



Grass grows as mercury dips into double digits

By John Connor
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FOB ECHO, Iraq – Picture row upon row of trailers, military living quarters crammed side by side, rows divided by walkways, hundreds of trailers with a sameness that makes one “block” look much like any other.

That is the general snapshot at a trailer park here at FOB Echo, a forward operating base near Diwaniyah in Qadisiyah Province south of Baghdad. The trailers are commonly referred to as CHUs, or “containerized housing units.”

The base hosts and has hosted coalition soldiers of many nationalities, as befitting the M in MNF-I (Multinational Forces - Iraq). A Polish division currently is in charge of base operations and security. Along with the Poles are Mongolian, Latvian, Romanian, Ukrainian, and others rounding out 10 countries present at Camp Echo.

Uniformity is absent in a stretch of the CHU complex occupied by, among others, some folks from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. There, in a couple blocks, are some out-of-the-ordinary sights.

For starters, there Christmas lights, which are functional at night as well as decorative. There also are rocket canisters turned into plant holders as well as plants in other containers.

Then there is a genuine surprise, found on a small patch of earth where the ever-present golf-ball sized stones that cover the ground of military installations across



Residents decorate outside their living quarters at FOB Echo. (USACE photo by John Connor)

Iraq have been removed. The surprise is grass. This is real grass, not desert stubble or tumble weed, but real, green grass.



A miniscule patch of Sahara Desert Bermuda grass begins to thrive in Camp Echo housing in Southern Iraq as temperatures no longer rise over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. (USACE photo by John Connor)

The grass was planted by U.S. Army Maj. Richard Hall, who said that "there's something nice about seeing something that is so basic and so familiar to allow one to slip, be it ever so slightly, into a memory of a better place where things aren't as chaotic and risk-filled as FOB Echo.

"The 120 degree heat was tough on even the 'Sahara Desert Bermuda' blend that I planted," continued Hall, who is in charge of logistical operations for the base, or U.S. Logcell IC for MND-CS.

"It has taken about three months to get the small patch that is growing now," the major said. "However, now that it is cooling down into the high 90s, soon the whole patch will be filled with grass as new sprouts can be seen coming up from the bare spots."

John Hughes, an engineer with the Qadisiyah Resident Office of the Corps of Engineers, referred to the whole scene as "the neighborhood beautification program." Capt. Chris Wenner, officer in charge of the Qadisiyah office, called the floral arrangements "the hanging gardens of Babylon."

As for the patch of grass, a passerby said, "You've heard of 'A Tree Grows in Brooklyn.' Well, here we've got 'Grass Grows in Iraq.'"

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