



(U) Tour of a Lifetime in Baghdad

FROM: [REDACTED]
(former) Exec, NCR Iraq
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(U) A search for adventure pays off...

(U//FOUO) Last winter I volunteered to deploy to NCR Iraq, in doing so I joined the ranks of a unique group of people - the men and women, military and civilian, who have volunteered to deploy in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom I wasn't the "typical" deployer - no prior military service, or experience as an analyst or a linguist. I certainly knew little about comms maintenance or IT support. But what I did have was years of field experience and a background as a "jack of all trades." Most importantly, I had a sense of adventure and a keen desire to make a difference.

(U//FOUO) Deploying to Iraq was a quick process for me. Exactly two weeks after I was offered the position as executive assistant to the NCR (NSA/CSS Representative) in Baghdad, I was on the first leg of my journey and catching my breath, relaxing from the incredible pace of the previous days (weapons training, immunizations, shopping, packing) doing all the things required when preparing to leave HQ (and the country) for several months.

(U//FOUO) Little did I know as I settled back into the dubious comfort of a seat on the hop from BWI to Boston that I would one day consider that seat the epitome of comfort! That was before I experienced flights into and out of Iraq in the cargo hold area of a C-130 or when I was given the option of wearing my armor or sitting on it while perched on a canvas sling seat less than 12 inches wide in a crowded flight with temperatures soaring over 130 degrees. Ignorance is bliss!

(U//FOUO) I also didn't know that I was flying towards the best and most rewarding job of my career! Every post-deployment person I spoke with prior to departure emphasized that I was on my way to a life-altering experience - for the better. My six months in Baghdad were by far the best of my 28-year NSA career. Every day brought new experiences (and challenges). While the hours were long (7 days a week, 14+ hours a day), and there were the occasional rockets and mortars, the mission was both absorbing and significant; the support from throughout the Agency was phenomenal. Enduring relationships were built with fellow deployers - the teaming amongst us all was the best I have ever experienced.

[REDACTED]
(U) [REDACTED] perched on her favorite Sadaam chair
and showing off her beretta

[REDACTED]
(U) August 2005

(U) Going into this deployment I'd been promised: "three squares a day" (and what wonderful "squares" they were - eaten in a palace ballroom!), "trailer life," a walk to work (no parking issues!), interesting people to work with, always something new to get into work-wise, a palace office (didn't mention it was actually in a converted hallway...) and the opportunity to make the job mine. All these promises were kept. In a long Agency career, I have had a number of interesting and quite a few wonderful jobs; these promises came true in a way that made my six months in Iraq a personal career pinnacle. Probably the best accolade I can give is that I would deploy again if possible!

(U) I am working on a series of "Letters from Baghdad" which when complete (hopefully before Christmas) will be posted on the [NCR Iraq](#) homepage. Please visit the homepage to check out the 200+ pictures posted in the "Picture Album." (A couple are posted above.) Consider volunteering to deploy - make this your experience of a lifetime!

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