



(U) Working at Prince Sultan Air Base, SA

FROM: [REDACTED]
IA Intern
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(S//SI) The call went out shortly after 9/11 for a military O2/O3 to deploy to the CENTCOM Area of Operations (AO) to support the campaign in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom - OEF) as well as continuing support of Operation Southern Watch (OSW) as Chief of the Cryptologic Services Group (CSG) CENTCOM (Fwd). Having just left active-duty as a US Army Captain a couple of months prior, I hesitantly inquired with the NIST office if they would consider re-activating me for this deployment. After a day or two of realizing the amount of paperwork that would require, the NIST folks decided that they would just send me in my civilian capacity, and I was on a plane to Saudi Arabia before the ink on my new passport was dry.

(S) The shades were drawn, the lights were out, and the transport plane hit the tarmac hard in the middle of the Arabian night. The cargo door slid open revealing a desolate dune-capped landscape lined with rows of razor wire and guard towers. The airfield itself was enormous - more than capable of handling the F-16 fighters, French Mirages, British Tornados, and RC-135 and U-2 surveillance aircraft that lay clustered under makeshift hangars. It was from here that the US and her NATO allies prosecuted OSW - the oversight and compliance enforcement of keeping Saddam's military in check.



Sunrise at the compound

(S) Feeling a bit like Jack Ryan (a'la Tom Clancy's "Clear and Present Danger") I was given access to an enormous white armored Suburban in which to transport myself and my fellow CSG members the 15 miles to-and-from our secure living compound to the airfield. Now, having spent more than 8 years in the Army sleeping in the woods, I was fully prepared to spend the next 4 months in sub-standard living conditions, working as I was on the "front line" of the Global War on Terrorism. This, however, was an Air Force Base, and I'm embarrassed to say that it actually had a pool! I was housed in an air-conditioned dorm room directly across from the Burger King and beside the movie house. Well, the BK was a trailer, and the movie house was a giant tent, but still - this was certainly not the hardship of Afghanistan.



Combined Forces Compound Entrance

(S) But then, it wasn't Club Med either. Prince Sultan Air Base was born from the tragedy of the Khobar Towers bombing in Dhahran in 1996 that killed 19 American servicemen. Terrorism, then as now, was a definite reality in Saudi Arabia, and the security there was more stringent than any I'd ever seen in my prior military deployments. Despite the tremendous security efforts, Saudi forces found a spent SA-7 launcher within the airbase perimeter while I

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was there, indicating that someone had recently infiltrated the post and launched a surface-to-air missile at a coalition aircraft during their vulnerable takeoff or landing profile. Luckily, the missile missed its mark.

Me at my workplace, the JIC

(TS//SI//REL) The day-to-day work in the CSG was fascinating, and I never knew what was going to happen next. Although the watch on Iraq was rather low-key compared to the action of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) a year later, this was during the initial stages of OEF, and I had the opportunity to help manage SIGINT operations for such notable Afghanistan operations as Operation Anaconda. One particularly noteworthy graveyard shift found me alone in the CSG when the call came in that an MC-130 Special Operations aircraft had crashed near an Afghan village, and I had to coordinate the national and tactical cryptologic support through the Combined Air Operations Center to facilitate the recovery of the survivors before Taliban forces could threaten the crash site. Other instances had me putting to use my prior training as an Army Psychological Operations (PSYOP) Officer in coordinating SIGINT support to psychological operations in Southern Iraq, encouraging Iraqi forces not to fire on coalition aircraft. I even had the opportunity to fly on the RC-135 "Rivet Joint" COMINT/ELINT collection aircraft as it ferreted out Iraqi communications along the Saudi border. It was one heck of an intern tour!

(U//FOUO) My recommendation: go to the [NIST webpage](#) now and volunteer for a deployment. You won't be disappointed, and you certainly won't be bored!

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