

**LTC Garrett Yee's Update #14**  
**(November 25, 2006 - December 6, 2006)**  
*Getting Ready to Redeploy (head back home)*

Dear Family and Friends,

We are getting close! This should be my last few weeks here in Iraq before I redeploy. I'm feeling good. While in Iraq, I have been attached to Fifth Corps, which oversees most of the military units. Fifth Corps rotated in from Germany and now they are getting ready to rotate out. It happens to be the same time that I am rotating out, but I'm going back to the states. The shoulder patch that I will continue to wear on my right shoulder is the Multi-National Corps—Iraq patch, which is unique to Iraq. As the days draw closer to my departure, it still does not seem real that I am actually leaving. There is still so much to do and so my days continue to be filled with various tasks. At the same time, feelings of anticipation grow and I begin to think more and more about home.



Well it's a Saturday and I start off the day by hitting the gym. The day is filled with out-processing through the Special Troops Battalion. I have to go to various places to "clear," before leaving. So this day, I cleared the arms room, the chemical room, the supply room, the computer section, and the communication security sections. After that, I attended the legal and chaplain's brief. One of the guys that I work with that I will always remember is SGM Robert Haemmerle. He is from New Jersey and he has a way of reducing almost everything down to one or two syllables. For example, an "informant" would be a "snitch," or someone that bothers you would be called a "noodge," and so on. He's a great Soldier and it has been my pleasure to work with him.



The next day, I had to make my last trip to the IZ (International Zone, remember?). MAJ Warner and I took the Rhino convoy to the IZ where we had some business to tend to. We were doing some planning for a visit by Brigadier General (BG) Eldon Regua and Colonel Blair Alexander later in the week. To do this, we had to go to the Multi-National Security Transition Command—Iraq (MNSTC-I, pronounced "min-sticky") located at Phoenix Base in the IZ. There, we met up with the officer in charge of the visit, Major Matt Holbert. After the meeting, we then drove back to the Embassy and had lunch in the north wing. Our afternoon meeting was with the Deputy Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR), Ms. Ginger Cruz. We discussed reconstruction efforts in Iraq and possible follow-on visits to Provincial Reconstruction Teams later in the year. At the end of the day at the IZ, we took the Rhino back to Camp Victory.

The next few days I spent getting my things in order. This included slowly packing my bags, giving stuff away, last minute laundry, cleaning out my work area, and finishing up some of the writing projects that I had been working on. I was able to get into the gym a few times during the week which feels good. I have lost some weight since I've been deployed. Not a lot, but enough to where I can notice it. On one day, I shipped a few boxes of items back home that I no longer needed (my second pair of boots, extra clothes, etc.). I was able to get a photo with one of my work neighbors, Lieutenant Colonel Dumutru Stroian who is with the Romanian Army. He is a busy guy and hard to pin down some times.



Last week, a group of students from Ohlone College sent me two care packages with an autographed shirt. I took a photo while standing on the balcony of Saddam Hussein's Al Faw Palace and sent it back to the college. I thought the students would like that.

On one of the nights, I stopped by my neighbor LTC William Alvarado from El Salvador and chatted for a bit. He had company over from the El Salvador contingent. They were having a good time. William will be visiting his sister in March who lives in San Jose so we plan to get together when he comes up from El Salvador.



My son Michael is really interested in the Japanese culture and Japanese course cars (of course). So when I told him there was a Japanese contingent here, he asked me to get him a patch from them, since he collects patches. One day I said hello to some of the guys that I had seen fairly regularly and I got Michael a patch for his collection. When I told the two Japanese service members I was part Japanese, they asked if I spoke Japanese, and of course I said I wish I could. Next question is whether I had visited Japan—no again, but that I'd like to some day. Of course, we took a picture.

LTC Ross Parker, who works with the Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC, pronounced "see flick") got a Christmas tree in the mail and decided it was legal to set it up since it was now December. Yes, we are in December. He mentioned that his wife set up the Christmas stuff BEFORE Thanksgiving! Can you image?... Here is a picture of Ross setting up the tree at his desk IN December.



As I mentioned, it is now December. The weather clear and the air is cool. In the mornings, there is chill in the air, but it feels refreshing. It is a huge contrast to the summer when I first arrived. I recall getting off the plane breathing in the propeller blast from the C-130 aircraft and thinking—THIS IS TOO HOT. Now it is a distant memory. I am now less than a week away from departure. The plan is that I will fly to Ali Al Salem in Kuwait, and then catch the Freedom Flight to the United States. Yes, time is running short and one of the things I have to get used to again, is my privacy... I will have to get used to the fact that I will not be sharing bathrooms and showers with hundreds of my closest fiends...NOT. I will have to get used to having a bathroom in the place that I live rather than down the dirt pathway ...NOT. There are a lot of things I will need to get used to but these two things I will be happy to re-adjust to. One thing that I might miss a little bit is the view of the Al Faw Palace which I see on my way to work at Camp Victory. I admit that it is quite the site.



On Sunday, I made it to church. I saw LTC Carlos Mena (from El Salvador) in church so I squeezed in next to him. At the end of Mass, they called everyone who was leaving up to the front to bless us. It was a nice feeling. It was also interesting to see that everyone in church was armed with a weapon. Hmm... My days here in Iraq are numbered. In fact, I'm running out of time. I think about it every day lately. I am supposed to leave for Kuwait in a few days so I am very "short."



I re-inventoried all my gear in duffle bags so I know what I have with me before I redeploy. This is to ensure I have all my assigned equipment to turn-in at Fort Bliss. That night, I got word that Brigadier General Regua and Colonel Alexander were due in a day and half earlier (the very next day), so I arranged for a ride out to BIAP (remember, Baghdad International Air Port?) to meet them.

The next day I got up and drove out to BIAP to meet BG Regua, COL Alexander and the rest of the group as they arrived in Iraq. I worked for BG Regua when he was my Battalion Commander, then later when he was the G3 of the 91st Division. I also worked for COL Alexander when he was the G3 for the 91st Division, following BG Regua. I kept them company until the folks from MNSTC-I arrived to pick them up and take them down to the IZ. I'll be meeting with them later in the week when they return to Camp Victory for a short visit—which will also be my last day in Iraq, so the timing is close, but good. It was great to see them. Of course we took a photo right when they got off the C-130.

Later that day, I finally had time to get a long-needed hair cut. Walking over to the barber area, MAJ Warner and I took photos in the holiday cut-outs just for kicks. Looks like couple of clowns to me.



On Tuesday, I am almost done with everything. I've given a few things away and sold a few items that someone else can use. I found out that my high school wrestling team mate has a son out here in Iraq, David Staley, so I pack a box of goods to send to him. At noon, it is the regular weekly bible study group. I'm not sure if I mentioned it but it is called "Smoke N Joes" Bible Study. It suits me just fine—it happens to be all men. I try to attend when I'm at Camp Victory and it is a great group of guys. This has been led by Chaplain (LTC) Eric Erkinen, who is getting ready to redeploy with Fifth Corps back to Germany. I have gotten a lot out of this group, besides coffee and tips on good cigars...



Wednesday is the last full-day of work before I fly down to Kuwait. I get up early and take my last run around Lost Lake. The air is cool and crisp—a far cry from the first time I ran around the lake when it was over 90 degrees. It is a strange feeling—nothing seems real. Am I really running around one of Saddam's palace complexes in Iraq? Have I really just spent the last several months in a war zone? I try to remember every detail as I run around Lost Lake—the trees, the water, the path, the buildings and guard towers. Parts of the day are filled with a little anxiety because I can't believe I'm really going back to the United States. At work, I receive a care package from Rick Kramer, a former co-worker who has since retired, and Ohlone College. I can't believe I'm still getting care packages! Neither can my neighbors! It is a bit overwhelming knowing that people that are not related to you really care. I can't use all that I received, especially on my last day, and so I repackage much of the items and send them to the Marines in Ashroff who really need the stuff, and share the rest with my co-workers.

As I say my good byes, SGM Haemmerle teases me about staying around longer since he won't be leaving for some time. I take it as a compliment from him that he'd like to continue working together. My last dinner was with MAJ Kevin Warner and LTC Jeff Adkins at the Coalition Café DFAC. It was steak night, so I had steak and seafood gumbo with my usual sweet ice tea. Since it was my last dinner in Iraq, I made myself an ice cream banana split sundae—bananas



and all. That night, LTC Jeff Adkins came over to my work and we walked out on the third floor balcony of the Al Faw Palace to watch the night skies. Not too busy tonight. It is a good night. Jeff helped me get over to Afghanistan while he was stationed there and now he is stationed here in Iraq. This is my last night in Iraq if all goes as planned. I try to remember it all.

Tomorrow will be a full day. I will meet BG Regua and COL Alexander at the helipad and take them around the Corps Headquarters area before departing for Kuwait.

Ross has lined up a flight for me to fly down to Kuwait with his boss, BG Martz. If all goes well, I'll get to fly down in style. From there, I will do some minor out-processing (including my final swipe out of country), hop on a plane and fly back to the states.

As I begin to bring this deployment to a close, I still cannot help to think about what we are doing here. You leave here knowing that there is unfinished business, and yet I really need to get home. I know that my life back home will take some adjusting, just as my family will need to get adjusted to having me around the house again. I am so thankful and blessed to have Maria and the kids to look forward to as I get ready to begin the journey back home. Yet as we are leaving, a new group of brave young, and not so young, service members arrive to take our places in Iraq to continue the mission here. They will need every bit of support and more that I received during my relatively short assignment out here.



One more update and I'm done.

That's it for now.

Cheers!  
Garrett