

CAREERS

INCIRLIK AIR BASE, TURKEY



Air Force Staff Sgt. Eric H. Garnett assists a weight lifter at the camp gym in Incirlik Air Base's tent city. Garnett, a recreation fitness director, is part of a 1,200-member team deployed to Turkey in support of the U.S. efforts to help Kurdish tribes people in an operation called provide Comfort. Photo by Rolando Gomez

BY CLINT WILLIAMS

The evening sun cast an orange hue over the long rows of sand-colored tents, as the son of a Portland man gathered to socialize and listen to the sounds of American music or just share the events of the work day.

Suddenly, from a Moslem mosque near the camp, a harmonic voice singing the haunting melody of an Islamic prayer carries over the entire base, calling the faithful of Islam to evening prayer to Allah.

Air Force Staff Sgt. Eric H. Garnett pauses to listen for a moment, then gazing westward, thinks of family and friends back in Port-

land. However, no matter how much he longs for the warmth and comfort of home, Garnett realizes he is contributing to the safety and security of an estimated 500,000 Iraqi Kurds in an effort called Operation Provide Comfort.

Garnett, 29, son of Nathaniel Pratcher, 1910 N. E. Cramer Ave., Portland, is a recreation fitness director who deployed from McChord Air Force Base, Wash., to support the United Nations ongoing humanitarian effort to feed, house and protect the Kurds, who fled to Iraq's rugged northern mountains.

U.S., British, and French forces are stationed in the area to prevent any

further aggression. Relief supplies, meanwhile, are flown from Incirlik to a staging site near the Iraqi border, then are brought in by truck caravans to the Kurds to help them reestablish their lives and communities.

Garnett joins over 1,200 men and women assigned here for the operation and works as a base support team member, and helps ensure Provide Comfort's activities run smoothly and effectively.

"My duty while deployed in Turkey is to provide overall sports and fitness programs for approximately 1,800 multi-national and multi-service personnel.

"I also perform additional du-

ties, such as umpiring softball games, planning all sports tournaments, and providing the military's "Fit For Life" program to increase our service members health and fitness activities," said Garnett.

Most of the people are deployed here for a four-month period, and had to leave their families and the routine of normal base duty for the somewhat austere conditions of camp life. However, Garnett said the job here isn't that different from what he does back in McChord.

"What's mainly different about the job I'm doing here versus back home is at McChord I also work as a food service supply and stock control specialist in the base's dining facilities," said the 1985 Benson Polytechnic High School graduate.

Deployed members may work

around the clock supporting air operations from Incirlik to eastern Turkey and northern Iraq. Off-duty time is spent either in the camp area, or in the local village near the base, where Turkish businesses offer everything from exotic oriental carpets, brass and copper goods, to 18 and 24-carat gold jewelry, as well as the local cuisine.

The recent exposure to all the sights, smells and sounds of this Mediterranean culture has left quite an impression on Garnett.

"The lifestyle here in Turkey is quite different from what we're used to back in the States. We live in tents here, and some of the tents have TVs and VCRs.

"Visiting the surrounding communities at Incirlik, we get a chance to see first hand the poverty of this

country. The food is different from the States mainly in the way it's prepared and served.

"Another thing about living in tents is we definitely know when it rains or when the wind is blowing hard," said Garnett.

Those who are deployed to support Provide Comfort are well aware that their effort is overwhelmingly providing Kurdish refugees a respite from the harshness of the Iraqi regime. It's an effort Garnett says gives him a great deal of satisfaction.

"I think we're helping the Kurds survive against Iraq's hostility toward them. If not for us they would probably be wiped out. Besides the protection, we're also providing them food and medicine, and consequently, we're giving them a better quality of life," Garnett said.

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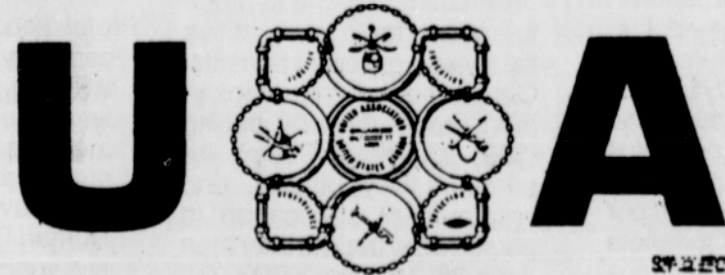
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