



Master Sgt. Jess Godinez, far right, finds a bit of shade in the Saudi Arabian desert with members of his Air Force unit.

MTA's Jess Godinez Won Air Force Honors for Saudi Arabian Desert Duty



Jess Godinez

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Sept. 5, 2001) Daily temps of 112 to 120 degrees. Sand. Scorching winds. More sand. Gulping down as much as a gallon and a half of water each day. That was life in the Saudi Arabian desert earlier this year for the MTA's Jess Godinez, a master sergeant in the U.S. Air Force Reserve.

Godinez, equipment maintenance manager in the Revenue Department, was one of a dozen local Air Force reservists who flew out of March Field in June to help support the multi-national effort to enforce a "no-fly zone" over Iraq.

His job: supervising a 17-member group of active duty and reserve aerial port technicians who were assigned to Prince Sultan Air Base to coordinate shipments of vehicles, supplies, food and personnel supporting Operation Southern Watch.

During his 45-day tour of duty, the group moved 380 tons of cargo and more than 3,800 passengers and their baggage into and out of the zone. His work earned Godinez honors as Senior Non-Commissioned Officer of the Month. He also was awarded the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for participation in Operation Southern Watch.

Very, very hot days

But, mostly it was long days of work under difficult conditions. "It was hot, very hot during the day," he says. "At night, it got into the high 80s and 90s. One night, it actually got down to 79 degrees and we had to bring out our sweaters because we thought it was a cold front coming through."

Water was a relief, but also a problem. "They tell you to drink a pint of water an hour," Godinez says. "I didn't think I could do that, but after two or three days, I found myself drinking five or six liters of water a day and that became a norm."

Milk and dairy products were plentiful; one of the world's largest dairies – with some 30,000 cattle – was located just outside the base. Food was typical cafeteria chow, but included a good and tasty variety of dishes, Godinez says.

Luckily, the troops no longer have to live in tents as members of the coalition forces once did. "I arrived at a really good time. The Saudis had just erected brand new dormitories for the English, French and U.S. troops."

Eventually, the 45 days ended and Godinez hopped a cargo flight to Ramstein, Germany, caught a bus to Frankfurt, a flight to Baltimore and another plane to LA. About 25 hours of flying, but a whole world away from what continues to be an international hot spot.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Jess Godinez is a Marine Corps veteran of Vietnam who, with his time in the Air Force, has 26 years' active and reserve service. He and his wife, Mona Lisa, live in Pomona. He has four adult children by previous marriages: Joshua, who works for a software contractor; Brandy, an Air Force staff sergeant and Russian interpreter; David, who works for Southwestern Bell; and Sarah, a certified nurses assistant and college student.

[Back to Bulletin Board](#)