

Greetings from Garrett Yee #4  
Journey to Dhi Qar Province

September 10, 2006

Dear Family and Friends,



After the last trip to the provinces of Salah ad Din and Diyala, I'm ready to settle down and get into a regular routine. It is August 21st, and I wake up tired and sore from the trip. I make my way into work, eating breakfast along the way. Today there are dust storms so visibility is low. It is still hot outside. It's amazing; this place never cools off, at least not during the summer. Every day it is 110-120 degrees, sometimes hotter, and at night, it still 90-100 degrees.



Today is more or less a "normal" day. I attend a briefing where general officers are working on plans for the future of Iraq, so this is very interesting. Our entertainment for the day was to feed the fish in the lake as we walk across the bridge from lunch to the Al Faw Palace. Champe's son got married the other day, but since he was here in Iraq, he couldn't attend the wedding. He had them play a song for his son and new daughter in law. I leave the office at 9:30 pm and call it a day.

The next day, I wake up again tired, but feeling better rested from all the travel over the past two weeks or so. I make my way into work (12 minute walk to the security checkpoint and 139 steps up to the 3rd floor) and the air feels cool. I check the thermometer and it reads 90 degrees (before the day heats up). I start writing up all the observations from my recent trips. I get a message that I have some packages downstairs so I go back down 139 steps and over to the administrative section of the C3 and find that I have 5 boxes waiting for me from Captain Martin at Fort Leavenworth. I get someone to help me carry the boxes up 139 steps and I open the packages—books and office supplies (just as I requested). At lunch, Champe and I check the temperature reading, and it reads 120 degrees. Yes, it is hot. Today, I was able to call the unit down at Fort Hunter Liggett and spoke with SSG Firestone, SFC Duncan, and CSM Skooglund, who happened to be down there for a training exercise. I finally leave work at 11:30 pm to get ready for the next day.



I wake up the next day feeling better, but with the smell of dust in the air. I try to get back into a regular physical training program by running around Lost Lake. I run a nice easy pace and when I'm done, I feel pretty good. Of course, it takes me about two hours to cool down. I'm a little dehydrated the rest of the day. I stop by the Security Manager to get finger printed to upgrade my security clearance. I leave from work at about 11 pm.

It's August 24th and I get up early and hit the gym. Yes, they even have gyms out here in Iraq. It is a large white tent with weights and cardio machines, but hey, it works. I exchange my laundry then get into work. Amongst the various tasks that I have, part of job at this time is to get smart on Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq, which is why I've been traveling. After dinner, I get back to my desk and get a message that I need to get to the International Zone (IZ) the next day in preparation for another trip. So...I leave work around 10 pm and pack for the next trip. Our destination, Dhi Qar Province, near the southern city of An Nasiriyah.



The next morning, I get up early and take a convoy to the IZ. I go into the US Embassy and meet with an old friend, Lieutenant Colonel Andre Dragomietry, whom I bumped into a week back at the IZ. Andre and I attended a military school several years ago up in Pocatello, Idaho. He is currently the Deputy Director of the National Iraqi Assistance Center (NIAC) in Baghdad and works with local nationals providing various forms of assistance. I'll talk more about the NIAC at a later date. I also get a chance to meet briefly with the director of the National Coordination Team (NCT) at the US Embassy—a retired two-star general. The NCT has been arranging all of our travel. Later in the day, I meet up with our "traveling road show" at the helipad, and we catch a Blackhawk flight to Balad. Balad is the hub, so we often have to get to Balad to catch the next flight. We eat dinner at Balad, then head over to our favorite transient tents where I stretch out my sleeping bag for the night.



The next day is a full day in Balad since our flight does not depart until about 2100. I get up and do PT at the gym near our tents, then get breakfast. In the Army, we can identify what unit we are associated with by the patch on our left shoulder. I see some patches that look familiar and I ask a Soldier if they were from Arizona—he said, "Yes, we just got in a few days ago." Bingo, I know someone in that unit so on the way back, I stop in and see CSM

Jeff Bodenshatz, who I knew from Fort Bliss—he is out here too. Yes, it is a small world. He is now with the 164th Corps Support Group stationed in Balad, Iraq.



Balad is a huge Logistic Support Area, so I take a bus to the Corps Support Command (COSCOM) to see if I can meet up with one of my co-workers. It is hot this day, and I am drenched with sweat. I ask a Captain if she knows where the COSCOM is located and she points me in the right direction. I must have looked overheated or out of breath because she asked if I just got in. I say no, just tired from traveling around in the heat. I get to the COSCOM and bump into a

chaplain and ask if she knew my co-worker, and she said yes, I just got out of a meeting with him. So she takes me to his work area and I finally get to meet Lieutenant Colonel Will Nikonchuck. He is a good guy—we tour the COSCOM and exchange work ideas for a few hours until I have to go. We had previously corresponded via email, so it was good to put a face to the name. I get back to the tents in time for dinner at the DFAC and then we make our way out to the Sherpa Air Plane passenger terminal. As usual, our flight is delayed, and so we finally get to Dhi Qar at about 1130 at night. We wait at the Talill Air Field (in Dhi Qar) for a ride, which finally arrives, and we get into our rooms just before mid-night. We are in “Little Italy,” the Italian run Forward Operating Base, Camp Mittica.



The next morning we get up and have Cappuccino and pastries for breakfast at the local Italian “coffee shop,” the coffee is in small cups and very strong. The Italians are responsible for providing the military support to the province of Dhi Qar, and Mittica is the where the Italian army headquarters is located. We receive a welcome and information brief, which includes meeting the Italian General De Pascule. The Italians have done a lot of work in the province. They have focused a lot on building schools and developing the water delivery systems. They have also started to work with the agricultural industry, which is the main source of jobs in an agrarian environment such as Dhi Qar Province. We have lunch at the Italian DFAC, where



everyone is speaking Italian (of course), and the food selection is all Italian (pasta, etc. of course). After lunch, we have more meetings with the Italian coalition members, and then take a break before late dinner by visiting the Zigurat, which is located on the air base. The Zigurat, located in the ancient city of Ur, is said to be an ancient Chaldean temple to the moon. In addition to the temple, there are other ruins. The Zigurat is said to be around 5000 years old and Ur is the birthplace of Abraham. This information

comes from the book of Genesis in the Bible. At the time, the Euphrates River ran through this area, but since 5000 years, it has moved about 9 miles away, and now runs through the city of Al Nassaria. Today, the area is barren and dry—and since it is summer, it is about 118 degrees with a hot wind blowing. This is an amazing opportunity to be here and see this all first hand. This is where it all began. At dinner, it is startling to see bottles of wine on all tables. The US forces (including myself) are prohibited from consuming alcohol (General Order Number 1), but for the Italians, this does not apply. Again, Italian dinner in the DFAC, wine at the



tables (to tease us), and lots of energetic Italian conversation (I wish I spoke Italian). After dinner, we go to the Italian “Bar” which if you didn’t know better; you would think you were in a bar in Italy. The Italians really know how to have fun! We finally retire to our rooms to get ready for the next day.

We get up and go across to another base camp, near the air field, for breakfast. At the other base camp (Camp Addar), we have breakfast at the DFAC, and here, since it is also a coalition partner, we see lots of Australians (Aussies) and Romanians at breakfast. Our driver to the air



field is a 26 year old First Lieutenant in the



Italian Army. I ask him if he is married and he says no. I take his picture and tell him that I will show my wife’s nieces and let them know that he was available. The Italians are a lot of fun. We catch our Sherpa flight to Balad, and are lucky to catch a Blackhawk flight from Balad back to Baghdad. It get back to Camp Victory, do my laundry, clean-up, and head back into work for the evening. At work, I

find to my pleasant surprise a care package sent to me from the 3-356th Logistic Support Battalion at Fort Hunter Liggett, CA—my previous assignment. I get a year’s supply of sunflower seeds, peanuts, sun block, and all kinds of good stuff (I could tell Major Troy Kennedy had a hand in this). I leave for the hooch about 11 pm and call it a day. I am tired and glad to be back at my own bed.

Well, that’s it for now.  
Cheers!

Garrett