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Iraq tour of duty has some amenities

Flight surgeon tells about life overseas

By Kate Nolan

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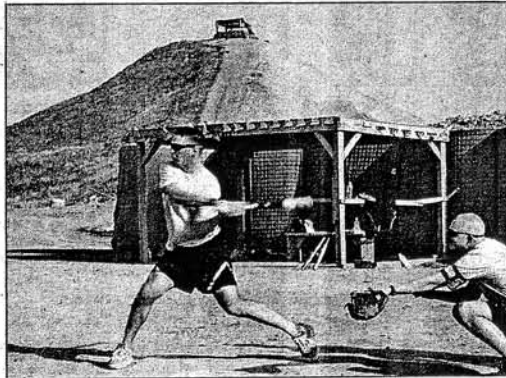
Last of three parts

Lt. Col. Robert Dixon, a senior flight surgeon at Luke Air Force Base, was an early trainee in Scottsdale Healthcare's combat medicine training program.

Dixon, 52, who has served in Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Afghanistan, was deployed this spring to Kirkuk Regional Air Base in north-eastern Iraq. The base is on the outskirts of Kirkuk, a city of more than 750,000 about 180 miles north of Baghdad.

Dixon is a Goodyear resident with specialty training in emergency and aerospace medicine and a medical degree from Virginia Commonwealth University.

He was recently interviewed



LT. COL. ROBERT M. DIXON

Medical personnel play baseball during their leisure time at the base hospital at Kirkuk Regional Air Base in Iraq.

Scottsdale Healthcare to honor active-duty military

Scottsdale Healthcare is initiating "Salute to the Military," a permanent display recognizing employees, physicians and volunteers who serve in the military and military personnel who train at Scottsdale Healthcare.

The first honorees:

■ Lt. Col. Frederick Marciano, medical director of neurology at Scottsdale Healthcare, is on active duty in the U.S. Army Reserves at Fort Bliss, Texas. In 2003 Marciano served at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, where he was lead neurosurgeon in the treatment of POW Pfc. Jessica Lynch, who was taken captive and rescued in one of the most highly publicized events in the early stages of the war in Iraq in 2003.

■ Lt. Col. Robert Dixon, senior flight surgeon at Luke Air Force Base, has served in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Currently deployed in Kirkuk, Iraq, Dixon participated in combat medical training at Scottsdale Healthcare in 2005.

Details: A dedication will be held at 4:30 p.m. Sunday in the cafeteria at Scottsdale Healthcare Osborn, 7400 E. Osborn Road, Scottsdale. Speakers will include U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz., and representatives of the U.S. Air Force, the Arizona National Guard and Luke Air Force Base.

online, with his responses reviewed by U.S. Air Force authorities.

Today's story, the last of three parts, provides a personal look at his experience as medical operations flight commander for EMEDS, or the Expeditionary Medical Squadron, in Kirkuk:

You sent photos of beautiful flowers growing in the Iraq desert.

Do you actually get to walk around doing nature photography? Isn't that dangerous?

Lots of flowering weeds abound (advantage of doing trash and weed detail).

(There is a) fairly large stand-off between us and the base perimeter.

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Scottsdale Healthcare military training

What: In 2005, Goodyear resident Lt. Col. Robert Dixon, a U.S. Air Force surgeon now serving in Kirkuk, Iraq, was one of the first trainees in a unique Scottsdale Healthcare program that helps the military accomplish its combat mission.

Update: U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell is working to secure funding for the unique public-private alliance between Scottsdale Healthcare and military bases around the country. According to Mitchell, D-Ariz., the program reduces costs and enhances military training.

Program: The military trauma training program at Scottsdale Healthcare Osborn consists of a trauma skill tutorial and hands-on clinical trauma rotations. The program partners with Maricopa Integrated Health System and offers training in trauma, burns, orthopedics, EMS ride-alongs and wound care.

Model: Scottsdale Healthcare executive Wendy Lyons and then trauma chief Dr. Tom Wachtel set up the program. It is described as a model for community hospitals to provide military medical training as military hospitals increasingly are shuttered. Luke Air Force Base, the U.S. Army Reserve and Army and Air National Guard units participate.

Duty: Surgeons participating in the program focus on preparing for a combat deployment.

Base features good food, recreation

DIXON

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What kind of living quarters do you have at Kirkuk?

KBR Inc., a company contracted by the U.S. government, takes very good care of us. Dining facility (D-FAC): the largest Golden Corral you can imagine, serving four meals a day. The living quarters are the best I've had in a forward deployed location: modular, air conditioned, with bathroom, sort of like a cruise ship cabin (inside cabin — no ocean view). Self-service and contract laundry services. All protected by sandbags and concrete blast barriers.

How do you spend your days off?

No days off; spend six to 12 hours a day at the EMEDS, but plenty of time off and sleep, depending on the work requirements. Things are better for all if there is no demand for my command or surgical skills.

There are two weight-training centers, two aerobic exercise centers, and a large gymnasium. I get about two hours of exercise most days. There is a swimming pool. There are libraries with



LT. COL. ROBERT M. DIXON

This sign is a constant reminder of being in a war zone at the base hospital at Kirkuk Regional Air Base in Iraq.

books, videos, and CDs; computers, phones, and video conferencing for communication with loved ones back home; and movies and USO shows. Individual units also have parties and cookouts.

We heard of a place on the base called the Clamtina. What is it?

The original "Clamtina" was in a clamshell tent structure, so called because both ends open and close like a

clam shell; it's like a USO canteen or cantina for movies, USO shows, large gatherings, and official presentations.

Have you been struck by cultural differences in Iraq?

I do not get any opportunities for significant interaction with local Iraqis.

What do you miss about home? I miss my wife most of all.

Unlike much of the world, we in the United States are truly fortunate to have peace and prosperity at home, opportunity and education, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of travel, and the privilege to govern ourselves.

Is there anything this community can do to help our military forces in Iraq?

Learn about legislation that affects active duty, (National) Guard, and Reserve personnel; especially regarding medical resources for veterans. It's important for the American public to understand how their tax dollars are used to support us.

If you have loved ones over here, e-mail or write frequently. Knowing we have that support network back home helps us accomplish the mission.