

Back from Iraq

Guest Speaker - Chad Mendoza
“A Soldier’s Story”

Name: Chad Galeana
Age: 21 years old
Branch of Military: ARMY National Guard
Year Enlisted: 2005
Still Enlisted: Yes; 3 ½ more years
Years of Service: 2 ½ years
Family Members: Older brother, sister, mom, dad, and cousin Daniel Mendoza

December '07 was a special time for all of us - holiday cheer, family feasts, gifts, and sharing time with loved ones. But, let's not forget those who cannot be with their families during the holiday season because they are serving in Iraq - protecting our country so we can live in a safer place.

Last month, we were honored to be able to speak with one such soldier, Chad Galeana. Recently home from Iraq, Chad, cousin of 6th grader Daniel Mendoza, was welcomed into Ms. Nau's classroom. The room was packed with audience members from Ms. Holmes' & Ms. Nau's classes as well as several Girls Club members.

Through his presentation, Chad brought the War in Iraq to life. No longer was it a conflict just heard about on the news. The War became real through Chad's sharing of his first-hand experiences of serving in Iraq for 12 months.

Just 21 years old, Chad gave a clear and in-depth description of life and his ideas about the struggle in Iraq. Please take a moment to read his Q & A (questions & answers) that were shared during this memorable experience.

Q: When were you sent to Iraq?

A: August 23, 2006.

Q: How did your family feel about your deportation?

A: They were scared but proud at the same time.

Q: Why did you decide to join the Army?

A: The 9/11 attack on the U.S. I was determined to do my part to try to protect my country from anything like this happening again in the future.

Q: How often and how did you communicate with your family?

A: I spoke to them once a week, or more. I called them using the phone lines.

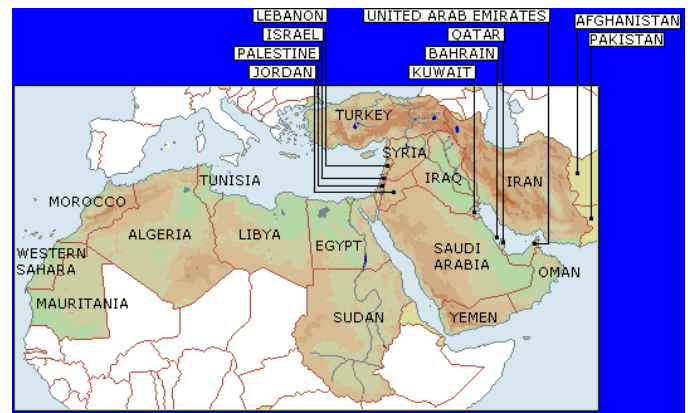
Q: How long were you stationed in Iraq?

A: 12 months.

Q: Where were you stationed?

A: Southern Iraq, Camp Bucca.

(See starred places where Chad was stationed - Al Basrah, Kirkuk, Tikrit, Baghdad, Al Kut)



Q: What is the weather like there?

A: It was very cold – icy!!! In Iraq, there are 6 months of cold weather. It gets really windy and sandstorms occur very often.

Q: What were your duties or jobs?

A: I protected the base to make sure the prisoners there didn't escape (ASO Detainee MEDVAC).



Q: What kind of equipment did you use?

A: I wore a bullet proof vest, IBA eye protection, a helmet, a pistol, rifle, boots, M4, BRAVO Machine Gun, and my uniform.

Q: Did you receive special training?

A: Yes. For every new skill we learned we received 2 or 3 days of intense training.

Q: Explain a "normal" day in Iraq:

A: Well, I would wake up 4:30 a.m., take a shower, eat breakfast; I'd have to yell at people a lot especially when I was on duty. Whenever I'd get the chance I'd listen to music.

Q: Did you interact with the Iraqi civilians?

A: Yes. Most of the time Iraqi kids would approach me because they wanted candy or toys. But this was actually very dangerous because the kids would run into the street without looking. I saw some close calls with kids almost getting hit by Hum V's.



And, when I was on duty I interacted with the prisoners.

Q: Do the Iraqi people appreciate the U.S. being there?

A: I would say that 80 percent do appreciate it and are glad we are there, and about 20 percent don't want us there.

Q: I've heard stories that the enemy will take a piece of fishing wire and string it across the street so that soldiers looking out from the top of a vehicle will hit it and be killed.

A: That's true. The Insurgance would tie some kind of wire running across the street right at neck level of a soldier looking out from their vehicle. Their goal was to decapitate, or have the soldier's head be sliced off as they drove by. Fishing wire is clear so you couldn't see it there. But, now we take special safety precautions against this.

Do you think we are making progress?

A: Yes.

Q: How much longer do you think the war will last?

A: Many, many years.

Q: Have you been near the Tigris or the Euphrates Rivers? We are learning about Mesopotamia right now, this area is now Iraq.

A: Yes, I've been to the Euphrates.

Q: How do you feel about the war? Are you for or against it?

A: I don't really know. I'm not really sure of the true reason we are there. But it's not my job to know why we are there or question why – I do my job which is whatever the Army needs me to do.



The Qayyarah Bridge on the Tigris River lost more than 100 feet of its span due to a truck bombing on Nov. 23, 2007.