

While at war, some days you ponder the meaning of life and death.

Other days, you can only think about how good the food tastes.

As far as I'm concerned, three things will get a soldier through the day: a comfortable place to sleep, a shower and decent food.

Some days you get all three, but other days you're lucky to grab one.

U.S. military bases are informally rated by the quality of their food. In Kuwait, the best food is reported to be at Camp Navistar; the worst is at Ali Al Salem Air Force base.

In Iraq, collective wisdom has it the best food is in Baghdad and Mosul.

Last week, I had an odd conversation with a young soldier. I asked him what it was like to be stationed in Mosul.

He told me, "You get mortared every day, and there's always car bombs and roadside bombs, but the food is great. It's, like, totally worth it."

Back in the States, I'm not sure I'd risk going to a nice restaurant if it meant possibly getting blown up on the way. Things are so much different here. In Iraq, good food is "like, totally worth it."

You eat in chow halls along with a few thousand of your best friends. You stand in line to wash your hands, to enter the building and to have food dropped on your plate.

Your plate and utensils are plastic. One of the definitive signs that I've returned to Chicago will be when I hold a real, metal knife and fork.

Generally, I'd have to say the food is OK. I try to keep in mind that they are cooking for 10,000.

For the most part, I've decided to avoid beef and seafood. The chaplains at my camp have dubbed the beef "Mad Cow Meat." It tends to be stringy, fatty and gray.

Freshly cooked food is almost unheard of. Most grub has been sitting in warming trays for an hour or two. But there are some exceptions. When you line up for lunch on Wednesdays, you can smell the enticing aroma of grilling beef. The problem is that it's being cooked for dinner, some five to seven hours later.

At Camp Bucca in Iraq awhile back, I was going to the chow hall just for coffee, but when I saw they were cooking eggs to order, I couldn't resist.

I thought I was in some fancy hotel. I couldn't believe it.

I walked up to the counter, asked for fried eggs (which I hadn't had in over three months), and they cooked them right in front of me.

I wasn't in the least bit hungry, but there was no way I was going to miss out on this.

I wolfed them down and felt sick to my stomach. But it was, "like, totally worth it."

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