

The assignment was challenging: Report from Iraq, Afghanistan, and two other undisclosed Southwest Asia locations in a little over three weeks. The constant flying, jet lag, missed meals, meals I'd wished I'd missed — these all paled in comparison to the loath of waiting in passenger terminals. I spent so much time in one terminal I feared the shifting sands of time, literally, were going to bury me alive.

I spent too much time waiting for flights and too little time sleeping. Finding a comfortable spot for a nap in a passenger terminal is like trying to find a Bedouin shoehorn salesman.

At Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, I couldn't tell if I was asleep or awake because nobody used lights outside — anywhere. No aircraft lights. No vehicle lights. I heard the sounds of aircraft taxing on the runway, but I couldn't see them until I nearly walked into them. Little glow sticks wiggled around when someone walked, or the sticks glided along in a smooth path when they were attached to a vehicle.

With no glow sticks of my own as I waited on the darkened flight line for transportation, I immersed myself into my own little world. I scratched parts of my body that itched, checked for foreign object damage in my nose, made a tiny hole with my thumb and index

finger and squinted through it so I could magnify the stars — I did all this until I realized people could see me plain as day through night vision goggles. They all had them.

These aspects of the trip I wish to forget, and will, with the help of a high-priced therapist or an extremely entertaining circus midget.

What I'll never forget are the people we met. Resilience comes to mind.

Resilience applied to Airman 1st Class Jessie Holladay, who deployed from Royal Air Force Lakenheath, England. He volunteered to serve in munitions at an undisclosed desert location for 120 days, only to be told later he'd have to stay 150. He wasn't the only one extended during the air and space expeditionary force "Blue." Many more tours were lengthened. Disappointed at first, he, like most people in that area, eventually learned he was clearly needed. Can't bomb the enemy without munitions, he figured.

"I feel good about helping out with what we know is right," he said. "My parents are proud of me, especially my grandfather, who spent 20 years in the Air Force."

Resilience also applied to the Guard and Reserve airmen serving in AEF Blue. One example was Col. (Dr.) Mark Weiner, a Reserve dentist deployed from Travis Air Force Base, Calif. He served as commander of the 332nd Expeditionary Aeromedical-Dental

Operations Squadron at Tallil, Iraq. The only Air Force dentist between Bagdad and Kuwait, he specialized in emergency dental care. Before his deployment, he fortunately sold his private dental practice. He felt lucky he didn't have to put a closed sign on his door for four months like a few others he knew.

"I would like to think patients would be sup-

portive of a doctor who needed to close one's office for a time. But realistically, the percentage of those who would return en masse has typically been low," he said. "From a business perspective, the financial impact would have been devastating.

"There is definitely a sacrifice that is made by all reservists, but I'd like to think that reservists make this commitment fully aware of the possible hardships that follow," he added. "My ability to help our warriors, and the personal satisfaction in doing so, was the reason I made the commitment early on, and have now made the sacrifice."

Resilience also applies to Afghanistan children from the village of Sortekle who were given a tent by Air Force members at Bagram. To the Air Force, it wasn't much, just an old eight-section tent. But to the school principal, that tent could be transformed into a school.

To those children and young adults, war is all they know. The Soviet Union invaded in 1979 and was forced out 10 years later by anti-communist forces supplied and trained by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and other nations. However, fighting continued among warring factions, spawning today's Taliban, which was able to capture most of the country. That is, until America and 90 other nations stepped in on Oct. 7, 2001, following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The Sortekle visit humbled me. The village, near Bagram, made the backwoods of Kentucky look like Beverly Hills, Calif. Villagers bathed and drank from the same stream. But the children looked well-fed, and the villagers seemed happy. I only wish I had brought some crayons, or something, for the children. If you feel the urge to help the resilient children of Afghanistan, send school supplies, personal items or toys to:

Adopt-a-Village Program
455th EOG/CC
APO AE 09354

And I guess resilience also applies to me, that is, after therapy. Anyone know an out-of-work, really entertaining circus midget?

— Tech. Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.

Got to be Gumby

An Afghanistan instructor teaches math to local youth. Air Force members at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, donated a tent to the village of Sortekle so villagers could conduct school, rain or shine, year-round.

by Master Sgt. Lance Cheung

