

Postcards from Iraq

“Computer girl” deploys, extends and deploys again

by Laurie Kaemming

Transatlantic Programs Center (TAC)

Last September, I deployed to Baghdad, Iraq. I was supposed to work at the Gulf Region Division headquarters in the International Zone for 45 days. Before that time was up, I extended through the holidays, returned home for a short period and now I'm back in Iraq.

I transferred to Camp Victory to work at the Gulf Region Central District office. The sites we support for GRC include offices at Al Asad, Taji, Ramadi, FOB [Forward Operating Base] Falcon and Ironhorse. FOB Falcon is also known as the 5BCT Resident Office – part of the 1st Cavalry Area Office, led by Lt. Col. Charles Klinge and John Keever. We also support several UPO – or USAID [U.S. Agency for International Development] Program Office – locations, run by Lt. Col. Patrick Caraway and Randy Hanna. Those offices include Baghdad, Kirkuk, Hilla and Basra.

I deployed because Charlie Wolford, my team leader at TAC, told me there was a need for IT support on the ground. Within a week I was on a plane on my way over.

As an IT specialist generally concentrating on wide area networking, I've now had the opportunity to work on everything from workstations and servers to all that's involved in establishing an office and assembling, installing, and recommissioning the satellite communications equipment.

I have been a DA [Department of Army] intern assigned to TAC since December 2002. While in Iraq, I actually finished the last three months of my internship, graduated from the program and am now a full-time TAC employee.

Deploying had additional benefits that I wasn't originally aware of. For instance, I had no idea that I would enjoy traveling around the country as much as I do. I've traveled in convoys, and flown in Blackhawks and Chinooks to get equipment to sites. Once there, it was my job to get it all set up and functioning properly before I could head back to Camp Victory.

Deployments to Iraq are dangerous, the hours are long, the living conditions are not always great, after a while all the food starts to taste the same, and you will never find a more rewarding job!

Doing reach back support at TAC for the folks overseas has been wonderful, but the satisfaction I experienced while deployed – getting a site's network up and running, especially when there was only limited communications available to them for months – cannot be compared to any other experience.

The folks in the field call me “Computer Girl” – a nickname that started when I was new and folks couldn't remember my name but needed my services anyway. Now that's just who I am!

When deployed, you meet and work with a wide variety of people and it's great! I could not have accomplished some of my projects in the field without the assistance of the military folks I have met on the different bases and I am thankful for that support. I would definitely make the same decision to go again; in fact, I have since I started another tour in February.



Kaemming in Iraq. (Photo provided by Kaemming)

