

Last week I told you the Bears were working hard. Would you believe we were busier this week? At Bear North there was a fire in an ammunition storage area that caused shrapnel injuries for several persons. Our hospital was in the "fallout zone," but luckily none of our soldiers was injured. We also treated several soldiers injured in vehicle accidents and shooting incidents. In each case, our hospitals provided the very best care to the injured persons.

The 21st hosts "VIP" visits to our hospitals, but one visit this past week was special. Ten Iraqi Doctors from a local hospital were invited to tour our hospital and join us for lunch. The Doctors were impressed with our modern medical equipment, abundant medical supplies, and professional staff. Their hospital in Balad is surrounded by a wall, so it was not looted like many hospitals. However, they still have a difficult time obtaining medications and have very few nursing personnel. We are developing partnerships with local hospitals to reinforce their ability to help the local people and so we have a place to return host nation patients after they are stable.

Last week I discussed showers and haircuts. This week, let me tell you about water and gasoline. For our stay in Kuwait and our first few weeks in Iraq, we only drank bottled water. However, we now drink Tigris River water that has been purified by a filtration system (called reverse osmosis) and chlorine added to prevent bacterial growth. We drive our "water buffalos" to the water point once or twice a day. In the average day, we consume almost 10,000 gallons of water. Gasoline, in our case JP-8, is also available from supply points. At each of our living areas and several convoy support centers, we pull up to a fuel truck and say "fill'er up." Several fuel stops can pump up to six vehicles at a time so even long convoys can be refueled quickly. No charge, just fill up and drive away!

The big question for many soldiers here in Iraq is "When are we going home?" We know the 21<sup>st</sup> is not on an early deployment list and I do not expect a decision on our replacement until late summer. Most likely we will be replaced by another hospital unit in the winter season, but these decisions have not been made. In the meantime, there are a lot of soldiers here that need our hospitals. The 21st proudly serves our nation as the two best hospitals in Iraq!

I'll close by focusing on the quality people in our hospitals. Our soldiers are the best and serve as a shining example for our Army and our Nation. Thanks for your daily sacrifice and support.