



(U) 3 1/2 Months in Qatar: Outside of Work

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(U//FOUO) In yesterday's SID *today* article, I wrote about my work responsibilities as an NSA analyst at CENTCOM Forward Headquarters (CFH) at As Saliyah, Qatar. Today I'd like to discuss some of my external activities. On average, I worked 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, for nearly 3 1/2 months. As you can imagine, the opportunities for external fun were few and far between.

(U//FOUO) After working 12+ hours per day, the easiest and perhaps most frequent destination was the on-base bar (The Oasis). At the time, two drinks were the maximum (thanks to rowdier crowds from the past), and a movie on the "big" screen constituted the entertainment.

[REDACTED]
With my CSG colleagues earlier this year.

(U//FOUO) Life at As Saliyah was primitive in some respects, highly advanced in others. For all but two weeks, I lived in a tent inside a warehouse with about 80 other people. When compared to conditions elsewhere in the AOR (Area of Responsibility), my accommodations were the equivalent of the Ritz-Carlton. My commute to work each day took 5-10 minutes via bicycle, and I have to admit that riding through the dust storms of February and March was a bit surreal.

[REDACTED]
The surroundings at As Saliyah.

(U//FOUO) In the first weeks after arrival in Qatar, the dust storms stand out as the most notable. Tiny dust particles found their way into everything - eyes, noses, clothes - and everyone seemed to have a persistent cough as a result. Newcomers to As Saliyah stood out because their incessant cough would keep half the tent awake until they adjusted. Located so close to the Persian Gulf, humidity was nearly intolerable at times, and got worse in April and May. By my recollection, the temperature soared to 120 degrees on the day I returned back to the states.

(U//FOUO) Food service was - well, I won't lie to you - incredible. Some of the dishes were repeated often, but never once did I eat an MRE (Meal Ready-to-Eat). Every meal was a hot meal. Each week, a surf and turf meal was served (and yet somehow we survived!).

(U//FOUO) Newspapers were hard to come by, and since my tent did not have a television, news was a hot commodity in the first few weeks. One of the local workers kindly agreed to deliver a copy of the Gulf Times to my bunk bed for \$1 per day. I also tuned in a short-wave radio to get the latest news.

(U//FOUO) Protective measures at As Saliyah began in earnest

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months before OIF began. New concrete and sandbag bunkers were constructed, and chemical and biological attack drills occurred every two weeks. Just prior to the outset of OIF, personnel were required to carry their protective masks at all times, and full protective suits had to be kept within a few minutes' reach.

(U//FOUO) Once we were finally allowed off base in late April, a favorite destination was "Shwarma Alley," a short stretch of road in Doha where small eateries specialized in inexpensive Middle Eastern food and frozen juice drinks.

[REDACTED]

Posing with the owner of one of the restaurants

(U//FOUO) Later in May, I visited the gold market and a few carpet shops around Doha. And finally, the day before returning, several of us enjoyed a day of warm (well, hot) weather swimming in Doha Bay

[REDACTED]

Swimming in Doha Bay

(U//FOUO) While I was able to travel outside of As Saliyah only briefly, it was enough to get a sense of the life and culture of Qatar. However, the work we did for CSG CENTCOM was far more important and, to this end, this overseas assignment was a complete success.

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