



## Norwalk guardian deployed to the deserts of Iraq

**Norwalk Citizen-Staff**

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What in the world is a Norwalk Coast Guard Reservist doing in the deserts of Iraq?

Western and southern Iraq is a vast desert region covering some 65,000 square miles, or 12 times the size of Connecticut. A huge desolate area of heat, sand, dust and more dust, not your typical environment for a USCG Boatswains Mate Chief to be spending time. However, that is exactly where you will find Chief Barry Natale who is serving as one of the senior members of USCG RAID Team X. As a Coast Guard Chief Petty Officer, the chances of his being deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, two nearly land locked countries, were slim. So, Natale volunteered for this demanding assignment with the Redeployment Assistance and Inspection Detachment, or RAID Team. He has been overseas since August as one of a very small contingent of Coast Guard members serving in Iraq.

The USCG RAID Team conducts hazardous-material inspections for Army units that will soon be homeward bound. The site of these inspections can be anywhere in Iraq, so Natale and his shipmates routinely travel by a variety of modes that include: Blackhawk and Chinook helicopters, C-130's and convoy.

The destinations for the RAID Team include Forward Operating Bases or FOB's, located throughout Iraq.

Natale said the most meaningful part of his job is

his interaction with the many soldiers he meets. The RAID Team works closely with the Army Mobility Officers, Unit Movement Officers and HAZMAT Certifiers. The RAID Team inspection is one of the last steps that must be completed before they return to the United States.

"Our team is based in Balad but we travel around quite a bit. It's all part of the Army redeployment process. The Coast Guard is here helping soldiers to get home, which is rewarding for sure. During the past three months, I've met many soldiers that have been deployed more than a few times and at least one that is serving on his fifth deployment. For our team it's pretty much a volunteer situation but for these soldiers, extended deployments are a way of life," Natale said..

"While I am missing my wife Neisha, I am experiencing the high point of my military career. The mission of USCG RAID Team X is a singular one: to assist soldiers in getting home. It is hard for me to imagine anything more rewarding," Natale continued.

Natale joined the Coast Guard Reserve in December 1989, just about 12 years after completing an enlistment as a submariner in the United States Navy. He is currently assigned to USCG Station New Haven. Following the attacks of Sept. 11 he was called to active duty to serve at Military Ocean Terminal Bayonne, Station New York and Station Eatons Neck.

Prior to being selected for RAID Team duty, he also served briefly at Station Key West.

Natale volunteered for his present duty assignment as a RAID Team member as he saw it as a rare opportunity to continue serving his country as a logical expansion of his military career.

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Natale and the other members of RAID Team X spent six weeks in intensive pre-deployment training to prepare for their mission in the Middle East. Since arriving in Iraq, the RAID Team crew has found life to be very busy, as there are so few team members and numerous missions. Natale is tentatively scheduled to return to Norwalk around the 1st of June 2010, just in time for the start of the Long Island Sound boating season. The timing of his release is serendipitous to say the least because in his civilian life, Natale is a USCG licensed mariner and he enjoys boating.

He and his wife Neisha operate the 37-foot Seaport Express, which departs from the Rowayton Market dock on the Five Mile River. The Seaport Express is a 37-foot twin diesel powered vessel that is certified by the Coast Guard to carry up to 27 passengers for hire. The Natale's are looking forward to the 2010 boating season when they intend to continue offering lighthouse tours, sunset cruises and other nautical adventures that will keep him out on Long Island Sound and faraway from the deserts of Iraq.

The Coast Guard Auxiliary is supportive of Natale, his RAID Team shipmates and their mission. Coast Guard Auxiliary crew members regularly send "CARE" packages overseas to the RAID Team that include shipments of foot powder, toothpaste, cough drops, eye wash, dried fruit, local newspapers, hometown photos and other items that are challenging to find or simply unavailable in Iraq. "We are here to support the Coast Guard in all of their missions," said Norwalk Flotilla 72 Commander Jason Farrow, "and are honored to be a very small part of making his mission a success. We look forward to our shipmate's safe return to the familiar waters of Long Island Sound."

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