

Letters from the desert

Though the war in Iraq has officially come to an end, the work is far from over. America's service men and women continue to help rebuild damaged infrastructure and get the country back on its feet. Dan Job, building superintendent at Basin Electric Headquarters in Bismarck, is a part of the recovery effort. His National Guard unit, the 142nd Engineer Battalion out of Fargo, ND, was activated in January. After training in Fort Carson, CO, the battalion shipped to Iraq.

The 142nd conducts general engineering tasks and constructs, repairs and maintains main supply routes, landing strips, buildings, structures and utilities. Job, a senior enlisted member, handles personnel issues, including training, policies, and health and welfare issues.

Job and his wife, Claudette, have two children and a son-in-law who also serve in the North Dakota National Guard: Derrick Job, and Stephanie and Joshua Entzel. They have not been called to active duty.

Job and his coworkers have kept in touch during his absence. Coworkers send Basin Electric "care packages" to keep him abreast of Cooperative news. Job writes letters, updating coworkers on conditions and missions in Iraq. Following are excerpts from some of his letters:

June 2, 2003

Hi, everybody. Well, have a few minutes so will drop a few lines. All is going OK here. Had a few days last week that were overcast and actually heard thunder and some lightning but only a few sprinkles. Temperatures are still warm in the range of 108-110 daily, nights around 70-75 - usually makes for poor sleeping. ...

We still all live in tents and make the best of it. (We) get a hot meal for breakfast

and supper, but very little variation. Fresh fruits are limited and never any lettuce or greens. We have volleyball or card game tournaments at night. ... E-mails are sluggish at best. Telephone calls are also hit and miss. We are supposed to get 9 satellite telephones for the battalion at \$1,800 apiece, along with 24 hours use for 6 months, so hopefully that gets better.

We are still working everyday and things are becoming somewhat more routine. Mail takes about 10-14 days from the States, so not too bad of a turnaround. ...

You all take care back there and hopefully see you all soon.

Dan

June 10, 2003

Hi, everyone. Just (letting) you know I am doing OK. Days are getting warmer - very little, if any, cloud cover and moisture. The last couple of days have been at 116-118 degrees. It is a dry heat (with) no humidity to speak of. But regardless, hot is hot. We work early mornings and late afternoons or early evenings.

Our soldiers here are still supporting "Operation Good Neighbor." Also have soldiers setting forms, pouring concrete for electrical generators, pushing up berms for force protection, tower guard duty and wiring buildings. The 957 Float Bridge Company out of Bismarck also now falls under us. This will make for 813 soldiers under us. I had that company prior to September 2002 for 3 years so now I know a lot of the soldiers. (It) will be a good challenge.

... We also have soldiers here whose parents work at DGC (Dakota Gasification Company) or BEPC etc. so we have gotten to know each other. ...

You all take care. Keep up the good support and hopefully this will all come to an end someday soon.

Dan

Command Sergeant Major Dan Job addresses members of the 957th Multi-Role Bridge Company in front of "The Sandy Six Cafe," the unit's cafeteria named in honor of the unit's six cooks.

July 12, 2003

Today is July 12th, the 170th day of activation, but who is counting. Weather is still warm along with no cloud cover. This never changes. Had a good 4th of July. We made our own barbeque grills and grilled steaks, hamburgers and brats for every soldier along with all the trimmings - an excellent meal. The temperature got to 131 degrees that day - had a few heat problems with soldiers but nothing serious. ... We have also been receiving mortar attacks here at our base camp. Last two nights were quiet.

... Mail has improved greatly with letters and packages taking around 2 weeks to get. ... We do have a few satellite phones per company but (they) cost the soldier roughly \$1.25 per minute. Our communications group has set up an Internet cafe, which is slow but it does work.

Soldiers are busy filling sandbags by the 1,000s to harden our living/sleeping areas to reduce future attack damage. A dining facility has opened here so food selection and quality has improved. ... The majority of soldiers are still actively building bunkers, berming ammunition buildings and perimeter, all utilities work, hauling missions and patrol missions on a couple of the big rivers here. Everything is going OK. Soldiers still have positive attitude but asking about that magic date.

Special thanks to Valeree King for keeping me informed with updates, etc. from B.E. [Basin Electric]. Also have had soldiers of employees at B.E. or DGC ask for some of this same info. You all take care. I am in good shape. See you soon.

Dan

