

Messages from Babylon is a diary of life in a combat zone, and provides an insider's story of Colonel Whitehead's experiences with the Marines and the twenty eight nation Multinational Division that replaced the Marines at Camp Babylon.

Messages from Babylon

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/2600.html?s=pdf>

# **Messages from Babylon**

Copyright © 2006 Michael Whitehead

ISBN-10 1-60145-024-9

ISBN-13 978-1-60145-024-1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Excerpts of the writings of Craig Trebilcock and Larry West are used with permission.

Printed in the United States of America.

Booklocker.com, Inc.  
2006

# **Messages from Babylon**

**Michael Whitehead**

## CHAPTER 1 – Introduction

On September 22, 2002 I was called into my Commanding General's office and told to report to the 358<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Brigade in Norristown, Pennsylvania, beginning in October. I knew that the 358<sup>th</sup> CAB was on the list of civil affairs units designated for an unspecified "contingency" in the Middle East, and the unit needed more people to bring it up to full strength. I also knew, on that morning in Pensacola, sitting in General Davidson's office, that because of the order I had just received, if our country went to war with Iraq, I would be going too.

I never imagined that at forty nine years of age I would have to leave my family, my home and my job and go to a war in the Middle East. I had been in the Active Army for six years, and then had entered the Army Reserve on leaving active service. Although I had trained for a war for twenty seven years of my adult life, I had never been in combat. Previously, in 1996, I was mobilized for the Bosnia operation and had spent seven months as a civil affairs staff officer in Belgium. A potential combat tour in Iraq, if it came to pass, would be on a different order of magnitude.

Although I had joined the Army as an Infantry officer, in 1991 I transferred to the Civil Affairs Branch. Civil Affairs units and soldiers are trained to deal with the civilian problems and issues that arise on the battlefield. The wartime mission of the 358<sup>th</sup> CAB was to provide civil affairs support to the First Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF). The Marines had a key role to play

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

in the Iraqi invasion plan. The Marine Corps did not have the kind of civil affairs units that existed in the Army, so they requested and received the 358<sup>th</sup> CAB. And me.

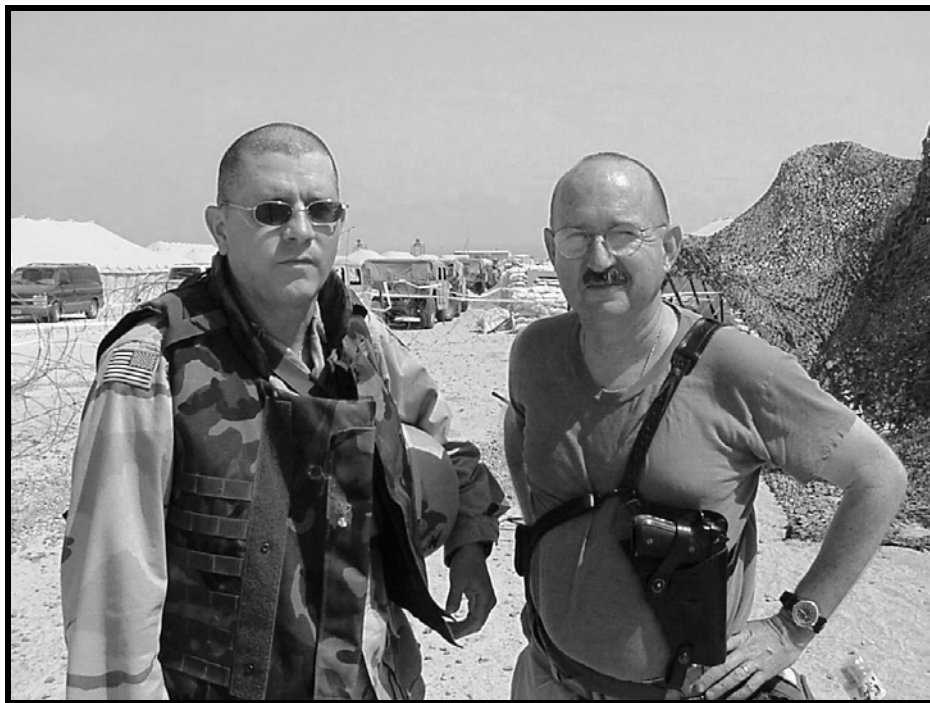
Four other Colonels, my friends, would be sent like me from Pensacola to Norristown to be mobilized and go to war with the 358<sup>th</sup> CAB. The other Colonels were Dale Foster, Larry West, Jerry Gaskin, and Bill Faulkner. I had known all the officers for years - in some cases for many years. If I had to go to war, at least I would be going with friends. Ultimately, Dale Foster and I would leave our civilian jobs and go to Norristown in November 2002 to work on getting the unit ready to go to war. We would remain in Norristown, except for visits home on Thanksgiving and Christmas, until our unit was mobilized on February 15, 2003. Larry West was mobilized in December 2002 and was sent to Kuwait in January 2003 in order to begin advanced planning with the Marines. Jerry Gaskin and Bill Falkner joined Dale and I in February when the unit was mobilized. I saw my wife Gale and my three children Lindsey, Sara and Jamie for the last time on February 8, 2003. I would not see them again until December 22, 2003.

After the mobilization of the Brigade, we traveled to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina to conduct pre-combat training. On March 21, 2003, two days after the war started, we were flown to Kuwait. After picking up our vehicles in Camp Arifjan, near the border with Saudi Arabia, we convoyed to Camp Commando in northern Kuwait. Camp Commando was the rear headquarters of the I MEF. Larry West and the rest of the planning team was there waiting for us. Larry gave me a big hug when we arrived.

Almost all the Marines had left Camp Commando when the ground war started. We had come too late for the invasion. Still, there was a lot of work to do. We set up our own headquarters and established a Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Center in order to assist the many international and non-governmental organizations in Kuwait City trying to get into Iraq to assist the Iraqi people. During that time, we got an Internet connection and I began sending e mails home. I decided

*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

to use the e mails as a diary of my experience, and I sent these messages to my family and to a small list of friends. What follows are my messages from Babylon.



At Camp Commando Kuwait, showing off my new haircut with Colonel Larry West (r)

## CHAPTER 2 – Camp Commando

From: Michael Whitehead  
Sent: Monday, April 7, 2003 4:57 pm  
Subject: Haircut day

I am watching SGT Manning out the tent window as he cuts COL Foster's hair. He is sitting in a chair outside under the shade of a camouflage net. The sky has clouded up and the wind has increased so things have cooled down considerably. Earlier, we felt like we were in a sauna. SGT Manning gave me a crew cut and I have a picture of me to record the event. How your hair looks doesn't seem very important out here. I have tried several times to attach a photo to my e-mails w/o success. I will keep trying.

I am in a tent full of people and we are all working on computers. We have to tape Saran Wrap over the keyboard and monitor to keep out the Major League caliber dust that is EVERYWHERE. I just heard someone ask, "What is going on in the war?" We hear things in bits and pieces as they happen.

I am getting a lot more information. Now I can read the classified Situation Reports that are coming from the major Marine and British units in action. These reports don't have the drama of a breathless reporter on TV. They are full of dry technical information about "kill boxes", boundary changes and a lot of other very technical jargon that comes with controlling the violence and making sure the bad guys are getting shot by all



*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

this technological violence and not the good guys. The complexity and level of sophistication in the management of combat is incredible.

Iraq is still a very dangerous place, so they are keeping us here at Camp Commando until "Indian country" is a little subdued. We are coordinating relief convoys of humanitarian aid into Iraq. Some of our people are going "north of the berm" as they call it to do assessments of the civilian populace. We are getting reports of these assessments from tactical civil affairs teams attached to the combat units. The information is flowing to us and we are analyzing this information, submitting reports and preparing briefing slides for the Marine General down the hill.

We live in North Camp and the flagpole is down this sloping hill at South Camp. The mess hall is at the top of the hill so that in the evening after supper when we come out of the mess hall we can see the Persian Gulf and Kuwait City in the distance.

For the first time in my life I am carrying a weapon and ammunition with me all the time. I sleep with it under my pillow, not because I am afraid of being attacked but because I am afraid of losing it. In fact, I go everywhere with my weapon and protective mask. I was thinking yesterday that when I get home from this thing I would be feeling for my weapon and mask for a long time.

We are also busy planning for what will happen when the conventional war ends. A lot of US Government agencies are showing up with big checkbooks, anxious to get into Iraq. They will be relying on us for advice on where to spend it.

I get up every morning and walk to the shower trailer in my flip-flops, army t-shirt, p[hysical] t[training] shorts, toilet kit, towel and protective mask. We go to the bathroom in port-a-potties.

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

The Kuwaiti translators with us say that this part of the country is Snake and Scorpion central during hot weather. There was discussion in the tent last night about stepping in those portalets in the dark. The consensus was that we needed to add a flashlight to our equipment when going on late night potty runs. [LTC] Ed Fulmer said that his worst nightmare was getting bit in the butt by a snake. The Kuwaitis say that the wooden floors in our tents are ideal hiding places for snakes and spiders. CPT Bare last night discovered a scorpion crawling on his leg while he was sitting in a chair.

As the ranking officer in my tent, I put out strict orders that there would be no discharging of firearms at reptiles, **ESPECIALLY** inside the tent. Everyone is carrying rifles, pistols and a full combat load of ammunition so this was said only half-jokingly. Some of these boys have no common sense.

We are having interesting problems integrating the different cultures of the Army, Marines and Brits. Following [my wife] Gale's daily instructions in her class, we are all trying to "play nice" together and get the job done. There is still some tension, unfortunately, but it is under the surface and does not affect the mission.

I get up every morning and look forward to my job. When we go forward across the berm we will be a part of an historic enterprise. I am expecting a lot of confusion, chaos and long hours. We all look forward to getting the job done and going home.

Mike

From: Michael Whitehead  
Sent: Wednesday, April 9, 2003 12:51 pm  
Subject: Here I am again

*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

I am forwarding my Army AKO mail to this address because it is easier for me to use. Continue to send to my old address because I will still get it.

The temp yesterday was 109 degrees. VERY hot. This morning I was sweating by 0730. The Marines set up a trailer w/ washers and dryers next to my tent. Everything is ready except the machines need adapters for the plugs. The best part of the trailer is it is air-conditioned. I went in there yesterday at mid-day to cool down and found three Marines hanging out there to stay cool. I might move my office there.

There are a lot of female Marines on this post. They stand out because they are so tiny in comparison to the other Marines. Maybe [my daughter] Sara or [my niece] Kelly Shea could check out the local Marine recruiter for the possibilities. They might get a chance to travel and see some interesting places.

Bright news - The Commanding General may relax the Force Protection requirements today. Rumor has it we will be able to put away our helmets and body armor unless we travel off post. Wearing that stuff in this heat is tough. No more reports of Scorpions. No reports of snakes. I might start taking a flashlight to the latrine at night. Dust is EVERYWHERE. Very hard on diskettes and floppy drives.

The ice cream is good and available in unlimited quantities. Bottled water is available by the truckload, but it is hot. We drink it anyway. I told Foster that when I was in Honduras we had the bottled water in big refrigerators. He said that they are buying freezers for the water. The turnover will be so quick that they don't think the water will freeze.

We watched Last of the Mohicans on the computer last night in our tent. A lot is happening with us in the War but I really can't

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

talk about it. We are still here at Commando.

MJW

From: Michael Whitehead  
Sent: Saturday, April 12, 2003 3:30 pm  
Subject: Details of the trip to Iraq

On Wed, April 9, the Brits requested assistance on civil government in Safwan and Basra. I was tasked to do the mission. Twelve people were identified to go - four to do the meeting and the rest for security. The area had been identified as permissive (especially Um Qasr). We traveled north on April 10 to meet with the Brits just south of the Iraq-Kuwait border, near Safwan. The road up is bustling with trucks heading north. We stopped in a desolate, dusty truck park and waited for the Brits to meet us. Three hours and multiple phone calls later, we found out that the Brit officer who was to coordinate the meeting got violently sick on the way to the meeting. We were instructed to go to Um Qasr to spend the night.

Some civil affairs people had been working there at the port with the Brits for some time. We had a good dinner at the Brit mess hall and even a better breakfast (Real bacon - not the namby pampy turkey bacon everyone eats in the US), beans, a fried egg and tea (with milk already in it). There was quite a large contingent of British there. Everyone was staying in the abandoned port buildings. They offered us a room with a floor to sleep on, but some of us elected to sleep outside because it was cooler. I put my sleeping mat on the hood of my Hummer, put my poncho liner over me and went to sleep - not as nice as a mattress, but I managed. I shaved the next morning using the mirror of my Hummer. Just like camping out!

I went to some meetings and did some coordination in the morning and we left for Basra at 1115. We saw a lot of

*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

abandoned/destroyed Iraqi military equipment. All the Iraqis were very friendly and either waved to us or gave us a thumbs up. School was out so the roadsides and sometimes the road itself was full of children. Many were looking for handouts or food/water. Earlier troops had set a bad precedent and gave out items from the vehicles. Now children were at great risk from an accident because they were too close to moving vehicles. Often they would try to reach in the vehicles to steal items. Once, when we slowed for a curve, the Hummer in front of me almost ran over a child who fell while trying to reach in the vehicle.

Basra was like a swamp covered in garbage that someone decided to build a city on. [LTC] Larry Wilson, who had been to Haiti, said that Basra did not have much on Port-Au-Prince. Most of the businesses that we could see had been looted. Children were everywhere.

The Presidential Palace was great in comparison. Actually, it looked like a cheap, tacky theme park Disneyland wannabe. The buildings were new but the wiring was not completed. They were vacant. A picture of the inside of one of the buildings is in the slide show [my sister] Lee Anne sent me. The Brits dropped a bomb from a Harrier on one of the smaller buildings to send a message to the defenders to leave. When they moved in, there was no resistance. British armored vehicles were everywhere, which is why I was not wearing my battle rattle when my picture was taken.

I am without a doubt the most inoculated and medicated member of the family. I had my three Anthrax shots and smallpox vaccination before I left. They gave us a bottle of green anti-malarial capsules to take when we enter Iraq. I have to take them every day now and will try to remember to take them with my vitamins.

Yesterday was much cooler and windy. Today, it is getting warm.

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

Someone in my office tent had a scorpion fall off the tent roof on his head. The scorpion did not survive the engagement.

My tent mate overhead a Marine who said as he stepped into the shower: Boy, this is going to be good. How long has it been since you had a shower? The Marine was asked. Thirty days, he replied.

MJW

From: Michael Whitehead  
Sent: Sunday, April 13, 2003 9:50 am  
Subject: I am washing clothes

The washer and dryer trailer was full before breakfast but available after. I am waiting for the wash cycle to finish. I am getting everyone's e-mails. Continue to send to my Army .mil address since I don't know how long I will be able to send from this address. Eventually, the Marines will go home and I will stay. My army .mil is forwarded to this address so I am seeing everything.

[My sister] Lee Anne's slide show was a big hit here, especially the first picture of the Marines crossing the bridge in Baghdad.

The uniform here in Commando has finally relaxed to the lowest level. We are wearing our uniform, soft cap and have to have our weapon/ammo with us at all times. Our gas mask has to be within 10 minutes of us. No more body armor inside the wire - hurray!

I censored some of the more exciting activities here the last three weeks in order not to alarm anyone. The scud alerts at Arifjan required us to put on our mask and chemical suit. A GIANT loud speaker in the middle of the camp would announce "Lighting! Lighting! Lighting!" and then a siren would sound. For

*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

a number of days this happened regularly at 0130 and 0530 in the morning. Things got even more exciting here at Commando. When we got here, [COL] Larry West announced that a few days previously a smaller Iraqi missile flew in under the radar and landed at the front gate of the camp. After that Larry started sleeping with his body armor on. If you look at the first picture I sent you would see sandbagged bunkers. They are everywhere here in Commando. When the alarm siren sounded, we had to leap up, run to the bunker and put on our gas masks. This happened day and night. I saw a Marine with the label "Scud Runs" on his helmet and he had 30 marks.

I slept in my PT uniform. When the alarm sounded, I slipped in my sneakers, put on my body armor, then grabbed my helmet and mask and ran for the bunker. I could make it in 30 seconds. When we got there, we put on our masks and waited. The All Clear usually came in about 15 minutes. However, Larry said that he spent the night one night in his bunker. Someone has a picture of us in the bunker with our masks on. I will try to get a copy.

One night, as I sat in my bunker with my mask on, I could here the Patriot missiles firing from the battery nearby. Before it all seemed like a drill. This time, I realized that the Patriots would not be firing unless a missile was coming. For the first time, I felt like I was being shot at.

The picture of me being interviewed by ABC News shows me wearing my chemical suit. We had been alerted to put it on and we wore it for about three hours. In the heat.

But that is all over now. Saddam tried but he never hit us. The Patriots did their job. But there were some midnight runs to the bunker. Gotta go put my clothes in the dryer.

MJW

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

From: Whitehead Col Michael  
Sent: Thursday, April 17, 2003 10:42 AM  
Subject: Trip to Baghdad

When I returned from Basra on Friday, Foster asked me about my trip and told me we were going to Baghdad on Sunday. The trip was delayed a day and we left on Monday 14 April. Our mission was to do an assessment of the humanitarian situation on the Marine sector.

Early in the morning on Monday we were deposited at the first in a series of desolate, dusty airfields. At 0940 we left on a Marine C-130 for Iraq. The pilots offered to let some of us come to the flight deck so I took my chance. When I looked out at what the pilots were seeing I was startled: we were flying at 200 feet over a vast expanse of sand.

The border is coming up, said one of the crew. I leaned forward and soon I saw the long, straight double fence that marked the border between Iraq and Kuwait. Almost immediately we saw evidence of the battle: Iraqi vehicles, burnt and destroyed, were scattered across the desert, intermixed with small tribes of Bedouins in tents.

As I said before, every war develops its own jargon. In this war it was Phase Line Carolina, LSA Viper, Commando, MEF Main, MEF Rear, and Tarawa. The airfields were named after athletic stadiums: Riverfront, Three Rivers and Yankee. Our destination was Yankee. Yankee was also flat, desolate and dusty. We stumbled off the C-130, wearing our battle gear and humping a rucksack with our gear. We spent the next five hours under the shade of a camouflage net, waiting to go to Baghdad. A humanitarian flight of medical supplies, doctors and reporters was due in from Qatar on another C-130 and they wanted us to stay and meet it. The supplies were to be transferred to two Marine C-46 helicopters and we would fly in with the media



*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

circus. The arrival time for the flight passed and the phone calls began to try and discover where the flight was. In the meantime, we sat, slept and ate MRE's (classic soldierly tasks).

Yankee had the finest, most excellent, top grade NFL caliber dust that I have ever seen in my life. Walking around, we looked like astronauts on the Moon, kicking up dust with every footfall. Our site was between a road and the airstrip. The road had a regular stream of hot-rod Marine drivers moving by way too fast. On the airstrip, we had a steady stream of Marine helicopters flying in to refuel right in front of us. Evidently, we were waiting at the refuel site. Things were a little dusty.

They finally gave up on the Qatar circus and we loaded in two C-46's for Baghdad. Everyone felt the drama of flying into the city only five days after Saddam's statue was pulled down. As we flew in, we started seeing green, planted fields fed by canals from the Euphrates River. Even the word "Euphrates" was laden with history. We sat down inside a huge walled compound filled with Marine vehicles and tents. A very large building in the middle of the compound was suffering from the effects of three direct hits by Tomahawk cruise missiles. On the way out two days later, I got a picture of me in front of that building holding my Gator pennant.

We checked in with the Marines and they arranged a ride for us to the Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC), located at the Palestine Hotel. Directly in front of the Palestine Hotel was the square with the statute of Saddam that was torn down live on TV. We arrived after dark and passed through the cordon of Marines guarding the perimeter around the hotel.

Inside, in and around the hotel, were over 400 media hounds. Satellite dishes, trucks, tents, and generators were running everywhere. I got my picture taken with Christiane Amanpour of CNN. I had dinner with Dr. Bob Arnot of NBC. Nick Robertson of

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

CNN fixed coffee for me and Foster. Very exciting.

Oh - we did do some work.

TO BE CONTINUED.

MJW

From: Whitehead Col Michael  
Sent: Friday, April 18, 2003 2:51 AM  
Subject: Trip to Baghdad cont

At the Palestine Hotel - Baghdad.

The media got the hotel rooms - we got the floor of the ballroom. The room was nearly filled with dozens of VERY SMELLY Marines (they had not bathed in two months). These Marines were guarding the hotel. The bathrooms were not unbearable - but close to that.

I went to a civil affairs meeting at the hotel. Attending the meeting were military, NGO's like CARE and Doctors without Borders, and local representatives of Iraqi organizations. What follows are my notes on the meeting (they are unclassified):

CDR Moore gave the medical assessment - MSF (Medicines Sans Frontiers) was doing assessments of the hospitals. The hospitals in the poor areas resupplied themselves by taking supplies from hospitals in the rich areas. He considered this an appropriate redistribution of resources. CARE said that someone in each hospital had taken charge. She felt that an announcement needed to be made that all hospital workers needed to come back to work (unfortunately, all the TV stations and most of the radio stations were still down). CARE felt that basic hospital care was available. The Health Centers were a bigger problem because they were not working and they

*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

provided the immunizations. CARE felt that the schools needed to be opened so the parents could go to work.

MAJ Broton reported on Electricity - the electrical substations had only 10-14 days of fuel. Trucking in more fuel was not the solution because they had insufficient trucks. They needed to get visibility on the oil pipelines from the north that were providing fuel for the generators. He needed the status on electrical power throughout the country because the electrical power was all interlinked.

LTC Brian reported on the Phone system. 90-95% of the buried phone cables are intact. The problem is that three of the four switching stations were bombed and destroyed.

An Iraqi commented that many people were not returning to work because they were afraid that the Saddam dinar (the Iraqi money with Saddam's picture on it) would soon be worthless and they would not be paid. Pay for the government workers was a big issue throughout the country. All Iraqis in Baghdad were issued seven months of food from the Oil for Food Program b4 the war. Of this supply, only about 3-4 weeks of food remained. The OFF ration was at a subsistence level, and the Iraqi ate at a higher rate. Food prices had quadrupled since the war started.

A city is a system of systems - all interlinked. Putting it all back together is very complicated. We have to get the workers back to their jobs because they know how all these systems work and can put it back together. The Marines could not stop the looting because they were still fighting. They could not do both.

This snapshot of the problems gives you all an idea of the very complex issue we are dealing with. We are peddling as fast as we can.

The trip back to Commando was just as much an ordeal as the

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

trip up. We flew by helicopter to Yankee. The weather was bad in Commando so we flew by C-130 south to Three Rivers and waited. For six hours, we hung out in a C-130 parked on the runway. We watched all the Marine helicopters come and go. We slept. We ate MRE's. I asked one of the airfield workers for the location of the latrine. He gave me a shovel and pointed to a patch of desert. No place to hide in the desert.

We finally got back in to Kuwait and a hot shower and a mattress about 11 that night. I was whapped.

MJW

From: Michael Whitehead  
Sent: Saturday, April 19, 2003 9:45 am  
Subject: On the desert

I have given this careful thought because I did not want to rush to judgment, but after four weeks I have decided that I do not like the desert. It has all the disadvantages (and more!) of the beach with NONE of the advantages. There is a constant layer of dust EVERYWHERE. And that is during NORMAL weather. I woke up this morning to the news that a sandstorm is due today. Bummer.

I just remembered a story from my trip to Baghdad. On the way up in the C-130, a young female Marine got on. She sat next to me. I told her that I had e mailed my daughter and niece about joining the Marines. She shook her head. Not a good idea, she said. What is your job? I asked. A cook, she said. How long have you be in Kuwait? Since January. The plane was heading for Iraq. Do you know where you are going? She shook her head no. She knew she was going to Iraq, but she didn't know where.

The snakes and scorpions have not shown up - yet. Hopefully,

*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

we will be out of here before they arrive.

MJW

From: Michael Whitehead  
Sent: Friday, April 25, 2003 8:55 pm  
Subject: Great new weight loss program

This program really works!

First you live and work in the desert. In a tent. Without AC. Then you work at a 100-hour a week pace for a month. No days off. You give up all alcoholic beverages - but you can eat all the ice cream sandwiches you want.

An officer was told he had lost a lot of weight. He replied: I have been misplacing a lot of things lately.

We have been ordered to move forward and are actively planning the move. Our advanced party has already moved forward to scout locations. We told them to look for palaces. Big palaces. In a few days I will stop forwarding my e-mail to this account. I believe that I will have e-mail access at the new location.

I have only received one letter - from [my daughter] Sara. Many people are in the same boat. The joke here is that the day before we move, when everything is packed and loaded, we will be deluged with all the packages coming to us in the pipeline. If I get a package here before I leave I will have to stuff it on the roof of my Hummer - I have no room in my bags. I have one rucksack and an aviator kit bag. They are both full. I filled my other duffel bag with winter clothes and my green uniforms and boots and put them in a shipping container the unit brought for storage.

Our advanced party says that it is cool at night up north and to

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

bring some cold weather gear. That sounds good. The heat here is draining and I go to bed every night exhausted.

Look for me in the Gainesville Sun. A reporter e-mailed me and I sent him some info.

Indians or Pakistanis are busy installing air conditioning in our sleep areas and work spaces. A lot of Army humor on that. They will be ready and running the day we leave. We may have to miss the snakes.

In the mornings and some evenings we can hear the call for prayer from some of the mosques in the nearby town.

Mike

From: Michael Whitehead  
Sent: Sunday, April 27, 2003 8:37 pm  
Subject: I am moving forward tomorrow

I will fly in a helicopter to our new location. I should be there tomorrow night if the AC doesn't break down. They say that we will have Internet access there. When I get there I will let you know where it is. Some civil affairs personnel were shot in Baghdad today. This may or may not make the news. ALL of the people wounded were in another unit. I am telling you this so that you will not worry that it may have been me or someone in my unit. I should have some new pictures and stories from my NEW HOME. We will finally get on the ground there and can really start doing our job.

Mike

*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*



My Team in Karbala, Iraq in May, 2003: (l to r) Specialist Jamie Taylor, Specialist Ryan Wildermuth, Major Fred Harmon, Lieutenant Colonel Craig Trebilcock, Lieutenant Alicia Galvany, Master Sergeant Javier Otero, Colonel Michael Whitehead, Lieutenant Colonel Howard Adams, Specialist Sonny Owens, and Lieutenant Tamara Montgomery, (kneeling).

## **CHAPTER 3 – Camp Babylon**

From: Michael Whitehead  
Sent: Tuesday, April 29, 2003 8:39 pm  
Subject: New home in Iraq

Things are looking up! My new home is on the grounds of one of the 73 palaces that Saddam had built. There are trees here! And bushes and grass. And water. We are next to a canal that carries water from the Euphrates River.

We are in the city of Al Hillah. On the palace grounds are the ancient ruins of the city of Babylon. Wow! The General immediately put the ruins off limits, but I expect to be able to see it before I leave.

The Navy Seabees (the term comes from the abbreviation for Construction Battalion "CB") are improving things every day. They are running electricity to the buildings (we are in buildings!) and improving the distribution of electricity every day. The chow hall is open. No ice cream sandwiches, but I am ready to give up ice cream now for trees, scenery and no desert.

I have no interest in returning to Kuwait again the rest of my life. Ever again. Hopefully they will let us fly home from Baghdad. They say that dust is still a problem here, but only when they have a storm.



*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

Right now, I am sitting on the marble floor of the building and typing. Our furniture is coming up by ground transportation with the main body tomorrow. The buildings in the palace grounds were looted of all light fixtures, furniture and plumbing appliances. The building structures are intact and all look to be excellent "fixer uppers".

The weather is excellent. They say they have to snuggle in their sleeping bags at night to keep warm. I could use that kind of problem right now. There is a mosquito problem, so I will need to get out my mosquito net. I am taking Malaria pills, but they don't totally prevent Malaria. The key is insect repellent and mosquito nets.

I will take pictures tomorrow and send to you. If I have time. I do have lots of work to do. We got to get this place cleaned up so we can go home.

MJW

From: Michael Whitehead  
Sent: Wednesday, April 30, 2003 9:27 pm  
Subject: Sleeping on the floor

Billions for defense but not one cent for a cot.

Evidently, there are hundreds if not thousands of cots in Kuwait, if not Iraq, unused, but nobody can seem to get some for us. Some people bought and brought their own. But not me. I got a chair, and I am sitting on it now with my computer in my lap. Hopefully, our furniture will be here tomorrow. But no cots.

I have a sleeping pad, but Saddam's marble floor is hard. The marble wall is nice and cool when I turn over against it. Anyway... if nothing else happens on this tour, I can say that I slept in one of Saddam's palaces. No electricity yet. I carry a

flashlight.

The Seabees have made arrangements for our sanitation and continued health. They bury plastic pipes in the ground, surrounded by a piece of plastic, for the men to pee into. They constructed wooden toilets. The deposits are made into 55-gallon drums cut in half. A detail of Iraqis hired for this purpose pulls out the drums, and substitutes an empty. The Iraqis then pour gasoline into the filled containers and burn them. We try not to get down wind of this process. The females have separate, marked wooden toilets. Big signs on the toilets say "No Smoking! JP4 being used." JP4 is the aviation fuel used for burning.

The Marines are ready to go home. They won the war, now it's time for them to leave.

I have not had a beer in 40 days. And I haven't died. Yet. There are some other things that I have done without which I will not discuss.

In between MRE's and fresh food the Military has something called T rations, or T rats. We have T rats for breakfast and dinner. For lunch we have MRE's. Due to problems in the Marine logistical chain that I will not EVEN go into, they have served spaghetti and meat balls, green beans and canned peaches for supper for seven straight days. I am only on day two.

Tours began today of the ruins of Babylon. I want to sign up. This place is much, much nicer than Commando. Tomorrow I will take pictures. I hope.

I took a shower in a tent today. The tent is about 200m from my house. They have set times for males, set times for females and set times for officers/senior NCOs. The tent has a room with a wooden table where everyone places their clothes. They stand there in line naked until a shower opens up. The water was hot.

*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

Then we dry off, get dressed and go back to our bunks to get dressed back in uniform. Most people wear their PT clothes to the shower. The water for the shower comes from the river. A ROWPU (Reverse Osmosis, Water Purification Unit, kind of like the Water Boys from Movie fame used) cleans up the water before we use it. We have water buffaloes placed throughout the camp. A water tanker fills up from the ROWPU and then drives around to fill up the buffaloes. No bottled water for us here!

No laundry unit here. I am going to have to wash clothes in a bucket. I see Marines doing that all the time. Laundry is hanging up everywhere.

This morning I got up off my aching back, put on my pants, pistol and t-shirt, got my towel, canteen and shaving kit, and walked about 50m to the pee tubes. On the way back I stopped at a Humvee and used the hood and mirror to wash my face and shave. Then I trudged back to my bunk to drop off my stuff and get my blouse and hat. I was ready to go to the mess hall. The coffee wasn't good, but it was HOT.

I keep a bottle of hand sanitizing lotion in my shirt pocket. I haven't gotten sick yet. The people who get sick are frequently the ones who fail to use good field hygiene. Most of the casualties in an army throughout history come from disease. People tell me that the sanitation at the rest stops along some of the main supply routes is horrible. People are going to the bathroom anywhere, and thousands of troops are passing through these places. Fortunately the Marines are disciplined and have good leadership about these kinds of things. They are important to keeping the troops healthy and are something you don't usually think about or hear on the news.

As you can see, we have to spend a lot of extra time each day doing the bare essentials. Things are slow today. Our troops will arrive in a convoy tomorrow. Things will get busier.

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

Friday, May 9th has been designated Military Spouse Day. Somebody ought to take a Military Spouse out to dinner then.

MJW

From: Michael Whitehead  
Sent: Saturday, May 3, 2003 6:40 am  
Subject: Trials and tribulations

News flash: supper last night was spaghetti and meatballs, green beans and canned peaches. And the night before. The coffee machine in the mess hall broke. No coffee for breakfast. The suffering and sacrifices I make for my country!

MJW

From: Michael Whitehead  
Sent: Saturday, May 3, 2003 8:44 pm  
Subject: Washing my clothes

Today was washday. Actually, yesterday was washday, but I didn't have time to get organized. Therefore, I had to go to Round two on a pair of underwear and socks. Since the showers only operate every other day, this makes for sticky living.

To wash, you need a bucket and two small tubs. First, you go to the water buffalo with the bucket and fill it. Then you pour half the bucket in one tub and the other half in the other. Tub 1 is the first rinse and tub 2 is the second rinse. Next, I you go back to the water buffalo and fill the bucket again. Add detergent to bucket. Take off shirt so it doesn't get wet. Put clothes in bucket and agitate. Wring out clothes and add to tub 1. Wring out clothes in tub 1 and add to tub 2. Wring out clothes in tub 2 and hang on clothesline. Remember those? Maybe some of you do not. I remember hanging clothes on a line LONG AGO in my youth. I remembered to buy and bring clothespins. Enterprising

*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

Marines and soldiers have strung clotheslines between trees and other objects. I wished I had someone to take a picture of me at the height of domesticity, in DCU's, with a pistol on my belt, hanging my clothes on a clothesline. I may have to repeat this, so I will try to get a picture next time.

Morale was severely affected tonight at supper: no Italian food. Instead we had Oriental glop over brown rice. Change is good.

We are getting established here and the Marines have us up and running. We should be sending teams out soon to assess the problems so that we can develop proposals to fix things. We are finally going to start doing real civil affairs.

Key point I forget to mention: when they burn the refuse in the 55 gallon drums, some poor Iraqi has to use a big board to stir the burning mixture to make sure everything is burned up. What a sight!

Very good news! Dale Foster managed to get a bigger cot. He gave me his cot to use. Heaven. I can't wait to try it out. It's the small things that make you happy.

MJW

From: Michael Whitehead  
Sent: Sunday, May 4, 2003 9:02 pm  
Subject: Cut off from the world

I am even more cut off from the world here than I have been since I started this episode. I have not seen a TV, a newspaper or heard a radio report on what is happening in the World since I got to the Palace. When was that? Four days ago. I have to look at my watch to know what day of the week it is.

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

My building still has no lights and it is as dark as a cave inside. After dark I have to carry a flashlight to get inside the building. The floor is covered with sleeping troops.

The Marines were forced to put barbed wire around the ruins of Babylon to keep out the looters. We are busy planning projects to rebuild the country. We identified the requirements to rebuild five bridges we destroyed during the war. The least we could do.

MJW

From: Michael Whitehead  
Sent: Monday, May 5, 2003 8:47 pm  
Subject: On the Marines

The Marines are a very interesting bunch. A lot of them, Officers and NCOs, are big, broad shouldered, well muscled men. There are also a lot of women Marines. Some are very attractive ladies. Most of the young privates almost look like [my son] Jamie. Except they are carrying rifles and they know how to use them. Very few Marines actually saw combat. Some were mechanics. A lot of officers sat in the Tactical Operations Centers, talking on the phone and sending e-mails.

The MEF (Marine Expeditionary Force), an organization of 70,000 Marines, is an extremely large and complicated beast. The communications infrastructure (like the e mail I am sending this message on), the fuel points, the helicopters, all the water bottles, MRE's and spaghetti and meat ball dinners were transported to Iraq and distributed forward during a war over a large area of land. I cannot completely describe to you how complex this organization really is. They have honed the application of violence to a science.

The Marines during the war did outrun their supply. They told me at one time the soldiers were only getting one MRE and one

*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

bottle of water a day. They were moving so fast the supply trucks could not keep up. It is kind of sad, but this fantastic organization that did so well during the war is being disassembled and sent back home. This was a one of a kind organization that may be created again, but not with the same people.

Marine Helicopters are flying over my head as I write.

A lot of questions as to who will be replacing the Marines when they leave. What will become of us? Some of us want to go home with them. Some want to stay. That will not be our call. We can't get our hopes up. What happens will happen.

MJW

From: Michael Whitehead  
Sent: Saturday, May 17, 2003 4:50 pm  
Subject: I am back

I have been on the road for 7 days. I am a little ripe. Let me get cleaned up and I will tell you all about it.

MJW

From: Whitehead Col Michael  
Sent: Sunday, May 18, 2003 6:12 PM  
Subject: Magical Iraqi tour

I left Babylon for seven days and civilization arrived. Washing machines. And dryers. No more bucket brigade.

Ten of us left in three vehicles, me in command for a tour of the provincial capitals in our area. We went east from Hillah to Al Kut, on the banks of the Tigris River. We drove south from the banks of the Tigris to An Nasiriyah on the banks of the Euphrates. Then we went northwest to Ad Diwaniyah. NW again

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

to An Najaf. Then north to Karbala. Finally SE today back to Hillah. Got a lot of pictures and a lifetime worth of experiences.

Stark memories of my trip:

Children, seeing us approach on the highway, streaming to the road to wave. This happened DOZENS of times.

A line of Iraqi women, covered from head to foot in black or colored dress, pots full of laundry balanced on their heads as they walk from the river.

A civil affairs soldier reported in a meeting, "We come out of a meeting tonight and some Iraqis approached us and said there were some teenagers nearby, drinking whiskey, and they had hand grenades. I sent the Marines over to deal with that." "Good idea," I told her.

A scene out of Lawrence of Arabia: sitting cross-legged on carpets in a large tent, filled with Muslim clerics, and eating lamb and rice and pita bread with our hands (right hand only!) from a large bowl.

Listening to a city council meeting in Karbala while a crowd of protestors chanted outside.

Seeing every military or civilian vehicle on the side of the road picked CLEAN down to the chassis. Once I saw a group of children trying to pry something off the top of a bus.

Everywhere people are friendly and happy to see us. [LTC] Howard Adams, the man on the other end of the Florida Flag picture, said that it was like being in a parade. We were constantly waving to people.

We climbed to the top of the Ziggurat of Ur, a pyramid structure



*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

near An Nasiriyah that is over 4,000 years old. Ur is the city where civilization was born. The first evidence of writing occurred there in that city. At the top of the monument, I saw a gray haired lady who looked like an American. "Where are you from?" I asked. "New York," she replied. "What are you doing here?" I asked. "I'm an archeologist. What are YOU doing here?" "The Army sent me here." She was working for National Geographic!

Sleeping on a cot on the hood of my vehicle. With a mosquito net.

Taking a bath with Baby Wipes.

Riding in a Hummer in full battle gear in 109-degree heat.

Three men walking abreast in the right lane of a street in An Nasiriyah. They were blocking the lane. Directly behind each man was a woman clothed head to foot completely in black. We drove around them.

Seeing men throwing wheat up in the air with a pitchfork, separating the wheat from the chaff as they have done here for thousands of years.

Drinking water that is so hot it tastes like the water from the hot water faucet. And then drinking some more because you are so hot and thirsty you have no choice.

Pouring water down inside the front and back of my body armor in order to cool off.

Hearing a Marine Battalion Commander describe how his troops captured the University of Baghdad.

Vendors outside the barbed wire of every Marine compound selling Iraqi Army bayonets, medals, ice, sodas and coolers. We

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

bought ice, coolers and sodas. And pita bread.

MJW

From: Whitehead Col Michael  
Sent: Wednesday, May 21, 2003 12:09 PM  
Subject: A sad day here in Babylon

Monday, May 19, was a sad and unlucky day here in Babylon. It started in the morning, when many of us heard a loud explosion from the Palace on the hill where the enlisted men live. A Marine was messing with some Iraqi ammunition when it exploded. He lost an eye and severely damaged his hand. Handling of any kind of Iraqi munitions is strictly forbidden but some of the young Marines and soldiers chose not to listen.

That afternoon, a Marine CH-46 helicopter struck a power line right after takeoff and disintegrated, falling into the canal just south of us. The four bodies of the Marine crew were recovered this morning. Right after the crash, a Marine jumped into the canal to save what he thought was a crewman from the helicopter. This Marine drowned. Then a report came in from down south that an Army battalion commander died in a head-on collision with an Iraqi vehicle. What a day.

The high today is forecast to be 112 degrees.

I am busy now with some planned elections for Mayor in An Najaf. I went to a meeting there yesterday and will go to another tomorrow. The local Commander has formed an election council to decide how the election will be conducted. I am attending and observing these council meetings. I am watching Iraqi democracy being born.

Big problems we are dealing with? Getting everyone paid. Trying to distribute propane and gas to the populace. They use propane

*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

for cooking, just like me. The fuel shortage comes from the fact that Iraq produces its gasoline, natural gas and propane as by-products of the refining of the oil it is pumping. No oil is being refined because no oil is being pumped. No oil is being pumped because the storage tanks are full. The storage tanks are full because our FRIENDS in the UN STILL have not lifted the oil embargo. The UN is causing us a lot of problems here.

I drove by a gas station yesterday where a long line of vehicles were waiting to get gas. A roadside black market is thriving to sell gas to people who are too desperate to wait in line. Iraqis are cutting down what little trees they have to use for fuel because they can't get propane. Our Civil Affairs people are working these issues hard.

The World Food Program, assisted by the Salvation Army, is working to get food in position at warehouses across the country in order to begin distributing food to the Iraqis at the beginning of next month. We are also working this issue.

Marines and Seabees are cleaning up, painting and repairing schools all over the area. In Najaf, they are fixing up an Amusement Park that was used exclusively for important Iraqi officials and their families. When the Park is complete, it will be open for everyone.

Big news: the tent showers are now open every day, instead of every other day. Quality of life goes up another notch.

MJW

From: Whitehead Col Michael  
Sent: Wednesday, May 21, 2003 7:42 PM  
Subject: Things I haven't done

Since Mar 22 I haven't:

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

Flushed a toilet.  
Read a newspaper.  
Watched a TV show.  
Worn civilian clothes (except for one day).  
Driven a car.  
Taken a bath.  
Been alone.  
Gone to a store. Any store.  
Had a beer.  
Fed my dog.  
Seen a McDonald's.  
Been to a movie theater.  
Been without my dog tags or my pistol.  
Ridden in a vehicle without my helmet and body armor.  
Been able to go anywhere without asking permission first.

I haven't had a day off since February.

MJW

From: Whitehead Col Michael  
Sent: Saturday, May 24, 2003 7:44 PM  
Subject: Strange cultural traits and other things

As I said, the Marines call the local Iraqis (and Kuwaitis) Hajjis. A sizeable number of locals are hired daily to perform tasks around the camp. A Marine guards them continuously. They pick up trash, do grounds keeping, wash clothes, burn the shit barrels, etc.

I have previously described our latrine facilities. The men urinate in the "piss tubes". The women get their own marked and designated latrine facilities. These facilities, like the men's, are basically outhouses constructed by the Seabees. Obviously, the Hajjis have to use the same latrine facilities as we do. The Hajjis are not used to our style of outhouse. Their latrines are like the

*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

French ones, basically a hole in the floor. Consequently, when they open the door to our outhouses, they are confused, as evidenced by the results. Evidently (we assume) they climb on to our seats, stand with each foot astride the hole, and squat to do their business. We assume this because their aim is not always too good and we can see the results.

Add this to our list of fond memories of our deployment.

A new unit moved in to Babylon and is going to take over our officer sleeping quarters as office space. Last night, I and the other officers had to move up the hill to the big palace to sleep. There is plenty of room up there, a splendid view and a nice breeze. The down side is the daily hike up and down the hill. Usually at 6 PM I take a break for a shower, put on my PT clothes and return to work refreshed and rid of the sweat, grime and sticky underwear that are a daily part of life here. NOW I am facing a walk up the hill to change, a walk back down the hill to shower, then a walk back up the hill to drop off my wet towel and soap, a walk down the hill to go back to work, then a walk back up the hill to go to bed. My legs are not ready for this. Therefore, I have decided to use my MASSIVE supply of Wet Ones. For the time being.

I looked out at Iraq last night from my view on the hill. I could see lights on. The lights weren't there when we arrived. The scene looked peaceful. There wasn't even the usual gunfire (celebratory or otherwise). Things looked good. I felt like we had accomplished something.

We had a Memorial Service today for the five Marines that died here last Monday in the helicopter crash. Two marines who were beautiful singers opened with the National Anthem and closed with the Marine Corps Hymn ("From the Halls of Montezuma..."). Standing here in uniform in this Godforsaken place, with Marines, Soldiers and Sailors around me, honoring our dead on

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

this Memorial Day weekend, the beautiful rendition of our National Anthem brought tears to my eyes. The Chaplain asked if anyone wanted to come up and speak on behalf of any of the dead. A friend of the Sergeant who jumped in to try and rescue the crew and drowned came forward. He was wearing his body armor and carrying his M16. He spoke very movingly and haltingly, frequently pausing to keep control of his emotions.

The Chaplain told a story of how he was standing by the river when the bodies were removed. When he saw the bodies, the Chaplain said out loud that that he wished their families and friends could have been with them at the end. A female Marine Lance Corporal standing nearby said, "But sir, they were. We're their family. We're their friends. We were here." All of us in the room felt the closeness of the Brotherhood of Arms. We were their family. We were their friends. We were here.

At the end of the ceremony, the Chaplain called us to attention, read out the names of the dead, and taps was played. The Chaplain gave us his blessing, and the packed room quietly emptied.

MJW

From: Whitehead Col Michael  
Sent: Saturday, May 24, 2003 1:37 PM  
Subject: Sudden recall of things I wanted to forget

In the office someone pulled out a bullhorn (we bought it to control crowds) and loudly announced, "Attention Camp Commando!" That brought back memories.

During the war when we were in Camp Commando in Kuwait, we were on constant alert for Scud Attacks. These alerts came at all hours of the day and night. Outside our tents, as you could see in some of the photos of Commando, were concrete bunkers

*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

covered in sand bags. The alert was called through a siren. We had to run to the nearest bunker and put on our protective masks. At that time, we wore helmets and body armor all the time or had it nearby. When I was in bed, I had my helmet, sneakers, body armor and protective mask right by my bed. I could wake up, get everything on and get in the bunker inside of a minute. Sometimes we would have several a night.

After about 10 minutes, the Camp Commando loudspeaker would announce, "Attention Camp Commando! Attention Camp Commando! All clear. All clear."

That is the memory that the fellow in our office evoked with the bullhorn.

MJW

From: Whitehead Col Michael  
Sent: Sunday, May 25, 2003 7:11 PM  
Subject: I have all kinds of problems

My butt hurts from sitting on hard metal chairs or wooden benches or concrete steps all day. Really. War is hell.

I would love to have a nice, comfortable chair with a cup of coffee and a lamp and a good book to read. I have the good book but nothing else. Prolonged reading requires sitting someone comfortable. Don't have too many of those places. Our sleeping area has had no lights since I got here. I have to carry a flashlight with me all the time so I can find my way to my bed in the pitch-black dark room of the palace. Now that I have moved up the hill someone has rigged some lights so I can at least sit up there and read. I am going to try that tonight.

I just took a shower. My first in three days. I feel much better. The Iraqis line up on the far side of the canal and watch us. They

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

watch us line up and go in the shower tent. They watch us drive by in vehicles. They watch us climb up the hill. They watch us sit out in front of the palace in the evening. We must be very entertaining to them.

The latest craze here is what the Army would call the "Field Expedient" method of cooling your water bottle. Everyone carries around a water bottle or two. We use marker pens to mark ours. We don't get bottles from the factory here like we did in Commando. We fill up our bottles from the water buffaloes positioned around the camp. As I said before, drinking a bottle of hot water is not pleasant. And we have to keep drinking because it is so hot. (It was miserable today. It was so hot I couldn't think). We get these grape or orange drink powders in our C rations and we put the powder in our water bottles to give some variety but that still doesn't help if the water is hot.

Evidently, the Army guys picked up this technique from the Marines: put an old sock around the bottle, wet the sock, and then hang the bottle out while driving or put it in front of a fan. As the water wicks off the sock, the water in the bottle cools. This won't get the water icy, but at least it is cool and drinkable.

Big news. I finally found someone with a bathroom scale and weighed myself. I have lost over 20 pounds. I think the weight has come off everywhere but my gut.

[My brother] Jeff is sending me Braves scores every day. That is good. And the football news. I like that, too.

MJW



*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

From: Whitehead Col Michael  
Sent: Monday, May 26, 2003 6:37 pm  
Subject: Civil Affairs heroes

I sent this picture before, but I want to tell a story about some of the people in the picture. This picture is of the nine people who accompanied me on the weeklong trip around southern Iraq. We are putting some of them in for heroism awards and I want you to see who they are.

The heroes are Specialist Taylor (far left), Specialist Owens (far right), Master Sergeant Otero (4th from right, behind me), MAJ Harmon (3rd from left) and LTC Trebilcock (4th from left, standing next to Otero).

When we were in Karbala, we attended a City Council meeting that was interrupted by a peaceful demonstration of Iraqis. I was inside during the whole incident, attending the meeting. The individuals listed above were outside securing our vehicles because we knew the demonstration would take place but we were unsure exactly what would happen. [They subdued an Iraqi with a grenade who tried to steal a truck].

The photo was taken in Karbala right before we went downtown to the City Council Meeting. As you all will be glad to hear, I missed all this excitement, but heard a lot about it later. I was very proud of them and hope that they get the awards for heroism they deserve.

MJW

From: Whitehead Col Michael  
Sent: Tuesday, May 27, 2003 7:25 AM  
Subject: Reply to Fenella [A good friend of my daughter Lindsey]

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

Fenella

I love to read your messages. They are very interesting. I was particularly interested in your internship with Cultural Survival. I have been in contact with a lot of indigenous people in South and Central America. In Paraguay they speak Guarani (that is the name of the currency) and in Bolivia and Peru there are Indians that speak Quechua and Aymara. In Guatemala a soldier told me that there are 22 different languages spoken by the Indians in that little country.

I have been to many places in the world, some of them not very pleasant, but Iraq is the most Godforsaken place that I have ever seen (except for Kuwait). It was 112 degrees yesterday. Last night a storm created a big wind and this morning we awoke with a layer of dust over EVERYTHING. We constantly ask ourselves - Why do people live here? That's a good research paper for you. Think about the Eskimos. Why did they elect to stay in Alaska instead of heading south with everyone else?

Civilization was born here because of the two rivers - the Tigris and Euphrates. Water here is EVERYTHING. Water is power. Water is life. And it all comes from the river. Where there is irrigation it is green. Where there isn't, there are acres of 6-inch deep very fine talcum powder dust that penetrates everything everywhere. Floppy disks have been particularly heavy casualties of this war. Why would anyone live here?

Kuwait, on the other hand, is worse. In Kuwait, there isn't even any water. If it wasn't for the oil, these people would still be living in tents and raising camels like they have done for thousands of years. It is a country full of lottery winners. The worst kind of lottery winners you read about in the paper. Kuwaitis don't do any work. The country is full of Pakistanis and Indians and Filipinos who do all the menial work. The women in Camp Commando who worked for a contractor who did our laundry

*MESSAGES FROM BABYLON*

were all Filipinos.

I have a much harder time being "culturally sensitive" here than in other countries. I have much greater feelings of ethnocentricity. I know it is wrong but I cannot help it. Once again, I am struck by the learning and broadening advantages of travel. I know how you and Lindsey (and I know Lindsey is reading this) rant about the male chauvinist pig patriarchal society we have in the United States but, like a lot of other things, you have not really seen a male chauvinist pig patriarchal society until you come to a country like this.

Our society is by no means perfect. It is too violent, commercial and materialistic, to name a few failings. But you cannot continue to criticize us on the race, women's rights and environmental issues like I have seen and heard the criticism the last twenty years. We have laws in place and the society has condemned inappropriate behavior. Here in the Middle East the subservient role of women is engrained in the fabric of the society. It is tied to their religion. Most of these people are still living in the 9th Century, AND SOME ARE ACTIVELY AND VIOLENTLY SEEKING TO BRING US ALL BACK TO THE NINTH CENTURY WITH THEM.

That is what this war is about. And the next one. And the next one. People who say this is about oil are just demonstrating their ignorance. There are people here who came here (before and after the war) for the express purpose of killing Americans. These people are like the Terminator: there is no reasoning with them. They have no compassion. They have no humanity.

I saw a Newsweek or Time cover that basically said: Why is the World afraid of us (the United States)? And the article inside was a hand wringing explanation of what we had to do to make things "better", i.e. make people in the World "like" us. Unfortunately, right now, we need people to be afraid of us. And there are some

*MICHAEL WHITEHEAD*

governments in this region that are doing their own hand wringing. Their citizens are STILL paying other people to go out and kill Americans anywhere in the world. They have got to stop this behavior. Or we will stop them. Right now they are afraid. That is good.

I am thankful that you and Lindsey are enjoying the wonderful women's rights that we have in the U.S. and are also enjoying the privilege of complaining that these rights are still not good enough. If you could see what I have seen through my eyes you would not ever complain again.

Mike

Messages from Babylon is a diary of life in a combat zone, and provides an insider's story of Colonel Whitehead's experiences with the Marines and the twenty eight nation Multinational Division that replaced the Marines at Camp Babylon.

Messages from Babylon

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/2600.html?s=pdf>