

Reflections of the Convoy Home

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Bags packed, gear loaded, trucks PMCSed, and my Soldiers were ready to go! The day was Friday, February 13, 2004, and my platoon was ready to begin the journey home. But we had one last convoy to make and I was the convoy commander.

This was my first major convoy and I was a bit nervous. It was a challenging yet exciting time to stand in front of nearly 55 soldiers and brief their last convoy briefing. They listened intently as I told them about the current route conditions and hazards we may have faced. Some had questions about how risky it looked, but most just wanted to get on the road and get our job done. I could see and feel the excitement as we climbed in our trucks and waved good-bye.

In a way, we were somewhat saddened to say goodbye to a place we called "home" for so many months. But it didn't take long for that moment to pass and feelings of joy to take over. We were finally headed home!

The first half of the convoy went by without error and by the end of the day we had made it to our first stop at Camp Cedar. It was a relief to be off the road, but we knew after a good night's rest we would be on the road again for our final convoy through Iraqi territory.

The next morning, we knew that if all went well, we'd be across the border and into Kuwait in less than 8 hours. And after the many hours of staring into the endless Iraqi deserts, we finally saw the sign that read Kuwait. I can't begin to describe the feeling I had at that moment. It was a relief to know I had safely led my convoy through miles of enemy territory and had just completed the most dangerous portion of our journey home.

One of the first things my Soldiers did was make their way to the food court area to have a little pizza and Subway, food we just hadn't had for a long time. One of the first stops I made was directly to Baskin-Robbins. I think that was the best ice cream I have ever had; or maybe it was just because I hadn't had true ice cream in about 8 months!

Unfortunately, we couldn't relax for too long as there were many preparations to complete in order to get our equipment ready for its shipment home. My soldiers worked hard in the heat every day in order to clean, organize and rid our equipment of the sand that had somehow found its way into almost every nook-and-cranny. Their hard work paid off, as we easily passed the Military Police inspections.

Our next major operation was the infamous wash rack. This was my first experience with a wash rack operation. It didn't take long for me to realize how tedious and tiring washing vehicles can be. But I got to see first hand, just how hard working my soldiers really are. They spent countless hours in the cold, soaked from head to toe, and yet, when asked how they were doing, I could still get most of them to smile. For most of the Soldiers it was a break and a better lifestyle to be living in Camp Doha. They loved to go to the PX and the food court to eat the fast food we hadn't had for so long. But, all good things must come to an end. After three days

of endless scrubbing, scraping and washing we had finally washed all our trucks and were ready to load onto the ship to go home to Germany.

Back at Camp Victory we waited impatiently for the Battalion to make the final arrangements for our flights home. We all passed time in our own ways. Some of us watched endless hours of DVD's, some read and a few of us played cards. When I talked to some of the troops, they couldn't stop talking about the first things they wanted to do once they were back in Germany. Some could talk about giving their kids and spouses big hugs and others couldn't wait to get their hands on a cold, German beer. Most of us, however, just wanted to be back in an area where we could go home at night and have our own room and time for solitude.

Finally, after what seemed like forever, the infamous day arrived. We loaded buses and headed to Camp Wolverine for our final night in Kuwait. The next day we loaded the planes and not long after we fell asleep. As soon as we could see German land all eyes were peeled to the windows. It was such an awesome sight to see green all around us! And to make our welcome home even better, the weatherman decided to give us snow.

After all the initial check-ins we loaded the buses for our ride back to Darmstadt where a welcome home ceremony awaited us. That first drive through the CFK gate was one of the most exhilarating and emotional times of my life. Even though I didn't have family to see me home, just seeing the Soldiers' families on the ground greeting us with waving flags and tears of joy was enough to really put into perspective how much our jobs and lives are appreciated. Arriving "home" is one of the greatest memories we will ever have!