

A few journal entries back I requested that people send me any hats that you might have extra so that I could give them out to some local Iraqis and some of the Turkish workers working here. Well a couple people really came through for me. Alan at Traverse City State Bank and Bill at the Park Place Hotel. Thank you both very much. I became popular on the base with the Iraqis for a while. I would hand out 3 or 4 at a time and I guess the word got out and whenever I would walk somewhere the Iraqis would see me and all come running over to me to try and get a hat. I was kind of the pied piper of hats. One time it was a bunch of Iraqis cutting down brush along side the road. Well they all had these sickles in there hands (if you don't know what a sickle is it is a long curved blade about 1 ½ feet long used for cutting weeds and brush). Needless to say I was a bit nervous standing there surrounded by 10 -12 Iraqis all-carrying sickles. I knew what they wanted because they where all gesturing like they where adjusting a ball cap on their head. Nonetheless, in this part of the world, at this time, it's not a good idea to be an American surrounded by Iraqis with long knives. It all worked out fine, but my instincts told me to leave as soon as possible, so I did not get any pictures of these guys. However, the ones not carrying knives I did get pictures of. Below are some of the pictures. Again, thank you Alan and Bill. (I blurred their faces to protect their identity.)





This picture above is of a local Iraqi working on the base that speaks good English. He has been working here for 1 ½ years and stays right on the base 6 days a week. I see this guy all the time and he is always working hard and always smiling. He leaves the base one day a week to go visit his wife and kids. He showed me a picture of his kids. You can tell from the way this guy talked about his family that he is a good father and husband. Keep in mind that this guy risks his life one day every week by leaving this base to go visit his family and he has been doing it for 1 ½ years. Of all the Iraqis I have met, this guy is the most impressive. I can tell you for certain, there are very few people in the world with more courage and character than this guy. I sometimes wonder if I would have the strength of character that this guy and guys like him have in similar situations. It's about all I can take to be here for four months and I have it 100 times better than this guy does and I don't leave the base once a week. Ask yourself that question. Do you think you have the strength of character that this guy has? I hope I do but I also hope I never have to find out.



The two guys pictured above are Turkish workers. The guy on the left is wearing a hat from Fire Engineering. This hat has a small American flag on one side. I offered it to several Iraqis and they indicated that they would get their throats cut if they had that hat, so I gave it to a Turk. The guy on the left is the foreman at the Burn Pit. He hears me

talk about Michigan all the time so I thought a hat that said Michigan would be good for him. He was very appreciative.



I think I have put this picture in a previous journal (Taken back in January). I put it in again and I am sorry to say, the guy third from the left was shot in the head and killed about 5 days ago. His name is Ishmael and he was a Turkish heavy equipment operator. He was riding in a convoy over to another base and was shot by a sniper. He was about a friendly a guy you would ever meet. He left behind a wife and two kids, a girl about 12 and a boy about 19. One of the many casualties of the war that go unmentioned and unnamed in the popular press. He is the first guy killed (Hopefully the last) that I can say I knew.

The guy forth from the left was the guy that was shot in the leg about a month ago. The guy forth from the right was the guy that was hit by shrapnel from a grenade about three months ago. The Turks have taken some heavy losses here lately.

As my final days here are winding down, I find myself taking a lot more notice of the people, the Iraqis, the Soldiers, and the surrounding area. To say that I will miss this place is not quite accurate. I will miss some of the people, some of the people I will not miss. I have seen a broad spectrum of humanity and have seen the best that humanity has to offer and I have seen the results of the worst.

I have a deeper respect for the men and women in uniform and the hardships they have to endure to be over here and to do what they do. Most of these guys go outside the wall everyday knowing full well that they may not make it back. I am nervous just looking

over the wall. The hardest part is being away from home, friends, family and loved ones. The soldiers are here for typically a year. Four months and its all I can stand. I see these guys come in from being outside the wall on patrol, for sometimes a full 24 hours, and they look like it. I will see a group of these guys walking to their camp and I swear it reminds me of the movies. Something like out of the “Band of Brothers”. Soldiers in full battle gear all dirty and hyped up talking excitedly about the events and action they encountered on their patrol. You can sense the bond between them all. They all wait for each other and walk together. I will miss being witness to those moments.



Ever wonder what a Ford F-350 would look like all armored up and ready for battle? Now you know. This is what one of the local security forces is using. They have dozens of these.

5 days and counting.