

Reintegration

August 18, 2005

Dear Family and Friends,

Many of you were the recipients of my emails from Iraq... this is my first email posting since my return and what a whirlwind it has been! It goes without saying that it is great to be back. A few days ago I moved back to Chicago. It is nice to be back home where I grew up. I am living downtown and enjoying the hustle bustle of the city. I have accepted an Attending Emergency Physician position at Advocate Christ Medical Center. I am pretty excited about it. It is a level one trauma center for adult and pediatric trauma and currently the busiest trauma center in Chicago. There is also a residency program and I will be heavily involved in teaching medical students, interns, and residents. That is a big part of the reason I sought the position.

June 30, 2005 was my last day as an active duty Army soldier. What a ride it has been since I joined the Army in 1995...from being immersed in the front lines of combat in the ghettos of Baghdad, Najaf, and Fallujah, to treating Saddam Hussein, to being promoted to Major and thankfully returning to gain a new appreciation for life. Now it is time to grow out my hair and enjoy the civilian life that soldiers work so hard to preserve. From here I will be on Inactive Ready Reserves (IRR) in the Army for two more years. After this time I will decide whether to resign my commission and receive an honorable discharge or to continue in the military. This means that it is still theoretically possible for me to get deployed again but it is much less likely. I guess it all kind of depends on the world situation. Peace on Earth!!!

As for the book I am writing, On Call in Iraq...it is currently editing. I hope to publish in the next year or two. You can find details on the progress on future postings on this website.

Yes, things have definitely turned for the better. But returning from nearly 15 months in a combat zone has its challenges as well. Some of these were anticipated and some caught us off guard. We expected to be "free" once our plane landed in the states. We hoped for an instant relief from everything after returning to a peaceful land. But instead we found ourselves "trapped" in the other things that engulf a soldier's life after a prolonged deployment. Mandatory debriefings took up the first several weeks of our time. Then it was a matter of adjusting back to normal life.

These are a few of the challenges a soldier faces after returning to the States:

1. *Every day things seem trivial.* For instance, sorting through 15 months of accumulated mail. Unlike Iraq, where survival was the only thing on our minds, here we become bogged down with errands that become a part of everyday life. Many soldiers come back to realize they are different people. It is amazing how life here remains the same despite the atrocities just a plane ride away. It is amazing how unaware some people are of it. It is amazing what people here complain about. It is amazing that these things once again become something we complain about. I guess that is a good thing.
2. *At times it seems that the United States is the "foreign land."* Shopping malls with escalators and neon lights---weird---very weird. Talking about death, killing, or artillery is not normal dinner conversation. Loud noises are not the result of a mortar round. People are not standing on the top of bridges throwing down grenades. It is a lot more relaxing driving now, but I still find myself looking up while crossing under a bridge. Although, the nice part about Baghdad was no traffic rules! Driving through lawns and bumping vehicles out of the way definitely gets you from point A to point B faster! We were told that most soldiers get in car accidents shortly after returning. My car was totaled within 3 months (thankfully not my fault). Nonetheless, I am now a statistic. Here, we also pig out on good food and take regular showers. Good bye canteens, hello faucets! We appreciate air conditioning and heat. Sleeping bags and layering clothing can only provide so much warmth. Full uniforms, a 45 pound bullet-proof vest and kevlar helmet are not fun in 140 degree temperatures either. In addition we must meet societal norms—no more barking orders!—and reintegrate into society. For some this is no joking matter. We realize that normal infantry vocabulary is not acceptable in most public places. I had to think before speaking during my job interview after hanging out with 18 year old infantry "dudes" all year!
3. *Personal and relationship changes.* Every day we savor simple moments that we once took for granted. But in the back of our minds we are saddened by those we knew closely who did not make it back. We refocus our goals in life. We experience frequent mood changes for several months, some more than others. Life moves on for our loved ones here....even without us. Some soldiers have young babies who do not even know daddy. Marriages dissolve. The divorce rate amongst military officers after returning is over 70% according to some sources! The soldier may survive but unfortunately at times relationships are killed in the turmoil of a lengthy separation. We recognize the sacrifice that others in previous wars made. It's much more than a simple sentence in a high school history book now.

I want to end my note to you all with a sincere thank you. I would not have been able to make it through this difficult period of my life without the outpouring of support from my family, friends, and even strangers who have become my friends due to this deployment. Everything - cards, emails, thoughts, prayers, photos, packaged food - made a difference in my life. I will be forever grateful for the support I received from all of you. I saved everything (well, except for the food). Looking back through every scrap of paper makes me smile that there are such caring people in the world. I would like to keep in touch with all of you. If you are ever in Chicago please let me know!

Peace! (and quiet!!),

Sudip



Pigging out!!!



My car is now making aluminum cans.