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Eric Hiltner, Charleston, IL

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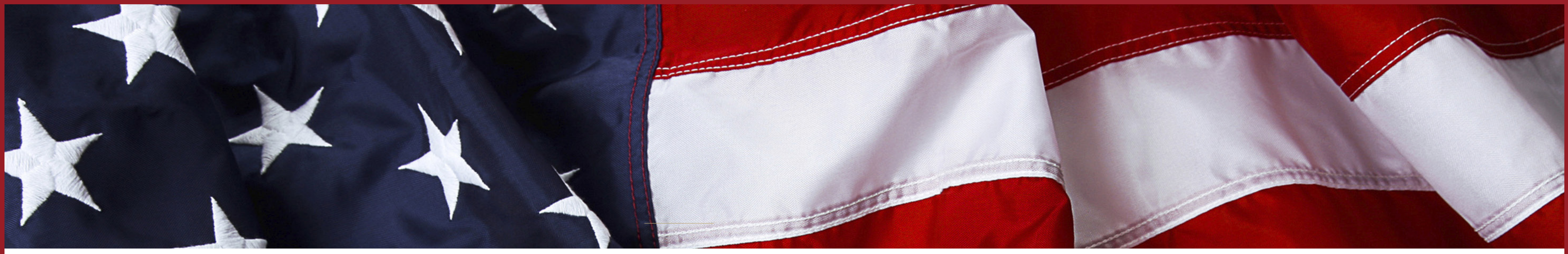


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Eric Hiltner

Age: 34

Branch of Military:
U.S. Army

Rank: Specialist

Dates of Service:
August 2001-August 2005

Deployments: DMZ/JSA, Korea; Baghdad, Iraq

EIU alumnus



Eric Hiltner

Charleston, IL



“For me, tattoos, they’re part of who I am and part of who I’m always gonna be. You know, my military awards are never gonna be taken from me. My service is never gonna be taken from me. I’m proud of my service, and, well, I don’t mind showing it off.”



“I’ve got my military awards that I’ve won, and I’ve just got kind of a sailor Jerry.”

“It’s always been kind of part of the culture in the military to have tattoos. It’s a sense of pride because it’s showing off who you are. You’re the anomaly if you don’t have a tattoo in the military any more.”



“That’s a patch from our unit, 1st Armored Division, Old Ironsides, and I adjusted it to make it a little more modern and more representative to me. We’ve got an Abrams tank for an armored division..., we’ve got the twin Minarets.

“I lived in the Martyrs Monument in Baghdad, and that is the monument for all the Iraqi soldiers that died in the Iran-Iraq War. It’s a really unique building and on top are these two really blue minarets. They’re tall and they just stand out; they’re really beautiful. For me, Iraq is really represented by the Martyrs Monument. It was home for a full year for me.”

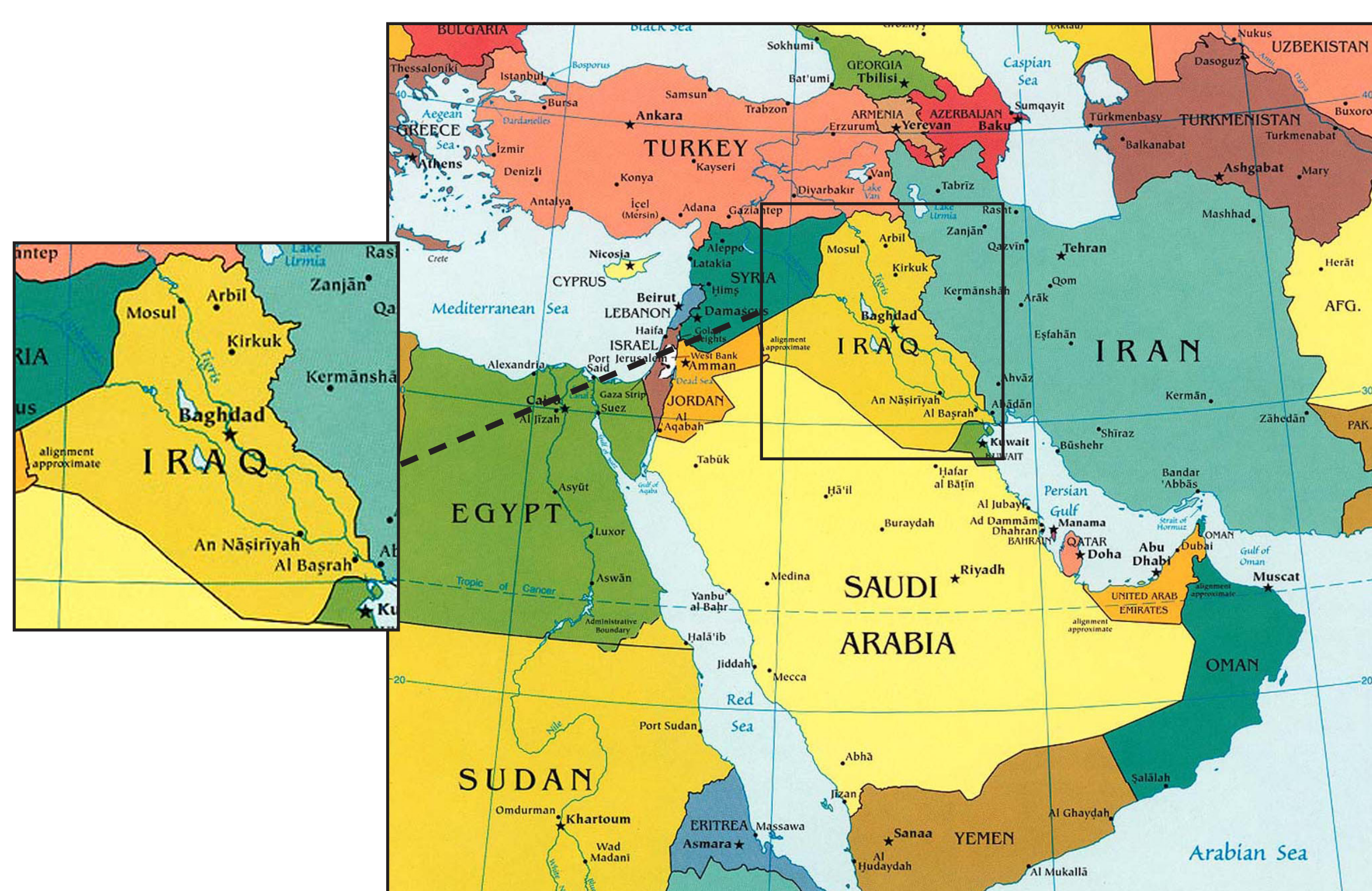


U.S. Navy photo by Aviation Electricians Mate 1st Class Rex Sackett
Martyrs Monument in Baghdad, Iraq.



“When I was in AIT, our drill sergeant came out one day and said, ‘All right, I got four slots for Korea,’ and I’m like, ‘I’ll take that chance,’ because I knew that if I went to Korea, Korea is considered a hardship tour, so you can choose your next duty station. I’m on the flight going to Korea, and I’m expecting donkey carts and grass huts and we fly into Seoul and it’s like bright lights - you have that view of, like, Tokyo with all the neon things. Seoul is every bit as bright as that, and it blew my mind right off the bat. This is not what I expected, and I loved it because it wasn’t just like being in America; it was a completely different experience.”

“After Korea I went to Bockenheim, Germany, and was in the 1st Armored Division. And about three months after I got to Germany, I got deployed to Iraq, where I was in Baghdad the entire time, spent 15 months there.”



Three ROK soldiers watch the border at Panmunjeom in the DMZ between North and South Korea.
Photo: Henrik Ishihara

“In Korea I was in the 2nd Infantry Division. I was a 96 Romeo. That’s a ground surveillance systems operator. At the DMZ in Korea, we set up our sensors along the border and we’d monitor them. I had to do three patrols along the border to kind of test out and replace equipment, adjust things.”

“I actually told my mom when I was like 8 or 9 years old I was gonna join the Army, and she didn’t believe me... It was after watching a Fourth of July parade and seeing the VFW float come by, and the old guys just sat there waving and everything, and I was like, ‘I want to be one of those guys.’

“Both my grandfathers served; my dad served. It’s a family thing.”