



Some attitude changes seen in most recent service there

By Jan Schultz

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Travis Vires spent a leisurely few days in Imperial the end of June, coming back to the hometown he hadn't visited in two and a half years.

His four days here were likely a stark difference from the U.S. Air Force Major's most recent tour of duty in Iraq from November, 2007, to November, 2008.

While he worked out of the "green zone" in Iraq, he told members of the Imperial Lions Club at a June 23 meeting that their compound was shot at more than once and "I lost friends."

During his year there, Vires worked with the Multi-National Security Transition Command as an advisor to the Iraqi Logistics Directorate.

He and other officers were charged with working one-on-one, five days a week, with Iraqi officers, "teaching them to think" and helping them learn basic western officer traits.

Unfortunately, under Saddam Hussein's rule for 30 years, the Iraqis did not learn to think much for themselves or develop the leadership traits needed as officers, he said.

Vires also spent five months in Iraq in 2006, and said he saw some changes in attitude among the Iraqi officers he worked with in his most recent year there.

"For 30 years, all that Iraqis heard was how bad the U.S. was," Vires said.

"But it's changing," he said, since their officers' exposure to the U.S. military.

Vires said the Iraqis he worked with were concerned about the U.S. pulling out of their country. U.S. soldiers are now leaving the country gradually, but advisors like Vires will "be there awhile," he said.

In fact, Vires fully expects to be assigned another tour of duty in Iraq, probably next summer.

Vires said he can't say for sure what the future holds for the new Iraqi government, but he does see growth in their officers' confidence.

"They possibly don't have a lot of competence yet, but their confidence is growing," he said.

"If they can turn that into competence, they'll be fine."

He said he's hopeful for the government there, but reminded the Lions members that it took the U.S. 13 years to elect its first president after Americans won their independence.

"Iraq is only into its fifth year of independence," he said.

He used a 20-year-old Iraqi interpreter in his work with the officers, and noted most younger Iraqis know English.

"They've learned it on their own" since the U.S. military arrived in 2003, he said.

Vires said he worked strictly with Iraqi officers most of the time, and didn't have much interaction with the public, but he believes they don't want to fight a 100-year war.

"They just want to raise their kids," he said.

Not surprisingly, Vires said their culture is vastly different than ours.

"Doing things for others is not part of their culture," he said.

Service organizations such as the Lions club to which he was speaking are completely foreign to them.

He said there is not a lot of water available, so daily baths aren't common, and air conditioning is scarce.

Noting the very warm temperatures even in November, he left it to the imagination how that affects individual body "scents."

However, nearly everyone has a cell phone, though only the wealthy can afford such things as the internet, he said.

When it comes to the Iraqis' view of the United States, he recalls being asked if all American women are like those on "Desperate Housewives."

For those who do have access to television, what they receive are U.S. programs, Vires said. "So, you can thank your Hollywood producers for that image," he said.

Since his return to the U.S. last November, Vires and wife, Rebeccah, and three children moved in March to Prattville, Ala., a suburb of Montgomery.

Vires is now assigned to the Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, where he works in the logistics area, with the budget and determining what the Air Force needs to be teaching in the future.

He came to Imperial the end of June to pick up Sasha, 12, Tristan, 10, and Nadia, 9, who had spent the previous two and a half weeks with grandparents, Bruce and Lorain Vires.