HS1 Don R. Mulkey, of Port Security Unit 313 writes a letter to his wife Jennifer on the Mina al Bakr oil terminal in the North Arabian Gulf off the coast of Iraq.

A REPORT FROM IRAQ

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Ed's note: YN1 Heavey is serving with PSU 313 in the Middle East. Here is a report he sent back to the States on May 1, 2003.

Anyone remember Waterworld, the Kevin Costner movie? Well, I have been to where "dry land is a myth." I've been there and back.

The primary mission of the Coast Guard Port Security Units (PSU 311 of San Pedro, Calif. and PSU 313 of Tacoma, Wash.) has been revealed in the popular press, so I can now speak openly. "Members of PSU 311 and 313 relieved U.S. Marines of responsibility for security on two gas and oil platforms in the Northern Persian Gulf. The Marines had held both platforms after U.S. Navy SEALS took them from the Iraqi regime." (From a USCG press release.) The PSU mission is to hold these two economic lifelines of Iraqi oil industry; the Gas and Oil Platforms (GOPLATS) known as Mina Al Bakr Oil Terminal (MABOT) and Khawr Al Amaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT). In the first few days after the Coast Guard took over, the Iraqi soldiers who were guarding the sister were still dressed as Enemy Prisoners of War (EPW).

The Coasties have established defensive positions at strategic points on the 1,200 yard-long platforms. Looking like an exercise in security, a project of some substantial child, with platform is several smaller platform sections joined together with huge in six-foot wide catwalks. The deck on KAAOT is about 20 feet off the water and MABOT starts about 40 feet up. KAAOT gets pretty wet during the periodic storms and heavy seas that sweep through the area.

MABOT starts in the South with a helicopter landing pad, that is followed by a catwalk, an transfer platform (can serve one tanker ship on each side) catwalk, generator platform, catwalk, another oil transfer platform also capable of serving two ships at a time, catwalk, laboratory platform, catwalk and finally on the north end, "The Condo."

A Coast Guardsman from Port Security Unit 313 sleeps on a cot outside at Mina al Bakr oil terminal.

SADDAM'S REGIME "EPNIDE DOWN"

The Condo is a four-story steel-framed and steel-floored building with offices, living quarters and group rooms. High atop the living and working quarters is a huge pictures of Saddam — so death to "insulter" the workers. The portrait is still there, however a slight modification was made. As the EPWs were being led away to board the ships that returned them to Iraq, they worked several hundred feet out of the Condo, and were told to turn and look back. Several of them gasped, several were laughed. Saddam's portrait now hangs upside down, as a pictorial reminder of what has been done to his regime.

Not even considered a threat, the EPWs were allowed to remain on the platform for several days, the latter was filthy beyond description. Things they were responsible for bringing in millions of dollars of income for their country, the Iraqi workers were often left without food and drinking water. When captured, the soldiers had been fishing for their food. The food stuffs left in the storage areas by the workers were infested with cockroaches and other vermin. Out on the platforms, when workers had to relieve themselves, these were as fatalities, as they stopped wherever they were and did what they had to do.

KAAOT has a huge rat infestation. "Huge" modifies **both** rat and infestation. For sport, some members of the crew have gotten a hold of pellet guns. They put on their night vision goggles (NVGs) and go hunting rats. One fellow already has 30 kills. The machinery on KAAOT is in such a state of disrepair they cannot pump anything, even if it was needed. The living area on KAAOT has been abandoned in the rats, and the crew lives in tents out in the oil pumping areas. Several crew members are sleeping inside large, armored pieces of the pipeline. Raised a couple feet off the deck, the pipes are like four cots and bugs. With a pad or two, the 48-inch wide pipes could be comfortable.

KAAOT is only six miles from Iran. For the first few weeks, the Iranians sent out patrol boats to keep an eye on the Americans. A few times, PSU 311 has fired flares warning the Iranians to keep their distance.

"OVER THE HILL" GANG

Back on MABOT, the Tacoma, Wash., based crew of PSU 313 brings a wealth of industrial experience especially its welding, plumbing and electrical work. The "over the hill gang" of Coasties renovates brings the knowledge of 3 tenenovers to bear on a difficult industrial situation. The crew has fixed the generators and the water flowing. They have not been able to fix the air-conditioner plant, making their own fresh water. They get the ice maker to working, the refrigerators running and the air conditioners working. Using several hundred gallons of Clorox, they scrub floors, walls and ceilings. All this in their "spare" time, when they are not manning gun emplacements and conducting security patrols.

The Persian Gulf turns out to be a roughier body of water than planners had thought. A storm in the first days rips away the barge which served as a water level looking platform. The PSU's 26-foot patrol boats will be emotted to pieces if they try up to the steel support pilot which rises up from the sea floor, so they become useless to patrol the area around the platform. In one a week via deep-keeling craft. The Navy and Coast Guard alternate with helicopters to patrol the air miles between the two platforms and encourage the Iranians and Iraqi fishermen to stay away from the platforms.

Periodically, a coalition ship will send a small boat over and two or three crew will transport back to the big ship for a day of liberty on a frigate or destroyer. The crew's favorites are the British ships.

After several weeks of clean-up, MABOT actually becomes a semi-pleasant place to live. But cockroaches are still an ever present companion. Most fellas (they will the lights on to keep them in hiding. They say that if you turn off the lights, wait five minutes and turn them back on, you will be greeted by a herd of cockroaches standing on their hind legs, antlers on their arms, saying "Trick or treat!" or "Gimme your money, or else!" "Gimme your money, or else!" "Gimme your money, or else!"