



65th Engineer Battalion, US ARMY

TASK FORCE TRAILBLAZER NEWSLETTER

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The Engineer General Visits COL Spider

By CPT Miguel Lima

Remembering back to my days back at the Engineer Officer Basic Course, I recall when the ranking Engineer officer in the Corp and commander of the Maneuver Support Center at Fort Leonard Worth, MO, MG Randal R. Castro, visited with our class for the first time. This was one of three specific times that I would see MG Castro during my time at EOBC. At the time, I just thought how lucky we were that he would have the time to hang out with us and how he really embraced a class of new 2LTs as the future leaders. It was a small gesture on his part but it had large implications on the students and cadre.

This past week, Task Force Trailblazer was witness to another such event for our Iraqi Army Engineer partners. Word came down rather suddenly that the IA Chief of Engineers was going to be paying a visit to the 4th IA Engineer Regiment at COL Spider. MG Merza, the ranking IA Engineer Officer, was paying the IA Field Engineer Regimental Commanders to check on the estate of their affairs as well as listen to concerns. We had scheduled with LTC Hameed to be present during the engagement in support of our partnership.

Arriving at Spider, we could tell that there was a buzz in the air. Colored flags had been set up along the roadway leading to LTC Hameed's office and Jinood and officers were bustling about to get things ready. As we sat and waited with LTC Hameed, a Jundi set down plates full of fruits on the coffee and end tables. We talked a variety of things as it was a normal partnership meeting. The bowl of fruit

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was one of the topics as it had figs and this was the first time several of us had ever had eaten one. LTC Hameed even got to check out the new TFTB Newsletter Issue #16 before it was published. He had kept receiving calls while we were there that were status updates on the general's whereabouts. Eventually, a Jundi came to the door and LTC Hameed stood up to walk out the door. We all followed.

Assembling in an orderly gaggle, we waited at the end of the driveway for the caravan of vehicles bringing the general. Now, we had met generals in the Iraqi Army before.

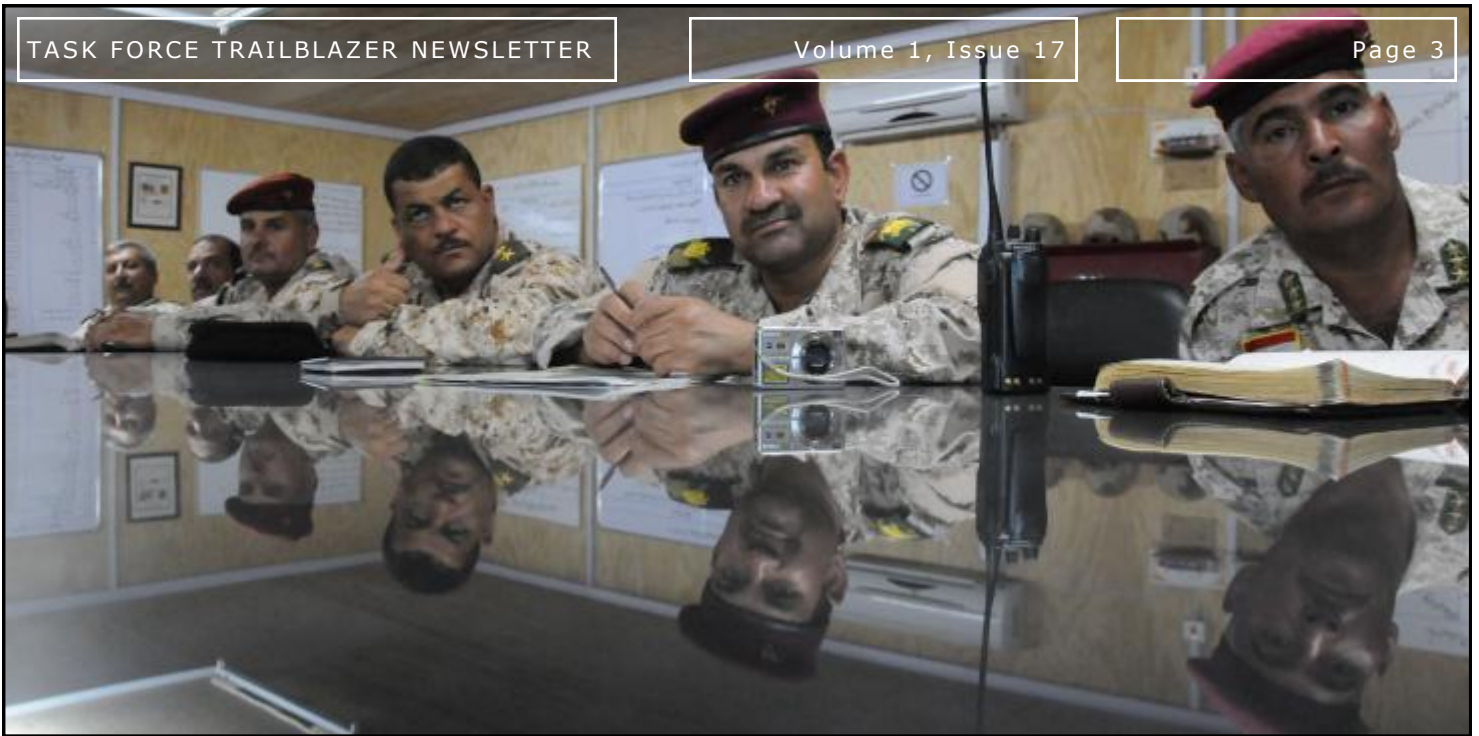
But this time, it was different. When we were back in Hawaii training at the Mission Readiness Exercise, I can remember CPT Mark Kuhar telling us about MG Merza and how the engineer chain operated in the IA. He had had some experience in his prior deployment as a MiTT Engineer with MG Merza. Then, in Baghdad, when I was a part of the Engineer Iraqi Security Forces conference, I can remember members of Team Muhandis mentioning how they had wanted MG Merza to attend to be a part of the work group. Basically, this was a person whom I had heard a lot about, but, to date, hadn't met. Now, it was only a waiting game.

As the caravan of Ford F-350s pulled into Spider's gate, the wait was over. MG Merza stepped out and was warmly welcomed by LTC Hameed. MG Merza and his entourage were led into LTC Hameed's office and we all sat down and began to chat about things. As LTC Hameed is prone to do for his higher ranking visitors, he let MG Merza sit at his desk as he sat nearby. As they exchanged small talk, MG Merza's entourage was making small talk with us. Some of them spoke very good English. After this reception, LTC Hameed led everyone on to the officer's dining facility for lunch. There was a spread on the table unlike any I had seen while at Spider. All of the officers on the post that were not on leave were present. The lunch was fantastic and it was good to see so many of the friendly faces at one place at one time.



Top: A bowl of fruit with figs; Above, Left: LTC Hameed checks out TFTB Newsletter; Above, Right: LTC Kamel smiles while sitting with TFTB and 4th FER officers at the feast that was lunch; MG Merza sits and talks with the crowd in LTC Hameed's office.





When lunch had concluded, there was a briefing scheduled in the Joint TOC. LTC Hameed and a few of his officers prepared an operations brief for MG Merza and we all sat and listened to them present their information to him. Good briefing is something MG Merza had stressed to another FER's command and staff and he had received the 4th FER's very well. While there was a lot to cover, they seemingly took their time to discuss issues that the 4th FER had. Some of these issues were echoed by other FERs. The discussions were noted and would ultimately improve the abilities of the engineers' mission capability. He fielded the questions from the leaders of the 4th and gave some of his own guidance at the briefing. This was probably one of the most beneficial times of the visit for the 4th as they could have a real discussion with someone outside of the Division, and, moreover, the top engineer officer at the Ministry of Defense that would understand the challenges that an engineer regiment faces on a daily basis.

As the briefing in the TOC came to a close, so did our partnership visit. LTC Hameed and MG Merza still had more to discuss but took the time to see us off. We said our goodbyes and MG Merza spoke with LTC Petersen to express his gratitude for the partnership work between the two engineer units.



Top: The officers of the 4th FER listen to LTC Hameed's brief; Center, Right: The scene of the briefing with MG Merza at the head of the table; Right: LTC Petersen, LTC Hameed, MG Merza bid farewell.

Ramadan through the Eyes of a Chaplain

By CH Keith Ferrell

On the 22nd of August the whole of the Muslim world began the celebration of Ramadan (literally 'Ninth Month'). Ramadan itself surrounds the celebration of *Laylat ul-Qadr* (The Night of Power) when tradition tells us that *Allah* is said to have imparted to the prophet Muhammad the words of the Qur'an. When many people back in the states hear of Ramadan, they often recall the news stories of upticks in violence and bloodshed. And indeed, there are those who use this holy time for violence. But Ramadan itself is a beautiful period of reflection for those of the Muslim faith who wish to contemplate their walk with their God. It is also a time devoted to prayer, to spiritual enlightenment, and of fasting.





Opposite page, full page: The scene of the Iftar with TFTB attendees and LTC Hameed; Inset: A close-up of the meal before us; Partners taking their chairs on the outside dining venue of LTC Hameed's lush lawn; Below: Waiting for sundown to break the fast.

Over the course of the last 8 months, the battalion has focused its primary attention to the development of our partnership with the Iraqi Army, most notably the 4th FER in the Salah ad Din province and the 12th FER in Kirkuk province. Throughout this time great friendships have been forged and a new way of thinking about other cultures has developed amongst many of the Trailblazer soldiers who work hand in hand with our Iraqi counterparts. Unfortunately for me, the chaplain does not have a counterpart in the Iraqi Army. Nevertheless, I travel from time to time with our folks out to visit our soldiers as they work with the Iraqi Army. On every occasion I have had the privilege of learning something new about not only the Iraqi soldiers themselves but of their faith. And of course, Ramadan has given me one of the greatest opportunities to date to delve further into the customs and traditions surrounding this holy time.

One such occasion happened recently when the Trailblazer leadership was invited out to COL Spider to participate in the *Iftar*, the traditional meal offered at the 'breaking of the fast' each evening when the sun goes down. For the Muslim, the thirty days encompassing Ramadan are a time of fasting in which the believer abstains from food and drink from sun up until sundown each day. This fast is called for in the Qur'an as a means of redirecting the heart away from unholy things and to cleanse and purify the inner soul. It also serves as a means of practicing self control, discipline, and shows a regard of empathy for those who are less fortunate. It was into this austere climate that we entered.

Although the *Iftar* can be quite formal with the celebratory washings to cleanse the body, prayers, and the traditional eating of a date and drinking water, our *Iftar* was more relaxed. In fact, most of those present broke the fast not with dates and water but with the more informal lighting of the cigarette. Even in Iraq nicotine is king. After conversation with several of those present, we exited the Iraqi Commander's office and we sat together outside in the open air with a wonderful arrangement of traditional foods to include lamb stew, baked chicken and rice, water, and a wonderful green soup. Add to this the '*shanena*', a yogurt drink mixed with sugar and salt and a host of other assorted foods that I would indubitably slaughter the pronunciation and spelling of in this article. All in all it was an outstanding meal that we greatly appreciated.



After supper we joined together once again by talking about a host of subjects over a few cups of hot chai. Before long it was time to call it a night and we said our goodbyes along with the customary salutation of *Ramadan Kareem*, which literally means 'I hope your month is filled with happiness.'

Although many of us had several different ideas of what would take place during the *Iftaar*, I do not think that any of us walked away that night unimpressed with the honor that was given to us by our partners in breaking bread together during this most holy time. As a Christian Chaplain, I was made to feel at home, devoid of religious contention or strife, and for a few hours on a warm Iraqi night, several faiths sat together celebrating the most holy of times in the Islamic faith as partners. *Ramadan Kareem* to everyone.



Above: CH Ferrell, 2LT Oney and CPT Kubar enjoy ice cream after the iftar; Left: CPT Biggerstaff, J oversees the final leg of travel for a freezer filled with ice cream. When asked, the one thing the Iraqis requested us to bring was ice cream. It was requested by LTC Hameed as the Iraqis do not have ice cream. Below, 2 Photo Blend: LTC Hameed, LTC Petersen, Huda the Interpreter and MAJ Dorf partake in some ice cream for dessert.





Above, Right and Below: Shots of SPC Vickers and SGT Iwai in the various events during the competition;

Far right: SGT Iwai and SPC Vickers at the award presentation.



Joint Best Warrior Competition

In late July, the winners of the 18th EN BDE Soldier and NCO of the quarter, SPC Daniel Vickers and SGT Eric Iwai, were competitors in the Multi-National Division-North's Joint Best Warrior Competition. This competition pit the best of the 65th against competitors from all different units in the 25th Infantry Division's Area of Responsibility. CSM Frank Leota, 25th ID CSM, had this to say about the competition, "We have tested their abilities and capabilities both mentally and physically. From writing essays to physical challenge stress shoots. Twenty-two warrior tasks that involve call for adjust fire, evacuate a casualty, PMCS, [and] weapons." Although, a grueling experience, SPC Vickers' kept his motivation up during the competition. "Feeling pretty good. Hurting...sore...tired. Ready to go again if I could. <big sigh> Feeling good." He laughs. "My NCO have always set me up for success. They've taught me what I need to know as far as people and technical skills to get to where I'm at." Said SGT Iwai, "It means a lot to be chosen out of, I can't even tell you, how many NCOs to come and represent my unit in this competition. Especially as a 92G [because] a lot of times, we don't always get the training that we receive while we're going through this competition." After the scores were tallied, SPC Vickers came out on top as the best Soldier in the competition. He was awarded an Army Commendation for his achievement by CSM Leota and MG Caslen at breakfast



Chief's Special Blend

By WO1 Weaver Prosper

Its 0500, prior to any Soldier's mission, PCC's, PCI's are completed and then comes one of the most important rituals: Coffee, Java, Joe. The scent is nothing if not intoxicating. It stings the nostrils and the warm liquid massages the pallets. For generations, Soldiers have depended on the aromatic beverage to get that first kick, in order to get the day going. Today, in the advent of numerous energy drinks, diehard Soldiers, especially the "oleheads", still crave for that "black Red bull". A cup of coffee or a cup of Joe? The most likely etymology for the term is that coffee is the drink of the common man, or "ordinary Joe". Others believe it is a derivative of "java". In the military world, "a cup of Joe", is slang term for a cup of coffee. Rumor has it that the name came from when alcohol was banned from Navy Ships by Admiral Josephus "Joe" Davis -- he only allowed coffee, terming it a cup of Joe."

Any great cup of coffee, whether purchased from your local coffee shop or the super-market has four basic fundamentals: proportion, grind, water and freshness. On the small island of Dominica where I grew up, I would watch my mother pick the coffee beans, dry it, roast to perfection, and then brew the most delicious cup of coffee you can imagine. She would always say freshness is key. That would be done on a weekly



basis.

Military coffee have been immortalized in cadences as "looking like muddy water and tasting like turpentine" but out here at the S3-C, 65th EN BN, on a daily basis you walk into the office and you are greeted with an aroma that tantalizes you and makes your nostrils quiver. At the 3-C shop, "Starbuck's Breakfast Blend" is brewed to perfection, and once a pot is brewed, the work never ceases.

Here are a few tips to making coffee. Soldiers here in Iraq and Spouses back in Hawaii can benefit from them, and everyone will be happy.

First, if given a chance always go with ground beans. They are best within a week after they're roasted. Always store the beans in an airtight container in your cupboard, never refrigerate or freeze the beans (think fresh vegetables as compared to frozen ones). Ground beans for brewed coffee are at their best for about an hour, so grind as needed.

Water temperature is very important. A range of about 185-205 degrees will bring out certain flavors and suppress others. Coffee/water ratio is also critical. 2 tablespoons for every six ounces will get the job done, any more or less and there goes your flavor. Your machine will determine the

Above: The NCOs of the Construction Cell, with Chief, SGT Miller, SSG Favinger, WO1 Prosper and SFC Coopwood.



final outcome of your drink. I have been through about eight machines within the last four years, and I have finally settled on the “Bodum French Press”, and “Flavia fusion Deluxe”. The latter costs about \$199.00, and the French Press will run you about \$29.99. The French press has been used for hundreds of years and it is a great way to make use of some of the best ground beans, hot (not boiling) water is added to the ground beans, for about four minutes, before pressing down the plunger, to release flavors that a regular machine won’t.

The Flavia coffee center or, which I like to call the “Commando 9000”, is a one button push machine that delivers a rich and aromatic cup of coffee that rivals that of Starbucks or Seattle’s Best. One hundred individual packs of Sumatra or Italian

roast will cost about \$39.99, but it’s worth every cent.

The downfall however is that, in country, we have all the time in the world to pay

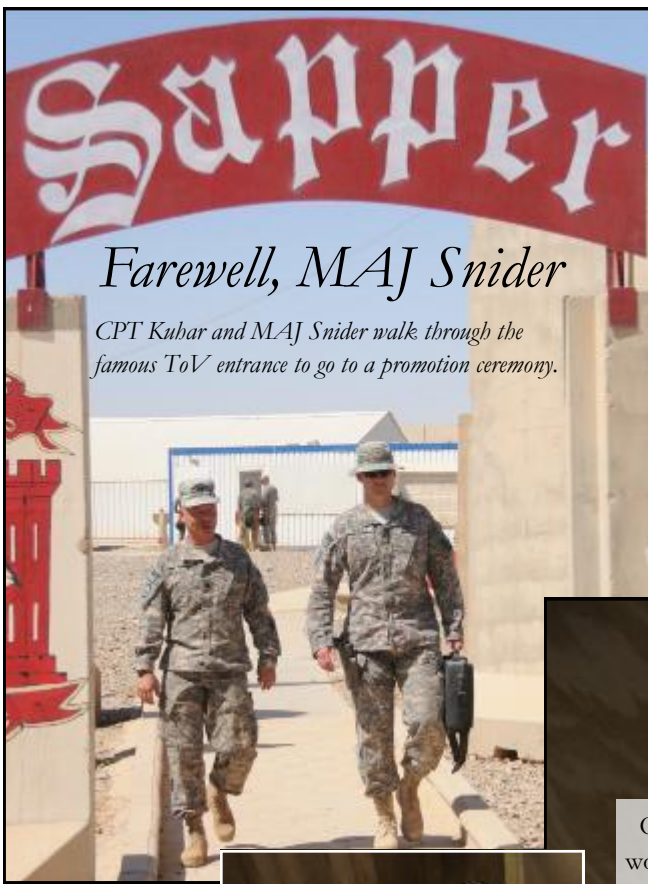
close attention to the fine art of brewing, but as soon as we redeploy, it goes back to the “turpentine” at the dining facility or watered down cappuccino at the shop-pette.

Spouses, I call on you to pay close attention and keep making that sweet, sweet java that “your Soldier” has become so fondly of downrange. Don’t quote me but I think a nice homemade cup of coffee with that special attention from the brewer, has a lasting and positive effect of Post Deployment Stress, so in so many words, “a good cup Joe at home, leads to a good Joe back home”.

This author is a self proclaimed coffee connoisseur and amateur coffee enthusiast with thousands of hours brewing the original “black gold”.



Top: Classic picture of Joe with a cup of joe; Center: A variety of coffees from Hawaii minus the Shock coffee which is available in cans here in Iraq; Left: SSG Jessica Prosper and WO1 Weaver Prosper sit in the office and start the day with a nice cup of joe.



Farewell, MAJ Snider

CPT Kuhar and MAJ Snider walk through the famous ToV entrance to go to a promotion ceremony.

MAJ Snider was known to pass on some great advice. These are just a few of the ideas or quotes that MAJ Snider imparted on those that worked for him.

As an officer progresses through their career and moves up in rank, they are not given the additional authority and level of responsibility for personal gain. But rather, they are given those tools in order to better support the people below them.

It is the role of the Senior Officer or Supervisor to push back on unnecessary requirements from higher. It is not their role to serve as a conduit, simply passing requirements, tasks and information up and down the chain; they should act as a filter to strain out the superfluous and extraneous requirements before giving guidance to their subordinates.

Throughout your career, take the jobs that excite you or you think you will enjoy. Do not seek out the jobs that you think are clutch positions that guarantee you command: all too often, position slotting boils down to timing, luck, and who you know.

MAJ(P) Martin Dale Snider
Battalion S-3 Operations Officer
65th Engineer Battalion
December 2007—August 2009

On behalf of the Soldiers, NCOs and Officers of the 65th Engineer Battalion, we would like to thank you for your extraordinary performance as the Battalion S-3, the energy and fun you brought to all social events, and the athleticism and spirit you put forth on the Frisbee Field. Your time in the battalion will always be appreciated and never forgotten. Good luck in all of your future endeavors.

Right: MAJ Snider at the first commanders brief after main body arrived in Iraq; Far Right: MAJ Snider at the 4th's STAFFEX w/ inset comments from the plaque he received.



Above: MAJ Snider, CPT Kuhar and SPC Vega in a Caiman on their way to COL Spider; Right: MAJ Snider practices his swing at FOB Dagger; Below: MAJ Snider, Mike the Interpreter and CSM Morse on a break at COL Spider.





As we fare welled, MAJ Snider at the opening of the First Inn, we also hailed his replacement, MAJ Aaron Reisinger. Within less than a week, he was already fulfilling his destiny to assume the prestigious position of Trailblazer 3.

Top Row, Left to Right: LTC Kiger hands off the S-3 Sword of Plans and Training to MAJ Snider; MAJ Snider tells the great story behind the Sword of Plans and Training as well as a few of the battalion's great deeds accomplished with the Sword at his side. It's the responsibility of the current S-3, owner of the Sword, to hand it off to his/her replacement upon completion of their Relief in Place (RIP); The Sword of Planning and Training his handed off from MAJ Snider to MAJ Reisinger, the new incoming S-3; Right: MAJ Reisinger is hailed by LTC Petersen; Bottom Row, Left to Right: MAJ Snider wears a bandage after knocking his head inside of a Caiman at the bridge opening at Al Sharqat; MAJ Reisinger shows his battle damage after hitting his head exactly as MAJ Snider did 6 months ago; SPC Tomasso mends MAJ Reisinger as MAJ Snider watches and reminisces.



Hailing MAJ Reisinger



Mustache Soliloquies

By CPT Eric Etter



I am going to ask you a few questions and just answer whatever you are comfortable answering. Don't go any further than you feel like going and if you want to add something later on to a question I've asked, that's fine too. When was the first time you saw it?

You know, it was sort of an accident. There was a mirror on the wall. And I walked up and was like, 'What is that? I have to go back to the CHU and do some research.' I didn't look at it until I made Captain. I took photos of it, but I would go back to my room to take the picture.



Are you embarrassed?

Not really. It's not like you can keep it secret, you know? But it's not like you can share it with others.

I realized that there was no context for men to talk about their mustaches. So I started asking my friends and fellow Soldiers,

'WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR MUSTACHE?'

Over the course of about three to five days, I talked to a lot of people about it. How did it feel talking about it? Strange. It is liberating but kind of funny too. And what each person told me was more outrageous than the next and before I knew it I was on the mustache path.

I bet that you're worried. I was worried. I was worried about mustaches. I was worried that we don't think of them and even more worried about what we did. I was worried about my own. But I needed a context, a community, a culture of other mustaches. There is so much darkness and cliché surrounding them, preconceived notions about people that had them. I talked with over five people. I talked with IRAQIS, AMERICANS... IRAQI-AMERICANS... At first they were a little shy, reluctant to talk. But once they started they wouldn't shut up. These guys loved to talk about their mustaches. Maybe no one has seriously asked them before.

This monologue is based on one man's story and is pretty much as I heard it.

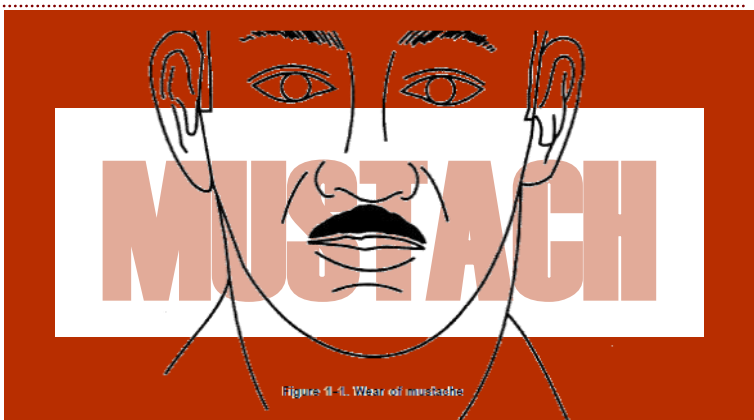
This subject came up in every interview I had and was often a point of contention.

The subject being **hair**.

Mustache **hair**.

Hair is a mustache, the mustache is **hair**.

I like my MUSTACHE hair. I have BROWN hair on top but the facial hair comes in RED. For some reason I have a BROWNISH-RED MUSTACHE and BEARD. I actually wish that I could let it grow bigger. Don't most people? No?

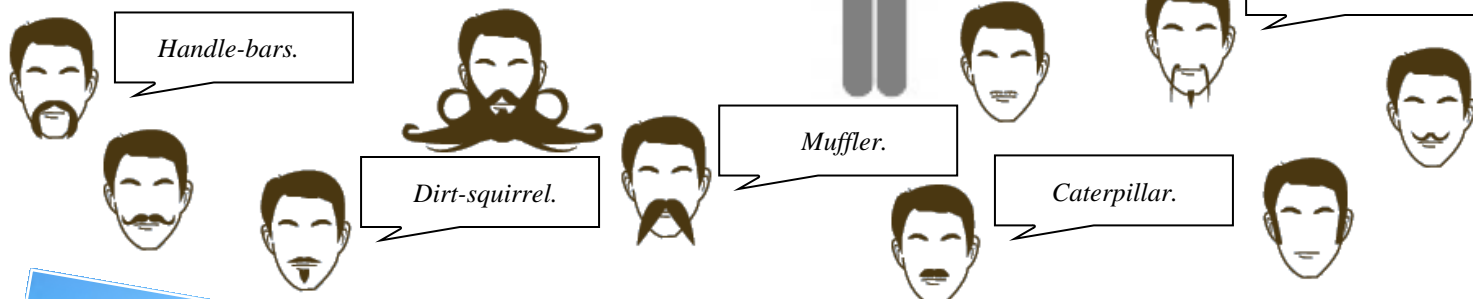


You cannot **love** the **MUSTACHE** unless you **love** hair. Many people don't. My first and only wife hated it. She said it was cluttered and dirty. She made me shave my **MUSTACHE**. My lip looked **puffy**, exposed, like a little kid. The skin was a lot **lighter** than the rest of my face and made it look ridiculous. Even more so after it burned. Little **red** bumps. It stung, even when she kissed me. I never shaved it again. We didn't stay married long. You have to **love** hair in order to **love** the **MUSTACHE**.



I asked all of the men that I interviewed the same questions and then picked some of my favorite responses.

What are some of the things that you have heard mustaches called?



I meet a used car salesmen that had a trust-ache, talked me into an '03 Saturn.

In Iraq we call it the Wasta-che, in where we swear by our mustaches.

You look like a 1980's TV show star.

Shouldn't you be in a different army, invading Poland?

Shouldn't you be in a panel van offering selling ice cream?

If your mustache could talk, what would it say?

BLOW YOUR NOSE.

Ah! Coffee's too

I hate myself.



That's when the flood hit.

A torrent of jokes. **Abhorrence.**

And with each of them there was an underlying sense of **judgment**.





A culture of anti-mustache sentiment. Mustache ^{HATE} was on the rise while their numbers were decreasing. Mustaches were unable to stand up for themselves. ^{DEFEND}. ^{Survive}. This is going on all over the world, and every day in developing countries, many more stories go untold.

To combat this tragedy, I am encouraging everyone to organize an event geared towards mustache appreciation.

The purpose, to create a forum, an opportunity, for positive and open dialogue. Add a float to the neighborhood parade or a booth at the local carnival.

It is time for everyone, from the **MUSTACHIEOD** to the **CLEAN-SHAVEN**, to support their local M-Day Event and jump on the mustache ride.

M-Day

Mustache Ride



YOUR FATHER'S MUSTACHE

AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF BANJO BAND NIGHTCLUBS
DEDICATED TO PROVIDING HIGH QUALITY ENTERTAINMENT
WITH WIDE APPEAL AT MODERATE PRICES.
"WHERE THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE IS RIGHT UNDER YOUR NOSE."

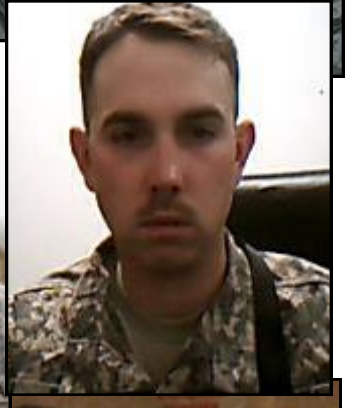
During the past eight years, Your Father's Mustache has become a synonym for FUN to millions of people all over the world - people of all ages and of varied musical tastes. And each year a greater number enjoy for themselves what makes Your Father's Mustache so popular. In 1970, new club openings in Vancouver, British Columbia, and in Brussels, Belgium, and a record number of "outside appearances" by our Show Band helped us to entertain the largest audience in our history.

forward which we know will increase enjoyment of Mustache evenings by providing the words to many of the favorite old songs played by our bands. A new issue will be published every four months. The next will be considerably larger, and will contain many more songs, stories of happenings at our clubs and articles on some of the performers who contribute so much to your entertainment.

We hope that you will enjoy using this free souvenir will take it home as a reminder of a fun evening. And don't forget to ask your many other souvenirs such as skinime cups, shirts and record albums that at all clubs.



**Notable Task Force
Trailblazer Mustaches**



Top to Bottom, Left to Right: 1SG Hurlocker with a faux-stash; CSM Morse with a pencil mustache; COL Juma with an Iraqi Wasta-che; 2LT Carney; MSG Kosier; CPT Burch with a dirt-stache; SSG McCartney; WO1 Prosper; 1LT Block; 2LT Douglas; CPT Etter; 95th's mustache group shot with SFC Wryn; SPC Chamberlin, PFC Ranson, SPC Boerm, 1SG Hurlocker (shaven), SFC Legg, PFC Sardari, 1LT Block, SSG Torres, 1LT Kessler and 1LT Flood.



Not Even C-Wire Can Stop the Burchinator

By CPT Brian Burch

I like to run. I'm not a competitive runner, but I enjoy getting out all alone and seeing the world go by at 8 mph. One of the great pleasures of running is simple exploration. Every time I move to a new city or post I drive around to find everything, but it's not until I run through the streets and trails do I feel like I know a place. Being deployed is no different. New FOBs, new places to explore, new hills, new roads and new trails.

I'll admit that I didn't run when we came through Kuwait. Running in sand sucks, and I had no desire to get to know that place. Iraq wasn't so bad. Originally with 511th, we first hit FOB Warrior (Kirkuk) in the middle of the winter. I run when it's below freezing. In fact, I much prefer freezing temperatures to skin-scorching heat. FOB Warrior was a great place to run. Flat, paved and large enough for some long runs.



But, there's one thing I didn't like about Warrior... So, there I was. It was late at night and very dark. I had just finished a nice 4-mile run and was trotting through a cool down when all of a sudden I tripped. Now, I've run in a lot of different places and tripped over a lot of different stuff. I've tripped over barbed wire before, but this was the first time I've ever tripped *into* concertina wire. I can confidently say that concertina wire works. It works well. The first thing I had to do was calm myself down. It's not a good feeling being



**This was
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...It works
well.**



Dramatization of the sequence of events leading to CPT Burch's running accident.



Above and Left, the dramatization recreation: CPT Burch sets out on a run; He comes across 1LT Frehulfer and 1LT Keyes who wave to him; Distracted, CPT Burch keeps running oblivious to the c-wire; 1LT Frehulfer and 1LT Keyes stop waving and try to flag CPT Burch down; CPT Burch continues on, presumably into the wire; Far left (not a dramatization): CPT Burch's stitches after the run-in; Opposite page, Top Montage (dramatization): CPT Burch wrestles to get out of the c-wire; Bottom, Right: CPT Burch winning 1st place in the COS Marez 4th of July Firecracker 5-miler.





caught suspended off the ground when every movement cuts deeper. My right hand felt the least caught, so I wiggled it free first. Ever so carefully, I removed the wire stuck in my face. Then, I reached over to pull my left hand free. Unfortunately, because I was hanging in the wire, I had to put my hands back on it to get some kind of balance. My legs were badly caught. I slowly worked from the least to worst cut wiggling and working the wire free until I was free. Luckily (relatively speaking at this point), I was near the company area and could get a ride to the hospital. For the curious types, yes, there was a lot of blood. I threw my socks away but kept the shoes; running shoes are expensive.

In March I moved to COS Marez (Mosul). Marez's topography is the opposite of Warrior's. The whole place is on a hill, every road is gravel and dirt, and a lap around the whole FOB is a scant 5 miles. Gravel and dirt roads are horrible to run on for two reasons. One, running at night is slower and requires concentration so as not to twist an ankle on the odd large bits of rock around. Two, every vehicle is towing a long cloud of dust no matter how slow it is driving. Despite these unfavorable conditions, I had a lot of good runs, including two 5-mile races the FOB hosted that I won.

However, there is a much more important story from running at Marez... So, there I was. I had been running pretty hard for a few months now and decided it was time to

turn up the intensity. I had never run a full marathon before, but as the saying goes "There's no time like the present". I planned my run to be 5 laps around the FOB with 1.2 miles tacked on the end. I would stop by my CHU each lap to grab water, Gatorade or food. So, I set out at a moderate pace. The first two laps weren't so bad. I had run a few 15+ mile runs before, so I knew I could keep pace through the third lap. Little did I know, I had already made my biggest mistake. I had not properly eaten prior to the run, and I didn't eat during the run until the third lap. I should have had more spaghetti-like foods the night before and started snacking during the second lap. The fourth lap was when it all started to hurt, but there wasn't much I could do about it now. One lap to go, I grabbed a Gatorade and reminded myself it was the last lap. Check my watch, still on target for making time. As much as I didn't want to, without the necessary energy, I was forced to walk at a few points during the last lap. I must say that I was not happy about walking. Through all the runs I have ever done, I've never walked. No matter how much I wanted to walk, I've always managed to push through and keep some kind of jog going. But, I had never run over 20 miles before. Lesson learned. I ran the downhills harder to keep pace. This was the inevitable gut check. I came around for the last 1.2 miles checked my watch and saw I could still make my target time. The home stretch is always the

easiest mental part of a run. I tell myself, "One mile to go? This thing is in the bag." It felt good and bad at the same time. I finally ran a marathon at my target time, but I was tired and sore. Just another reason I like running, runner's high. Where else can you feel so good and so bad at the same time?

I'm glad that I'm at Speicher now. It's back to paved flatlands. I was getting tired of running on gravel and hills. I plan to make at least a couple runs around the 12-mile loop. Maybe I'll run in a few of the 5k races they have. I've only been here a couple weeks, but I've been getting around. Though, I don't have any good stories, yet...



Running through Life

By 2LT Stephen Kraus

Everyone has a hobby or activity that they can do anywhere they go which brings them enjoyment and makes them feel content, even if for just a short time. For me, this is running. Not exactly the norm I would venture to guess. Most people would probably prefer to stay inside a comfortable room, playing cards, XBOX 360, or perhaps strumming a guitar. That's great, but not me. I'll take it easy for a while after a good 8 miles of rubber on pavement, in sub-par conditions, stretching the boundaries of my physiological and mental capacities. While there is some selfish motivation to why I run, there is also much more. The discipline, physical and mental toughness, and sense of teamwork learned as a competitive runner are great building blocks to succeed as a leader of Soldiers.

In college, I was a middle distance runner in a Division I track and field program. Specializing in races between 800 and 3,000 meters, I needed to have both speed and endurance to be successful. This required a lot of training, dedication, and commitment. Every afternoon and evening was spent on the track, local trails, and in our training facility. After the main workout was done, there was strength training to be completed, followed by stretching, treatment, and ice baths. By the time I got back to study, it was already late in the evening. Needless to say, compromises were made at times with my school work for the sake of my track career. I would constantly look for ways to improve myself, whether that be with supplemental exercises, better nutrition, or more sleep to recover properly. My goal was to be the best runner I could, which required 100 percent commitment.

When my college career came to end, I was posting personal records of 1:51 in the 800 meter and 4:11 in the mile. In addition, I was part of many 1st place 4x800 meter relay

and distance medley relay teams competing at meets all over the country and posting top 10 times in the school. When graduation came, however, and the season was over, the competitive atmosphere that I had lived and excelled in for four years was gone as well. I no longer had my teammates to train with on a daily basis, and there were no races to compete in besides an unsatisfying local

fices involved if we did. It was at this point that he said that if he wanted to, he could train and still be competitive, but the reality was that he wanted to be the best platoon leader possible and that his soldiers deserved his full attention. This was not a groundbreaking statement, but for some reason I needed someone to say it aloud for me to fully inculcate the responsibility and mindset of leading soldiers. How selfish would it be to take shortcuts in my job, especially in a deployed environment, in order to indulge in personal ambitions? Now luckily, there is often a time and place for a good run and there could be worse things to want to do. However, the point is that personal desires must be set on the backburner for the sake of accomplishing the mission and taking care of Soldiers to the best of my ability. The focus is now 100 percent on my job, not on running, as it was during my competitive years.

Meeting my unit in Iraq a few months into their tour, I knew I would have to meet high standards and expectations. A couple days after arriving, I ran a 9:53 two-mile (although the course was possibly a bit short) on a company APFT, letting my Soldiers know that there would be an emphasis on running in the weeks and months to come. Since then, I've been working to inspire and educate my Soldiers to run smarter, more efficient, and ultimately faster. It has already begun to pay off, with my entire platoon now passing the APFT.

Through classes, drills, and runs, I am trying to share my knowledge so that they have a basic understanding of the principles of running and fitness. I am a believer that if someone knows why they are doing something and how their body will react, they will be more motivated to do it. Another thing I stress to my Soldiers is proper recovery after a workout. No matter how much or how hard you push yourself in a training session, it will be pointless and potentially detrimental if you do not properly hydrate, eat, and



2LT Kraus racing the indoor 1000 meter in the Annual Army-Navy dual meet.

road race. It was at this point that I knew my focus would be changing. While I continued to run, and enjoyed doing so, I began to realize how my Army career would be deserving of my full attention.

Appropriately enough, I realized this most clearly when I was on a run with a former teammate and friend who was a year older and already a platoon leader. We had been talking about running, our potential if we kept on training past college, and the sacri-



sleep. Understanding and abiding by some basics such as this can dramatically improve performance.

In a way, I am starting to come full circle with my running career. Beginning as an inexperienced middle distance runner, I pushed myself and developed into a successful Division I athlete with the help of my teammates and coach. Now that that time has passed, I am more in the business of coaching, teaching, and mentoring my Soldiers to run. While not everybody will develop the same passion that I have for the sport, I hope that what I bring will at least

bring them some satisfaction and help them in their Army career. I can confidently say that traits such as dedication, commitment, and personal sacrifice which are learned and required when running will positively carry over to other parts of life, helping to make my Soldiers successful with whatever goals they set out to achieve.

Top to Bottom: SSG Reed leads a group of runners on FOB Warrior; SGT Knea gives the 'rock on' sign as he lead the pack; SGT Knea and PFC Hooks try to catch up SFC Millare (not really); SFC Millare finishes strong as he rounds the final corner.



FIRST INN

By MAJ Aaron Dorf

There was a screened in porch in the Town of Vengeance (ToV); a legacy structure that belonged to the Iraqis—it was constructed of a 20 foot by 40 foot concrete slab with masonry walls that stood approximately three feet tall. The structure was covered by a metal lattice that served as a frame—the frame was wrapped in a screened mesh that served as a barrier between man and bug—sand flies to be more exact. It contained two screen doors that faced into Town of Vengeance and resembled a glass-less green house. Several items were scattered inside: two freezers, several small tables, and a few folding chairs in various states of disrepair. Covering these contents was six months of dust that had accumulated from the weekly dust storms that had plagued the Tikrit area

for most of the year thus far. The layer of dust measured in millimeters; everything was brown and the entire areas looked shabby and unkept—a sore-spot in the rather well-maintained Battalion area.

After deciding that the Battalion would never use this area for recreation—validated by the fact that it was never used even once during the past three months of pleasant evenings, CSM Morse, the Battalion Sergeant Major, was convinced without any reasonable doubt that this facility would never get used especially during the long and hot Iraqi summer to come. One morning while making his rounds through the ToV facilities, he stopped, looked at the mess, and without any hesitation stated: “Have that removed!” These words signaled change—work immediately began on dismantling the structure. Over the course of the next several weeks, FSC welders spent some long hours cutting up the metal frame into small pieces that could fit into the back of a 5-ton dump truck. Once removed, C/84 received the task to demolish the masonry walls and return the site to a bare concrete slab. Concurrently, several simple AUTOCAD drawing began to circulate on what the replacement structure might look like. After several iterations, a small SWA Hut, raised onto a wooden floor was selected to fill the void.

ToV lacked a Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) facility. There was a building called the ‘MWR Hooch’ and during the reign of the pervious battalion, this facility



served in this capacity. Unfortunately, the Battalion required a meeting room and transformed it into a conference room and painted it bright red. Although the change was meant to be temporary while a new building was being constructed, the ‘hooch’ remained a meeting room.

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Top: The old structure; Left: SSG O'Neil (C/84th) and MSG Montano (HHC) acting as real-life hammer-slingers; Bottom Row, Left to Right: A group of NCO's build the wall sections; 1SG Azucena (HHC) steadies a board as MSG Montano overwatches; SFC Brown (FSC) watches SSG White (95th) get ready to build a truss.



Members of CST and 1st Platoon C/84 set the first truss, one of forty to go; Inset: a shot looking into the building after several trusses have been set and work has stopped due to oppressive temperatures.



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Even if the Battalion had returned the 'hooch' to its original function, it was highly doubtful that Soldiers would spend any free time in a facility with a gaudy paint job, uncomfortable furniture, and a gym floor. This opened the possibility for a new facility; one that was nicely constructed, presented a more friendly atmosphere, and a place with a large TV so that Soldiers may actually want to spend time there.

The challenge was finding somebody to build the structure. Now as a reader, you must be wondering why this would be any problem at all. We are an engineer battalion and have an attached construction company that has two vertical and one horizontal construction platoons which have over 130 Soldiers assigned to them. Unfortunately it wasn't that easy—since all of the troop con-

struction was tied up constructing checkpoints, joint security centers, tactical operation centers, and a myriad of other mission related facilities—finding available Soldiers would be a challenge. CSM Morse decided he would use NCO manpower and dub the construction effort—NCO professional development. Under that guise, construction began; to bolster the effort and ensure that whatever was eventually built was done safely, he enlisted the services of the C/84th Commander's Security Team. Known as a Combat Security Team (CST), the C/84th team consisted of eight Soldiers who were project managers, carpenters, equipment operators, and electricians by MOS. The team was created from a group of NCOs and Soldiers that were pulled out of hide from the line platoons. They provided the C/84th Commander the opportunity to battlefield circulate across northern Iraq. Due

to the fact that two construction projects were rarely ever at the same patrol base, FOB, and COS and almost never on COB Speicher, they were critical to the good order and discipline of the unit. Additionally, the CST was designed to provide mobile security to support internal Combat Logistic Patrols (CLP) that were often required to support extended construction operations, deliver BOM (Bill of Material or construction materials), and fuel to the jobsite.

The project commenced—oh, yes, it did—at 0445 in the morning on one bright and sunny Monday morning in early June. I was enjoying some blissful slumber in my CHU—the one geographically closest to the concrete slab where the building was going to be erected—when the work started. Unbeknownst to me, CSM Morse had begun his NCOPD session.

Around that time, all staff sergeants and above in the Battalion gathered around the slab of concrete to receive their first round of instructions on building an Iraqi style SWA Hut. SSG Velmer, the C/84th CST leader was the NCOIC of the project and he enlisted the help of SGT Dearman, another CST member and talented carpenter, to get the project rolling. Lesson one was construction of the floor joists—a defining moment to validate that a structure would actually be built.

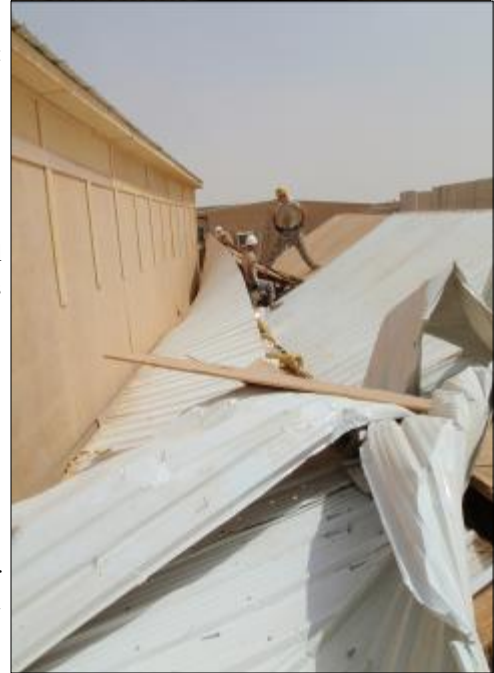
The team wrestled the 2"x6"x16' stringers into position and created a large 20'x40' rhombus that covered the concrete slab. The stringers were then shimmed to help level the structure on the existing concrete slab which was lumpier than previously thought. To help set the stage, there is a saying in Iraq: "Iraqi Good"—and this is synonymous with the old adage "Good enough for government work." These phrases identify some of the challenges with construction in Iraq, especially when constructed at 0400 in the a.m. To further complicate issues, most of the wood used for the project was scrap wood that sat in the open air for over four years and was warped, dried out, cracked, and extremely brittle. There were enough seriously warped pieces of lumber to lay the keel of a small skiff, and this would have

been easier to build than a squared-up building. Despite the challenges, two layers of opposed 3/4" plywood sheathed the stringers and the floor was ready to receive walls.

Step one was complete; ToV was transformed into a genuine construction site, and once again my CHU was ground-zero to the main effort. Unfortunately for me, sunrise was at 0425 and this meant that the temperature would rapidly rise from 80 degrees to approximately 100 degrees in a scant few hours and thus be too hot for construction. This ensured the construction effort would be concentrated in the early-early morning and I'd be doing morning PT at least for the foreseeable future. Flooring compete, walls and roof trusses were the next two steps of SWA Hut construction. Due to the fact that C/84 was a "T" (trained) in this task (14 SWA Huts already constructed), they would execute this SWA Hut as a design-build project (short for no plans).

The NCOs were split into several teams, and put to work fabricating the different sections of the walls. A select few were sent to the roof truss station and had the honor of constructing forty identical trusses.

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Clockwise from Top, Right: 2nd Platoon, C/84 wrecking crew ready to tear down the gym; Job Done—Building demolished—now the hard part, breaking down the rubble into piles of wood, metal, and trash for recycling; Demolition in-progress—the crew earned a real days pay as they tear apart the inside of the building; SPC Yoder works the sledge hammer as he works off the days frustrations!





A view of the demolition in-progress as the full team dismantles the gym's interior as the temperature rises.

The roof trusses were not in the traditional SWA Hut style that form an isosceles triangle and create a steep pitched roof. These contained a 90 degree angle with a shallow slope pitched towards the entrance. The reason for this will become clearer later, as the building was expressly designed to nest neatly against an existing structure and snow accumulation was not factored into the roof design.

I soon learned that fabricating roof trusses was the least fun part of SWA Hut construction and that it was actually rather boring and tedious work. A truss jig was constructed on a make-shift plywood table that had a number of slots on it. These slots were arranged in a pattern that held the 2"X6"X16' boards, arranged at the angles required to produce like cuts for each of the 40 trusses required. Reluctantly, the trusses started to stack-up, inching closer through-

out the week towards the required goal. Concurrently, four walls were constructed with four exterior doors notched into the design, one for each of the four walkways that exited the previous structure; a rather odd design to be honest.

By week's end, the trusses were complete and the walls were insulated and sheathed on both sides with rather warped 1/4 inch plywood on the inside and 3/4" on the exterior. Once complete and ready for lifting, CSM Morse gathered a large crew of NCO's early one Saturday morning and stood up the walls. Erecting the walls was relatively easy, sort of....placing a trapezoidal wall on a rhombus shaped floor proved challenging, and despite some overhang, the building began to take shape. The manufactured center beam was hoisted into place and balanced with two 4'x4' columns and set onto

two of the exterior wall sections. This is where the NCO professional development trailed off and the C/84th CST received a much larger mission than they had originally bargained for. On the bright side, every member of the team would involuntarily cross-train as a 21W (carpenter).

Much to my chagrin, the CST team started working in the early morning around 0430 to maximize the cooler temperatures and available daylight. Unfortunately this limited their work day to a few hours and set the project on a slow course to completion. With help from C/84th first platoon and other company Soldiers, the trusses were finally set and roof sheathing began.

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As a casual observer, I was happy with the progress and figured the building should be completed before we redeployed home. Then one morning, I noticed the team ripping off the roof and tearing apart some of the wall sections. After some casual conversations—"Like what are you doing?" "Construction or Destruction?"—they explained that if the bowing in the front wall was not corrected the building might collapse under the weight of its own roof. Since the original design called for square on square, and we produced trapezoid on rhombus, several critical adjustments were made to minimize the effects of our non-volunteer NCOPD carpenters. Thankfully, cooler heads prevailed, and without any hard timeline to meet, the deficiencies were corrected.

The building progressed a little at a time with the good idea fairy popping up from now and then. One of the challenges was how to construct a facility in the middle of the Battalion compound and have it not look like every other non-descript wooden structure, painted white, adorned with a silver colored corrugated roof made of tin.

Additionally, the plywood used on the exterior walls was of the poorest quality and deemed unusable for other projects. To further complicate the issue were the problems of electrical power and drainage; two key factors that normally are resolved in the design stages and are not usually responsibility of the builder to fix on the fly. In this case, both issues needed quick resolve on the fly. Based on the projected lighting and air conditioning plan, the new building would require approximately 43 amps. The only power source was from a panel that fed the adjacent building known as the 'Prison Gym' and it required 38 amps. Since 38 plus 43 equaled 81 amps, and the power panel only contained a 63 amp breaker—power was going to be a problem. Furthermore, since the new building was butted up to the 'Prison Gym' and the gym had a steep pitched, rainwater would run off of the roof and onto the wall and under the concrete pad of the new building. And yes it does rain Iraq—during the winter months this area will get one or two good rains, enough

to cause havoc, especially to buildings with poor drainage.

Since CSM was now on leave, I took the easy route towards fixing these two problems: I decided to tear down the gym. Luckily, we had an excess facility (the new conference room) within ToV that was mothballed due to the lack of power, but with a stroke of luck and some long awaited funding, it was electrified and easily transformed into a much nicer gym. Complete with adequate air conditioning, two water coolers, and floor mats, it was dubbed the 'pump house' and is well used by TFTB Soldiers. This is when the project really ramped up and turned into a bone fide construction effort. With another star in alignment, a vertical platoon became available due to the unexpected delay of another project—additional manpower was available to finish building. Demolition began and the 'prison gym' disappeared in a puff of smoke as 20 Soldiers from 2nd Platoon armed with sledge hammers and crow bars attacked it with vigor. This coupled with the aid of a 10k forklift and the building was quickly reduced making way for easy access to all four sides of the new facility.

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Above: Members of 2/C/84 work on the back of the building and apply the 1"×12"×16' full board siding at night; Right: SPC Alvarez and SPC Brown run the nail gun to speed up the siding process. Although the wood was brittle, the nail gun worked better than expected.

The first good-idea was the addition of full board siding using 1"x12"x16' pine planks. This added the unique character to the building which would eventually lead to it being known as the 'log cabin' building by visitors of ToV. This covered the mangy looking rough-cut plywood and helped seal the exterior from the elements. Inside, 1"x6"x16' pine planks were used for a full board flooring that was laid at a 45 degree angle to the corner. This helped to disguise the rhombus shaped floor through a variety of cuts and angles. This really helped the overall interior appearance and reduced the spongy feeling when you walked across the floor. To help hide the trapezoidal shaped walls, 1"x12"x8' pine plank was used as interior paneling and was used to fill the gaps between the floor, ceiling, and wall sections. Easy in theory—this additional finishing work added a full week to the project, as many of the boards received were split,

warped, or just unusable.

The ceiling received 1"x4" molding to cover the joints with additional pieces added to present a drop ceiling appearance. Base-board was added to lock the floor boards to the wall paneling, and then routed to present a more finished appearance. The inner columns were finished and sanded while the electrical wiring was neatly hidden behind racetrack and a wooden chase. Due to serious safety issues across Iraq in the past involving shabby wiring—all electrical wires were run externally and placed in a racetrack to facilitate easy inspection. This is the theater standard and has significantly cut down the number of electrocutions and other electricity safety related incidents.

Dust is and will probably remain an ever-present problem in Iraq. Most buildings are constructed with vestibules that contain an

additional door that is well sealed from the elements. These help to create a buffer between the airborne dust particles and the interior living space. Since most dust is circulated by high winds, vestibules are essential for maintaining cleanliness and prolonging the life of the air conditioning units—another essential for living in Iraq. It was decided to add additional vestibules and cover two of the three doors left on the final design.

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Below: SSG Velmer (left) and SGT Dearman (right) from C/84th CST inspect the progress of the interior work as a crew installs the wall paneling; Inset: SPC Wolf screws in a piece of ceiling decorative trim.





Regardless of the prediction, it was a welcome sight to see electric lights and cool air being circulated throughout the building.

The 'Bar' team was led by SGT Dearman and was constructed from a schematic drawn on a piece of scrap lumber. His design skills were heightened during one of the worst dust storms during the entire deployment where he sat outside in the swirling dirt and created his master blueprint. Now as the reader you might ask why there was any need for a bar, especially in a 'dry' country and one where all military and civilian personnel are strictly forbidden to drink any alcohol. Since non-alcoholic beverages are available for free at the DFAC and purchase at the Shoppette, a bar was deemed necessary. Using a pallet of weather beaten Iraqi oak doorframes, a purple-heart board from an M870 trailer, and some good old fashion American wood-working skills, the bar was constructed. After several coats of varnish, a few worn-out saw blades, a pile of unserviceable sander belts, a well used router, the building was almost complete. With the addition of three cipher locks, some minor roof work,

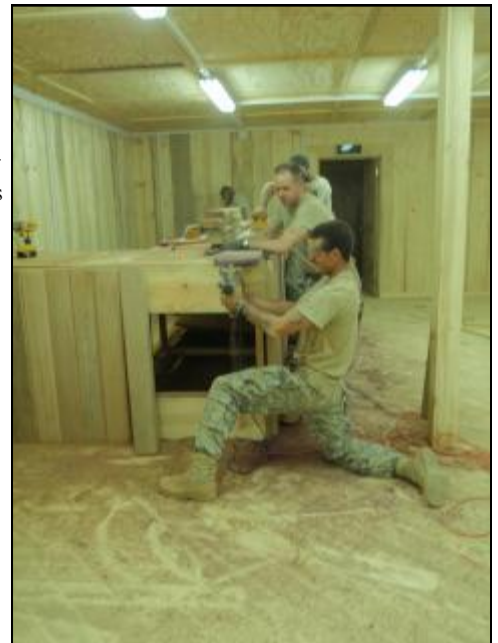
and a few punch list items, the building inched closer to its grand opening.

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Top Left: SGT Dearman hold the blueprints for the bar sketched on a 1"x6" scrap board—notice the dust in the air; Below (top to bottom): SGT Dearman and the CST crew work the router as they put the decorative edges on a piece of purple heart wood; each piece of the oak planking was had routed to present the distinctive look.

The third door would be sealed and used as a service and emergency entrance. The vestibules were designed to match the existing building décor, but with a pitched roof with 1"x6"x1" wooden shingles to add the finishing touch. The building was stained in a deep brown color; the exterior doors, vestibules, and shingles were varnished to make them stand-out. The coloring added to the 'log cabin' appeal and the unique character of the building. After a few weeks in the sun, the color lightened to a golden-honey brown color—a true Speicher original.

The interior finishing work came next; the work was divided between two teams: electricians and bar. The electrical work was collaboration between the Trailblazer Repair and Upgrade (TRU) team and 2nd Platoon. The original design called for 20 interior lights, 4 split air conditioning units, several exterior lights, and a plethora of power outlets set in strategic locations throughout the facility. Possibly overkill—the electricians were convinced the Battalion was actually building an operating room and not an MWR building. The primary electrical team, led by SPC Lewis, projected the interior would be bright enough to continue sun tanning, even after the hot Iraqi sun had set.





After acquiring a few new decorations coupled with the skillful harvesting of furniture from around the Battalion, the building was adequately furnished—complete with a pool table and all. A large TV was begrudgingly loaned from HHC and the AFN antenna and cable work was completed courtesy of the S6 shop.

The final order of business was naming the facility. A number of names were suggested and ranged from the construction platoon's motto to the Arabic word for engineer. There were suggestions of a dedication to former Task Force Trailblazer Soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice during previous deployments or even the

current default name: 'The log cabin building'. In the end, 'First Inn' was selected. The name incorporates the first part of the Battalion's motto and with an additional 'n', fits nicely with the character of the building. Rumor even has it that a 'last out' sign will adorn the exit of one of the vestibules. In several months, when the 65th Engineer Battalion is replaced by the 1st Engineer Battalion, there is a good chance that they'll keep the name as it is equally as fitting. Unfortunately, most units rename their facilities as soon as the previous unit is gone so

in this case, only time will tell—hint, hint [we'll make sure to float them a copy of this newsletter].

Clockwise from Top Left: The building exterior with vestibule and service door; inside of the vestibule with decorative wooden doors; the other vestibule on the 'bar' side; the bar adorned with the engineer castle.



In closing, this project served as a great training event for both the Soldiers in C/84th and the NCO's in the Battalion. It presented challenges at every corner (no pun intended) and allowed the carpenters to hone their skills on finishing work. It has provided a facility for the Chaplain's MWR events and provided an area for Soldiers to relax and watch a movie or shoot some pool. In a few short weeks, Sunday Jersey night will start with the onset of football season. As the CSM says—"Bring it on" Go Colts!

Clockwise from Top, Right: SGT Miller, SSG Favinger, SFC McCreary, and SFC Coopwood busy at work killing virtual bad-guys; CPT Burch tests his skills in a game of pool; a view across the building; view of the TV that is ready to host football season; view from the bar.



Stairway to Heaven

By SSG Lucas Velmer

For over 6 months, the CST was used to going on around 15 to 20 missions and traveling over 1000 miles every month. Then comes July...our missions hit the brakes faster than an auctioneer trying to sell the Mona Lisa. Granted, we traveled close to 1000 miles to support the company. However, our normal 15 to 20 missions were cut by a third and we were left to focus on constructing the 65th Engineer Battalion Morale, Welfare and Recreational (MWR) facility.

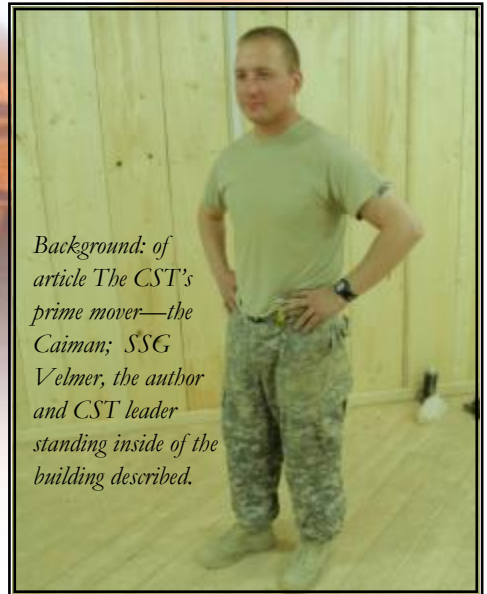
From the framework that started in June with the help of the senior NCOs in BN, to the finishing work and the help of 1st and 2nd Platoon, there is light at the end of the tunnel. At the beginning of July, the CST worked a split shift, working from 0500-0900 and 1800-2200. About mid-way through the month, we switched to working from 1800 to midnight. This allowed us to concentrate on maximizing the amount of work we could accomplish, while still maintaining proficiency in our primary mission of escorting the Commander and First Sergeant.

During the course of the month, the CST sided three quarters of the building, placed tin

on the roof, paneled the interior wall and custom cut diagonal pieces to give the floor a hardwood appearance. The siding was constructed from 1" by 12" wood, laid horizontally and overlapped, giving the building a more "finished" look than most buildings constructed here in Iraq. The interior paneling was constructed from 1" by 12" wood, laid vertically and placed side by side, which gives the interior a "cabin" feel to it. The floor was a daunting task, constructed from 1" by 6" wood. Each piece that was placed against a wall had to be cut at a 45 degree angle in order to give it a diagonal appearance. Each piece was laid side by side and could not have more than a 1/8th gap in between in order to carry the diagonal appearance across the entire interior of the building. With that, there are 2 center brace poles which help keep the ceiling from sagging. Each floor piece had to be cut precisely in order to fit around each pole. SPC Nicely and SPC Lim were tasked with measuring and laying each piece on the floor. SPC Longenecker was tasked with cutting each piece. Their teamwork led to the floor being completed in just 3 days.

Over the course of the next month, the CST looks forward to completing the MWR facility

by finishing the minor trim work on the interior. 2nd Platoon will work on the 3 doors, staining the exterior, and building vestibules to help keep the dust out of the facility. So, on behalf of all Soldiers in the CST, I'd like to extend a big "thank you" to 2nd Platoon for their help on this building, which is set for completion on the 8th of August. As missions start to pick up again and we wind down the deployment, we expect to travel a bit more to various locations to visit those platoons working outside the wire.



Background: of article The CST's prime mover—the Caiman; SSG Velmer, the author and CST leader standing inside of the building described.

The Last 100 Days...

By 1LT Chelsea Frehulfer

So much emphasis is placed on our first 100 days in theater. They talk about how we should react to potential threats, what our techniques and procedures are for convoys, the jobsite, and daily activities. We discuss policies, listen to rambling speakers, and conduct rehearsals. Oh yes, and meetings. Hundreds of meetings—meetings of lessons learned and lessons to come, of others' mistakes and our own, of ways to improve and how we already have. Of course, that is mostly the leadership, but don't get me wrong, it all gets passed down in more meetings at the Platoon and Squad level, and through plenty of practice and rehearsals. The first 100 days really are a time to learn, and a time to do great. It is a time to meticulously avoid mistakes, and a time of long hours learning and practicing what right looks like—down to the lowest private. It is a time which required

discipline and patience, but it paid off. You see it in the projects we've accomplished, and good fortune we've had in our safety (which, if you ask me, has less to do with luck or fortune and a lot more to do with how the Soldiers are mindful of details and execute the task at hand).

That last hundred days, which we are now well into, are not discussed with nearly as much fervor or dedication (maybe because the excitement of the deployment is wearing off, and we are starting to look forward to the Alaska winter...). Yet, it requires just as much discipline, and even more focus. It is about now, when we are starting to wind things down, that we are most comfortable with the tasks we have been conducting the last nine months (I am pretty sure some of mechanics could do a service with their eyes closed, the carpenters construct a 20' x 40' SWA hut in their sleep, and the earth movers kick some dirt around

with their hands behind their back). However, this is when our focus needs to be strongest—to maintain our vigilance while on the road, to pay attention during the smallest of tasks, and to avoid the most miniscule safety violations. It is when we may be working long hours to pack up our gear, and transfer our equipment so that we can come home on time! However, we still have many projects coming up: SWA huts to build, Hescos to fill, vehicles to maintain, berms to construct, lots of training for the Iraqi Army to be self-sufficient when we leave, and lots of equipment to transfer!

This is where all of you come in—Wives, husbands, sons, daughters, parents, siblings—all of you are important in helping us come home! Help us stay focused, give us motivation to drive on through the last day here, and we will come back safe and more than ready to be home. We're in the last 100 days and counting. Thanks for your support!



It's all about the Benjamin.

By 1LT Michael Chadwick

What comes to mind when you think of Uncle Scrooge? A miserly old man counting his coins and missing out on the joys of life? That's exactly the path I was headed down before marrying my lovely Sarah. We started dating in high school and I managed to keep my frugal ways a secret from her for many years. After dating for over seven years, we finally took the plunge, and as expected experienced some "growing pains" along the way. She quickly caught on to my secret and we butted heads often, as she was used to purchasing whatever she wanted when she wanted. I was more interested in wanting to save every single penny that came my way.

I have made a lot of progress in the "lack of spending" department; however, I still tried to save wherever I could and had even hatched a new savings plan for my upcoming deployment. I mentioned to a fellow Lieutenant that I bet I could live on \$100 for the entirety of our deployment, of course was omitting my mid-tour leave and necessary expenses back home. This little plan of mine really came as no surprise to my Commander, First Sergeant, and peers because they had already realized that I was, "frugal, thrifty, prudent, economical, sparing, finan-

cially careful, penny-wise, parsimonious, a penny-pincher, tight, stingy, and meager".

If anyone was ever curious about my spending habits, I found they would usually ask, "Why are you so overly financially responsible?" Masking their true question, "Why are you such a tight wad?" I would reply that I never had a problem spending money on, say an experience, but in-between the experiences I found a way to live a simpler life. If that response did not satisfy them I usually followed it up with, "my wife and I are saving for our first house, more education, and a family."

Once I was in Kuwait, I did some rudimentary math to see exactly how feasible this plan would be. I figured hair cuts to cost about \$4 a pop; \$6 with tip. I would like to add that that is a gracious 50% tip! Then I considered toiletry products, but knew I could count on my generous family members to send me those items. I would just need an excuse my mother would eat up: "Mother, they just don't have bar soap over here. No razors either. Well, if they don't have razors they surely don't carry shaving cream or toothpaste. It must be a logistical issue." I also omitted food from the budget since quality food is always provided at the

Dining Facility with over 18 hours available for food consumption.

The Dining Facility also had ample snacks accessible so I just planned to sneak a few things out until I had a reserve of Cliff Bars, Gatorade, and Rip-Its in my office. Then I realized that internet would prove to be a problem. The internet provider wanted to charge upwards of \$100 per month for internet! Out of all of my financial expense options, the one I wanted the most was internet. This problem was solved when I learned that the MWR building was approximately 38 feet from my CHU door and had free internet access 24/7. Laundry service is provided by KBR and there was no need for detergents or softeners as they are included with the service. Let's be honest with each other, I probably wasn't going to be using softener anyways. My TV and DVD player came from CPT Etter. I would borrow DVD series from my peers and once my family had sent, "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia" Seasons I – III, I made sure to offer anyone the opportunity to borrow them; to return the favor. After all, no one likes a mooch. I would attempt to call home once a week, or at least every two weeks, with free USO calling-cards or I would make the effort to find a DSN calling station some-

where. I really thought I had most my basics covered, but I wanted to factor in some unforeseen expenses, just in case. After a quick recalculation, assuming the cost of two haircuts per month, I realized I would exceed my \$100 budget by \$44. That meant either shaving my head for 3-4 months or finding someone willing to cut my hair for free. At any rate, I decided I was going to try my hardest to stick to this budget, which would be hard for even the Scroogiest of people!

As the months passed and a weight lifting competition surfaced in the Forward Support Company, I found that my bare-bones budget was getting very hard to manage. While most of my fellow Soldiers were spending their money on their CHU's, Guitars, fast food, DVDs and what would eventually become the downfall of my \$100 budget, weight lifting supplements. In order to remain competitive with my Company, I knew I needed these supplements to provide that extra edge. I had to make a hard decision, save money or compete with the guys?

My competitive side won over my frugal side on May 8th, 2009, and I have since greatly exceeded my budget because of these supplements. When I arrived in Iraq I weighed around 190 lbs. I currently weigh close to 220 lbs. Was this 30lbs weight gain worth "breaking the bank"? Definitely! I know money doesn't buy happiness, and neither does saving every penny.



Left: CPT Amsdell and 1LT Chadwick pose for a post weight room shot—So who will be first to reach 350 pounds on the bench?? Bring it on, CPT A.

Wolfpack Maintenance

By 1LT Joe Block

In a moment of synchronized chaos, over eight million dollars worth of route clearance equipment known as MRAPs (Mine-Resistant Ambush-Proof Vehicles) pull out of the razor-wire enclosed Wolfpack Motorpark and begin the fifteen minute drive across COB Speicher to the Wolfpack Motorpool for the infamous “maintenance day.” Maintenance day has many peculiarities for a route clearance platoon. On one hand, many consider maintenance day to be a “down day” due to the fact that the platoon does not have any route clearance patrols that evening. On the other hand, maintenance day is probably the busiest day of the week due to the large amount of work required of the Soldiers to take care of their vehicles and weapons. Another peculiarity is that for many Soldiers, maintenance day is one of the primary methods of marking the passage of time. Sappers in Iraq don’t get Sundays off or any other day off for that matter. Instead, we have maintenance day. No longer is there a Hawaiian, sand-and-surf filled weekend to look forward to every weekend to mark the passage of the work week. For Wolfpack Sappers, a sand-and-dust filled day at the motorpool is the next

best thing. Many Soldiers use maintenance days as their countdown to an upcoming R&R leave period or towards the end of the deployment. Displaying its versatility once again, maintenance day is also known for the lunch break at the Main PX. It is the one chance for the Sappers to take a break from the chow hall and MRE’s and get some good, all-American, greasy food from Burger King, Pizza Hut, or Taco Bell. Truly, maintenance day is a day like no others for the Soldiers of the Mighty 95th.

But what exactly happens at the motorpool? The answer is simple – hard work. Soldiers from 1st Platoon of the 95th Engineer Company wake up at 7 AM, conduct personal hygiene, and meet at the Wolfpack Motorpark. The squad leader will assign a driver and truck commander for each vehicle and task them to drive the vehicle to the Wolfpack Motorpool located across COB Speicher. Some vehicles are also assigned to travel to other locations on COB Speicher for work. Some vehicles are sent to the gyro-cam shop, others to Mantech, others to BAE, and others to many different civilian contractors to receive specific maintenance work. But for the vast majority of the platoon’s vehicles, the Soldiers



make the trek from the motorpark to the motorpool in a cloud of dust and a symphony of engine noises and tires pounding themselves over the gravel and pavement.

Upon arrival at the motorpool, the Soldiers line the vehicles in two parallel lines along the southern edge of the maintenance bay. At this time, one or two vehicles will drive Soldiers back to the motorpark to pick up the remaining vehicles left behind. At the motorpool, the Soldiers immediately begin work on their vehicles. The squad leader and team leaders assign Soldiers to conduct maintenance on specific vehicles and the leaders pass out maintenance forms that must be filled out by the Soldier. Usually, one or two Soldiers are assigned to conduct PMCS (preventive maintenance checks and services) on each individual vehicle. Team leaders and squad leaders provide technical expertise to the Soldiers as they walk around by answering questions, offering advice, giving guidance, and assisting the Soldiers in any way possible.

Opposite Page: PFC Witkowski, throwing the cleanliness of his uniform to the wind, crawls beneath the Husky to get a better view of the suspension system. PFC Witkowski is a primary “Husky” operator, which is an odd vehicle in the route clearance world because it holds only one person, has no weapon system, has metal detection capabilities, and is designed to fall apart to absorb the impact of an explosive blast.



PFC Steele checking the fluid levels of his RG-33. Although it is only 9 AM, the PL authorized PFC Steele and other Soldiers to take off their outer blouses due to the oppressive heat and blazing sun.

Each Soldier assigned to a vehicle must conduct PMCS for that particular vehicle. So what exactly occurs in a PMCS? One of the most entertaining assignments of a PMCS is to clean the vehicle air filters. Using the air compressor at the motorpool, the Soldiers run a high-velocity stream of air through the air filters causing a cloud of dust to ascend from the air filter and surround anyone unfortunate enough to be standing nearby during this process. After a thorough cleaning of the air filters, the Soldiers go through the PMCS check-list found in the back of the vehicle technical manual. Soldier's check every single item on the list, no matter how tedious, in order to ensure their vehicle will run properly. Soldier's check fluid levels, electronic systems, safety systems, belts, tire pressure, suspension, and various other aspects of the vehicle. Whenever a "fault" is found on the checklist, the Soldier will annotate the "fault" on the maintenance form. After the checks are complete, the Soldier attempts to fix any deficiencies he can. Generally, the Soldiers can replace engine fluids and fix basic wiring problems with the large "KC lights" mounted all over the vehicle. The Soldiers can also replace tires and other general maintenance tasks. However, if the Soldier cannot fix the issue he will receive assistance from a highly motivated and knowledgeable Wolfpack Mechanic.

The mechanics in the 95th Engineer Company are very skilled and spend most of every day laboring in the motorpool to fix broken vehicles. Most of their behind-the-scenes work is often underappreciated, but you can be assured that without the tireless efforts of the company mechanics, the 95th would not have the capability to run so many missions. The mechanics are valuable at fixing issues on the vehicles; however, the real value of the mechanics is found not in what they fix but instead in what they don't have to fix. Let's put it this way. If the mechanics catch a potential problem and rectify the issue before it actually becomes a problem, then they have just saved themselves and the line Soldiers an incredible amount of time and effort, and also saved the Army

quite a bit of money in the process. It can't be overstated that the Wolfpack mechanics are exceptionally good at preventing problems as well as fixing problems. But for all of the good they accomplish, Wolfpack mechanics still face situations that would leave most people angry and frustrated.



For instance, the maintenance clerks spend hours every day searching for vehicle parts in a variety of complicated, slow, and inefficient computer programs. The process of ordering parts can get so frustrating, sometimes a clerk or mechanic might just feel like calling the local Iraqi auto parts dealer and seeing if they might have the correct part. Yet, even when parts could be obtained to allow a Wolfpack mechanic to fix a vehicle, a thick wall of bureaucratic red tape prevents Wolfpack mechanics from fixing the vehicle. Most of the route clearance vehicles maintained by the company are under very specific warranties from the vehicle manufacturers. These warranties often restrict the type of work Army personnel can do to a vehicle because the war-

ranty calls for only the civilian contractors to work on certain aspects of the vehicle. Hence, Wolfpack mechanics regularly will be gnawing at the bit to correct a deficiency on a vehicle but the warranty calls for civilians, and not Soldiers, to fix the problem. If this is the case, or if neither the Soldier nor

the mechanic can fix the problem, then the Soldiers take the vehicle to a specialty shop to fix the problem.

On paper, motorpool maintenance sounds like a relatively simple and easy process. However, things get tricky when some other factors are added. One factor which greatly reduces the enjoyment of maintenance is heat. Spending a hot, sunny day working under the hood of a vehicle requires the consumption of vast quantities of water. It isn't unusual for a Soldier to consume bottle after bottle of water and still feel like he isn't quite hydrated enough. The heat in the motorpool is no joke, and as professional Soldiers, the Wolfpack takes "beating the heat" very seriously. A second factor that reduces the enjoyment of maintenance is dust. Dust is not fun. Dust penetrates the eyes, mouth, nose, and ears and manages to stick to every drop of sweat on one's body. After a short time, a noticeable coat of dust will adhere to a previously clean engine, preventing Soldiers from easily distinguishing the severity of a fluid leak

from the engine. And most Soldiers will point out without hesitation that they often clean the vehicles, but are accused of leaving the vehicles dirty only a few minutes later – it only takes a few minutes for a previously clean vehicle to transform into a dusty mess again. And dust isn't the only factor preventing a Soldier from staying clean. Refilling fluids and checking for fluid leaks all day only makes it that much harder for a Soldier to stay clean. Checking oil, transmission fluid, coolant, and other fluids becomes a very messy process. And once it gets on your hand, there is no faucet nearby with which one can wash his hands. Simply put – the life of a Soldier on Maintenance Day is dusty, dirty, and demanding.

Luckily, the timeline for 1st Platoon Soldiers at the motorpool is relatively simple. From 0800 to 1230, the Soldiers from one squad work on the vehicles. After eating lunch and with bellies full, the other squad takes the place of the morning shift and finishes the job. The afternoon shift is generally lighter and less demanding, which is why the squads alternate shifts from week to week. The afternoon shift finishes any vehicle maintenance not yet complete, and then focuses on cleaning and organizing the inside and outside of the vehicles. The afternoon shift also has the responsibilities of obtaining forms for each vehicle that authorize the vehicles to be used for seven days. And finally, the afternoon shift must also take any vehicles requiring civilian technical support to the respective shops of the civilian support companies. This action requires Soldiers to remove all sensitive items and ammunition from the vehicles, and to coordinate for another vehicle to pick the Soldiers up after dropping off the vehicle.

Sometimes the Soldiers must turn a vehicle in to a civilian support company to receive additional armor called "Spall Liner." This process requires coordination with many different military and civilian maintenance components for proper completion. First, the Soldiers take the vehicle to a civilian shop to get the gyrocam or electronic weapon system removed from the vehicle. Next the Soldiers take the vehicle to another



SGT Hein imparts some knowledge and advice to PFC Juneau as they discuss the maintenance forms requiring completion at the motorpool. Notice PFC Juneau drinking water and sweating though his dirt-covered uniform. The Soldiers certainly earn their pay on days like these.

shop to remove the electronic warfare system from the vehicle. The Soldiers then take the vehicle to the 95th Communications Section to remove the radios, antennas, radio wires, and the radio "tower." Finally the Soldier has to drop off the vehicle at the civilian shop for the armor installation and catch a ride back to the motorpark from another Soldier. When all vehicles are dropped off at civilian support shops or taken back to the motorpark, the Soldiers are then finished with "maintenance day."

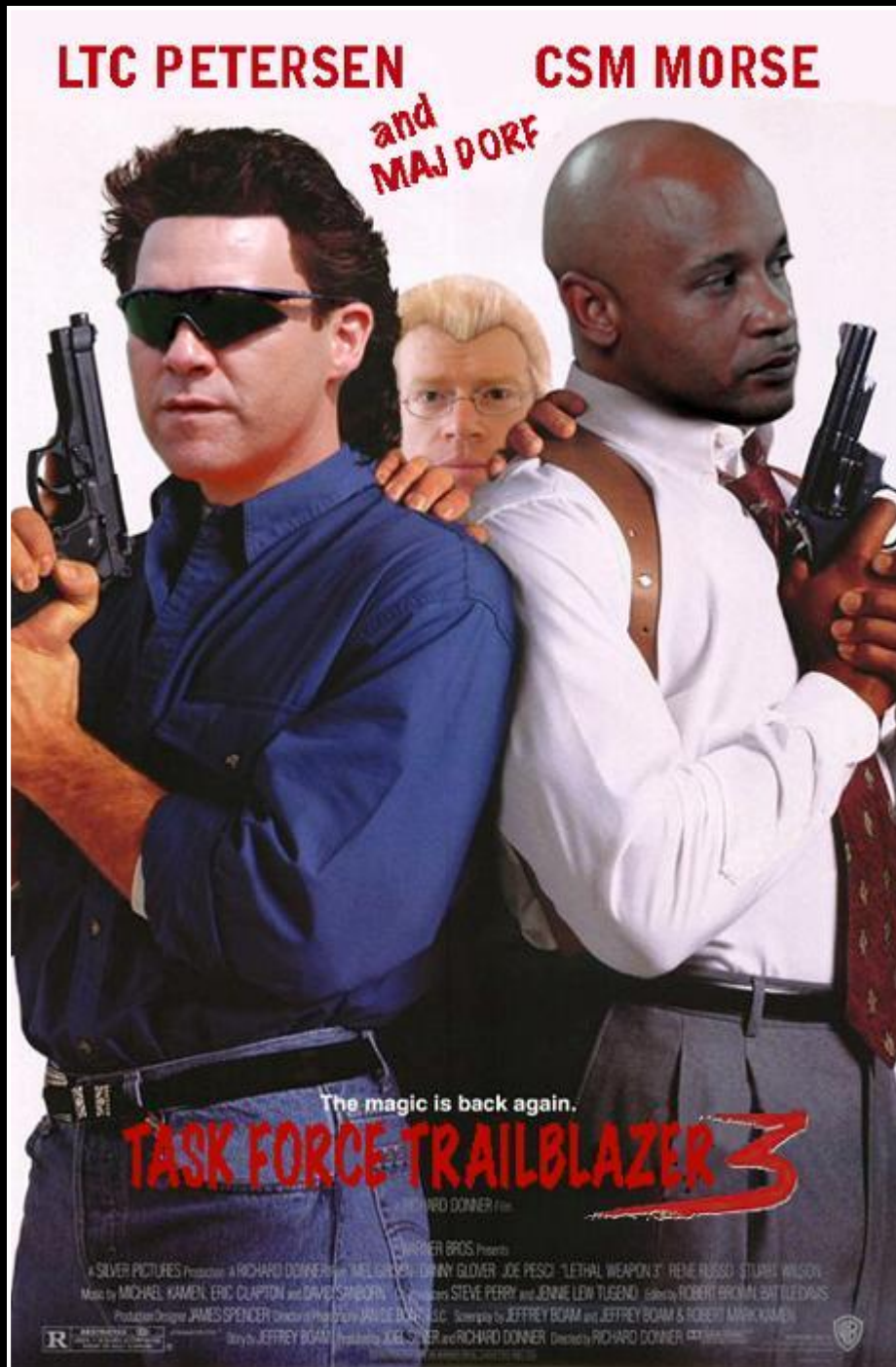
Upon returning to the hooches, the Soldiers still have the responsibility to clean

weapons and other personal equipment in preparation for the next week. Cleaning weapons is a tedious and long task in Iraq, where the dust, dirt, and grime infiltrate the most hard to clean places on the weapon in less than a few hours. Nonetheless, the Soldiers tackle the task of cleaning their personal weapon as well as collectively cleaning one of the ten crew-served weapons found in each individual platoon. In addition to weapons, Soldiers need to clean night vision devices, protective eye-wear, helmets, body armor, and weapons optics and scopes. The final task of the day is something more commonly associated with a mother of four than a Soldier – sewing uniforms. When climbing in and out of trucks all day, it isn't uncommon for a Soldier to have a number of new rips or tears in their uniforms that need mending before the week begins. Finally, after all of their work is done, the Soldiers will often relax for a few hours, eat some dinner, spend time talking and emailing family and friends, and sleeping. Maintenance day is the only true "down day" for the Soldiers of the Wolfpack in that the Soldiers don't go on any missions that day. But in light of the busy schedule kept by Wolfpack Soldiers on Maintenance Day, it is safe to say that Maintenance day is a "down day" by name only.



SPC Kirchner pulls out all of the stops as he attempts to fasten a bolt-and-nut buried deep within the interior of the engine of his RG-31. SPC Kirchner specializes in maintaining and operating the Buffalo, but has the skills and knowledge to maintain many different vehicles within the platoon.

The lighter side of Iraq.....now showing...



LTC Scott Petersen and CSM Christopher Morse, Head Sappers with the 65th Engineer Battalion, respond to a call of a VBIED threat at the Tikrit Mayor's Office. LTC Petersen convinces Morse to go in with him, reasoning that EOD never arrives on time. Petersen examines the bomb, and decides to cut one of the wires. Distracted by a stray dog, they are then forced to run for their lives. The building explodes and collapses but at least they saved the dog. The next day, they are both busted down to patrolling the streets of Bayji. It's especially embarrassing for CSM Morse, who is only a week away from retiring from the Army. He decides to buy a retirement house and his real estate agents turns out be his old XO, MAJ Dorf. The trio goes on an adventure of destruction disguised as a search for weapons of mass destruction throughout MND-North. After finding nothing, they are reinstated as Head Sappers and take off with the CST to go fishing on Lake TarTar.

WOLFPACK

ROUTE CLEARANCE PATROL 14 AUGUST 2009



2nd Platoon, 95th EN CO before a mission. In the picture from left to right: CSM Frank Leota, SPC Brame, PFC Ferry, PFC Lugo, SPC Talley, SPC Cantrell, PFC Zentner, PFC McPherson, SPC Vann, PFC Ruth, PFC Montano, SSG Clark, SPC almaraz, PFC Swan, 1SG Hurlocker, CPT Sivley and SPC Fonseca.



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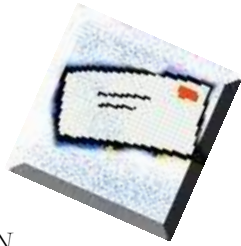
Rank, First and Last Name

Company Name

65th Engineer Battalion

COB Speicher, Iraq

APO AE 09393



CONTACT THE EDITOR

CPT Miguel Lima, HHC, 65th EN BN

E-mail: miguel.limajr@us.army.mil

CONTACT THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

MAJ Aaron Dorf, XO, 65th EN BN

E-mail: aaron.dorf@us.army.mil

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CONTACT THE BATTALION FAMILY READINESS ADVISOR (FRSA)

Ms. BRIDGET SHIOSHITA

E-mail: bridget.shioshita@hawaii.army.mil

Editor's Notes

Salaam,

Nearly a year ago on 24 August, I was on the North Shore of Oahu having a dinner at the Mexican restaurant, Cholo's. I was celebrating my birthday with CPTs Juliana and Adrian Biggerstaff whose birthday happens to be the next day. Fast forward to the present and here we are in Iraq. We all made plans to have dinner together at the DFAC and also, break our normal diets and have dessert that evening as something special. The stark contrast of the two experiences really made me think about what's important during deployment. Special days like holidays and significant dates in our lives in this setting are an altered state to what we recognize as the norm.

Equally as irregular, are the holidays and significant dates that we don't celebrate but the Iraqis do. When planning our own Iftar dinner at COB Speicher, I had asked the PRT if they would be gracious enough to let myself and CPT J. Biggerstaff sit in and watch how it was done. It was a fantastic experience and the food was really top notch. And so, a reflective look on another year in my life bookended with birthday dinners, ends with where I'm at presently and I can honestly say that it's overwhelmingly awesome.

- CPT Miguel Lima



Commander's Corner

Aloha Families and Friends of Task Force Trailblazer,

It's hard to believe that September is upon us—we are looking forward to cooler temperatures here, but they are definitely not here yet. I think the most significant thing to mention that's occurred since our last issue is the start of the most sacred Muslim holiday period called Ramadan. For most Iraqi's, this season means a month of fasting (no food or drink) during the hours of daylight, and abstinence from intimate relations and vices (like smoking). It's much like the Christian practice of Lent—just a bit more extreme. Although not all Iraqi Muslims adhere to this practice absolutely, many do, and it affects many things. Just like all of us, not eating or drinking in this heat can be exhausting (if not dangerous to physically exert oneself), so things slow down a bit. We adjusted our training schedules with our Iraqi partners to accommodate their customs, and have even shared in some of their cultural practices. As you might expect, when the sun goes down, the focus is on eating. Each night during this month-long observance, they have a special dinner known as Iftar. Several leaders and Soldiers in the battalion have been invited to have dinner with our partners, and it is an interesting experience. All of us are particularly sensitive to those who are fasting so that we refrain from eating, drinking water, or

even chewing gum in plain view of our Iraqi Partners. They don't expect non-Muslims to fast along with them, we simply do this out of kindness because it would almost be like torture to watch someone eat and drink while you are very hungry and thirsty. I think most of the Taskforce has been affected by this season either directly or indirectly and probably has many wondering if they could do it themselves. For Muslims, it's a time to focus on those less fortunate and to practice gentleness and forgiveness.

When Ramadan ends in late September, we'll get even busier. Our partners in the 12th Engineer Regiment are getting their equipment and doing some initial training for their future missions. Our job will be to advise and assist them in being successful. Because of the success we've had with our other Engineer Partners, I know we can do just that, but we don't have as much time left to get them ready. So, we'll be busy during the final months of our deployment, if not busier. Trying to accomplish our tasks while preparing for redeployment will be a lot of work. But as usual, the Soldiers of our battalion are up for the challenges.

Last but not least, I'm happy to welcome back the FRGs from the rest of the battalion that's not currently de-

ployed. Since 130th Brigade is now deployed and they no longer have a Family Readiness Support Advisor (FRSA), our very own Bridgett Shioshita will help the FRGLs and provide information from now on. We will also be able to share our plans for "re-integrating" the battalion when we get back and continue preparation for the next deployments and training events. So, welcome back to the Families of the 82d Engineer Support Company, 34th Sapper Company, 15th Explosive Hazards Team, 5th Geospatial Planning Cell, and the 7th Dive Detachment.

Hope you enjoyed this issue, and thanks for all you do for your Soldier, our unit and our Country. That's all for now!

First In, Last Out,
Trailblazer 6

