



Dr. Emil Graf graduated from PISR in June of 2008, he is now overseas serving as a General Surgeon in the US Army.

Please check back with us often as we will be posting his letters and hoping for a quick & safe return to the states.

Date: Sunday, November 2, 2008, 5:27 AM

Greetings Everyone

Week one has passed. I am starting to get settled in. I took my first primary call a few days ago. I was helping another surgeon out with that open belly pt I mentioned in the last email, and I got called from the ED in regards to a new trauma pt. It was a young soldier who was pulling security on a 20 foot wall. He was shot by a sniper and fell off of the wall. He had entrance wound in the back and exit through the left flank, and another in and out of his left arm. When I got downstairs he was still awake and lucid. When I examined him both his spleen and colon were hanging out of this huge left flank wound, and his left arm had an open humeral fx. In residency we saw gunshot wounds but very rarely a rifle wound. This one round had entered in the back come out the side and then blew a huge hole in his left arm. High Velocity. Off to the OR.

Earlier in the week we also had another IED attack with one soldier losing one leg and almost losing the other. Today I wasn't on call but they had a few more come in from an IED attack. Again last night another young marine lost one of his arms in an IED attack. It is really tragic. I have not seen one soldier older than 21 yet, not counting the Iraqis.

As I mentioned in my last email I have been doing a lot of burn cases lately. Our burn surgeon left so I have been helping this other young general surgeon. He and I are managing several severely burned Iraqis and some real bad wounds. We have a little Iraqi boy with terrible burns, well over 50% that needs his neck and face grafted. Part of his ear just came off yesterday. Thankfully a Burn guy came down from Ballad yesterday and will be here until our burn surgeon comes. It is a good thing, because we definitely needed someone with some gray hair at this point. Especially with some of the other complicated pts in the ICU. This surgeon seems like a really good guy, he is actually a reservist from Grady Memorial in Atlanta. He has a ton of experience with trauma, critical care and burns.

It is really different here compared to residency. The ER docs run the traumas and as a surgeon you just sit back and wait to see if they think that there is a surgical issue. Sort of weird. The ED docs nurses and techs have all been here for 12 + months though so they are quite seasoned. Last year when things were busier frequently the surgeons would be tied up so the ED docs began running the traumas and things have not changed. There are 3 ER docs and they actually all seem like really good folks. So believe me I ain't here to rock the boat. I do whatever they want me to do, and that includes stay out of there way if that is what they want for a primary and secondary survey. In addition there is a young critical care doc running a closed ICU. So if your pt needs the ICU then he really sort of runs the show. He is a pretty abrasive guy. Sort of a pain in everyone's butt to be honest, and very defensive. He wants everyone to come do group rounds every morning at 8 and every evening at 530. There are 6 pts in the ICU and only 3 are surgical. Sort of retarded.

Halloween was interesting. You can tell that there are some sexually frustrated individuals here. There were several scantily clad women and there were also several scantily clad dudes. It was really quite frightening. They had a party in the dining facility, and it was pretty funny. Some very creative costumes came out of the woodwork. One doc was basically in a thong with a tight t shirt. I saw two guys wearing diapers only. Really odd party, especially without any cold beer. Most of the cleaning crew and the translators are all local nationals, and they were looking at the people like they were crazy. The commander let people wear their costumes all day at work.

They put out a warning the other day about possible kidnappings. Our guys pulled over a suspicious van in the International Zone with tons of weapons, handcuffs and sedative drugs. Intelligence here is saying that is one of the biggest threats in the area. They are stressing that no one goes anywhere alone and that no one go out at night. It is really weird because during the day this area seems like a quiet small community hospital in a dirty little city. There is not much going on, nothing seems threatening. There is a lot of concern here however over the SOFA (occupational forces agreement or something like that). Basically we have a UN mandate to stay here through December 12; however at that time we are supposed to be out of here. There is an extension in the works that is being contested at the government level, and the concern is that if it is not approved by Iraq, or if certain concessions are not met then there will be an escalation of violence. In addition Iraqi elections are coming up in December as well and there is speculation as to whether or not that will result in increased violence.

The hospital is a safe place, but out on the streets you can get yourself into trouble if you are an idiot. I don't remember if I mentioned this last time but the Iraqis are pushing to reclaim this hospital, and I have heard talk that the Combat Support Hospital (CASH) may be moving to Bdad International Airport right around the new year.

Now that I am not drinking beer, I am consuming tons of dessert. I try to eat at least 2 desserts per day. 2 huge chocolate chip cookies after lunch and 2 more chocolate chip cookies with chocolate ice cream after dinner. Oh Yeah! And let's not forget the ridiculous amount of red meat I am consuming. The vegetables and fruit are not what one would call fresh. Eating produce has never been my strongest suit, but it is even harder now, because it is old and not

tasty. There is not enough ranch dressing or Cheeze Whiz in America to fix this problem.

I mention this only because I know that some of you may send candy and sweets. I appreciate the gesture but go easy on the sweet treats, because I am definitely getting my fill.

The camera should be here shortly, when it arrives will send some pics. Today I was walking back from lunch and a med evac blackhawk helicopter was landing right next to me just outside the hospital and it was really cool.

Will keep in touch

Love

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