

Postcards from Iraq



From the edge...

By Ross Maris
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Two years in Iraq spread over three tours. That's what I'll have to look back on after I redeploy to my home district in Los Angeles for the final time. The first two tours were spent in the comparative safety of the Camp Victory area, while this past year I hop-scotched repeatedly between Fallujah, Ramadi and Al Asad in the Marine-patrolled Al Anbar Province.

"Expeditionary environment" were the words they settled on to gently warn those of us coming "downrange" for the first time not to expect all the comforts of home. True enough, that first tour there started with the first few weeks lodging in a trailer with two to four others, all of us sharing a single bathroom. The rest of the time I shared half a trailer and a bathroom with one other soul. Any inclination to complain was tempered by the stories of tent life told by co-workers who had been in the first wave of civilians to enter the country after Saddam's overthrow.

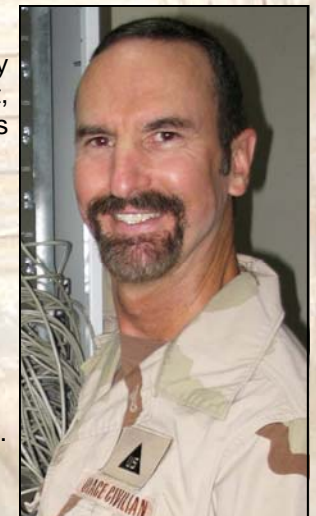
For Tours 2 and 3, I either enjoyed a private room in a dorm-like setting or occupied half a trailer by myself, sharing the bathroom with the person on the other end of the trailer. I suppose even that might be considered a hardship by some. For me, having spent the prior 10 years living on a sailboat, I reveled in the spaciousness.

Food, the other major "Quality of Life" indicator, was near-miraculous, I thought. All-you-could-eat quantities and a prodigious variety, served in clean, well-lit facilities, combined to make a dining experience that you were proud to write home about. If you absolutely had to complain about something regarding the food, you might accuse it of being generally over-cooked. It's worth noting, however, that in the entire two years I never experienced an upset stomach from the food, unless it was from eating too much at one sitting.

It's a good thing the Life Support environment was as comforting as it was. As one of the few Information Technology Specialists in GRC's perennially under-staffed IMO department, I found the workload associated with maintaining the computers and networks supporting the over 150 personnel located at about a dozen sites either "challenging" or "brutal", depending on one's perspective. There's no denying, however, that the range of duties I had was far broader than that I would have enjoyed Stateside

In summary, I would say that my experience with the Corps of Engineers in Iraq represents the most challenging period of my life. "Intense" is another word that comes readily to mind, with each day demanding my best effort. I feel that as a result I am, if not a better man, certainly a better IT Specialist.

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Ross Maris is congratulated by MG William H. McCoy Jr., former GRD Commander, for his work during an Engineer Summit.