

LTC Garrett Yee's Update #7
(September 24, 2006 – October 2, 2006)
Welcome to El Salvador and back to Babil

Some times I hear that the pictures that I send home don't look the same as on TV. Well, Iraq is a big place. Other times family and friends say that I'm always smiling and that it looks like I'm on vacation. Well, I wouldn't call it a vacation, but you might say that I'm always looking on the bright side. Don't get me wrong, Iraq is a very dangerous place, but those that know me might say that's just the way I am.



Sunday, September 24, 2006

Got up and ran around the lake. It is getting warm again. Today, I packaged and dropped off a box of various items to send home. Some things in the box were for Alissa--she will be 13 pretty soon. I got her a pair of gold dolphin shaped ear rings, a scarf, an alarm clock shaped like mosque, and some Iraqi money placed in a card. I told her not to spend it all in one place! During the day, I met with LTC William Alvarado (my neighbor) from El Salvador to discuss an upcoming trip. Before the afternoon Battle Update Assessment, other known as a BUA (pronounced Boo Ah), I met with MAJ Travis Robinette, who worked for CALL some time back. Travis currently works with the Iraqi Ground Forces Command, which is the headquarters for the Iraqi Army. Travis has been helping me with the Iraqi Lessons Learned Center to make coordination with the Iraqi Army units—big help. After dinner I worked until about 10:30 pm, then called it quits.



Monday, September 25, 2006

The days are rolling along and we are well into Ramadan. The weather is warming up again. I tried to catch a convoy into the International Zone (IZ), but there was no room, so I called Catfish Air and got the last open seat on a Blackhawk helicopter heading that way. After dinner, I meet with a few Navy guys assigned out here who work with the electronic warfare systems. This is high-tech stuff that we are working with. On a not so high-tech, unpleasant note, I've been getting these irritating heat rashes (again), and because I'm wearing boots for so many hours during the day, I'm been getting athlete's foot. Between the blisters, dry skin, etc. my feet look horrible. Yuk! (Just thought I'd share that.) I left work around 10:30 pm and called it a day.





Tuesday, September 26, 2006

I can tell that fatigue is starting to set in for me. I can tell by my patience in certain matters. I got up and got a ride to the “LZ.” L and Z are the initials for Landing Zone which is a term used for helicopters. The flight to the IZ from the Victory was a nice morning flight—the air was relatively cool so you didn’t have the hot air blowing in your face. My counter part, LTC Rex Rodwell, was there at the IZ LZ to pick me up and take me to the NATO Training Center. We made it in time for the meeting, which is always an interesting experience for the first time. The Iraqi Two-Star General led the meeting with an interpreter doing the translation. Other NATO countries were represented giving their briefs using English as the common language, except

for the Iraqis. After the meeting I met with BG Angelelli, the Italian One-Star General, to discuss our plan with the Iraqi trainers. After that meeting, I met with Iraqi Brigadier General Munir and Staff Colonel Salman to discuss a trip I had planned for them, which was to travel to Camp Victory and brief the Chief of Staff for the Iraqi Ground Forces Command.

Sometimes, I have to remind myself that nothing in Iraq is ever easy. I think that the Iraqi people have understood this concept which shows in their patience. If something is to happen, then “inshallah,” which means “if God wills.” If you are not sure about something happening, then “inshallah.” Some may say that the Iraqi culture is slow or lazy. I think it is patient. If you lived under a dictator for the past 30+ years, you would develop patience. When it is 120 degrees outside, you can’t be in a hurry or you will wear yourself out in a matter of minutes. You learn patience. So, as I begin to get fatigued after working 70+ days in a row, I need to remind myself that things take time and that I need to be patient. It is now 2300 and it’s time to call it a day.

Wednesday, September 27, 2006

Got a good night’s rest and I feel much better today. I met my neighbor, William, and his co-worker Carlos, also from El Salvador, this morning and I got a ride to breakfast. I normally don’t eat breakfast, but it was good company. I got a chance to talk with them about my trip to Al Kut the next morning. Today, one thing that should have gone well didn’t go well. Rex and the Iraqi General missed the convoy from the IZ out to Victory, so the meeting with the Iraqi Two-Star General didn’t happen. I’m not sure what happened or didn’t happen. Inshallah I guess. I made more progress on the handbook that I’m writing, so that’s good. On the way to dinner, we could hear the Muslim call to worship. Later, my work neighbor, LTC Ross Parker, and I went up to the top of the roof and watched the “fireworks” in the night sky. Because it is Ramadan, you can see the mosques out in the distance lit up like it was Christmas. Of course, you can see the usual flares from helicopters, the illumination rounds from the artillery, and tracers shooting up into the night



sky, which may or may not be celebratory shots being fired. Walking back to my hooch, the air was clear and cool. A nice night. I feel much better today.

Thursday, September 28, 2006

Got up, met my neighbor William from the El Salvador Air Force, and went to breakfast. I find out that William's sister and parents live in San Jose, California! Small world! After breakfast, he drove me to the helipad at Liberty and I met the other coalition Soldiers. The Italian Lieutenant Colonel, Antonio, arranged today's flight. Once the Italian General arrived, we boarded the Blackhawks and flew down to Camp Delta, which is located near the city of Al Kut in the Wassit Province. Today, I am visiting the El Salvador contingent. As we arrive, I can see old Russian aircraft, which are now used by the



Polish Air Force. The Polish are in charge of this sector and the El Salvador contingent falls under their tactical control. At the airfield, COL Galvan from the Salvadorian Army meets me and takes me back to their headquarters. I meet with his staff for a while, then they take me out t their outpost, at which point they demonstrate their quick reaction force (QRF) for me. They look pretty good. I then visit the living quarters of the Soldiers and get to meet with some of the Soldiers. After this, we eat lunch, or should I say *comida*. Yes, this is the Spanish speaking contingent and it

is a good thing that a few do speak English since my Spanish is so poor! Before I depart, the commander, COL Galvan, gives me a T-shirt from their contingent. This is a very welcoming group and maybe some time, I will pass this way again. We fly back to Liberty and I get back into work and begin planning for the next trip. All in a day's work.

Friday, September 29, 2006

Well, today, I was supposed to go to Al Hillah in the Babil Province, but the flight got cancelled. So... I had to figure out how to get to Al Hillah a different route. First I tried to fly to Kalsu, which is near by, so after some phone calls and checking the flight routes, I get a flight to Kalsu lined up. Then I find out that it



would not be possible to get from Kalsu to Al Hillah until at least Monday. So...I cancelled and we went back to the drawing board. In the end, Al Hillah arranged for a civilian PSD (protective security detail) to get me there. During the day, it was difficult to get much work done due to the

continued efforts to get transportation out to Al Hillah. Today was one of those days where you don't feel like you got a lot done even though you are busy all day long. Go figure.

Saturday, September 30, 2006

I get a ride to the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) at Camp Liberty. There, I'm waiting around for the convoy when I see a familiar face, LTC Jon Revolinsky. We worked together several years ago. I had heard he was some where at the Victory Base Complex. Small world. How many times have I said this? Lots.



I meet up with the security detail, which is Aegis, a civilian company from the United Kingdom. The driver's nick name is Sleepy, the convoy commander is Jewels (short for Julian), and my co-passenger is Gary, who goes by Woody. Sleepy, Jewels, and Woody. All three Brits. We convoyed down the MSR (Main Supply Route), which is the primary route for moving supplies and logistics up through Iraq (therefore, highly targeted by insurgents). Along the side of the road, we saw a herd of camels! After lunch, we hit the road onward to al Hillah. As we got close, the convoy took an alternate "back route" into the city, which took us through small rural towns. This was very scenic.



We got to Al Hillah Regional Embassy Office (REO) by mid-afternoon and we were good to go. They gave

me a VIP "Can" which is a CHU (containerized housing unit). It is by far the best place I have stayed in to date. I have my own bathroom! The small pleasures in life...

Sunday, October 1, 2006

Busy day. First meeting was at 1000 with "Engineer Mohammed," the Provincial Council Chairman and Sammy, one of the more experienced interpreters. The Chairman is an interesting individual and happens to be the same age as me. There have been several assassination attempts on his life, yet he continues on. I later met with the Deputy Governor, who is in his late 30's and also has had his life threatened several times. At the end of the day, I met with the Provincial Police Chief and his deputy for interviews. This was very gratifying to be able to interview these individuals and discuss the current and future situation of Provincial Reconstruction Teams in the province.



Monday, October 02, 2006

Got up and met the Civil Affairs team down by their motor pool where I loaded my gear onto one of the HMMWVs. This is the company commander's second tour in Iraq. He is confident



and capable as he gives the combat patrol brief to the 18 Soldiers heading up north from Al Hillah to Baghdad. He talks about the route and the recent activity in the last 24 hours along the route. There have been plenty of attacks and small arms fire all along the route. Before we leave the compound, we stop short of the gate to load and chamber our weapons, activate the electronic systems, then roll through the gate.

On the first part of the journey, we pass through small villages and farms until we get on to the main thoroughfare through Iraq. Part way up, we stop into Forward Operating Base Kalsu, which is just one big dust bowl. The convoy drops off some equipment and then begins heading north again. The next location that we head to is on the north east part of Baghdad—FOB Loyalty. As we get into Baghdad, we find that some of the roads are blocked and so we take longer to find our way into FOB Loyalty. As we drive through town, the roads are crowded and there Iraqi people all around.



School is back in session and you can see kids everywhere dressed up neatly getting picked up by their mothers and families. You wouldn't know that we in a war zone. We make it to FOB Loyalty and break for lunch at the DFAC. At FOB Loyalty, they have been supporting the Baghdad Security Plan and so there are Stryker Vehicles and Iraqi Army vehicles everywhere.

After lunch, we head out of the FOB and back onto the streets of Baghdad. We head back down the way we came and then try to head over the July 14th Bridge. Unfortunately we took the wrong lane and so we had to take an alternate route. So, we go back into town through the busy streets, although not as busy now due to Ramadan. As we work our way through the streets, our gunner hears a shot fired at the convoy but can't positively identify the shooter so we just keep moving out. We work our way through the Karata Peninsula and onto Route Irish, which connects the IZ to the Victory Base Complex. We finally make it into Camp Liberty where I get a ride to the adjacent FOB, Camp Victory. It is now the end of the day. I take a shower, exchange laundry, and head into work after eating dinner. At about 9:30, I call it a day and head back to the hooch. It has been a long day and I'm glad to be back in my own bed.

