

# Desert Duty

By Doug Imberi, DDJC Public Affairs

After serving six months at the Defense Distribution Center's (DDC) forward distribution activity in Bahrain, Defense Distribution Depot San Joaquin, CA's (DDJC) Donny Hernandez was eager to get his biological clock back on Pacific Daylight Savings Time. "There is 11 hours difference between here and there," he pointed out.

He didn't have any trouble adjusting on the front end. There were mountains of over-ocean containers waiting for him when he arrived in Bahrain. He landed on the tiny island in the Persian Gulf on January 11, 2003 at 2 a.m. Just five hours later he was starting work.

He was part of the seven-member DDZZ team — the first DDC combat theater distribution platform. The distribution center consisted of thousands of containers filled with Class IV material like lumber, fencing, and sandbags. To ensure American and Coalition Forces had all the DLA Class IV items they needed, the DDC set up shop in Bahrain.

"There were hundreds of containers waiting for us when we arrived," recalled Hernandez. "We opened them up, inventoried them, and logged them in DSS (Distribution Standard System)."

DDZZ was termed "CONEX Beach" by those who worked there — acres of freshly poured asphalt with lines to mark storage locations. Encased by a chain link fence and concertina wire, there was not much protection from the elements.

"When we had sand storms, it was like a brown cloud," Hernandez recalled. "No matter what you did, sand was always in your nose and eyes, itching. Sometimes they lasted 3-4 days, but it didn't stop us from working."

The heat was also a problem with temperatures in the 95 to 110 range throughout the year. "When it was really hot, we tried to start work at sun up," he said. "About 4 a.m."

There was never a shortage of work at DDZZ. Containers had left U.S. ports in November 2002 and when Hernandez arrived, 1,100 containers were waiting for him. The first shipment to the troops was for 158 containers in January 2003. In the next two months, DDZZ would receive and process 2,000 more of the 40-foot containers.

When shipments arrived, the team worked 12-16 hour days. As part of the first team there, he helped set up the procedures for operation. "Each of us were multi-skilled and knew how to perform all the functions (at DDZZ)," Hernandez said.

He enjoyed the camaraderie they shared. They lived in the same apartment complex, drove to work together, left work together and ate their meals together. "We would alternate cooking meals for each other," he said. "I would make Mexican food, Charles Holder from DDRT would make Texas Chili, and others would make their specialty for all to share."



*DDJC's Danny Hernandez in desert gear.*

Home for the team was a complex of about 200 apartments with mostly Americans, located near a U.S. Navy Base. Security was provided by the Bahraini Police. When he was able to get out and see the sights he liked going to the outdoor markets to buy rugs and other local products.

He didn't care much for the local food though. "You find a lot of mutton and hummus (made from garbanzo beans)," said Hernandez. "I preferred my own cooking."

After being back home for just over a month, he was recalled to DDZZ. "He is a great worker, who knows the operation better than anyone here," said LTC Robert Guarino, USA, Commander, DDZZ, in an email to DDJC Commander COL Edward Visker, USA. "He did it all here, supporting the mission operationally, administratively and socially," added Guarino. "He is a natural leader who showed the replacement team the step by step processes that his team had developed over the last months."

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