

Dear Christmas for Out Troops,

22-Dec-09

I would like to say a big 'Thank You' for the holiday cards and box of goodies that you sent to me. Here's a little bit about my experience while being away from my husband and children who live in Spokane Valley, WA.

My chain of command came to me on 1Apr09 (April Fool's Day no less) and asked me if I wanted to deploy, even though I would be deploying out of my window of opportunity (Jan09 – Apr09). I said "yes" without any hesitation. Then they said it would be for 179 days to Afghanistan, I still said "yes". And then they said that I would be working with the Army for this go round, to my reply was still "yes". I asked when I would leave, their reply was 3May09, that's when my heart jumped into my chest. But I swallowed and realized that they wouldn't have come to me if I wasn't apparently needed somewhere.

So on 3 May09 I left behind the 'normal' life I had known, and went off on my adventure into Afghanistan, but not without some hurdles first. Prior to even going into country I had 3 different trainings to attend, all over the U.S. before even going. I attended a classified computer course at Keesler Air Force Base (AFB), MS for one week. After that I was sent to Ft. Jackson S.C (right by Columbia) for another week to train on how different the Army's rules, regulations, instructions, and chain of command differ from the Air Forces'. Then I went to Ft. Dix, N.J for 5 weeks at a Combat Skills Training (CST). While there I learned how to react while riding in a humvee, should it roll over on land or water, throw fake grenades, hand-to-hand combat, a 4-day medical course in which I am certified for up 1 year in which I can give an IV to someone in trouble.

I graduated the course on 18Jun09, since I hadn't seen my parents in about a little over a year, the drove from Hubbard with my sisters, and my extended family drove from Virginia to see me. It seems like everyone got involved and my mother-in-law told my husband to come see me and she'd watch the children in his absence. So my husband flew from Spokane, WA to visit me too. It was a nice semi-family reunion before I left to go to Afghanistan.

I left Ft. Dix by bus on a 9 hour ride (it should have been 7, but the bus driver got us lost and we used the GPS on someone's phone) to Norfolk Naval Air Station (NAS), which was my port of departure. After waiting for about 3-4 hours I finally boarded the plane. After the first 9 hours we ended up in Leipzig, Germany to refuel and clean the plane. We were back on the road for another 7 hours which took me to my staging base, Manas Air Base (AB), Kyrgyzstan. Since I was nervous, I didn't sleep on the bus ride, nor any of the flights, or any of the time in between, so I was up for approximately 33 hours without sleep. Once I in-processed at Manas, I went to a tent that could hold about 200 women, and slept what seemed like forever.

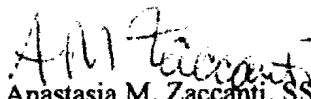
Before you know it (less than 48 hours after arriving) it was time to leave and onto my final destination. While out-processing myself and 2 others, we were told our end destination had changed, we were no longer going to Kandahar in southern Afghanistan, but rather we were headed to Bagram in Afghanistan, which is on a normal route, about an hour drive from Kabul, Afghanistan's capital.

I arrived to Bagram on 29-Jun-09, but to me it was day 179 and counting down backwards, until I reached day 1.

Since arriving here at Bagram, I have worked the in-bound passenger terminal for 2 weeks, then moved to the military Identification Card and Passport Section. I make contractors, DoD Civilians, Foreign Nationals, and all branches of the military their ID Cards. It's not a glamorous job, but somebody has to do it because if you want to work on a government computer, you have to use your ID card to log in.

Today was a good day. I should get to leave here in 8 more days. I'll get to start my out-processing next week. I can't believe that I finally get to go home, me, who started this journey mentally on 1Apr09, and physically on 3May09. I will finally get home sometime in January 2010.

Your Friend,


Anastasia M. Zaccanti, SSgt, USAF
(Stacie Pipic)
