

The View From Over There

The Web site AnySoldier.com has published letters, photos and requests for supplies from more than 3,800 servicemen and women in hot zones around the world since its launch in 2004. The following excerpts from recent submissions are a rare glimpse of day-to-day life on active duty. They have been edited for spelling.

WEB EXCLUSIVE

By Susanna Schrobsdorff

Newsweek

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Dec. 14, 2005 - **Cpl. Daniel G., Iraq, October 2005**

We have been conducting missions 24 hours a day. It is a lot to maintain the birds [planes] and such when you never have that one day to catch up, and we always have to have them mission capable, and have succeeded in it. We did not have water for almost the whole month of October due to insurgents using IEDs [improvised explosive devices] on the main. But it has been fixed, and the situation is controlled. So we can shower now. Some good things in some packages were Red Bull, it would be awesome to get some more of that, it is good go juice. Other than that all is well in this part of the world, it will get a little rough around the holidays, keeping everybody's head in the game. I am sure nice packages will help lift their spirits some. I am mainly concerned with the younger, newer guys, who are on their first deployment. Some things that come to mind are of course beef jerky, still, lol. Winter is coming, and we were blessed to get a microwave, so things like Chunky Soup, Chef Boyardee, Dinty Moore stew things.

Airman 1/C Katrina S., Afghanistan, October 2005

We are in plywood huts with our own room. They are small and odors spread fast. Any kind of 'smelly good' things would be awesome. We do have regular outlets. Body sprays for the females and SOMETHING for the guys. I'm about ready to duck tape [laundry] fabric sheets to them :) We have a laundry service available to us which helps a lot. Chow hall food isn't that great. Most of us eat MREs [meals ready to eat] which gets old pretty quick. We do have a microwave though. Any kind of snack food would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time and caring.

Spc. Karrie M., Iraq, October 2005

I spent time on a patrol outside the wire yesterday, and meet a very nice family that made Chai Tea for me and some Iraqi bread. It was so nice to meet the faces that I am here to protect and give the same freedom I have to. The youngest little girl was about 2-and-a-half years old, kinda chunky and with only a onesie on, unsnapped, as it was way too small for her, and she was barefooted. Then there was a 5-year-old little barefooted beautiful big brown-eyed little girl with jeans on that she had to keep pulling, as she was

tall and skinny and the pants where huge ... I could feel the welcome hospitality from these females and they looked so sad when I told them I had to go, they welcomed me to come back at any time and asked for me to bring a picture when I returned. I am grateful to have been a part of Operation Iraq Freedom, and it is the days like yesterday that remind me why we have come to such an awful place.

Cpl. Justo O., Iraq, November 2005

I want to thank everybody that has sent us thermals, gloves, hats, food, movies and all those wonderful letters that warmed our heart when our day got cold ... October 2005: A lot of our Marines have children. Most of them were just newborns when we left. Sad reality is that they are not going to remember their daddies when we get back. And nothing breaks a Marine's heart like getting rejected by his own child that does not remember him or her. We want to make small videos where our Marines can talk to their children or read them stories, and their babies can watch them back home ... If anybody has any kind of video camera or tapes we would very much appreciate them.

S/Sgt. Brian K., November 2005

When the siren sounds on camp, run as fast as you can to take cover cause we have something coming that's going to make a big boom ... incoming artillery, RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades], mortars rockets, etc. You never know when it's going to be your time--[you need] something to relieve stress and take your mind off things--magazines, games, being able to call home, no ATM machines so no phone cards etc. ...

Gunnery Sgt. Ryan P., Afghanistan, Dec. 2005

I cannot describe the feeling I have knowing that you and your community back there still think about us now and then. Our days are long & busy and sometimes we forget we'll actually get home one day. The items you provide keeps us going especially the music, the under armor underwear and DVDs, again thank you. The weather here has gone from extremely hot to very cold. Each week it gets colder and colder. Our mission has given us a much greater appreciation for what we have there in the States. We will never forget how we helped the Afghan people & gave hope to those who needed it.

Pfc. Daniel B., Iraq, November 2005

At this point we are stationed outside a small town in western Iraq where the living conditions are a little rough but getting better. There is what we call "moondust" everywhere, it is a talcum[-]powder[-]consistency sand that gets everywhere ... Food would be helpful although all we have to cook with is a coffee pot but it works. Extra long nylon bootlaces are desperately needed here because of the number we break. Combat socks for tall soldiers is a need here since half of us are over 6'2" tall. We are moving into winter and under armor cold gear and ba[la]clavas would be a great help. Tactical gloves for big hands would be appreciated too. As for wants DVDs, CDs, PlayStation or Xbox games would be most used for entertainment. As for me, I am 19 and enlisted in the Army while I was still in high school. I am happily married and my wife is having a tough time with this. It is a great feeling to know that people at home support us and may not agree with why or when but that they are still behind us as soldiers. On behalf of myself and my soldiers I thank you for your support and want you to know that what we do over

here could not be done without loved ones at home and people who care. Thank you again.

Capt. Gregory S., Iraq, November 2005

Basically looking [for] some additional contact with the outside world.

Spc. Ryan D., Iraq, November 2005

We could use a very loud police siren to clear the road when we are coming through Baghdad. I see them on other vehicles but we can't seem to get our hands on one. Otherwise I can't think of anything else. Mach 3 razor and electric shavers for when we can't get to a sink or even waste the water to shave and maybe just a really big box of candy. Ahhh ... room [for one] more thing, and tool kit of some sort. I found a toolbox but I haven't found a place to buy tools for it. We have to fix our own trucks a lot and tools would really help when we are on the road and only have a pliers and screwdriver. Just like sockets and wrenches, things like that. OK that's really it now. Thank you very much and we all look forward to seeing American soil as soon as possible

Chief Petty Officer Todd V., Kuwait, May 2005

While traveling from camp to camp we were overtaken by a sand storm. During the storm, you could hear sand blasting against the vehicle with such force that you could feel the sand removing the paint. This lasted for sometime until we changed direction and drove out of the storm. The best description of being in a sand storm that I have heard is this: "It is like being in a sauna with a million[-]volt hair dryer blowing sand on you. You stop thinking about the stinging sand particles when you realize you cannot breathe." Not all sand storms are as bad as [the one] described but they do come EVERYDAY!

Andrew B. (no rank listed), Afghanistan, September 2005

Below is a letter from Miguel our K9 security contractor. He describes his relations with the kids at the gate in Tarin Kowt. While I appreciate everything the AnySoldier.com supporters have done for us (the response has been staggering, really), we now have pretty much everything we could want. These kids don't have everything they need, though.

From Miguel: Hello everyone, I am sending this letter to as many of you as I possibly can to explain what I am doing and am involved with here in Afghanistan. In the last month or so I have adopted some 12-16 kids that gather every day at the front gate of our base. They come to beg for the garbage that our soldiers leave behind ... Every day I take our leftover breakfast (still edible) and feed the children. In feeding them, I have taught them some English words. They have to wash their hands and face every morning with baby wipes that we provide for them. At first I would wash everyone's hands and faces, even feet, now I just hand them the wipes, mention the word "face, hands" and they repeat the words with me and clean themselves. The older ones (8-10 years old) help out and clean the little ones (1-2). I have used the words "the little ones" so often that now they are "the little ones" even to the locals ... I would like to see if you are interested in adopting one of these children and while I am still here you can take a part in reaching out to the hearts of these children. I know that we will not win the hearts of

the adult population for so many reasons, but I feel that America still has a chance in the future generations of this country starting with this small "little ones" generation.

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