



By Carolyn Lee
The Imperial Republican

The heat of a Nebraska summer has nothing on Afghanistan. SPC Cole Fitzke said that temperatures could climb as high as 142 degrees in the southern part of the country.

Fitzke, 25, was in that country from April 2012 until January of this year with his Army 2nd Infantry Division Unit 1-17 Bravo Company Second Platoon First Squad.

The Company served at Forward Operations Base (FOB) Pashmal South in southern Afghanistan in the Zhari and Panjway Districts on the Kandahar Province.

The 2006 Chase County Schools graduate enlisted in the Army in October 2010, and was first stationed at Ft. Benning, Ga. He is an automatic rifleman. He ran patrols, searching for IEDs (improvised explosive devices), and working with “the Afghan National Army (ANA) to train them in proper patrols.”

While on patrol, Fitzke rode in a Stryker, an eight-wheel vehicle, instead of a tank or Hummer.



There were about 120 Army personnel and 70 ANA at the POB. “I felt safe with the guys I was with,” Fitzke stated. “The people knew what they were doing.”

The troops lived in tents that had air conditioning and heat. That wasn’t bad, the soldier said, but the food was.

There were no snacks on base, parents Russ and Peggy Fitzke of Imperial noted, so they would send him a care package every once in awhile with some homemade salsa and nacho chips.

That’s what Fitzke said he missed the most while over seas—good food.

However, the region in which he was stationed is known for its grapes. The locals build mud huts with holes in the sides in which are inserted long wooden rods.

The clusters of grapes are hung on the rods to dry.

Sometimes, if a patrol was on a three-day mission, it would stay in a grape hut, seeking shelter from the sun, Fitzke said.

A typical day would be to patrol in the morning, talk to the village elders about what they need and if they know the location of the Taliban, then pull guard duty, followed by another patrol in the afternoon.

And yes, some natives would point out a Taliban location, or an IED. Fitzke said that’s because they have lost family to the terrorist group.

Of the natives, “Some want you to be there to help their country. Other’s don’t care.”

In the area, the villages consisted of mud huts and walls. Two languages are spoken, and the religion is Muslim. Fitzke said he learned a lot about the culture of the area.

He also learned to know his limits—“How far you can push yourself if you have to, and how to work with all sorts of people.”

The soldier’s next stop is Ft. Lewis, Wash., on April 14. He has just less than one year of active duty left, and will then spend five years in the Army Reserves.

As for the future, that’s in the future. He was just glad to be able to spend Easter with his family.