



ARE WE TRULY READY?

SUPPORTING THE
DEFENDERS OF PEACE

CAMP AS SAYLIYAH, QATAR

SEPTEMBER

2014

THE
DESERT
MESH

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This month, you will notice a dramatic change in the Desert Mesh. Based on Soldier feedback, we have completely redesigned the publication.

A recent survey of Soldiers stationed here on Camp As Sayliyah helped to identify several ways in which we could improve the look, content and function of the Desert Mesh.

Changes include a modernization of the visual presentation, a revamping of command content, and the inclusion of lighter material, such as culture, humor and entertainment pieces. We have done this because we believe this publication can be more engaging, informative and entertaining to you, our uniformed audience. We promise to pursue that goal with all due diligence.

While the Mesh is far from perfect, recognizing the need for improvement is the first step toward identifying meaningful solutions. And, while perfection may never truly be possible, it is the pursuit of lofty goals - rather than obtaining them - that builds character.

This month, you will find several articles highlighting the importance of the pursuit of perfection, the character it builds, and how the goal-oriented mentality of individuals has the power to change society as a whole.

The goal of this publication is to serve you. To do that, we need your feedback.

Your needs and views formed the core of the changes we have made. With your continued support, we will pursue further changes to bring us just a little closer to perfection.

We encourage you to lend your voice to the CAS community by "liking" us on Facebook, following us on Twitter, and by reading the Desert Mesh. Get involved, speak up, and we will listen.

To contact the installation public affairs office, feel free to use any of the information posted below. We also regularly monitor and update our presences on social media, and they are great sources for additional content you can easily share with friends and family.

We look forward to spreading the word about all the great things you do here, and to making the Desert Mesh a highlight of your deployment.

Levi Spellman
Editor

ON THE COVER: PFC. MALCOLM DONCKERS OF THE 114TH INFANTRY REGIMENT, NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD, MANS HIS POST DURING A PERIMETER SECURITY ASSESSMENT AT CAMP AS SAYLIYAH.

US ARMY PHOTO BY ALFRED TRIPOLONE III

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TWO M1A2 SEP ABRAMS TANKS FROM 116TH CAVALRY BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM, IDAHO ARMY NATIONAL GUARD, CONTINUE TO SEARCH FOR THEIR OPPOSING FORCE ADVERSARY DURING AN EXPORTABLE COMBAT TRAINING CAPABILITY EXERCISE AT ORCHARD COMBAT TRAINING CENTER, SOUTH OF BOISE, IDAHO, AUG. 14, 2014.

TOTAL FORCE REVISITED

STORY AND PHOTO BY
STAFF SGT. CHRISTOPHER McCULLOUGH
3RD STRYKER BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM,
2ND INFANTRY DIVISION PUBLIC AFFAIRS

COURTESY OF ARMY.MIL

JOINT BASE LEWIS-MCCHORD, Wash. (Aug. 26, 2014) -- The Soldiers of the 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, are training at the Orchard Combat Training Center, south of Boise, Idaho, this month, demonstrating their ability to conduct fiscally responsible, multi-component training as part of the Army's Total Force Policy, while simultaneously conducting gunnery tasks and supporting their division's concept for integrated training strategy.

"It's a multi-component operation," explained Command Sgt. Maj. Sean Mayo, a native of Bridgeport, Connecticut, and senior enlisted adviser for 1-14 Cav, 3-2 Stryker Brigade, 7th Infantry Division, out of Joint Base Lewis-McChord. "Basically, you have the Idaho National Guard, the 191st Training Support Brigade, who is an active unit, and us; we're playing OPFOR (the opposing force) for them."

The exercise, which is an eXportable Combat Training Capability operation, is overseen by the 191st Infantry Brigade, First Army Division West, also from Joint Base Lewis-McChord; along with units from the Army National Guard, the Army Reserve, and the Active Component, all working in unison toward a common goal, which is to conduct realistic training while relearning the tenets of the Total Force Policy.

"This is a fight that we knew pretty well 10 years ago, but over several deployments we've gone away from that," said Lt. Col. Brad Christopher, 116th Infantry Brigade's operations officer and Boise native. "So, we're re-energizing

that thing that we knew, and applying the new systems that are available to us. It continues what we've established over the last 10 years in Afghanistan and Iraq; it's an opportunity for us to combine forces and re-engage the heavy fight, something that is not new, but is relearning for both forces."

The Total Force Policy was initially implemented in the early 1970s, during the twilight years of the Vietnam War. It establishes policy for the integration of the Army's Active Component and Reserve Components as a Total Force, according to the Army's website. It fell into disuse during the first decade of the 21st century, as counterinsurgency operations increased in Iraq and Afghanistan.

At the heart of the Total Force Policy, is the simple premise that the Army will do its job with less, and that the National Guard and Army Reserve will take a more direct role in national defense. In keeping with the basis of the Total Force Policy, "Warhorse" battalion, 1-14 Cavalry, is doing more with less while at Orchard Combat Training Center, by conducting gunnery training in addition to its duties as OPFOR.

"(The gunnery training) is just as important as what else we're doing out here," said Lt. Col. Robert Halvorson, 1-14 Cavalry commander. "The 7th [Infantry Division] is leading the way to put the precision in Stryker gunnery that's never existed. Working with the Maneuver Center of Excellence, 7th [Infantry Division] is working hard to make gunnery something it's never been in the Stryker community. As the first cavalry squadron taking part in that,

we've got a responsibility to do it right.

"Conducting operations this way is cost efficient, and if you do it correctly, and maintain your own training objectives in support of your METL (Mission-Essential Task List), you will actually get training out here that's only rivaled by NTC (the National Training Center, at Fort Irwin, California)," he continued.

Mayo said this is also the squadron's first opportunity to capitalize on the lessons they learned while at the NTC, in January.

"We took a bunch of AAR (After-Action Report) comments and critiques, things we learned about ourselves at the National Training Center, and we talked a lot about them, but we didn't have the opportunity to shake out the bugs," he said. "This provides us a tremendous opportunity to capitalize on the lessons learned and things we needed to work on coming out of NTC."

The cavalry's OPFOR counterparts, the 2nd Combined Arms Battalion, 136th Infantry Brigade, agreed that this year's eXportable Combat Training Capability operation provided their unit a tremendous opportunity as well.

"I think what it has highlighted is that we want to be here," Capt. Craig Isaacson, a Bloomington, Minnesota, native and company commander for Charlie Company, 2-136 Infantry, said of the exercise. "We want to train hard, and that our Soldiers are paying attention, taking notes and trying to perfect their craft, so that when they get called up to support the active duty, they can expect that we are those professionals who show up and can do the same things that they're doing."

SYRIAN MILITANTS ORGANIZING, BECOMING DEADLIER

AP STORY BY
BASSEM MROUE
AP PHOTO BY
BILAL HUSSEIN

COURTESY OF US WORLD NEWS AND REPORT

LABWEH, Lebanon (AP) — Lebanese troops battled rebels from Syria for control of a border town Monday, the deadliest challenge in years for the armed forces of this tiny country whose own sectarian tensions could boil over from the incursion.

Dozens of armored personnel carriers, tanks and elite troops arrived to surround the town of Arsal, some 90 kilometers (55 miles) from the capital, Beirut. Meanwhile, thousands of Lebanese civilians and Syrian refugees fled the clashes in vehicles packed with all they could carry.

The fighting in Arsal, which began Saturday, marks the first time that militants battling Syrian President Bashar Assad have carried out a large-scale incursion into Lebanon. The clashes have killed 17 soldiers over three days, while 22 others remain missing after attacks on army positions in the town, authorities said.

The civilian exodus came early Monday morning during a lull in the fighting. A few hours later, an army bombardment around Arsal saw three shells land every minute.

“We call on the Lebanese army to strike with an iron fist,” said Mohammed Hojeiri, who fled Arsal with his family Monday. “Those gunmen are terrorizing civilians.”

A resident on the outskirts of Arsal told The Associated Press that the militants there committed “atrocities” and shot at people fleeing. They also looted homes, he said on condition of anonymity for security considerations.

Dozens of rebels have been killed in the fighting, he and other residents and security officials said.

It remains unclear exactly what allegiances the Syrian rebels who seized Arsal have. Their attack comes after the Lebanese army said Saturday its troops had detained Imad Ahmad Jomaa, who identified himself as a member of the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front — one of the most powerful rebel groups fighting against Assad.

Former Lebanese Prime Minister Saad

Hariri, a Sunni leader with a large following in the country, has accused al-Qaida linked groups in Syria, including the Nusra Front and the Islamic State group, of taking Arsal hostage.

The fight for Arsal is the bloodiest involving the army since the military fought a three-month battle in 2007 against the al-Qaida-inspired Fatah Islam group inside the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr el-Bared in northern Lebanon. The Lebanese army crushed the group, but the clashes killed more than 170 soldiers.

The clashes in Arsal, a predominantly Sunni town of 40,000 whose population has almost tripled because of the presence of Syrian refugees and rebels, could worsen

already bubbling sectarian tensions in Lebanon. The town is wedged between Syrian government-controlled territory and Lebanese Shiite villages sympathetic to Lebanon’s premier Shiite militia, Hezbollah.

The Syrian government, which is battling a largely Sunni insurgency, has seized nearly all the strategic Qalamoun region bordering Arsal with the help of Hezbollah fighters. On Monday, some Hezbollah fighters were seen around Labweh, a town near Arsal in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley, though it was not clear if they were taking part in the fighting.

A senior Hezbollah official vowed Monday to support the Lebanese army against the militants.

“Whoever threatens to divide the army... we say to them that neither Lebanon nor the Bekaa (Valley) is Mosul,” said Sheikh Mohammad Yazbek, referring to Iraq’s second-largest city which has been seized by militants of the Islamic State group, which is also fighting in Syria.

But it isn’t likely that the militants in Arsal raided the town to gain territory inside of Lebanon, said Aram Nerguizian, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He said Arsal was surrounded by Christian, Shiite and even Sunni Muslim areas hostile to Islamic militants.

“This would be the definition of a very precarious deployment,” Nerguizian said.



A LEBANESE FAMILY WAITS TO DEPART IN A MINIBUS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF ARSAL, A PREDOMINANTLY SUNNI MUSLIM TOWN NEAR THE SYRIAN BORDER IN EASTERN LEBANON, MONDAY, AUG. 4, 2014. THOUSANDS OF LEBANESE CIVILIANS AND SYRIAN REFUGEES PACKED CARS AND PICKUP TRUCKS MONDAY, FLEEING AN EASTERN BORDER TOWN THAT WAS OVERRUN BY MILITANTS FROM NEIGHBORING SYRIA AS LEBANESE TROOPS FIGHT TO LIBERATE THE AREA.

AND WHY IT MATTERS

ANALYSIS BY
CAPT. JOSHUA FRANQUI

AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR
SPECIAL SECURITY OFFICER

Since mid-2011, conflict has raged between factions of Syrian rebels and Lebanese forces. This is nothing we haven’t heard before. But, it’s important to recognize that it does have an effect on us, as U.S. citizens, because we have aided Lebanon throughout the ordeal.

Specifically, we have provided more than \$100M in funding through the International Military Education and Training initiative and the Foreign Military Financing programs.

Those programs serve to provide equipment and training to support the internal security, border protection and counterterrorism efforts of foreign nations, enabling them to better combat insurgent activity in their respective regions.

Additionally, we have provided agricultural and infrastructure engineering support through the U.S. Agency for International Development, enabling them to improve mountain agriculture and irrigation systems, fully inspect dam systems, and to better sustain the Lebanese populace.

Despite the aid of the U.S., Syrian rebels have become more organized and more aggressive. This may possibly be a result of the influence exerted by the militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS (the ISIS and ISIL acronyms refer to the same group).

The coordination we’ve seen has resulted in the deadliest attack in three months. It reflects a shift in tactics from the splinter-cell and lone-wolf approaches, to massive, organized ground assaults. This, they have realized, is what will gain them control of geographical areas. And, as a result, Lebanese civilians and Syrian refugees continue to suffer the consequences of these actions.

So, the question is: how does this impact a regular Joe deployed to the Middle East? The answer is James Foley.

Recent headlines have been awash with the ISIS/ISIL beheading of U.S. journalist, James Foley. This action, they claim, was a result of their demands not being met — specifically, the removal of all U.S. ground forces from Iraq and the immediate cessation of U.S. air strikes.

Syrian militants captured Foley in 2012, near the border of Lebanon and Syria. As these small, asymmetrical groups began to adopt the organized, larger-scale tactics of ISIS/ISIL, we can assume their collaboration grew, as evidenced by who controlled Foley at the time of his death.

This matters, as there are several Americans living and working in the turbulent areas of the Middle East. Joint Task Force Lebanon, a humanitarian mission, currently has Americans on the ground in Lebanon. And, with ISIS/ISIL calling all Muslims to kidnap U.S., British and Israeli citizens to be used as bargaining chips, we must all be very aware of our surroundings.

However, this extra caution should not be limited to those in these regions; media outlets have directly linked Foley’s murder to a British jihadi group. That means U.S. civilians, contractors, families and military personnel should take this matter seriously, both at home and abroad.

It is our responsibility to raise awareness of these issues for all who may be at risk. We believe it is important that you understand the intentions of groups like ISIS/ISIL, the Taliban, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the other small militia cells who support them. Soldiers, tourists and journalists are specifically being targeted for kidnap, ransom, exchange and execution.

Safety is a matter of vigilance. This is a call for all of us to remain aware, remain educated and to be ready for anything.

THINKING LIKE THE ENEMY: A LOOK IN THE MIRROR

A JOINT SERVICE INSTALLATION VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
ALFRED TRIPOLONE III

AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

The devil, as they say, is in the details. Those details can be all the difference between effective prevention and outright catastrophe. Details, after careful analysis, can enable an organization to not only view their operation objectively, but can give them all the information they need to implement improvements.

For more than a week during the month of August, the units and individuals of Area Support Group Qatar came together in an effort to better train on issues of threat assessment and prevention. From leadership to supporting units, it was a comprehensive exercise designed to improve the full spectrum of installation operations.

"The Joint Service Installation Vulnerability Assessment is a very broad exercise. We talk about things on a large scale, and then we break into smaller groups to discuss what we've learned and what they've seen in their experience," said Tony Boyce, the primary security operations instructor with the JSIVA team.

Members of the class came from many backgrounds, services, and job fields, all with the common purpose of installation security. And, while some were required to attend, others requested the opportunity to participate.

"I requested to go to the JSIVA seminar. I had never heard of it before," said Staff Sgt. Kyle J. Slania, the Kennel Master for Camp As Sayliyah. "It turned out to be a much more in-depth class than I expected."

Going into the exercise with an open and willing mind, ready to learn something new, was important to getting the most from the training. It allowed students to pick up on details and ideas they wouldn't otherwise, Slania remarked.

The training was conducted in several phases, of which lectures and group discussions on installation safety were some of the first.

According to Boyce, throughout the weeklong training, periodic assessments are conducted to ensure everyone is tracking the material. If they are not, the assessments allow them to circle back and re-address topics that were not fully grasped. In doing so, it opens the group to more detailed discussions later.

"Once we've discussed and gone over a number of situations and procedures, we take them out into the field to see firsthand how things are done," Boyce continued. "There we allow them to ask questions and assess vulnerabilities on their own."

The array of backgrounds brought into the discussions make every breakout group unique.

"I found it interesting, because when we go out and assess 'vulnerabilities' everyone brings their skills to the table," said Slania. "When I went out, as a working dog expert, I focused on how we could use working dogs to fill the gaps, if any were found."

By placing class members in the field with the Soldiers actively conducting the security mission, a better understanding and larger scope of the mission was revealed, Slania explained. By identifying and breaking down the parts that make the whole of installation security, Soldiers were able to reevaluate their understanding on perimeter defense and view it in a new light.

"Backwards planning is another factor I learned more about," Slania said. "Our instructor, Tony, would say, 'you have to think like the bad guys.' So, we would go through all of the steps it would take a person to get access to something, and then ensure that we were taking proper security

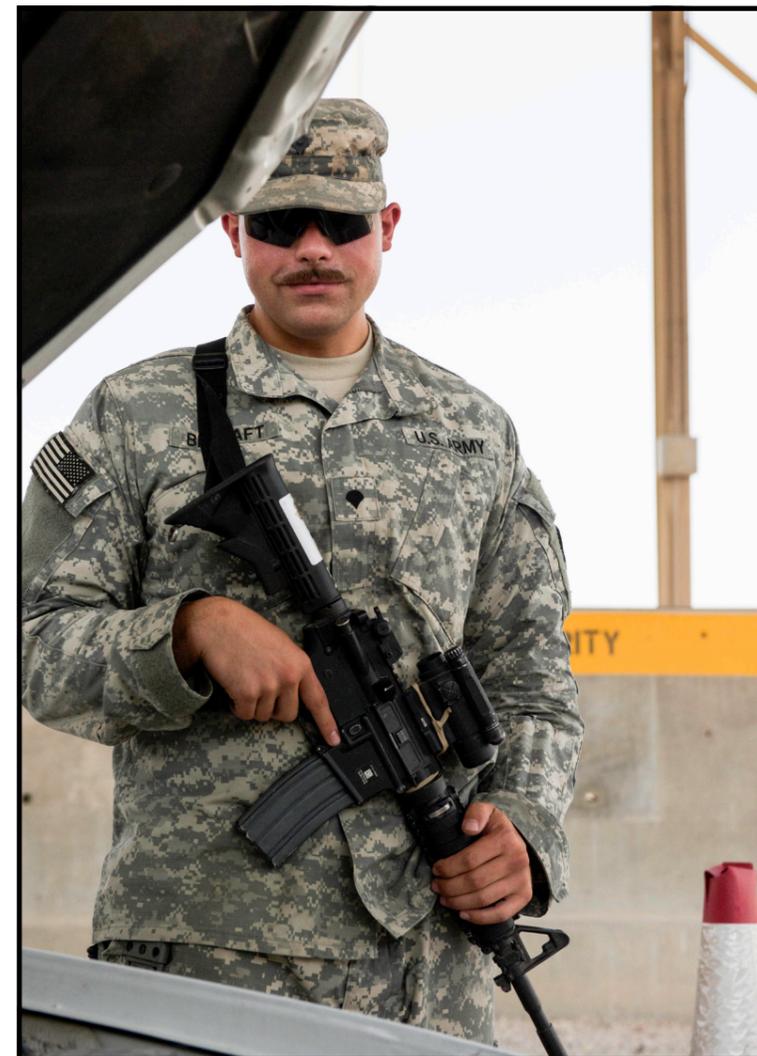
steps. I had never thought of it like that, and it was very interesting."

Keeping class members on their toes, and actively showing how the mission changes from one instance to another, was also beneficial to growth.

"It's an important learning experience to go from the classroom to the field, and see how procedures vary from classroom to the real world," Boyce said.

The goal of the JSIVA is to have students leave the class with a fresh perspective and new-found respect for identifying and adjusting to any vulnerabilities they find.

"Now, I can go to any installation and help the commanders assess their installations for vulnerabilities," Slania said. "So, when I go back to my home station, I'll be able to identify and inform my commander about any vulnerabilities I see, and how we could use different measures to correct them."



[LEFT] SPC. CHRISTOPHER BECRAFT, AN INFANTRY SOLDIER WITH THE 1ST BATTALION, 114TH INFANTRY REGIMENT, NEW JERSEY NATIONAL GUARD, INSPECTS THE ENGINE OF A VEHICLE AT AN ENTRY CONTROL POINT ON CAMP AS SAYLIYAH. BECRAFT, A CONTRACTOR FROM NEPTUNE, NJ, IS CURRENTLY DEPLOYED AS PART OF THE SECURITY FORCES UNIT WITH AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR.

[BELOW] DURING THE SECURITY OPERATIONS BREAKOUT SESSION OF THE JOINT SERVICE INSTALLATION VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT, SOLDIERS AND AIRMEN ARE TESTED ON THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF PROCEDURES AND QUESTIONED ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES. THE WORKING GROUPS BROKE DOWN INTO SMALLER GROUPS FOLLOWING TESTING TO DISCUSS IDEAS ON A MORE INTIMATE LEVEL.



CHANGING THE GAME

BARRIERS, BREAKTHROUGHS AND HOW BASEBALL BECAME A CORNERSTONE OF HISPANIC HERITAGE

STORY BY
SGT. 1ST CLASS JAIME MONTANEZ

AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ADVISOR

National Hispanic Heritage Month begins Sept. 15, and this year will focus on the themes of Hispanic legacy, current achievement and the promise of a successful tomorrow.

This is personally meaningful to me, and to many members of the armed services who have Hispanic roots, because it is a story we live through on a daily basis.

For us, that story has been a historically turbulent one. However, today, there are high-profile Hispanics achieving incredible things in every aspect of our society. The importance of that long and difficult transition cannot be overstated and, in my opinion, begins with something much simpler: a game.

I love baseball. During my childhood, my father and I would go to see games at the local stadium, listening to the broadcast on a small radio.

Statistics, commentary, and play by play would pour through the speaker on those afternoons, sometimes invoking names of Latin greats like Orlando Cepeda, Roberto Clemente and Louis Aparicio, the first three Hispanics inducted to the hall of fame, and icons within our communities.

Beginning in those early days, the number of Hispanic players in the league has grown. In the 1990s, one out of every eight players on the all-star team was of Latin

decent. By the 2006, that ratio had climbed to 23 players of 71.

However, the meteoric rise of Latin players can perhaps be captured in a different way. Since 1990, more than a third of the MVP awards have gone to Hispanic players.

The groundbreaking acceptance won by our earliest athletes helped to inspire subsequent generations to success – not only in athletics, but in the professions as well.

As a result, Hispanic culture is now included at the forefront of advertising and marketing efforts, indicating a major shift in the cultural landscape. Famed players like Miguel Cabrera, Albert Pujols and Carlos Beltran regularly lend their names to products and services to increase their commercial appeal.

These changes are part of a different kind of success, one that transcends the individual. They mark the importance of breaking down barriers, the power of inspiration, and the success of a people.

As we observe National Hispanic Heritage Month, it is also important to mention that World Series is right around the corner. For me, this all started with a game. And, while the game has changed in many ways, it is still very much the game I remember – the one I watched with my father – and the one I still love.

NO LIMITS

STORY BY
MASTER SGT.
MONTGOMERY MILLER

AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR
MASTER FITNESS TRAINER

The men's world record for the one mile was officially set for the first time in 1913. The International Amateur Athletic Federation recognized a time of four minutes, 14.4 seconds by John Paul Jones of the United States.

While times steadily improved, doctors said a natural barrier existed that prevented humans from breaking the four-minute mark. The exertion necessary, they believed, would cause the heart to burst.

That is, until 1959.

Roger Bannister, a medical student from Great Britain, rewrote the medical consensus regarding that barrier – and the record books – by personally running the mile in 3:59.4. His training methods, considered unorthodox at the time, helped pioneer the training standards of today's top athletes.

However, Roger Bannister's greatest contribution to athletics wasn't his physical ability, dedication, revolutionary training methods, or even his world record.

It was his attitude.

Seven years before he accom-

plished "the impossible," he failed to qualify for the 1952 Olympic team. His refusal to accept failure and his rejection of limitations changed not only the trajectory of his own career, but that of all of modern athletics.

More than a half-century later, the current record stands at 3:43.13. This is a direct result of that attitude being wholly embraced by the athletic community. In fact, Bannister's record stood for only one year before it was broken, a testament to the power of attitude and the importance of what he accomplished.

Like Bannister, we must first learn to recognize and discard the limitations we impose upon ourselves. Only then will traits such as work ethic and force of will allow us to transcend those limits and reach our maximum potential.

To realize that potential, it's always advisable to set realistic goals. Therefore, it's important to know the difference between reasonable precautions and bare-faced excuses. That way, when you write down your goals, you can accurately track your progress because you have a realistic idea of what your gains should look like.

This mentality can help keep you honest and help keep you on track. You want to run your two miles in less than 13 minutes? Go for it. Having trouble passing height and weight? Set a goal and get after it; the gym is always open.

Will this be harder for some than others? Of course. But, does that mean it's impossible?

Ask Roger Bannister.



Just 23 days after Roger Bannister clocked the first sub 4:00 mile, another Brit, Diane Leather, became the first woman to run the mile in less than five minutes.

However, official records were not kept for women's sports at that time.

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Roger Bannister

Before 1954, the average time a record stood before being broken was 3 years, 26 days.

The average for the years that followed is 3 years, 77 days.

The current record was set in 1999. At 15 years, it more than doubles the reign of any other record, and remains the longest-standing men's record in history.

HOW TO SUSTAIN A LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIP

FIVE TIPS I LEARNED FROM MY WWII GRANDPA

STORY BY
KYLE SCHAEFFER

COURTESY OF THEARTOFMANLINESS.COM

In 1942 my grandfather, Peter Stoppi, a young man of 29 years old, joined the army to fight the Nazis during World War II. Like many men his age, he left behind family and friends to serve his country. But when Peter boarded his military boat to Europe, he wasn't just missing his mother and buddies. He was missing a brand new girlfriend as well.

The primary mode of contact home for a soldier in the 1940s was, of course, the written letter, and over the next three years, my grandfather wrote a 294-page history book's worth of letters home to the young lady who would eventually become his wife. These letters chronicle a journey across war-torn Europe, the life of an American soldier, and the story of two young people dating across an ocean. More than 70 years later, I turned to these letters for advice in my own long-distance relationship. Though much has changed over the decades, my grandfather's correspondence gave me five truly timeless tips for any man loving from afar:

1 FREQUENT COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Peter was a great communicator with his girlfriend, Helen. He wrote to her weekly, stayed abreast of events going on back home from her letters, and divulged all the information about his life the military censors would allow. In his letters he talked about the future, his dreams, things he wanted to do on returning to the US, and he even took a little time to tease and flirt with his future wife. For a long-distance relationship in 1942, communication was wide open and clear.

Thankfully, technology has improved leaps and bounds since our grandparents' time, and men in long-distance relationships today have a host of great tools to keep them connected to loved ones. Products like Skype, FaceTime, and Google Talk allow you to spend time face-to-face with a person. All you need is a webcam and a decent internet connection. Texting apps like WhatsApp and Viber give you the ability to text anyone in the world for free. With so many modes of communication at your disposal, there really is no excuse to lose touch.

But the importance of communication goes deeper than simply talking. You and your loved one must trust each other and address relationship problems or doubts immediately.

2 MAINTAINING YOUR INTEGRITY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Trust is important in any relationship, but once you add the element of distance the importance increases ten-fold. A man must conduct himself in a manner befitting the respect of others around him, and in a way that can reassure his partner of his faithfulness beyond just words.

At night when camped behind front lines, many of Peter's buddies went into town to drink, see a show, and canoodle with the local young ladies. Peter, however, often stayed behind to write to Helen, expressly telling her about his decision. This may have been a show of social reclusiveness, but the action was also a strong gesture of his commitment to her even

from so far away.

Now, should you stay in every night and never see friends or speak to others while away from your significant other? Of course not. But your actions will say more than your mouth. News of your indiscretions travel far faster and easier than they did during the Big One, and are bound to get back to her. Not only that, but the fact that you are even flirting with the idea of stepping out on your gal will unconsciously creep into your voice when you talk to her, sparking mistrust, arguments, and strain in the relationship.

So conduct yourself with integrity, and remember that you are committed to someone even if that person is not physically near you at the moment. If you can't handle that commitment, then you need to reconsider the relationship.

3 KEEP THEM CLOSE EVEN WHEN THEY ARE FAR AWAY

Before he left for Europe, Peter snatched his new love's class ring, saying he would return it to her after the war. He carried that ring with him every day to remind him of the special girl waiting for him back home. When he did return to the United States, the large gem, standard to any class ring, was missing from its band — a fact Helen, jokingly, never let him forget.

A mutual trinket or piece of jewelry can be a fine way to feel connected to your loved one. In honor of this story, my girlfriend and I each wear a shark tooth around our necks. We dug the teeth for each necklace from the bottom of an aquarium tank while shark diving in

South Korea. When I wear the necklace it reminds me of that great moment together in our relationship. Now, when I see my girlfriend wear her shark tooth it is a reminder that she loves me.

4 HAVE A PLAN TO BE PHYSICALLY NEAR EACH OTHER

My grandparents had no idea when the war would end, if Peter would survive to see that end, or when he would finally be discharged from the army. Despite their inability to control present circumstances, they planned for a future they could control. Peter talked regularly about what he would do when he returned home — his lack of desire to become a miner, his want of children, and all of the dances he and Helen would attend together. Eventually, when he did return home, Peter took up work as a bus mechanic, married his sweetheart, and had a beautiful daughter — all things he planned for and dreamed about with Helen during the war.

Difficult situations are made easier with an end in sight. Have a plan for when you will get back together. Naturally, a specific date is not always possible (as was the case with Peter and Helen), but it is important for both people to work toward the goal of a permanent reunion.

5 YOU STILL MUST LIVE YOUR LIFE

Peter demonstrated his integrity by avoiding the bars and wayward ladies of Europe, but he also recognized his duty. At the end of three years of fighting in Europe, he turned his attention to the Pacific and wrote home that he would willingly go on to help finish the war with Japan. He could have pushed for discharge, but he saw that the job was not yet over.

Although this may seem contradictory to number two, it is important to remember that you and your partner live separate lives. No matter how connected you stay, or how involved you are with your partner, you will have different friends, different jobs, different schools, and different activities. You may feel the urge to dedicate all of your time to your partner, but that is impractical and unfair to you.

Be an active participant in your own life. Take time for friends, school, career advancement, leisure, and all of the things that make you an awesome man. An active life will help you relax, feel good about yourself, and will make you more attrac-

tive to your partner. After all, no one likes a clingy man-child whose sole reason for life is the person they date.

Peter and Helen Stoppi married in 1947, built a house, built a family, and remained happily married for 53 years. All of this sprung from a love begun in war-time, maintained across an ocean, and deepened solely through letters over the course of three long years. Dating long-distance is not easy, but a story like that of Peter and Helen Stoppi has much to teach the man

who loves someone from any distance, be it a mile or an ocean: success is possible. Just keep on fighting.

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HELEN AND PETER STOPPI, 1947
PHOTO COURTESY OF KYLE SCHAEFFER / THEARTOFMANLINESS.COM

ASK A CIVILIAN

ANSWERS TO LIFE'S DEEPEST QUESTIONS

BY
HANK BRAUGHTIGAN

SPECIAL GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

It's no secret that military service can be hard, especially when it means being so far away from friends and family. Most of us back home try our best to show our gratitude in whatever way we can. So, when I was asked to offer a civilian's approach to some of the issues facing our serving men and women, I was honored to accept.

Q: *I found some unspent brass lying around post. What am I supposed to do with it?*

A: I'm not really sure what you mean by "spent," but I'm pretty sure you can't use brass to pay for things anymore. Gold? Maybe. But brass? Those days are over.

Anyway, I'd probably see if anybody wanted it. But, if not, just throw it away.

Or, better yet, put it in the recycling bin.

Q: *Sometimes, it's hard to tell when something is SHARP, and when it's not. We've all had the training, but sometimes it's right on that line. Any recommendations on how to handle that sort of thing?*

A: I wouldn't expect this from a child, let alone an adult with military training.

OK... Sharp objects aren't toys. Don't play with them. Don't point them at someone's face, and... you know what? Forget everything I just said. You should probably just be under adult supervision at all times.

Q: *I've been wanting to go to HALO school, but I can't get my command to sign off on it. What should I do?*

A: Let me get this straight. You want to go play X-Box games, but you think taxpayer dollars should foot the bill?

Wait. Back up. I have a different question.

There's a SCHOOL for that? ARE YOU SERIOUS?

Never mind. Listen, I'm going to give you and your generation a nickel's worth of free advice: video games are a waste of time. They don't help you develop any appreciable skills. You sit in front of the TV for hours – like a zombie – and end up with nothing to show for it except a bunch of Twinkie wrappers and early onset diabetes.

If you really want to be lazy, just read a book or something - ANYTHING - that doesn't amount to a grown adult getting into crude, online insult battles with 12-year olds.

Q: *My girlfriend back home broke up with me. What should I do?*

A: It's over, kid. Find a new one on post.

Q: *Why is the food at military posts always so disgusting?*

A: I have no idea. But, I hear prison food is even worse.

Stay out of trouble.

Q: *How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?*

A: Spc. Alvarez, if I ever see you down-town, I'm going to punch you in the face for asking such a dumb question.

I'm not really sure what to say, at this point. I did my best to answer these, despite my better judgment, and all I'm left with is a sense of deep concern. Maybe rage. I don't know.

Look, I don't mean to get upset. I'm just trying to help people with their problems, and some of these questions are just completely absurd.

So, if you have any REASONABLE questions you would like answered by a civilian, post them on the installation Facebook page.

Keep it family freindly, and next month I'll tackle the ones that get the most likes... or, at least, the ones that make some kind of sense.

This feature is satire and Hank Braughtigan is not even a real person, which is unfortunate because he would probably be fun to hang out with.

Nothing in this advice column should be considered real, actual advice.

Seriously.

Don't do these things.

ACCORDING TO THE INTERNET

Sometimes, a picture is worth a thousand words. But, other times, words make pictures even better.

This is one of those times.

Every month, we will post a new According to the Internet photo on the CAS Facebook page, and the top caption will be published in the Desert Mesh.

So, check us out on Facebook for more details, and for your chance to be cool... but, not as cool as this guy.

