

Home Sweet Baghdad

February 8, 2004

Family, Friends,

Wow! I cannot even begin to put in one email what I have experienced here in Baghdad since I arrived on the 1st of February.

Anyways....the convoy went decently well....as well as can be expected. Flat tire on one vehicle from an explosive device. Gunfire in the distance.... who knows what they were aiming at. Some Iraqis shoot in the air for celebration so it's hard to distinguish. One of our medics shot an Iraqi man on a rooftop who was aiming a weapon at an Army vehicle while the tire was being changed. Luckily no major injuries....Probably the most heartbreaking thing was the little 3 year old children in the villages waving to us on the way and begging for food. We were ordered not to give anything because then the kids run in front of the military vehicles and injure themselves. Really hard to say no and tell them to go away...

However, on the way, many camels, sheep and desert miles later... we passed through the quaint villages with villagers in traditional attire....holding a can of Pringles potato chips and Swimsuit Issue of Sports illustrated.....truly the Americans had arrived.....kind of humorous.

Then I arrived to BIAP (another happy army acronym for Baghdad international Airport). We then convoyed to the main camp/area we would be staying in. There is absolutely nothing there. No phones, internet, etc... It is a brand new prior unoccupied area. The one good thing is the rooms are trailers with heat (which is an upgrade from the tents we were in prior that I sent a picture of)....or is it an upgrade???? It poured the first night and my room completely flooded! My clothes stayed completely dry the whole trip up from the States and got soaked in my room in Baghdad! Go figure. Wore around wet stuff all day. Kuwait was freezing. Baghdad is wet. Pick your pain!

Then came the idea that they want me to stay off the main base area in case of an attack there. In that case I would be the treating doctor. So I have been pretty mobile. Almost everyone else stayed on the main base. I moved out of my trailer and have been in different areas. I have been treating patients in the most random places. I saw a patient with a fracture that I treated in the butcher shop of Odai's (Saddam Hussein's dead son) palace. Once used to chop chickens and now used to manipulate human bones! I'm sure he would be proud. He has a nice swimming pool where he had all his parties but unfortunately no swimming for me :)

Now I am located just off the Tigris River. Myself and a select few were supposed to stay near the Iraqi Intelligence building (like their C.I.A.). There is a nice building that was once the General's home. Would be a nice place to stay but slight problem...the Americans blew a big hole in it with a missile when the war first began! So I stayed in a room in some building with no electricity, heat, open windows without glass, human excrement on the walls, and rats running around. Glad I did this higher education for the finer things in life! Talk about dollar motels.....this was like the ten cent room!!!!

So now I write from a different area. Nice to have internet for the first time. Our area gets hit with mortar round around 8-9 times a day but they don't seem to hit anything since they are aiming from across the Tigris River. But I do get to go on the joyous missions when we attempt to catch the bozos doing this. I basically sit about 1000 meters back waiting for casualties. It is pretty neat to see the home raids though. Sometimes I have to go into the homes with them....M16 machine gun in hand! Absolutely insane! Never pictured myself doing this....Talk about uninvited guests!!!

Today I went to the orphanage and tuberculosis clinic and the university hospital. One of the things our unit is attempting to do is to help these facilities pick up on their own feet again. This involves traveling the streets to get to these areas. The streets remind me very much of India or Mexico City. Similar feel. Similar overcrowdedness. Similar ambience....except for the fact that there are military helicopters constantly flying overhead and people running around in camouflage with weapons. Sometimes I feel like a sitting duck on the streets. But then again I think I could die in my backyard from a rattlesnake bite or at a busy intersection in the States. How's that for rationalization? I pray I am not at the wrong place at the wrong time....wherever that may be.

Shortly I will begin shifts at the Combat Support Hospital. They are staffed by a different unit but they overlooked the fact that they are short of emergency room doctors and have mostly family practice doctors. This is the sole trauma center in Baghdad and is located in the heart of downtown. They want me to pull a couple of shifts there a week in addition to the other excitement.

As you can see, the butcher shop and these broken down buildings are not the opportune place for internet access. The homes we raid may have internet but I'm pretty sure I'm not invited to use it:) Please do not get worried if you do not hear from me for a while here and there. I will be out of contact for certain periods of time but will do my best to keep in touch. I do know that I do receive mail....about 3 weeks for letters and 8 weeks for packages. It will go to the main base and from there they will track me down wherever I may be:

Captain Sudip Bose
HHC 1-5 Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division
Operation Iraqi Freedom
APOAE 09379

People have been receiving mail at this address. All mail needs U.S. postage rate on it (This is an U.S. address)from there it gets shipped to me. I think the packages are xrayed before I receive them. I have plenty of food (and shipment takes a while so food may not last) but I could always use soap, toilet paper, old magazines, newspaper clippings etc... (I have no access to the news as of now) I don't care....send me a wad of chewed gum in an envelope and I'll be happy :) You are in my thoughts!