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Third-graders with warm hearts, multiple languages, and lots of curiosity

By John Connor
Gulf Region South District

TALLIL, Iraq—It was rainy and cold, a thoroughly nasty day in southern Iraq. Then the package arrived.

The brightener was a care package from a third grade class at the Rutledge Hall Elementary School in Lincolnwood, Ill. It was the sort of package kids across the U.S. sent to troops in Iraq, filled with assorted stuff such as gum, oatmeal, razors, beef jerky, deodorant, and a toothbrush.

In this case, the recipient was a U.S. civilian working in Iraq as a public affairs officer for the Gulf Region South District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. And, with all due respect to the goodies, the letters from the kids were the best part of the package.

The letters reflected the openness and curiosity of youth and served as a reminder of the diversity of America.

Adnan reported it had snowed. He said it was fun to make snowballs and have a snowball fight. He also said he likes to read and do science experiments.

Subhan said he felt like he was in the North Pole when he fell in the snow. He wondered what language I speak. He said speaks Urdo and English. Elias said he is Greek and wondered, "How is it in Iraq?"

Jasmine asked if it was snowing in Iraq. In fact, it has snowed in Iraq this winter, farther to the north. "What do you celebrate?" she asked. "I celebrate Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, and the 4th of July."

Sven asked if I like my job. Yes, I do. He said he goes to the nutcracker play every year around Christmas.

Juliana inquired if I speak a language other than English. She said she speaks Spanish because she is Colombian. She was one of several children to tell me her teacher, Diane Kane, is friends with one of my daughters, Molly.

Justin said he speaks Korean as well as English. "Is being a reporter fun or boring?" he asked a one-time reporter. "Is being a reporter hard or easy?" All of the above, depending on what's going on.

Sliwa said he speaks Assyrian and English. He said he has a cousin serving in Iraq. He said his cousin is about 21 years old. "How old are you?" he asked.

Georgi said he's Greek and that Greek dancing and food like feta cheese are part of his life. He also said he plays soccer and that he's good at it.

Unnati said he speaks English and Gujarati.

Note: John Connor is a public affairs officer with the Gulf Region South district, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Iraq. For more information, call 540-665-2656 or email requests to CEGRD.PAO@tac01.usace.army.mil. For more information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, visit www.grd.usace.army.mil.