

Postcards from Iraq

The Saddam Copter

by Eric Aubrey
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Although the Corps mission in Iraq is a long, challenging and rewarding one, it can at times push a person close to their limits. Once in awhile, it's nice to get a "breath of fresh air". Different people cope in different ways but some like to visit attractions of local interest. Iraq is full of wonderful and fascinating sights, history and artifacts. No matter where a person is stationed in this country one can always find something interesting to see. Becoming aware of these sights and locations sometimes requires more luck than knowledge. Often, they are discovered by word of mouth...talking and listening to people who have been here for awhile. For those stationed in the Baghdad Green Zone, there are numerous things of interest that many people are unaware of.

One of them is a helicopter. Sure, there are dozens of helicopters flying around here all day and night but this one is different. This particular helicopter reputedly belonged to Saddam Hussein. At first glance, it is quite obvious that it hasn't flown lately and certainly won't be flying anytime soon. It is in an obvious state of disrepair. Most likely, with all the restrictions on goods to Iraq over the past decade, obtaining the parts to make it operational was just too hard to do.

Based on its relatively pristine, three-color camouflage paint scheme with the old Iraqi flag still emblazoned on its fuselage, it certainly has the visual appearance of a former VIP helicopter, similar to what many high ranking U.S. military officials would use today. It is not hard to imagine this chopper being used to whisk Saddam and his close cohorts to various locations on a moments notice. A walk through the interior makes it unmistakably clear that this was not your typical troop or cargo helicopter. Most cargo or utility helicopters do not have a toilet in them, as this one does. There are also four very comfortable, cushioned reclining seats in the passenger section. They are positioned in an opposing manner so all parties can engage in a discussion. Again, the infantry and spare parts weren't flying on this one.

This particular model appears to be a variant of the Sea King, a helicopter with water landing capability, which this one has. It's a little hard to see a real need for that in Iraq but it appears that Saddam wanted to be prepared for any contingency.

Looking at it now, with all the rotors off, holes in the windscreen, most of the cockpit instruments damaged or missing, the flight crew's seats missing, the interior in a general state of disrepair, not to mention the condition of the engine, transmission and related components, it would be quite a project to make it flyable again. But knowing the Iraqi people with their ingenuity and ability to fix and repair items, I'm sure that one day this helicopter will take to the skies again.

For those with an interest in aircraft or just in seeing something that you will never likely see again, let alone be able to explore, you might want to consider volunteering to serve in Iraq and take the opportunity to visit it yourself. The stairs leading down from the copter beckons visitors.



Mark Moody, Lakes and River Division, poses on the steps of the helicopter for a photo opportunity. Mark is a project manager in Project Management, Gulf Region Division. — Photo by Eric Aubrey



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