

**LTC Garrett Yee's Update #9  
(October 14, 2006 Through October 25, 2006)  
Welcome to Estonia!**

Dear Family and Friends,

This letter begins on Saturday, October 14, 2006. Got up and ate breakfast with my Salvadoran buddies, Carlos and William. After breakfast, William dropped Carlos and me off at the helipad to catch a Blackhawk helicopter flight. Destination: Camp Taji to see the Estonians. I'm on the flight with MG Montouri of the Italian Army, so our flight arrangements are easy. The Estonians are



a small contingent here on their 7th rotation as a country. They work under the US forces in Baghdad. Most speak English well. Their language and background is very close to Finnish. They are a very impressive group of Soldiers assigned to a very volatile sector to patrol. All soldiers in the contingent volunteered to support this mission. In fact, if there is a discipline problem, the fix is to send the soldier home. For many soldiers, this is their second tour in Iraq. Estonia currently supports other missions around the world,

to include operations in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Their language is similar to Finnish, and about half the platoon speaks English well, with the remaining understanding English. Estonia is a small country (about 45,000 sq km) with a population of about 1,445,000 inhabitants. Their contribution to the Global War on Terror is significant per capita given the size of their country. I've included a map since I figured some of you might be wondering where Estonia is located (I didn't know before this).



After flying we get back from Taji, I get back to my desk and find that I have a care package from Scott and Sue Morris. Scott was one of my old high school football coaches. I use the word "old" but the photo that I get of Scott shows that he has not aged a bit. Hmm...Back at work, I find out that my flight down to the Diwaniyah Province is not supported. This means that the Corps was unable to provide mission support. I'm relieved in one hand because it allows me to better prepare for the upcoming

visit from the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) team coming out to Iraq that I need to provide assistance.



Rhino Day. The next day, I had to take Rhino Convoy into the International Zone (IZ). My work neighbor Ross joined me today to get a break from his regular routine. We stopped into the Battle Update Assessment (remember BUA?) at the US Embassy, followed by meeting folks at the National Coordination Team, which oversees the Provincial Reconstruction Teams. We then got our “battle rattle” and took the NTV (non-tactical vehicle) to the NATO Training Center and ate lunch at their DFAC—this has a limited menu but more varied company. There I met with the NATO guys and the Iraqi Officers that I’m working with at the Iraqi Lessons Learned



Center. After that, we went to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and met with Dr. Marty Hannraddi, who is recovering from a vehicle accident. After that, we stopped by Camp Phoenix to see the MNSTC-I compound and show Ross where it was at. After that, we went back to the US Embassy and dropped into the PX to see what they had. At the IZ, you can order a car or a motorcycle and have it waiting for you back in the states. Although I’m not in the market for a new car, a motorcycle would be nice...

This day was one of those many days where you wish you could be home just to help out around the house. Maria is doing a fantastic job getting everyone to where they need to get to without thinking of what she needs. I feel bad that I cannot be there to help, physically and emotionally for all that she is going through in my absence. I am lucky to have her as my wife and life partner.

For the next few days, I am super busy getting ready for the upcoming team from Fort Leavenworth. I’m making appointments with various organizations in order to build an itinerary for the group coming out. I’m coordinating for meeting space, transportation support, aviation support to get to the various locations, and office calls with senior officials. At the same time, I’m trying to do my regular duties. It’s a lot like getting ready for visitors coming over to your house, except that it is for a long time. There is so much to do, and it is impossible to be in more than one place at the same time. One night Ross and I go the roof to watch the fireworks. Not too much tonight. We talk a lot about why we are here in Iraq and how both our perspectives changed after being here in Iraq. It is hard to explain, but once you live here for a little while and see first hand what there is to see, you quickly realize that there is no simple solution to the situation out here. One thing we both agree upon, the leaders out here are doing the best they can given the circumstances. Neither of us would want their jobs.



The day before the group arrives from Fort Leavenworth, it looked like it was going to rain. It was about 90 degrees, but it felt humid and the sky

was gray. Since I'm picking up the team from CALL the next day, I need to find out their arrival time. So, I call the BIAP PAX terminal, and they said I need to call back after 2200. I wait until 2200 and call the PAX terminal, and then they say that they can't give the flight information over the phone. So I say to send it on secure email, and they say they don't have access. I figure it out eventually. That evening, we watched the lightning from the roof top. Kind of a quite day, this is nice for a change.

On Thursday, October 19, 2006 the team from Fort Leavenworth arrives—life gets really busy. With the help of LTC Hess, we drive a van and a pick-up truck out to BIAP to pick up the 9 person team from Fort Leavenworth. We arrived before they arrived, which was a good thing, since it takes about 30 minutes to get to BIAP from Victory. First order of business was to drop the gear and head to Chow Operations at the DFAC. After lunch, it was transient billeting, which is code word for tents—kind of like camping with the cots. They all had interesting comments on the tent billets. After that, I took them to the Corps security desk to get badges for access. After this, it was time to take a tour of the Al Faw Palace. Saddam built many palaces which still stand today, and some don't.



For the next week, my life is non-stop working issues for the team from Leavenworth. If it is not one thing, it is another. Fortunately I have help from Major Jeff Wood, who is an Air Force officer assigned to the team. I also have help from fellow CALL officers assigned to other locations throughout Iraq and Afghanistan. The team has luggage issues, billeting issues, vehicle issues, and issues with the Corps Command Sergeant Major. On one of the issues, I got called into the Deputy Chief of Staff to answer for. Was it an ass chewing? No. Was it very uncomfortable? Yes. Bottom line is that I felt that I had

to answer for something that had control over. You just got to wonder some times.

On one of the days, I took part of the team out to the LZ to catch a flight to Fallujah which is in the Marine sector; however, we could not fly due to a weather hold. After three hours waiting at the LZ, we called off the mission since it was pretty obvious that the weather was not going to change. It wasn't raining; it was just that there was poor visibility. We rescheduled for a night flight. So, we went to lunch in the meantime. Later in the day, we would cancel the night flight due to weather so we didn't make it out to Fallujah, which was fine. On a bright note, I earlier found out that a friend of ours has a son in the Marines who just got deployed to Iraq.



His name is Lance Corporal Tomas Becerra. Tomas wrestled with Gilbert while in high school. I was able to locate Tomas and this day, Gunnery Sergeant Alberto Mercado was scheduled to fly out to his duty station. Before he left, I put together a little box of snacks to take out to Tomas. Even though I was not able to see him personally, it was nice to make the connection while here in Iraq. I left early from work one night (2100) to watch a movie that Maria sent me, Assassins.



Day 4 of the team from Fort Leavenworth. Since the team had a plan for the day, which was in the local area, my day started off easy. I was able to take care of some simple tasks in the office. This team essentially takes out a month of my tour in Iraq preparing for and tending to its requirements. My regular CALL job essentially ended at the beginning of October and will resume at the end of the month. That's okay with me. For the rest of the team's visit in Iraq they are all over central Iraq so I'm busy working with the team's operation officer, Major Jeff Wood. It includes trips to Taji, the International Zone, Balad, and Camp Liberty.



One night after dinner, Ross and I watch the night sky from the roof top. We can hear a few large explosions in the distance—I think this was the large Ammunition Supply Point at FOB Falcon that got hit by a mortar and made the news. On days 6 and 7 of the team from Fort Leavenworth, things are settling down and we are getting ready for the next leg of the trip up to Balad Air Base, also known as Logistic Support Area Anaconda. On the team's last day in Baghdad, the big event is to get them on a helicopter flight to Balad. I picked the team up from their meeting location and drove them to

the helipad. We thought we were set, then about 10 minutes before the flight arrived, the terminal operator came in to the tent and told us that the flight was cancelled. After making a few calls, we were back on the flight. But, for those 10 minutes, it was a close call and we were exploring other options to get to Balad. I watched the team members get onto the Blackhawk, and then I headed for dinner. Later in the night, I called Balad and confirmed they got there, and then reported back to Fort Leavenworth to let them know they were at their next station.

Although I didn't mind supporting the team, it was very tiring. When I got back from the helipad, I found two boxes from Ohlone College on my desk. What a great surprise! In the boxes, I got a book from Dave Smith on the history of the City of Newark, cards, news clippings and snacks. What a great way to end the day! Well...it's time to get some rest for the next mission.

That's it for now.

Cheers!

Garrett