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Boo's Great Middle East Adventure

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Boo's travels took her all over Iraq and to four other countries. Donning her military uniform and newly-acquired lieutenant rank, Boo visits Al Asad Resident Office, one of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 27 resident offices in Iraq. The staff at Al Asad Resident Office is responsible for the engineer and construction management of 22 active projects valued at more than \$138 million. Projects include five new schools, an additional wing for Haditha Hospital, and two new airfield parking aprons for Al Asad Air Base, one for C-5s and the other for medium aircraft. [USACE Photo Courtesy of Maj. Todd Heuser]

Baghdad, Iraq - Military families find different ways to cope with the long separations that come with military service and deployments. Maj. Todd Heuser, stationed in Baghdad, Iraq with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gulf Region Division, found a unique way to connect with his family and friends back home, providing fun and relief from the daily monotony and giving his family a new way to experience his deployment.

Prior to leaving for Iraq, Heuser's daughter, Ashley (10), gave him a stuffed

bear named Boo as a way of remembering her.

"Every time dad goes away I give him a stuffed animal," Ashley explained. "It's a little token for him to remember me by." Ashley and her older brother Will (13) are home in Marysville, Ohio with their mom Shelly, Heuser's wife of 19 years.

"Boo was a gift to Ashley from a member at our church after we lost everything in a house fire in 2007," Heuser added. When Ashley gave Boo to her dad January 1, 2008, little did she know that Boo would play a starring role in her father's deployment to Iraq.



After completing a four day trip to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers offices in southern, Iraq, Boo and Maj. Heuser travel back to Baghdad from Basra aboard a British C-130. USACE has an area office and resident office in Basra. Staff there oversee \$250 million in construction projects including new water and wastewater treatment plants, police stations and court houses. USACE Photo Courtesy of Maj. Todd Heuser]



A U.S. Air Force Staff Sergeant hands Boo back her travel paperwork explaining there is no room on the flight from Baghdad to Kuwait. Fortunately Boo and Maj. Heuser were able to get on a flight the following day. [USACE Photo Courtesy of Maj. Todd Heuser]

Travel is integral to Heuser fulfilling his duties as the contract office representative for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on its personal security contract with Aegis, a London-based security company. He oversees all aspects of the contract and has made seven trips throughout Iraq, as well as trips to Kuwait, Dubai, Qatar and Afghanistan.

"Within Iraq, the target is to get to each site about once a quarter," Heuser explained, "which means I'm traveling about a week and a half each month."

Aegis employees are co-located with USACE personnel at 17 locations and provide site and transportation security. Heuser has visited all of those locations multiple times since his deployment began in February.

Heuser made his first trip solo but every trip since, Boo has been his travel companion. Along the way, he documented their travels through photos and compiled them into PowerPoint presentations that he shares with family, friends and co-workers back home.

There are fifteen installments of Boo's adventures. Not all of them highlighting work related trips, one presentation is a

visit to Saddam's Bunker, as well as several others documenting daily life in the International Zone where Heuser is based.

The presentations provide an important link between Heuser and his friends and family.

Ashley said she feels more connected to her dad this time, as opposed to his first deployment to Iraq in 2003-2004 with the 79th Quartermaster Company.

"His first deployment I barely got to speak to him," she said, explaining that she was usually at school when he had opportunities to call home.

Often humorous, Boo's adventures have a strong following with Ashley's friends and teachers at school, as well as with family and friends.

"People look forward to the next installment," Shelly Heuser said. "Some people find it insightful, getting the soldier's perspective. It has become a topic of discussion and Ashley feels more comfortable knowing what's going on with her dad. He's carrying her bear all over Iraq and that is helping her feel connected."



Boo hangs out with her new friends in the International Zone. Ashley Heuser gave Boo to her father Maj. Todd Heuser prior to his deployment to Iraq. Heuser is deployed with the 412th Theater Engineer Command, supporting the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region Division's reconstruction mission. [USACE Photo Courtesy of Maj. Todd Heuser]

The response to Boo is mixed, Heuser said. He does get his fair share of odd looks but most people are willing to go along; checking Boo in for flights, giving her manicures and massages while on R&R, and letting her “drive” the forklift that was loading bags onto a military flight.

Gen. David Petraeus, commander of U.S. Central Command, even posed for a picture with Heuser and Boo as part of a photo op held at the U.S. Embassy prior to his departure as commanding general of Multi-National Force – Iraq.

As Boo’s adventures evolved, she acquired the proper uniform and accompanying flak vest thanks to a sewing shop in Tallil, Iraq. She also received some face work, needing to have her nose restitched, which is also documented as part of her journeys.

Ashley sent over some civilian clothes for Boo to wear when travel required it. Boo has also acquired military rank, earning promotion to lieutenant after a month’s time in Iraq and quickly rose through the ranks to colonel, currently outranking Heuser.

“Boo has been a great hobby, a distraction,” Heuser explained. “It’s something fun to do and a stress release.” It has also served as an incredible link between Heuser and his family, allowing them to experience his travels and see aspects of Iraq that aren’t always available.

Ashley says she looks forward to her father’s e-mails and gets so excited to see the next installment.

Heuser and Boo will redeploy shortly. Having completed his mission as an Army Reserve Soldier with the 412th Theater Engineer Command based in Vicksburg, Mississippi, Heuser will return to his civilian job as a quality engineer for Honda of America Manufacturing, Inc., in Marysville, Ohio.

A place of honor is already set aside in Ashley’s room in anticipation of Boo’s return. Boo will be on a special shelf and seated on a special chair, she explained.

“I will never get rid of Boo,” she said. “She will be passed down to my kids.”

Ashley and her mom frequently joke about Heuser “having too much fun” with Boo’s adventures, but they both agree it brightens their days and helps to ease the time of separation.



Traveling begins to take its toll on Boo. She is able to get some face work done in Tallil on August 8. She felt like a new bear afterwards [USACE Photo Courtesy of Maj. Todd Heuser]

Five of Boo’s Adventures

[Boo Travels South](#)

[Boo Comes Home for R&R](#)

[Boo Travels North](#)

[Boo Goes to Dubai](#)

[Boo Travels South \(Again\)](#)

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