

Postcards from Iraq

It's not easy being green

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It's not natural for a Sailor to go to the desert. Is it? I mean, when one thinks of the Navy, one probably thinks of big ships and the ocean. So why send a Naval Officer to Iraq? There are no piers at Camp Ramadi, HUMVEEs don't have a forecastle, and I haven't seen one anchor anywhere in this whole country. Oh yeah, maybe it is due to the fact that I am a civil engineer. That skill set is needed here and for six months I served with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Yes, for half a year I was Army green.

And let me tell you, it is not easy being green. First there is the language barrier. These Army dudes say latrine instead of head, left instead of port, right instead of starboard, and floor instead of deck. I mean where does the Army come up with this crazy terminology? If I were to say "aft," people might have thought I spoke with a lisp while referring to my backside. And don't even get me started on the whole HOOAH thing. I mean what's up with that? I was told it means everything except "no." So let me get this straight ... if I were to make a dictionary of Army terms, it would have a grand total of two entries – "HOOAH" and "no?" I guess that sounds about right.

The next obstacle I had to over-come was the overall Army culture itself. Is there any reason to get up so early to run around? I had an Army officer ask me once if I wanted to join him for some morning physical training. "Why sure," I responded. "What time do you want to meet?" My Army compatriot answered back, "we'll meet at 0600." Yeah right, I don't think so. Shipmate, I only see one six o'clock per day and it ain't the early one.

And what's with the whole gun thing? I mean, if I wanted to tote around a weapon all day, everyday, I would have joined ... well ... the Army. My weapon of choice is the sliderule. Okay, that may be an exaggeration. I'm not that old. In fact I don't think I could pick out a sliderule from an engineering tool line-up. But I digress.

Yes, my tour was filled with trials and tribulations. I had to withstand the onslaught of hazing for only completing a six month deployment vice 12 to 15 months. I was constantly called "Major." My boss relentlessly peppered me with demands to submit a Blue to Green package, whereby I would transfer from the Navy to the Army ... permanently. Sir, with all do respect (why do we need to say that when the next comment is more than likely borderline disrespectful?) I am happy to help out for a bit, but I don't think I am cut-out for Army life. See the previous three paragraphs for reference.

So back to Newport, RI, it is for me, just a stones through from the water. I wish you all Fair Winds and Following Seas.

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LCDR Andrew Sullivan leads a tour of Ramadi projects for BG Jeffrey Dorko, Commanding General, Gulf Region Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

