

Greeting from Garrett Yee #3

September 6, 2006

Dear Family and Friends,

After the last trip to the province of Kirkuk, I get back to my desk at Camp Victory, and find there is a box from Fort Leavenworth and one from home. The box from Fort Leavenworth contains lots of books that I requested and the box from home contains a portable DVD player and cards from my niece Sofia, nephew Isaiah, and Maria. I also got some great photos of the family—a few with notes on the back from Maria and Alissa.



It is now the second part of August. This afternoon, Champe and I go to Camp Slayer to shop at the PX. I get an Icee, a patch for Michael's collection, and an alarm clock that looks like a Mosque. I then go back to my hooch to pack for yes, another trip, which is to the International Zone, and then on to Tikrit (north of Baghdad). I'm never sure how long I will be gone, but I always plan for at least 4 days.

In this part of Iraq, mornings are not always the same—some times the air is clear and sometimes it is so dusty, you can't see in front of you. I get up, get dressed, grab my rucksack, and catch a convoy into the IZ. I go into the US Embassy and grab a quick bite to eat for breakfast, meet up with my group, and catch a Blackhawk flight up to Forward Operating Base (FOB) Speicher. As we fly over this area of Iraq, you see the houses that look like they are made out of dirt and abandoned structures in the middle of what seems to be no where.



The FOB is located at the former Iraqi Air Force Academy, near the town of Tikrit and in the Salah ad Din Province. We arrive before dinner and load our bags into our rooms. After dinner, we attend a briefing, and then split up. Some head off to bed, while a few of us stay up and chat for a bit. It is probably 105 degrees, even at 11 pm.



We wake up for breakfast and go into the Provincial Reconstruction Team offices and have follow-up meetings with Team members. The facilities at the FOB are very austere and there is dust and dirt everywhere. Add 110 to 115 degree heat with broken air conditioners and you get real discomfort. We are scheduled to leave that afternoon, but it turns out that our flight is cancelled due to the dust in the air. Yes, dust. When the wind kicks up, you get these dust storms where you

can't see far enough to fly or even drive. It is thick as fog (which is something that I'd rather be in). So, we have a change in plans. Instead of heading out for FOB Warrior that afternoon or evening, we are delayed until the next day. That night, a few of us chat for a bit into the evening. It is interesting to hear everyone's different stories of where they are from and how they ended up here—in the middle of the Sal ah Din Province, which is essentially just a big dust bowl.

The next morning, the air is clear so that's good news. We get up, eat breakfast and catch a Blackhawk from the FOB and on to a place near the town of Baquba, in the Diyala Province. Baquba, is near the Tigris River and is known as the breadbasket of Iraq. Baquba is famous for its oranges, citrus fruits, dates, pomegranates, and wheat. I am told that Baquba means House of Jacob and it is also where the Profit Daniel is buried. The Silk Road also passes through Diyala, which is adjacent to the country of Iran. This makes the province a very strategic location for Iraq.



As you fly over the area, you can see the tank fighting positions left over from the Iraq/Iran war. Baquba was one of the most fortified cities in the region. Now that we are here, we get a briefing from the Provincial Reconstruction Team, and then get to work in our respective areas. We grab a late lunch and as luck has it, we are able to catch a Blackhawk flight back down to Balad and then on to Baghdad. We are in and out of Diyala Province in less than a day.



Our flight takes us to the IZ, which means I need to figure out how to get back to Camp Victory. As I walk off the flight line, I see the young sergeant that brings passengers out to the aircraft and I ask if there are any flights to going to Victory. The response is “Yes, right now.” What luck—I get manifested and I turn around and start walking to another helicopter to fly back to Victory. I hitch a ride from the Landing Zone at Victory back to my hooch.



My assignment in Iraq falls under the Multi-National Corps – Iraq (MNC-I). This means that our organization is comprised of many coalition partners from all over the world. It is truly an international flavor. It is most interesting to see the different uniforms and nationalities working side-by-side to accomplish the same mission. As I get back to my hooch, I meet my neighbor, Lieutenant Colonel William Alvarado, an Air Force officer from El Salvador. His hooch is two doors down from me at the

other end of the trailer. He just arrived in Iraq. He seems like a nice guy. I’m exhausted from traveling, so I take a shower to get “refreshed” and head back into work for the evening to see what awaits me when I get there.

Well that’s it for now.

Cheers!

Garrett