

Another "normal" day

May 25, 2004

Dear Family and Friends,

Once again greetings from Baghdad! Just wanted to send you all another update to let you all know I am still doing okay. Hope things are well for you all too.

I ponder what to write this time. Reminds me of when I would come home from school back in the day and my parents would ask.... "How was your day? What happened in school today?" I would always answer "nothing much." No matter what happened to me the day seemed uneventful from my perspective. Just the same old routine. "Another normal day." I guess here too I have fallen into the "same old routine." My life is so different from that just 5 months ago, yet things seem to be becoming more "normal." Things that I would never have imagined myself doing are becoming "normal."

- Blackhawk helicopter whizzing overhead.... "normal."
- Tanks driving by constantly.... "normal."
- Explosions.... "normal."
- Providing medical support for daily and nightly missions.... "normal"
- Buzz of army acronyms over our radios.... "normal"
- Saw a porcupine trying to enter my building (lizards, scorpions, rats and other unwanted guests not welcome in this home).... "normal."
- Another packaged lunch.... "normal"
- Cross under a bridge while taking a quick glance overhead that there is no one throwing grenades from the top.... "normal."
- Another window shattered.... "normal."
- Put on my Kevlar helmet and my 40 lb bullet proof flack vest and protective eyewear to venture out on a convoy.... "normal." I cannot imagine going anywhere without this gear on me. I wonder if I would recognize myself in my old clothes and longer hair anymore!

- Sweat.... "normal." It is getting extremely warm out here. July/August reaches 125 degrees in the shade from what I am told! Temperatures as high as 150's last summer! That's okay though since it's a "dry" heat!!!

Getting into the groove of things and realizing the luxuries of home which I missed so much earlier are becoming less and less of a craving. Life out here is becoming "normal."

As June 30th approaches (the date for "turnover" of Iraq) my schedule seems to remain the same. Unfortunately this upcoming date does not mean a plane trip home anytime soon. I hope this deployment will be one year total (end in January 2005??!!), however I am expecting anything since recent units have been extended. Who knows, maybe one day I will become a permanent Baghdad citizen! (No thanks). From a personal standpoint, my job will be the exact same on June 29th as it will be on July 1st. So will most of ours. If anything, it may become busier for us as more uprisings are anticipated.

From a medical standpoint, things have been steady. My patients encompass a broad spectrum mostly consisting of U.S. troops in Baghdad. With my physician assistant on mid-tour leave, I am pretty much the only front-line provider on this north side of the city. At the Combat Support Hospital I see most of the trauma cases in Baghdad as well as occasional trauma patients from Najaf, Fallujah, and other nearby towns (Army, Marines, etc). I regularly care for Iraqi prisoners of war (treated nobly may I add....sorry to disappoint but won't see pictures of me with abused prisoners on TVJ), Iraqi civilians, U.S. contractors, and occasional V.I.P. patients...maybe one day I will be allowed to reveal who. Just as thought provoking is taking care of detainees as they glare, spit, and curse at us. Many have routine complaints. However, daily trauma care too is becoming "normal."

The other day I saw a patient with a shoulder injury. "How did you injure your shoulder?" I asked. This soldier fell asleep on his cot in an awkward position. His left arm fell asleep. In the middle of the night his left arm lay across his chest, heavy without sensation. In a state of grogginess he awakens to feel "a heavy arm" lying across his chest. Frantically he reaches for his knife to stab the arm which he mistakens to be someone else's limb. Perhaps the enemy's arm reaching for his weapon? Luckily there is no knife in proximity. He pulls his left arm violently with his right arm and nearly dislocates his own left shoulder! Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications. Tylenol. Rest, ice. Call me in the morning. "Normal" combat stress.

Another soldier comes to me and hands me his M16 weapon. "You must take this from me doctor, or else I am afraid I will do something I will regret." His wife had recently informed him she was going to leave him for another man. Many marriages and relationships suffer the rigors of a 15 month deployment. Unfortunately another "normal" patient.

I pronounced Sergeant XXX dead at 0130 in the morning on the concrete. His intestines protruding from his abdomen he lie lifeless after an attack from a rocket propelled grenade to his vehicle. My trembling medic informs me "I was supposed to be in that vehicle!" His mission had been recently changed due to unforeseen circumstances. This was fortunate for the medic or he may have met the same fate. He could barely hold his composure. It is not usually the soldier with the bullet holes that suffers from the combat stress. It is his friend or acquaintance who nearly missed becoming a casualty. A "normal" reaction.

I guess overall not very fun out here... but unlike several others I have seen I still have my arms, legs, and vision. No new holes in me. Hopefully, it will stay this way. Fortunately this is temporary and will end. I cannot complain. One day I will look back at these "normal" days as an abnormal memory.

Take care, thank you for hearing my stories and for your support! As always you are in my thoughts!

Sudip

Deployment Motto: "It could be worse"