

LTC Garrett Yee's Update #10
(October 26, 2006 Through October 31, 2006)
Welcome to Afghanistan!



This is a short letter and covers my travel from Iraq to Afghanistan with a stop at Qatar on the way. For the past several months, I have been studying Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Iraq and now I'm headed over to Afghanistan to visit a few PRTs there to see how they operate. PRTs in Afghanistan have been around longer and operate somewhat differently so I'm looking for lessons learned at these PRTs that may have carry-over value for PRTs in Iraq, and vice versa. So, it's off to Afghanistan.

Thursday, October 26, 2006. Today was my recovery day from the first 7 days of the team from Fort Leavenworth. This essentially means that I spend my time catching up on everything that has been placed on hold for the past several days. The team is in Balad and on their way to Afghanistan, so I booked a flight out to Balad to catch up with the team. Today, it didn't rain much, so it didn't get much muddier. It is funny to see all the mud tracked into the palace. All day long, the third country nationals were sweeping the floor, the steps, and the walk ways to try and stay ahead of the dirt and mud. I got an email from my old boss, Colonel James Mathis. He is certainly one of my favorite brigade commanders to work for of recent history. I enjoyed working for him. The first thing he does is starts making fun of me. That's how he is, and I guess somehow, I would be a little disappointed if he didn't. Go figure. Since I'm flying out tomorrow, I need to finish packing my bags. Ross is going to drop me off at the helipad tomorrow so I'm set.



Trip to Balad. The next day, after taking care of some follow-up actions at work, Ross dropped me off at the helipad so I could catch a flight to Balad. I caught a flight with one stop at Washington (the

International Zone) en route to Balad. At Balad Air Field, Air Force Major Jeff Wood met me and connected me with the rest of the group. From there, I borrowed a vehicle and drove over to the 13th Sustainment Command and met Lieutenant Colonel Rick Taylor, the CALL Officer at Balad. As we were getting out of the vehicle near the air field, we heard a blast that was very close to us. We figured that this was an intentional controlled detonation. As it turns out, it was an 82 mm mortar round that landed within 200 meters of us. All I can say is that they missed. We talked a bit then we went to dinner. At dinner, I met SGM Jeffrey Bodenshatz, who I met earlier when they first arrived. After dinner I went for a short workout at the Air Force Village where we are staying. By the way, the Air Force Village is very nice! My room mate is Master Sergeant Lindsey, who is an Air Force Joint Ranger with more badges and tabs than most Army guys. Today the weather picked up and the sun came back out again with the temperature around 90 degrees.



On Saturday, I again worked with LTC Rick Taylor at his location and at the 164th Corps Support Group (CSG). I introduced him to some of the key leaders at the CSG. While we were walking into the headquarters, I met Sergeant First Class Ratlif, who I met about seven years ago when I was down in Panama. In fact, I went out on a patrol with him down there, just the two of us, so he remembered me. Small world. Then, later at the DFAC (pronounced “dee fact”), I met Chief Barella, who previously worked for me as a maintenance sergeant at Fort Hunter Liggett. She is now a warrant officer assigned to the 4th Infantry Division. This was her last day in Iraq. Later, I stopped by the Bazaar and picked up some DVDs for the trip. I also got a haircut at the Air Force Village. All in all, it was a good day in Balad having the opportunity to work with LTC Taylor and meeting two people from the past.



Sunday is fly day. The morning was more of the same from the day before. By mid-day, our bags were packed and ready to go. We had a mid-day show time at the PAX terminal for our



flight to Al Udiad Air Base located in Qatar. After checking in, we grabbed lunch and waited, and waited, and waited. Finally, they called our flight and took us on bus to the flight line, then to the C-130 airplane. We took off at 5 hours later, stopping in Kuwait, and finally landing at Al Udiad Air Base, Qatar, late at night. I looked up Qatar on the internet and



here is what I found: “Qatar forms one of the newer emirates in the Arabian Peninsula. After domination by Persians for thousands of years and more recently by the Ottoman Turks, and finally by the British, Qatar became an independent state on September 3, 1971. Unlike most nearby emirates, Qatar declined to become part of either the United Arab Emirates or of Saudi Arabia.”

After deplaning, they took us through customs and then we had to check our weapons in. This is the first time that I am without my weapon since deploying to Iraq. We load our bags on to a bus, go to an Air Force transient tent (much better than the Army), eat dinner (DFAC open 24 hours a day), draw linen, and hang out at the recreation center until about mid-night, then hit the sack. Oh yeah, they gave us a “ration card”, which I’ll explain later.



Monday is all day at Al Udiad. Got up ate breakfast, then headed for the CAOC (combined air operations center), which is where they control the air operations for all of Iraq and Afghanistan. It is an interesting place. While there, I got to meet the chief of staff for the Air Force, who is a 4-star

general, and the Command Chief Master Sergeant for the Air Force. Let me tell you about Al Udied—it is hot and humid, and there is nothing to write home about (but I guess I am anyway). They advertise for fishing and entertainment, but I'll never see any of it. Qatar is unique in that even though it is in the Central Command area of operations, it is exempted from General Order Number 1, which is a restriction on alcohol. It has a swimming pool, PX, shops, nice recreation complex with stage, which is covered by a double white tent awning, referred to as the "bra" if you could imagine. Since the threat is low, we don't carry our weapons. Life is very good here—in fact, I hear they have a huge mall downtown that is very western. Don't get me wrong, if you are assigned here, you are separated from family and home, but one might consider it as good duty. We have a late night flight so we have a full day at Al Udied. We will fly all night and arrive in Afghanistan in the morning. We won't get much sleep.



On Tuesday, October 31, 2006, at 0630 in the morning, we landed in Bagram Air Field (BAF), Afghanistan, after an all night flight and a 1 1/2 hour time change (forward). It is Halloween. Bagram has an altitude of about 5000 feet elevation with the Hindu Kush Mountain Range



surrounding the air field like a bowl. As the tail of the C130 aircraft opens on the runway, you can actually see the Hindu Kush Mountain Range that is well know in Afghanistan. We start with dropping our gear off at our room, created out of 40 foot shipping containers, eating breakfast, followed by a full day (without any sleep). In Afghanistan, I meet with my CALL counterparts, LTC Scott Simmons, LTC Jeff Adkins, and CPT Charles Abeyawardena, who work in the basement (bomb shelter) of one of the buildings made by the Russians. The living conditions are somewhat austere, but the weather for now is great

compared with Iraq. Today is my last day with the team from Leavenworth. From here, I will go off on my own collection plan while the team from Leavenworth will finish up and head back to Qatar, then to the states by the end of the week. I will remain here in Afghanistan for the next one to two weeks. This all seems surreal to be in one war in Iraq, then two days later, right into another in Afghanistan. After a short time on the ground, you can see how things are so different from Iraq. The people are different (of course) and the military operations are different. There is a lot that is different, but for now, I've arrived in Afghanistan and ready for my next mission.



That's it for now.
Cheers!

Garrett