

Dear Lizzie and your friends at BLR,

I would like to thank you for your incredibly generous care package you sent me. Of course I shared this package with the soldiers in my company and by the end of the day the entire package was gone! Again, thank you for all that you sent to us.

I don't know how much my mother has told you but I'm an executive officer for a mechanized infantry rifle company in Tal Afar, Iraq, about halfway between the city of Mosul and the Syrian border. Tal Afar is about the size and population of Akron, Ohio and has both Sunni and Shia Muslims as well as some other religions and ethnic groups. My company lives in the city itself, in what would be considered a mansion by Iraqi standards. We operate out of a compound that we share with the Iraqi army. There is a base approximately 10 miles south of the city with an airstrip and logistics support for us. Everyday we get one hot meal brought out to us by our supply sergeant as well as Gatorade, sodas, ice, and bulk dry food such as cereal, bagels, muffins and so on. Overall, the foods pretty good but after 6 months it's the same old same old.

We patrol around the clock, 24/7. We use both dismounted foot patrols in order to talk with and engage the local population as well as mounted vehicle patrols to cover more ground and clear routes. Many of the patrols we conduct are joint with the Iraqi police in order to train them and make them better. The Iraqi army is pretty good, they've got the benefit of organization and experience but the police are still coming along.

Things overall are quite well. The temperature started off at a reasonable level when we got here in January (it even flurried a couple of times) but it steadily went up and by late May it was in the 100s. Now we're getting into the 110's and even 120's every 10 days or so. We're lucky compared to down south where it's even hotter. Fortunately it's a dry heat with very little humidity and though I didn't think that would make a difference, it sure does. The heat is spectacular, you walk outside and into the sun and feel like you're in a blast furnace but at least it's not humid. The dust is something else though, it gets everywhere and it's incredibly fine. Even inside if you put a sheet of paper on a table and leave it there for a week it'll be noticeably dusty and after a month it'll be brown from all the dust.

And that's about it, can't think of much else. Really appreciate your support and thoughts and of course, your package which the soldiers really are thankful for. Thanks again.

Soren N. Gutierrez
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Executive Officer