

Welcome to new members

Gurpal Atwal	Price Waterhouse Coopers	Mike Leigh	Quest
James Barber	SABB	Ross Lloyd	BAE Systems
Peter Bibby	DTZ Middle East	Sam Maatouk	United Motor Company
Simon Brand	Jones Lang LaSalle	Gary McMillan	BAE Systems
Andrew Campbell	Almarai Company Ltd	Iain Morrison	SABB
Clive Carne	BAE Systems	Richard Morten	Rize Saudi Arabia Ltd
Firas Chakra	Calyon Saudi Fransi Ltd	John Mullaney	BAE Systems
Andrew Clark	SABB	Steve Nettle	GSS
Peter Dadzis	Olayan Financing Co.	Lynne Newbery	Quadrant Security Group
Trevor Davis	Cunningham Lindsey ME	Susan Noble	Quadrant Security Group
Graham Dean	BAE Systems	Scott Oliver	Al Rabie Saudi Dairy Co Ltd
Richard Dobbs	BAE Systems	Ian Pacey	BAE Systems
Jeffrey Forrester	SDT Co Ltd	Chris Parsons	BAE Systems
Justin Francis	BAE Systems	Jan Patrick	British International School
Al Hassan Goussous	Scottish Widows	Rupert Pierce	Paradigm GPT
Sylvia Grand	KFS Hospital	Andy Ritchie	Rider Levett Bucknall
Alex Gray	British International School	Kathleen Rooke	KFS Hospital
Robert Hanway	BAE Systems	Ian Simpson	BAE Systems
Stephen Harpum	MoDSAP	Kevin Steele	SAMA
Malcolm Harrison	Siemens Ltd	Peter Stoddart	SANGCOM
David Holding	Paradigm GPT	Mark Turner	American Express
Kevin Jenkins	British Embassy	Margaret Whittaker	KFS Hospital
Helen Leifer	Symonds Ltd		



Above:
Saddam's Throne

It was the early hours of the morning by now and the aircraft was much fuller with very dusty and weary looking soldiers. A young Portuguese soldier sat next to me. After a while, his head began to droop sideways and he was fast asleep on my shoulder. He must have been so exhausted to sleep in such conditions that I didn't have the heart to move and wake him. Another soft bump and we had reached Baghdad International Airport. Certainly, no turning back now!

I knew the final leg of my journey was about to start and was the most dangerous by all accounts. We were only a few miles from the Embassy, but our mode of transport was by RAF helicopter. The adrenaline was pumping around my body, I was feeling quite exhausted and it was freezing cold. I had got to the stage where I just wanted to get to a bed and didn't care how. Two Pumas descended from nowhere. We were reminded to wear our safety goggles and were quickly bundled into seats with our luggage and strapped in. Up we went, swinging and swerving around the city. I could see the River Tigris just below and tried to imagine how it would look in daylight. Two gunners were hanging out each open doorway. This was almost exciting, until flares were set off with loud

bangs! A stark reminder of where we were. After around ten minutes we had landed in the Green Zone and were rushed off into the waiting Embassy armoured bus. Gordon, whom I was replacing, was there to greet me and take me to my temporary accommodation in a 20ft metal container. By now, it was past 3 a.m. and I would be up and ready to go by 8. From Kuwait, it had taken over 9 hours to travel just 550km. After a quick security briefing – just in case anything happened overnight, I sank gratefully into bed and slept like a baby.

It has been an extraordinary time since then, meeting new colleagues and contacts and getting involved in work. A highlight was moving into my permanent POD, where I could begin to settle in. Spending Christmas, New Year and even my recent birthday in Iraq without family was a challenge that I did not relish, but so much was planned to keep us all entertained that we did not have time to feel homesick. Other surreal moments to date include: learning the foxtrot, partnered with the Ambassador, and continuing to dance on during a bomb alert; listening to members of the Baghdad Symphony Orchestra play Christmas music in the UN bar on Christmas Eve; finding myself sitting next to Iraqi President Talibani during his lunch. I have even got used to seeing so many armed personnel around, when they often seem to fill up a room with weapons and bulky armour.

Now, I am only a week away from my own first R&R. Although I am looking forward to it, I don't feel desperate to get out and know that I will be happy to return and pick up the reins once more. And there's a planned Valentine's Ball – so I may need that posh frock after all!