

21 June 2009
Iraq

To all the students, teachers, and staff of Landmark School:

Thank you! Last week, I returned to my desk and found a wall of packages stacked on the end of it. Inside them was found a great deal of munchies and fun stuff. The first thing we did was inflate the alien and post him on watch. The beach balls followed.

The munchies went very quickly and were much appreciated by the tactical operations center watchstanders. It's hard to track and direct missions against the bad guys when you're low on goodies. A 100-calorie pack of sponge cake, two handfuls of mixed nuts, and 37 cups of coffee puts that pep back in your step. We decorated the desk of a coworker with all the gummies as a joke, but now he's stashed them and refuses to share any. I took some of the beach balls to a staff meeting and we threw them around.

I read every letter that I found in the boxes... all the ones grouped by class and 14 others found throughout the various boxes. I, and everyone I serve with, appreciate your support. I wish I had the time to write every one of you individually, but there were 111 letters by my count!

Many of you asked similar questions:

What's it like to ride in a helicopter?

A lot of fun. Sometimes like a roller coaster. I always travel at night and I have night vision goggles, so it's really neat to see the farmland in a spooky, glittery green as we fly over it. It's too loud to talk, though, and I usually don't have a headset that patches in to the helicopter's system, so I spend most the time thinking about the mission I'm heading out for, day dreaming, and napping. Never turn down a nap when you get the chance.

What vehicles do I ride in?

Inside the base, we use regular pickup trucks... little Mitsubishis and Nissans. Outside the base I've been in Strykers and these big monsters called MRAPs ("em-rap"). Between bases, I've flown in the UH-60 Blackhawk, CH-47 Chinook, and C-23 Sherpa. I've also flown in the C-5 Galaxy and the C-17 Globemaster to get around the world. Haven't got to ride in a tank... yet.

What kind of gun do I use?

I carry an M16A2 rifle and an M9 pistol. No grenades. My basic gear is: rifle, pistol, ammunition, armor, helmet, and night vision; it weighs 85 pounds and I wear it all whenever I leave the base. When I'm kitted up, I weigh 315 pounds just wearing my basic gear!

Some of things I've seen over here are foxes, shrews, hedgehogs, palm trees, and dust. Lots and lots of dust. You hear that there's sand over here, but it's nothing like the sand in a playground or at the beach. It's like moon dust--even finer than talcum powder. We don't get rainstorms like you've been having; we get sandstorms. Big clouds of dust roll in and you can't even see 25 feet away. It's like the fog of a haunted house, but yellow colored and made of dust. The other day there was a storm that covered almost all of Iraq! There's lightning, too, but not a lot.

You all asked about what I miss. Well, some things are:

Rainstorms. I miss the sound of the wind and rain on the roof.


My family and friends. Who wouldn't miss them when they're on the other side of the world? Well, okay, sometimes I think that's where my little sister belongs, too. ☺

Riding my motorcycle. Even (or especially!) in the rain.

Lazy Saturday mornings. We work twelve hours every day of the week. There are no weekends over here for us. Sometimes we can sneak a little time off, but mostly it's just work. That's why we loved the beach balls and other silly things so much.

I look forward to coming home, but I will be over here for quite a while yet.

Again, thank you so much for the care packages. We greatly appreciate them.



Eric Laursen,
Chief Petty Officer
United States Navy