



Perris News

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Perris city worker back safe from tour in Iraq

Juan Lemus usually spends his days patching potholes, installing stop signs and trimming trees as a public works employee for the city of Perris.

But Lemus recently traded in his city uniform for body armor, a combat helmet and a gun while pulling a six-month combat tour in Iraq with a Navy construction battalion helping rebuild that war-torn country. Work began at sunup and lasted until dark. Lemus said rocket-propelled grenades sometimes struck within 200 or 300 feet of where he and his colleagues worked.

And the heat was almost unbearable. Daytime temperatures hit 130 degrees routinely. Lemus said construction workers toiled 40 minutes at a stretch, then relaxed for 20 minutes before going back on the job.

"People here have no idea how it is over there," Lemus said after returning to Perris, where he met and received the thanks of Mayor Daryl Busch. "You never feel completely safe. It's a hard time, a stressful time. But things seem to be getting better. The Iraqi people seem to be trying to make an effort to improve their lives."

Lemus, 37, arrived in Balad, Iraq, on March 5, part of a Camp Pendleton-base construction battalion, whose duties included building gymnasiums, huts and barracks, repairing roads and improving the quality of electrical service. Lemus said he usually worked as part of a team consisting of four to 10 members. His work didn't allow him much interaction with the local Iraqi population but he said that life in the country seems to be on the upswing. Bazaars do brisk business and plenty of Iraqis show computer and Internet savvy.

Lemus said the city of Perris has supported his military commitment and Mayor Busch praised his efforts, saying they help insure the safety of all Americans. His deployment was not the first overseas tour for the 2nd Class Petty Officer. Lemus also completed a tour in Germany in support of NATO.

"I'm proud of the work I did," Lemus said. "It's a good feeling."

Lemus is the father of three children, two girls and a boy. He has worked as a Perris employee for four years.



Perris public works employee Juan Lemos (left) is congratulated by Mayor Daryl Busch after completing his deployment as a Navy construction worker in Balad, Iraq.

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