

Kid's KOrner

Women GIs In Saudi Arabia Make Their Presence Felt

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AL-KHUBAR, Saudi Arabia — When 19-year-old Valerie Mitchell breezed into the local Safeway supermarket here one night looking for "Afro perm" hair-care kits, more than a few customers gave her a second look.

Dressed in battle fatigues and sand-caked combat boots, the St. Louis native brushed past heavily veiled Saudi women in floor-length black "abayas," Arab men in flowing white "thobes" and scores of Europeans, Filipinos and Americans in this polyglot corner of Arabia. On aisle four she found what she and her sister soldiers wanted.

"After three months in the desert," beamed Pfc. Mitchell, a computer operator with the Army's 24th Mechanized Infantry Division, "this is a little bit of all right."

No problem, either, that Mitchell had only American dollars in her pocket as she lined up at one of a dozen checkout counters.

"We get more than 200 Americans a day in here, a lot of them women," the supermarket manager said, "and we gladly make change."

Thousands of American women in uniform have arrived in Saudi Arabia, perhaps the most conservative country in the Islamic world, as the U.S. troop buildup moves toward more than 400,000. A Pentagon spokesman refuses to say how many women are serving in Saudi Arabia and neighboring

skeikdoms, saying only that women make up 11 percent of U.S. armed forces worldwide.

Because of the "combat configuration of our forces," says Air Force Maj. Douglas Hart in Washington, D.C., "the percentage is less in the Persian Gulf."

By U.S. law, women are barred from serving in front-line combat units. But on today's battlefield, distinctions between combat and non-combat are blurred.

The presence of women GIs, say both Saudi and U.S. officials, is an unspoken challenge to custom, tradition and religious teachings that have long made Saudi Arabia one of the most restrictive countries in the world for women.

While American women serve as tank mechanics, cargo-plane pilots, doctors, nurses, ammunition haulers and weather forecasters. Saudi women aren't allowed to drive cars. The government officially made it illegal in November after about 70 Saudi women staged a protest in Riyadh, the capital, to challenge the decades-old traditional ban on driving.

Under severe Islamic strictures, Saudi women are veiled and robed from head to toe, forbidden from appearing in public with men and from traveling anywhere without the permission of husbands or male relatives. The rules are based not so much on laws as on the Sharia, the edicts of the 14-century-old Koran.

"I haven't the slightest doubt," says one Saudi businessman who asks for anonymity, "that all these



Preparing for a battle they hope won't come, Navy nurses Pamela Wright of Waukesha, Wis. (left), and Joel Holmes of Trenton, N.J., checks a seaman's vital signs during a combat drill on the hospital ship USNS Mercy in the Persian Gulf. Nearly half of the doctors and nurses on the 1,000-bed ship are women.

American women will change our country, especially the attitudes of very conservative young people."

The number of uniformed married couples who are assigned to Saudi Arabia remains murky. Pentagon officials say they don't keep such statistics.

Murky, too, are numbers on mothers such as Pat Antosh, a major in the Army National Guard, whose four children are in the care of relatives in California. "Sure it's tough, tough on everyone," says Antosh, whose husband, Ste. Marine Corps pilot, is also in Saudi Arabia.

The Pentagon policy for women GIs who find themselves pregnant in Saudi Arabia is to send them home to have their children. Then they either return to military duty

or take an administrative discharge.

At an air base in eastern Saudi Arabia, National Geographic saw more than a dozen women in battle fatigues board a military cargo jet for Dover Air Force Base, Del. All were pregnant, said an Air Force officer who showed the correspondent transportation orders confirming their condition.

The Pentagon confirms that 12 American women have been airlifted out of Saudi Arabia because they were pregnant, but says that all of them were considered "medical evacuations." It keeps no statistics on those shipped home for so-called "administrative channels" — discharges — because of pregnancy.

On another cavernous cargo jet, the flight crew taxis for takeoff. The co-pilot, a reservist, is a woman. A military police officer who stands guard nearby is a woman. So are the air base's weather forecaster and some doctors and nurses.

Lisa Wysong, 27, of Portland, Ore., her long brown ponytail flowing from underneath an Army-issue baseball cap, barks orders at Pakistani drivers as she directs the latest arrivals from America, members of the Alabama National Guard, onto buses that will take them to the desert.

"Whether you're a man or a woman," says Wysong, a graphic-arts student who was called to duty with the Oregon National Guard, "this place stinks."



Pakistani bus drivers receive instructions from U.S. Army Sgt. Lisa Wysong of Portland, Ore., at an air base in eastern Saudi Arabia. Wysong, one of thousands of women GIs stationed in the Moslem country, is responsible for moving fresh troops from the U.S. off jumbo jets and onto buses bound for desert bases.

Never Too Young To Start Saving Energy

Every Saving Tips for Kids:

Did you ever wonder what you can do to help save energy? Adults aren't the only ones who are using energy. You use energy every time you turn a light on, take a shower or play Nintendo. We sometimes forget how much energy each of us uses every day. Did you know that it has been estimated that one-fourth of all energy used is wasted? One 100 watt light bulb uses one fluid ounce of oil of 1 1/2 ounces of coal every hour it is turned on -- this is whether anyone is in the room using the light or not.

When we burn fossil fuels (coal or oil) we are using up our supplies and we are also polluting the environment. When fossil fuels are burned they produce carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide collects in the atmosphere and contributes to what scientists call the "greenhouse effect." Scientists have noticed the earth's atmosphere is warming (like a greenhouse) and believe this effect is changing our weather.

Each of us needs to save energy to conserve our fossil fuel resources and to protect our environment. Here are some hints for how

you can help save fossil fuels and the environment. Remember every little bit helps. If everyone shut off lights they are not using, we'd save barrels of oil. Try using one or two of these simple ways to save energy.

Some very simple, but effective ways you can save fossil fuels today are:

- Make your shower no longer than necessary. By not staying in the shower until the hot water tank is about empty, you would be saving water supplies, the energy needed to heat the water and contributing to the good disposition of the rest of the family.

- Recycle waste materials. Newspapers, cardboard, aluminum, glass and some plastics can be recycled to conserve energy and also helps solve the problem of what to do with garbage.

- Combine trips so errands are completed with a minimum of mileage and backtracking.

- Close doors to rooms not being used and shut off heat or air conditioning to those areas.

- Take advantage of free solar heat! Open blinds, draperies and shades on the sunny side of your home during the day to let the sun

warm your house in winter; keep them closed on hot summer days.

- Don't turn the water faucet on full force to wash your face and hands. Save water by using stoppers in the sinks when washing dishes or your hands and face.

- Use cold water or warm water rather than hot as much as possible when you do laundry or clean.

- Turn off the TV and radio when no one is listening. Unplugging the "instant-on" TV saves energy and also prevents possible damage during an electrical storm.

- Turn off lights when they are not needed. Newer models of light bulbs are often more efficient and produce the same amount of light with less wattage. Check the packages for lumen ratings rather than wattage. Keep light bulbs and shades clean.

- Remind other people in your family to help save energy by following these same hints.

For more information or if you have other ideas for ways to save energy, please contact Debra Bryant, Wayne County Cooperative Extension, 925 Court Street, Honesdale, PA 18431. (717) 253-5970 ext. 239.