we catch a Balckhawk flight out of Catfish Air back to Baghdad. I hitch a ride from the helipad from a young Soldier and get back to my hooch. I shower, exchange my laundry, and head for dinner. At dinner, I sit down with an Aussie Soldier (Australia is one of our many coalition partners) from northern Australia. It was a most enjoyable dinner conversation—I had a little difficulty understanding some of he was saying due to the speed of his speech and some of his phrases. I then head into work to catch up on email, then head out about 11:30 pm to my hooch and call it a night. I'm exhausted. Traveling in a war zone takes it all out of you.

Let me close by saying that Iraq is still a dangerous place and everyday, we have very brave men and women serving our country in a very austere and harsh environment. If you meet any of them, you won't hear complaints about what they have to do or why they are here. Rather, if you say hello, you will likely get a smile and hearty greeting right back. That's the way it is.

Well, that's it for now.

Cheers!

Garrett Yee