



This is a bunch of guys that went through the training with me. Good group of guys. Hung out with them solid for three weeks. It was kind of like going back to college for a while. Not a whole lot to do. Living away from home, not much responsibility, so like college, we drank. Started early and went late. Much longer in training and I would have needed a liver transplant.

These to Guys are the ones I hung out with most during training. Guy on the right (in the picture on the right), named Russell (but we called him Diesel because he is a diesel mechanic) was a good guy. He is an X Pro-Arena Football player. Big into football. For a big guy he sure can dance. One night we went to a little bar near our hotel and went dancing. He is probably 260 – 270 but when he danced he looked 150. Good dancer for a big guy.

David Tellas, the Guy on the left was one of the guys I first met and the guy I did everything with. For being only 25 he was very mature and articulate. I think the reason I hung out with him the most was because he had a good sense of humor. Going through this training was mostly standing in line and sitting in classes. They had to dumb the classes down to the stupidest guy in the class so it seemed very elementary and mundane. David and I kept each other laughing.



The class I started with in Houston was about 500 people (they start a new class every week of about 500) by the end of the training we were down to about 300 – 350 because

people would drop out for various reasons. Some did not pass the drug test or failed the physical for some reason. Others could not get passports to leave the country. Apparently if you owe more than \$5,000 in back taxes or in over due child support they will not give you a passport. I was amazed at the number of dead beat dads there were. Others had some undisclosed criminal record that disqualified them. Throughout the training they would show videos of road side bombs and describe mortar attacks. People would decide that maybe they could not handle the environment and quit. Once they had all the people qualified and had completed the training they would purchase the airline tickets from various commercial airlines and you would be scheduled for a flight to Iraq. I guess it was especially difficult to get out class out because of the Holidays and the airlines being so busy with people flying home and such.

The picture above (left) is of some of the people I flew with. This picture was taken at the London airport on Christmas Eve. We flew straight from Houston leaving around 8:00 pm on the 23<sup>rd</sup> to London arriving the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup>. Everyone was very tired because most people could not sleep the night before we left for obvious reasons and it is hard to get much sleep on an airplane. So the picture above is of people trying to sleep while waiting for our next flight to Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates (a little country just south of Egypt).

This picture (above right) is of me at the airport in Dubai. Passed through customs with out a hitch, which is more than I can say for some people in our group. There was this one guy that got detained for trying to sneak pornography in. They tell you in our training classes over and over again not to bring in any pornography or alcohol. Pornography is illegal in most Muslim countries and you will usually get arrested if you are in possession of it. Well this guy apparently had 20 DVDs of it. Dumb ass. They just put them in a DVD player and played them. Held the whole group up for an hour until a representative from Halliburton smoothed the way for him. Another guy was detained for having a poker set. Just a case with poker chips and playing cards. They never said anything about poker chips. But gambling is also illegal in most Muslim countries. You can beat your wife and even kill her, if in your eyes deserves it, but don't play poker. They tell us in our class that we may see a man beating his wife in public but we are not to do or say anything about it. It's "their" custom. The women in our class go through extra training. They are told not to look men in the eye and to avoid talking to them unless it is necessary. Well most of the women in this class are not the submissive type, quite the contrary. I'm sure half of them could kick my ass and would love doing it. The second class citizen stuff did not go over well with them, but we did not have any problems that I am aware of. They also tell the men that if we see a woman dressed in the traditional Muslim dress that we should not talk to them or go near them. If we were getting on an elevator and there is a woman in the traditional dress on the elevator we should wait for the next elevator. Personally, I think it's because the Muslim men know that their woman would prefer an All American guy like me and they just want to keep them separated from us. Jealous bastards!



This is what it looked like out my hotel window in a town just outside Dubai. We got in at about 5:00 in the morning on Christmas day and left at 4:00 in the morning the next day. We stopped in Dubai for 1 day to do a little more training and to wait for another flight into Baghdad. In the short time I was there I went shopping on the streets of Baghdad. I would liken the shopping there as being very similar to the streets of a border town in Mexico. Can't speak the language and they have similar booths set up on the street hawking everything under the sun. That night, Christmas night, a bunch of us went to Hard Rock Café, Dubai. It seemed weird to 1) have a restaurant open on Christmas and 2) to be going out to a bar. But it is a Muslim country so Christmas means nothing to them. We had a great time at the bar. Believe it or not they actually made it look like they had 4 inches of snow on the ground inside the bar. They had these Styrofoam balls, millions and millions of them, and they just covered the floor. I would hate to have to be the person to have to clean them up.

So the next morning we get up and go to the airport and board this Russian Airliner for our flight to Baghdad. It's pretty interesting because the plane looked pretty old and only one person on the crew can speak any English and still that was not very good. During the flight over a panel comes falling down on some guys head. You know the panel right above where you sit, the panel that has the oxygen masks and lights in it just above your head. Well this panel comes down on this poor guys head and a pilot comes back and tapes it back up using duck tape. Pretty funny.

So we get into Baghdad and we are immediately aware that "we aren't in Kansas anymore". Soldiers everywhere with machine guns. The air port looks virtually abandoned. It's pretty run down. Lots of old airplanes. When we came in for a landing we spiraled in pretty fast. You can't do a traditional landing anywhere in Iraq. Because people are shooting at you with guns, rockets and RPGs (rocket propelled grenades). So to avoid flying low over hostile areas you get over the top of the air port and spiral in. Quite a ride. Its was pretty disorganized inside. We had to go though "customs" which I thought was pretty stupid. I mean we own the country right now but we have to let some local Iraqis go through our bags to again look for pornography and alcohol. We were told that sometimes they try and take things from you. They will tell say you can't take in a DVD player or something and they will tell you you have to leave it with them. Our

handlers told us we did not have to give them anything and if they do to speak up and they would come over and deal with it. Fortunately we did not have any problems with customs. I think they have figured out who there employers are (US, at least for now).

Before we left from Dubai they told us not to take any pictures on the planes or at the Baghdad airport otherwise I would have some pictures. Security reasons. So unfortunately I do not have any pictures of this part of my journey. It was also interesting to note that at this point at the Baghdad airport I was likely within 1 mile of Saddam Hussein. Rumor has it they are keeping him at the Airport somewhere.

So they put us on a bus and drive us around the airport to another gate and yet another security check point where they again x-rayed and searched our luggage. I was joking that my bags were going to get cancer from being x-rayed some many time in the last 3 days.

So after we go through the security there is this guy/skycap that takes your luggage about 200 feet over to the ticket counter. Then the guy sits there with his hand out wanting money. He wants \$1 per bag. Well I had three bags and gave him 2 dollars. He stood there awhile trying to get me to give him more until I told him to leave. We were told that we pay day laborer at the military bases in Iraq (the local Iraqis) \$6 per day for labor and that is really good money for them so I figured this guy, even if he only got \$1 per person (I know it was more) he made over \$50 in about 30 minutes because there was over 50 of us. This guy is probably makes more money than a Doctor in Iraq. He was doing o.k.

So they take us once again on another bus out to the middle of a large airplane parking area to our next plane from Baghdad up to Mosul. As we drive out there are three planes parked there. One is a very large military looking cargo jet, the other is what looks like the Russian 737 we just flew in on and the last one is this 1960's looking era twin prop plane that looks like it has 10 coats of paint and has had more than a few hard landings. Guess which one is our plane. Yep. I had to tell myself that if it has been around this long it must be a good plane right? I hoped that was the case. So we get on the plane and once again, Russian. Only this time, no one speaks English. My thinking on the whole Russian airline thing is that because of "liability" reasons no American airline would probably take the job. I mean what am I going to do if the plane crashes because of lousy maintenance or some thing, sue a Russian airline. What do you think my odds of success are with that? So because of "liability" and the fear of it my personal "liability" is higher. I have to fly on a less than ideal airline with who knows as a pilot. Thank you US lawyers! We do need Tort Reform in the US; it costs jobs in America and puts people at risk. Enough of my soap box for now.

So the flight to Mosul is pretty uneventful. I was a clear day and we were only about 10,000 feet so we got a pretty good view of the country. Just like I suspected, pretty much dirt. Not much vegetation at all. Once we got close to Mosul we started to see trees and grass and such but south of here, dirt. I wondered what do these people eat. No wonder they needed the "oil for food" program. More on that later.

So we land at the Mosul airport. Same type of landing only this time it seemed much steeper and faster. You could tell that the airport /base was located within the city of Mosul. It was hard to tell where the base began and where the city started. As we came in I could see rows of trucks heading down a highway in a convoy. Everywhere you go outside the base they have convoys. No one vehicle (except heavily armored vehicles) travels alone unless you have a death wish.

So we land and get off the plane and they unload our luggage. They gather us up and proceed to tell us that they get mortared and shoot at all the time so they have us put on our PPE (personal protection equipment) which constitutes a bullet proof vest and a bullet proof helmet. They gave us all this equipment before we left from Houston. We had to drag this stuff with us everywhere. It's heavy. The vest weighs about 35 pounds and the helmet must be 6 – 8 pounds. It's like carrying a heavy back pack. I am bound to drop a few pounds while I am here luggage that stuff around. It does make me realize what it would be like on my feet and knees to be 40 pounds heavier. It's amazing the difference in effort it takes to do anything with that extra weight on you.



So they load us in a truck and drive us over to an administration building to fill out paper work. I have filled out more paper work doing this than in the last 10 years of life combined. Forms for everything. Unbelievable. So we get there and it's pretty disorganized. Small little room with everyone standing around and they want you to fill out a bunch of paper work but there is no place to sit down and write. So everyone is writing up against the wall but some guys can't even get a spot on the wall. The form has a lot of acronyms and terms that we don't know what it means. Like "Place of Origin" I ask what does this mean and this girl replies like I'm stupid "Your Home Address". So I say "how about just putting home address on the form" like she is stupid. I don't think she likes me. So after a bunch more BS they finally introduce me to my new co-workers and new boss. (I am not going to go into that yet but let's just say I have had warmer welcomes).

After my orientation, if you could call it that, I was taken over to my new digs. They call your room a "hooch". So I go to my hooch to get settled in. It's not too bad, but it is not all that good either.



They are set like a construction trailer. You walk in the door and the bathroom with just a shower and a toilet is in the middle. There is a room on either side with a sink in each room. Like I said it's not bad but it could be better. I actually have it pretty lucky. Most people are two to a room. I had a room mate the first night but he left and went to another base and I have not had a room mate since. I have been keeping quite about that because I would prefer my privacy at night. Besides, I think that they some how messed up and think I have a roommate. Because I know some people are 3 to a room. Lucky me!