

SELECT UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX DEGREE PROGRAM

- [Criminal Justice](#)
- [MBA](#)
- [Business](#) (NEW)
- [Information Technology](#)
- [Health Care](#)
- [Management](#)

Wednesday, June 07, 2006 Partly cloudy 86°
5 Day Forecast

The Kalona News

[Top Stories](#) | [Community News](#) | [Feature](#) | [Sports](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Kalona Past & Present](#) | [Letter to the Editor](#)

Home on leave from Iraq

By: Mary Marek
06/07/2006

[Email to a friend](#) [Post a Comment](#) [Printer-friendly](#)

Many of you

Advertisement

will

remember

last fall when

I wrote about

my brother-in-

law, Wayne,

who had

been

deployed to

Iraq. Since

he left last November, a lot of people have been praying for his safe

return, and so far, it seems to be working. Wayne was home on leave

last week and I had a chance to make him a few deviled eggs -

something he really likes and which are impossible to ship to Iraq. Oh,

I'm sure I could get them there, but I'm equally sure no one would want

to eat them once they'd arrived.

Wayne and his wife Amy stopped by our house for supper while he was

home and I had the opportunity to visit with him about his experiences in

Iraq. For security reasons, he couldn't give me details about the missions

he and his men carry out, or even tell me exactly where he's stationed,

but I did come away with a better idea of what it's like for him and our

other men and women who are serving over there.

Find Your Graduating Class





I graduated in:

classmates.com

1996 ▲
1986
 1976
 1966
 1956 ▼

Verizon Online High-speed Internet

The best value in broadband

Now as low as
\$14.95/month
for up to 768K

Get your first month FREE

[LEARN MORE](#) ▶

Wayne said that when he first arrived late last fall, he and his men were living in tents with plywood floors. Bathroom facilities consisted of porta-potties - not very pleasant in the high heat of the desert.

Eventually, though, trailers were constructed, each large enough for three small rooms. Shower and bathroom facilities are in other buildings. All living facilities are air-conditioned, which is a good thing since normal summer temps are way above 100 degrees.

Meals are provided four times a day - breakfast, lunch, dinner and a midnight "snack." The late night meal is necessary because there are soldiers on duty 24 hours a day. Wayne said you can tell which day of the week it is by what they're serving for meals. Each week is the same - one night is seafood, one night is Italian, one night is Chinese, etc., etc. Cooking in their rooms is frowned upon. Wayne said there are a few microwave ovens but no one has hot plates in their rooms. The base does not have fire-fighting equipment, so they try to avoid anything that might be a fire hazard.

There are no restaurants so the soldiers either eat what the government supplies, or go hungry. Recently, though, a coffee shop, The Green Bean, opened. In addition to coffee, it sells cold drinks, such as smoothies and slurpies, so it has become quite popular. Alcohol is not allowed in the country.

Most soldiers at Wayne's base work 12-hour shifts, which stretch to 14 hours by the time they prepare themselves and their equipment to go to work, and clean the equipment when they return. As I said earlier, Wayne couldn't give me details about what he and his men do all day, but he did tell me that one of their jobs is to escort convoys. This is a particularly dangerous mission, due to the landmines and roadside bombs the insurgents like to use.

The missions can become especially tricky if the convoys are using one of the roads that run between two canals (used for irrigation in the arid climate). These roads are narrow with no shoulders and steep drop-offs on both sides, leaving no "wiggle room" in case of a hostile confrontation. Most of Wayne's work, though, keeps him in an office on the base, a fact his family is grateful for.

During what little down time they have, our soldiers have a variety of recreational opportunities. There is an exercise room, as well as areas with televisions and movies. Wayne said most soldiers have their own computers and many have hand-held computer games.

Also, they recently installed a sand volleyball court, which was not as easy as it might seem. Although Iraq is a desert country, the area in which Wayne is stationed doesn't have sand. The soil is mostly red clay, so to find enough sand for the volleyball court, they had to dig about five feet down.

When it comes to communicating with friends and family back home, the soldiers have a few options. Phones are available, but can be expensive, and the lines to use them are often quite long. Individuals are limited to about 20 minutes per phone session. To use one of the phones, a soldier must use a credit or debit card. Calling cards may be used, but if you're planning to send one to someone in Iraq, be aware that a card worth 200 minutes here, might be worth only 20 minutes (or less) in Iraq. International calls are much more expensive than domestic calls.

Cell phones are permitted, but service is poor and, again, is quite expensive, with charges up to 33¢ or more a minute. Email is another option, but, just like with the phones, soldiers have to wait in line to use the public email servers, and personal email accounts are costly.

When it comes to shopping on the base, choices are limited. The government supplies our soldiers with free bottled water and toilet paper. Everything else - toothpaste, shampoo, soap, deodorant - they must buy from the base "store."

Wayne said he has had little personal contact with the civilian Iraqi people. Some, he said, are glad we're there, and others are not. Wayne noted that, since the insurgents ("bad guys") don't wear uniforms, it's often very hard to know which civilians are friendly and which are dangerous. Even members of the Iraqi military and police might be insurgents who have infiltrated. It's hard to know whom to trust.

While Wayne told us about his time in Iraq, his wife Amy sat quietly nearby, listening to her husband talk, interjecting a comment now and then. These past months have been hard on Amy. The constant worry

about his safety, as well as having to assume all responsibilities at home, isn't easy for her or any of the spouses of our military personnel. Another factor that makes things difficult is the different time zones in which the couple lives. Iraq is nine hours ahead of Iowa; eight hours ahead of Ohio, where Amy lives. If Wayne tries to call Amy before he goes to work at, for example, 8 a.m., that's midnight in Ohio. If he tries to call at 8 p.m., it's noon in Ohio and Amy is at work. When Amy gets off work at 5 p.m., that's 9 a.m. in Iraq and Wayne is working.

When Wayne stepped outside to take a call on his cell phone, Amy told us that she thought he had changed while in Iraq. She noted that she, also, had changed. She's been forced to become more independent in his absence.

By the time you read this, Wayne will be on his way back to Iraq. When he comes home for good - hopefully, late this fall - he and Amy will undoubtedly have a period of readjustment, as I'm sure many military couples do after one of them has served in a war zone for several months.

But they'll be OK. They'll get back into a routine and things will slowly return to normal.

In the meantime, keep them in your prayers.

For anyone wondering what to send to someone serving in Iraq, Wayne and Amy had a few suggestions. Since the soldiers have to do their own laundry, laundry detergent is always needed. Rechargable batteries can always be used, as well as the personal hygiene items I mentioned above. Other popular items are air and fabric fresheners such as Febreze, Swiffers and bug spray.

That said, remember that aerosol cans cannot be sent through the mail, so look for either creams, lotions or pump spray bottles.

If you want to show your support for the troops, but don't know how, there are many websites that can help; www.anysoldier.com is one that can tell you where to send stuff and what is needed most.

©Kalona News 2006

 [Email to a friend](#)  [Post a Comment](#)  [Printer-friendly](#)  [Top](#)

*Send us your community news, events, letters to the editor and other suggestions.
Now, you can submit birth, wedding and engagement announcements online too!*