

God Provides

In April, 2003, I was activated for Operation Iraqi Freedom and assigned to a barren patch of desert known as Camp Viper. I am a Religious Program Specialist, Fleet Marine Force, Petty Officer 1st Class in the U.S. Naval Reserve.

After spending many months in the region, our Marine unit anxiously awaited word of a return to Kuwait and better living conditions. But each evening our colonel came and went without news of our leaving Iraq anytime soon.

On May 2, I walked out of the operations center, and a young Marine asked if I could help out a visiting major. The major had just rolled in with the 8th Tanks Division, a small contingent of Marine reservists from Kentucky.

Morale was low among the reservists, and they were very battle weary, having just returned from the front lines where they had been engaged in heavy fire fighting. They had only Meals Ready-to-Eat (MREs), and none of them had heard a voice from home since they arrived in the country.

It had been three weeks since they had last showered, shaved or had a haircut. And they were thirsty for spiritual refreshment.

I spoke to my chaplain, and we set up a Protestant service for that afternoon. The chaplain provided a befitting sermon, and I sang a solo and provided the music with our small boom box.

The showers were opened to them, and one of our Marines gave haircuts. I began five-minute phone calls for each Marine and kept them going until every one had heard a voice from home.

I sat among them, listened to their stories and gave them T-Rations, which are larger portions of MREs served out of heating bins. To them, it seemed like a feast for kings.

As I walked around , one of the Marines asked me, "You wouldn't happen to have any boots, would you?" His combat boots had melted down to a thin sole from the heat of the metal flooring inside his tank.

I told him, "We only carried our gear out here and barely had room for extra clothing, but I will see what I can do. What size do you need?"

He replied, "Ten-and-a-half regular."

I went to the Operations Tent and asked if anyone had any extra boots, but the answer was no. I asked others as I walked around our camp, but no one had any extra boots or sneakers.

Discouraged, I walked back to the chapel, praying, "Lord, how can we help this man if we have no shoes?"

The Lord reminded me that the chaplain had received new boots from his wife because he needed a wider size. I asked him what he was going to do with his old boots.

He said, "I'll probably throw them away."

"Can I have them?" I asked.

As he pulled out a box from beneath his cot, he smiled and asked, "Why, does someone need them?"

Grinning, I said, "Maybe. What size are they?"

Handing the boots to me he said, "Ten-and-a-half regular."

I smiled as I went back to the Marine, dropped the boots in front of him and said, "Ten-and-a-half regular." He looked up at me in utter amazement. I smiled and said, "God provides."