

# Postcards from Afghanistan

## My Time Here

My time at the AED has been a challenging and unique assignment. It's something I wanted to face head-on, and I'm sure glad I did.

My arrival at the Unit Deployment Center (UDC) in Virginia was bumpy and very exciting. It was a great experience. At the UDC, they went over every step of what I needed to know and do, in my opinion, in a very professional manner. I give them props!

However, my arrival in Afghanistan was something completely unexpected. After landing at the Kabul airport on April 4th 2009, I got off the plane, grabbed my bags, and in a rush, followed my guide to the parking lot. There he pointed at all the safety gear laying on the ground and required me to put it on. After zipping up the fire proof jumpsuit, snapping up the protective vest and clipping on the helmet, I proceeded to load onto the bus. I did all this as the force pro guy shouted out the instructions required for the trip ahead. (Did I just join the army?) This was quite unnerving. (Wow, I'm in a combat zone!)

I sat down and buckled in, and in a flash we raced off blindly to our destination. (The bus had windows that were coated with a milky white film so you couldn't see through them.) It was a short but wild ride that nearly gave me motion sickness. We began weaving, maneuvering and speeding through Kabul traffic in order to "safely" get us to our final destination at the Qalaa House, the Corps Headquarters in Kabul. Upon arriving, I dropped my safety gear, grabbed my bags, and was herded to a place where they issued me my own personal safety stuff, i.e. IBA (flak jacket and helmet) etc. Again someone was giving me instructions of what to expect during the next few days. (OMG! this is boot camp...) As they walked me to the Patriot House (transient quarters), I realized I had to carry all my heavy things down the stairs to the basement. By this time I was extremely hot and tired. "Where's the elevators?" I exclaimed (oops! did I say that out loud?) I heard laughter from down

the hall. Somebody thought it was funny. That same somebody later became a good friend and we still laugh about that comment to this very day.

The first three days here in Afghanistan gave me the weirdest greeting. The first day I was welcomed with hail. (I'm from Hawaii!) It completely covered the ground. The second day, walking to breakfast, it snowed. I also never saw snow falling from the sky in my lifetime. (Did I mention that I'm from Hawaii?) Finally on my third day, while I was in a newcomer's briefing, the Qalaa House district room began to shake, rattle and roll for at least 4-5 seconds. No one really knew what it was until 2 hours later when one of our speakers said it was an earthquake. WOW!

I've got to say, one of the best parts of being here is what I accomplished personally. First I wanted to ride a camel, and on Independence Day I got to do just that during our festivities here at Qalaa. Even though the camel stunk something awful, it was the best 2 minute \$5 ride money could buy. Secondly, I wanted to fly in a helicopter and on July 8th 2009, I did. OMG! It was a blast! I took a lot of memorable photos. We took off and landed safely a total of 8 times on my trip and I loved every minute of it. To my amazement I didn't get sick at all. I really got to see some of the country side you wouldn't normally see.

You have got to admit, things are definitely different here in Afghanistan. I sure did learn a lot while here. I wouldn't trade this tour for anything. I'm really glad that I have been able to experience all of these firsts for me, but I'm now ready to go home.

Look out Hawaii, here I come!

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