

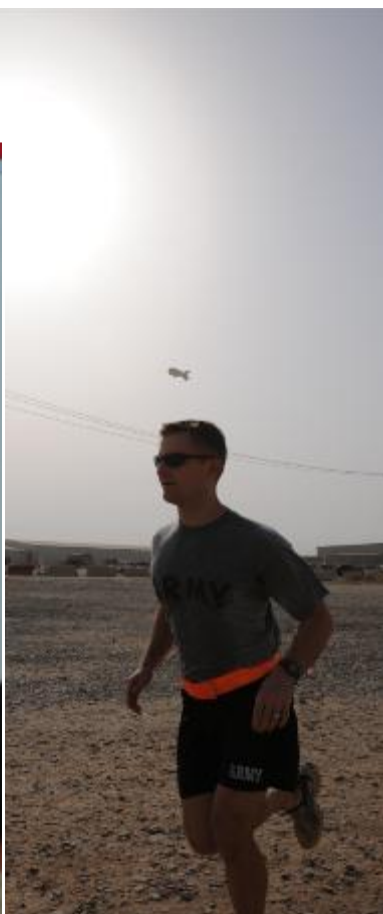


65th Engineer Battalion, US ARMY

# TASK FORCE TRAILBLAZER NEWSLETTER

Monday, July 14, 2009

Volume 1, Issue 14



**Including Artwork from  
CPT A. Biggerstaff**

## *The Halfway Point:*

*Four stories about the things we value during deployment*

Intro By CPT Miguel Lima

Well it's not over yet, but it's an important milestone all the same. It's the halfway point. Six months earlier when we started this deployment, we were bushy-tailed and bright-eyed to start the mission we had been trained to accomplish. Now, while we're still determined to accomplish the mission, we're definitely glad to have passed the halfway point. Some might be quick to say its all downhill from here. Operationally speaking, that's not the case at all. But if you're the type that

crosses out the days on a calendar and tracks the countdown to redeployment, then things are looking pretty good.

Six months ago, I was stuffing two duffle bags with everything I would need for the deployment (and then some). I can remember being tired from all the last minute preparations that needed to be done. All the while I was contemplating what a deployment to Iraq would really be like. Fast forward a month and I was in Iraq. It

FOUR STORIES, *Continued on Page 2*

*Left to Right: CPT Lima stands in front of the lens to share his work and that of his colleagues behind the camera; Interested in his health and the health of those around him, CPT Biggerstaff runs with some friendly competitions; 2LT Doty reaches new financial heights as he improves his and others' portfolio everyday; 1LT Chadwick stays hungry to complete the mission.*

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was cold and we were learning our 326 EN BN counterparts' duties. They had been here 15 months and were very anxious to return. They had a count down on a dry erase board that they updated with glee everyday as their time in country dwindled down to single digits. Once, while listening to my counterpart explain to me how he updated a report, he stopped in mid-sentence, noting that the countdown had not been updated. Immediately, he walked over and adjusted the oversight. That effectively killed his thought process and motivation to bother to finish the conversation. Understandably, this was reality for many of our counterparts as they predominately had returning home the minds nearing the end of a long deployment. Also during this first month there were our own folks that speculated when we'd be heading home ourselves. Resigned to believe that it was too early to start such speculation, I remained mute towards the subject. I wasn't ready to start thinking about when I was getting home when I already knew that I had at least a year to spend here.

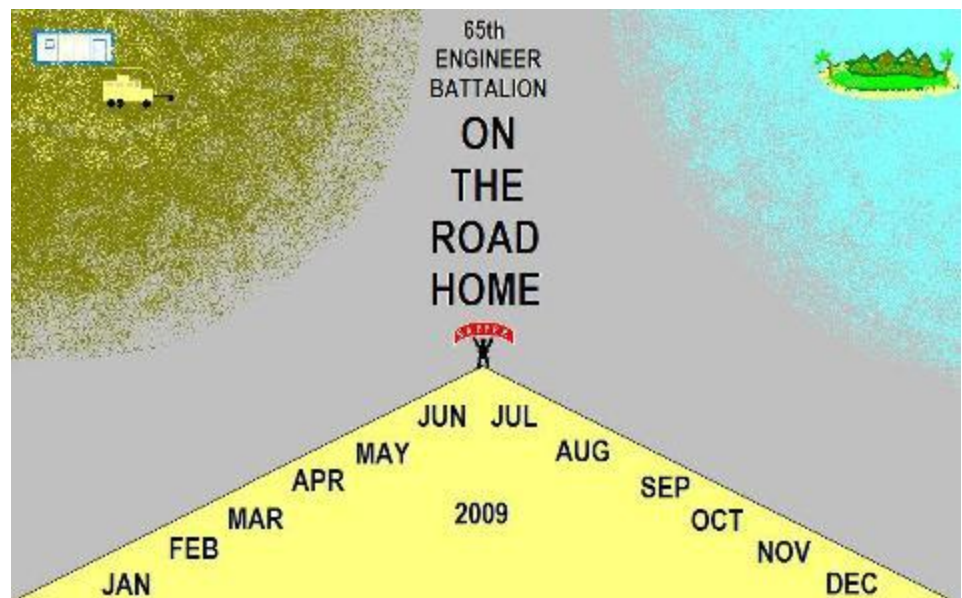
Now, it's a different story, however. Like we've mentioned before in other issues, there are a lot of changes that are happening in Iraq these days. We are past the halfway point which has always been somewhat of a motivational mark for me. Much like when exercising to a time or distance goal, I've

always used the halfway point to motivate myself. "I've already gone halfway, the remainder will always be less than what I've already done." I think the same way when it comes to this deployment. I've made it six months and now, whatever time is left is less than the time I've already spent in Iraq.

Instead of resorting to simply counting the days, there are a lot of things to keep us busy over here. Aside from missions, there are other pursuits that help us bide the

time. The following is a collection of stories of events, all from different officers, regarding different manners of pursuits. Some occurred over a week or two of anticipated waiting and ended in the instant gratification like that of eating what an Iraqi would consider exotic: a burrito. Others may continue on through the remainder of the deployment and slowly culminate in a healthier or more lucrative lifestyle.

Read on and see the things we do with the passions that drive us.



*After accepting the challenge to pictorially represent the halfway point, CPT A. Biggerstaff made the following. His work is also dotted throughout, complementing each of the next four stories.*

## *The First Independent Film Festival in Iraq*

By CPT Miguel Lima

In 2005, I graduated from the University of Central Florida where I studied Film Production at the School of Film and Digital Media. After graduating I joined the Army and made a pact with myself to keep up on my film studies. Creating a few of my own short films here and there, the 29<sup>th</sup>'s documentary, a Netflix account and a budding interest in photography have helped me to do just that but even so, there's times when I need to get back to my roots. After I had deployed, I had asked my professor and friend, Lisa Cook, about the new films coming out of the film program. Within two weeks, I received a box from Lisa that was stuffed with DVDs of short films from the

students. Some I had seen before, but others were completely new to me. It was exciting to me to see so many new films from the school. After viewing them, I knew I couldn't just keep them for myself. I wanted to arrange a screening of some sort.

Now, the original intent of the short films was to show one or two before our normal movie nights that the Chaplain puts on as a Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) event. It was meant to be a marketing hook to draw more people with the promise to show something that they hadn't ever seen. Looking at the volume of material, though, the idea of a film festival quickly evolved. Enlisting the help of the Chap-

lain, we became a two-man festival selection committee. We sat down to watch all of the movies which proved to be a task in itself. After a few hours spread out over a couple of days, we finished the complete set of films and set out to build the festival's programs. After setting the time constraints of having only two 45 minute long programs, we chose the films we liked best to fit within the time allotted. After some hard decisions but surprisingly, little disagreement, we narrowed it down to the final twelve to be shown.

In most of the film festivals I've attended, the audience gets a score sheet. This gets added into a larger tally to determine the audience's favorite film out of the entire





festival. In addition to the audience's choice, there is panel of judges that also vote on all of the films. Our panel of judges consisted of a diverse bunch of people representing a variety of organizations on COB Speicher (see next page for Judge's panel). After that, advertising the event and watching the weather was all that remained until the evening of the screening. Originally, the event was meant to be shown as other movie nights were. The venue would

be an open area in the center of Town of Vengeance with a set of painted T-walls that would serve as the screening surface. Unfortunately, a particularly long-lasting dust storm settled over COB Speicher in the days prior and wasn't letting up anytime soon. We had to forgo the traditional venue of choice and thus, moved it into our MWR building as a back-up.

On 3 July, 2009, over thirty Soldiers, officers, State department employees and even

two of TFTB's own Arabic interpreters sat down to be an audience to the first independent film festival in Iraq. The films that screened seemed to be an amiable mix that the audience greatly appreciated. "A terrific evening!" said COL Michael Scotto, Salah ad Din PRT Officer in Charge, in response to the evenings' show, "Most of the films were well thought-out and show what creative people can do with a small amount of money but a lot of imagination."



*Above: the scene of the screening as seen from the judge's table; Left—CPT A. Biggerstaff's picture "Film Festival" win a screen capture of the Judge's award winner, "Mr. Malikai Battles the Aero-plane", written and directed by Drew Blatman. While "Mr. Malikai..." was a crowd pleaser, the Audience award went to "American Deluxe", written and directed by Aaron Brownlee.*

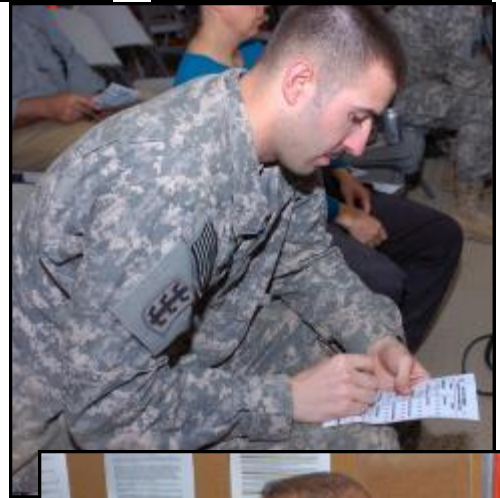


1LT Andrew Thorell had this to say after the screening, "I thought the screening was very well done, and as a UCF graduate, I was proud to see my fellow alumni's hard work providing entertainment for my fellow Soldiers here in Iraq."

The end of the year for UCF film students is a time for a screening opportunity on campus where we'd create a program and screen films we made that semester to a public audience. The audience is primarily made up of students and professors and any other friends and family we can cajole into attending. Usually, most in the audience had something to do with at least one of the films being screened. In this case, however, I was sitting in a room full of folks that had nothing to do with the filmmaking process of these films and it was all fresh and new to them. As the only UCF filmmaker in the room, I can say that it was truly an honor to play the films for a deployed group of folks that are working hard every day and cut loose this evening to come out and experience the festival. And, as you can imagine, it was very gratifying to hear all of the compliments that followed after the screening and on into the next day. At one point during the next day, I had two of my fellow staff officers waiting in my office for my return to discuss and ask some questions about the films they had seen that last night.

That evening I wrote to my fellow colleagues to let them know how the screening went. Most replied within a day to let me know they were glad to hear about the screening and how well it went. "It is a pleasure and an honor to be selected", said Matt Acevedo, director of the black and white comedy, '6:50 at the Used Bookstore.' Drew Lindo, the writer and director of the comedy, 'Losing Toby', replied, "Glad to know the film gave the troops some laughs." "That's the coolest thing I've heard in a long time!" responded David Estrada, director of the experimental short film '4-91011-4', "I'm extremely impressed and speechless."

I'm prone to agree wholeheartedly with my colleagues' responses and summarize my own feelings on the film festival in a one word response: Ditto.



*All Photos From Top to Bottom, Left: SPC Mass, CPT Kubar and SFC Perro watch the films with their audience voting slip in hand to rate the films throughout the screening. Next Page: the TFTB IFF publicity poster.*



#### The Judge's Panel for the TFTB IFF:

From Left to Right:

Mr. David Stewart—Salah ad Din Provincial Reconstruction Team Leader, US State Department

CW2 Michael E. Harden—Reconstruction Program Manager, USACE, Gulf Region North

MAJ Aaron Dorf—Acting Commander of Task Force Trailblazer, 65th Engineer Battalion

MAJ Glenn Fuller—PSYOPs Officer in Charge, 25th Infantry Division

CPT Juliana Biggerstaff— S-4, TFTB, 65th EN BN and longest serving officer within the battalion (inset picture, left)





**Task Force Trailblazer** and **University of Central Florida**  
**Film Department** present

**NO-AIR HOUSE: THE BLIGHT OF THE SUBURBS!**

**SIX-FIFTY PM AT THE USED BOOKSTORE**

**MR MALIKAI BATTLES THE AEROPLANE**

**THE UNTETHERED CITIZEN**

**LOVE AND KLEPTOMANIA**

**TRANQUILA MI AMOR**

**GOODNIGHT CHARLIE**

**AMERICAN DELUXE**

**IMANCIFI PULSIFI**

**LOSING TOBY**

**LOVE IS DEAF**

**4-91011-4**

**The  
Task Force  
Trailblazer  
Independent  
Film Festival**

**FRIDAY, 3 JULY at the TOWN OF VENGEANCE. Films start at 2000.  
2 programs each 45 minutes of indie films from UCF Film.  
Audience votes to award TFTB IFF Audience Award.**



## Trading the Day Away

By Justin Doty

Most normal people (civilians), or even Soldiers not currently deployed, look forward to Friday nights and the weekend that follows. On the other hand, I and many other Soldiers in Iraq have quite the opposite mentality. Monday is the beginning of our five day weekend! This is for one reason and one reason only... the Stock Market! Yes, there is nothing sweeter than the ringing of the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange every Monday at 1630 hrs here in Iraq. Let the trading begin!

There has not been one day of deployment in Iraq where I haven't chatted with a fellow comrade about market trends or some new hot stock that I have been researching in my spare time. I even bore my poor girlfriend and parents over SKYPE about how my portfolio fared throughout the trading day. I can say with utmost confidence that stock market chatter has helped unite the S2 and S3 shops in the BN TOC. My day would not be the same if CPT Hallett did not walk into OPS and ask me how I felt about the market today. The great thing about stocks is that you can share your tips and advice with others and it will have no negative implications on your portfolio. It is actually reassuring to have someone else buy into the same company as you. CPT Coe and I have exchanged many profitable stock purchasing tips with each other.

This daily market talk has proved to be a lucrative fixation for my personal finances. For example, one day while CPT Coe and I were lifting weights at the North Gym we

were talking about stocks (go figure). Half-way through our work out a nearby eavesdropping Soldier by the name of SPC Wasteman decided to jump in with a stock ticker symbol called TC. TC is the ticker for a company called Thomson Creek Metals Co and SPC Wasteman was ecstatic over this company. Apparently he had ridden the company from a buy in price of around three dollars all the way to the seven dollar range. SPC Wasteman's advice was look at the company's Cash to Debt ratio. Well, later on that day CPT Coe and I did look into this stock. Not only did we look, we bought shares in this company. To date we are currently up over 50% on our TC purchase. Thank you SPC Wasteman!

Before you can get into the stock market game, you have to be tracking the lingo. If I am carrying on a conversation with someone and I say that I am very bullish on

Bank of America, you have to realize that bullish means believing the stock price will be rising. The following should get you well on your way to understanding the vast lingo of the stock market:

**NYSE** – New York Stock Exchange.

**Bullish** – To believe the market will go up.

**Bearish** – To believe the market will go down.

**Portfolio** – Your collection of different companies that you own stock in.

**Opening/Closing Bell** – Bell that signals the opening and closing of the trading day at the NYSE.

**Ticker Symbol** - Is a mnemonic used to uniquely identify publicly-traded shares of a corporation on a particular stock market. A stock symbol may consist of letters, numbers or a combination of both.

**Buy & Homework** – To evaluate your portfolio periodically. This has become very important as of recently with greats like GM filing for bankruptcy.

**Crash** – large sell off of stock in the market (10% or more).

**Dividend** – A taxable payment given to shareholders from the company's current or retained earnings.

**Limit Order** – An order to purchase shares of a certain stock at or below a specified price, or to sell it at or above a certain price.

**Price/Earnings (P/E) Ratio** – Ratio of market price compared to the company's earnings per share.

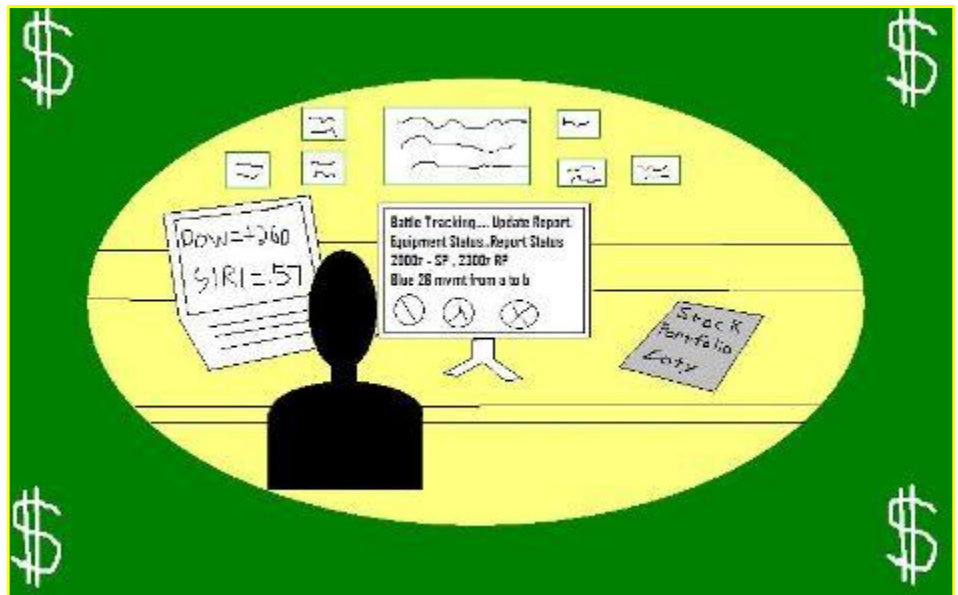




Now that you are tracking the market lingo you are ready to set up an online brokerage account and start trading today! No, I am totally kidding; do not start buying stocks today! Do start talking about the market with others who have knowledge to share, and start doing your own online research.

I hope I was able to shed some light on an area that you have never considered before. Doing stock research, buying and selling stocks, and monitoring global news for market trends has been a huge hobby of mine to help the lengthy days pass by in Iraq. Nothing beats having a 5 day weekend! Now, get out there and go make your first trade!

Good luck!



*Opposite Page, Top: 2LT Doty and PFC Stauber have become avid day traders during their time spent in the TOC. It's a common lament that the days frequently drag while on duty in the TOC but the stock market is a proven cure for such idleness. Bottom: 2LT Doty's graphic representation of the satisfaction gained by day trading over the course of a week; Above: CPT A. Biggerstaff's art simply titled, "Doty"; Below: Figures blur as they whiz past on an electronic stock ticker.*

## 2LT DOTY'S TOP 10 TIPS FOR STOCK TRADING

- 1 Yahoo Finance! Use it and love it. Create a portfolio with stocks that you might like to own and monitor them for a while before you actually purchase them.
- 2 Create a diversified portfolio. In other words, don't put all of your eggs in one basket. Purchase stocks in totally different sectors of the market (retail, banking, entertainment, etc.). I purchased a company with the ticker symbol SQNM back in November. If you look at what the company is worth now you will understand why diversification is important.
- 3 Never buy a stock on someone else's word. Take their advice and do your OWN research before you purchase stock in a company.
- 4 Dividends are your best friend. A well diversified portfolio has some holdings in strong companies that pay a nice dividend.
- 5 Don't be afraid to cut your losses and walk away from a stock purchase. Sometimes you need to just sell a stock off at a lower price than what you bought it for to prevent future losses.
- 6 "Pigs get slaughtered" – Don't get too greedy with your gains, or you could end up with nothing!
- 7 Set short term and long term goals for your portfolio. For example: if your growth stock (small cap) gains 50% in value, pull out 50% of your position in that company and put that money into a safer dividend paying company (large cap). This way you can help protect those profits.
- 8 Only invest money in the market that you do not need when you get back to Hawaii. No one should be putting their entire life savings into the stock market!!!
- 9 Create a stock market purchasing allowance for yourself (say maybe 500 dollars a month). If you do not limit yourself you could become addicted! I won't mention any names here...
- 10 Jim Cramer from CNBC does not spit golden stock advice! He will tell you himself... Take his leads and do your own research.



## Operation Burrito Drop



### Phase I: Getting it Out of the US

By Sarah Chadwick

It all started several months prior to deployment when a friend innocently offered to make my husband's time in Iraq a little bit more tolerable. "You know, Mike, I fly to Balad about once a month. If you ever need anything, just let me know and I'll try to get it to you."

After the tears had dried and the initial shock that I was going to be separated from my husband for 12 months wore off, a light bulb went off in my head. I knew exactly what special something I wanted to do for him. He hadn't had one of those 1500+ calorie burritos since we moved to the island and I'm almost positive he dreams about them nightly. From that moment forward, I was determined to get a Chipotle burrito to my husband in Iraq.

The idea seemed so simple and well, perfect. Jimmy (my brother's friend from pilot training) flies to Joint Base Balad; Mike runs missions to Balad, how could this not work? All I needed to do was run the idea by Jimmy.

Jimmy flies into Hickam Air Force Base

every so often and luckily, he was coming in town shortly after I sent him an email. I met him during his layover here to convince him that not only was my idea awesome, it could actually work. He still had doubts the burrito would make it so we thought of alternatives.

"What about a ping pong table? We haven't taken one of those over before," he suggested. "How is my husband going to get a ping pong table back to Speicher on their convoy? Plus I know Mike wouldn't want me to spend several hundred dollars on a ping pong table..." I replied. "Honestly, the only thing I can think of that he would absolutely want for his birthday is a burrito."

I gave Jimmy my blue lunch box sized cooler. The final piece to this puzzle was getting LT Vu on board so that Jimmy could hand it off the burrito to him and then LT Vu would be responsible for getting it in Mike's hands. I emailed LT Vu to see if he would help; no response. Several days later, LT Vu replied and was on board with the plan. Everything was all set. But of course, there had to be a snag. Mike



*Above: Casing the burrito joint, Chipotle. Known for its neatly wrapped meals in burrito form, it's the only thing that LT Chadwick wanted from home...even more than a ping pong table. Left: 1LT Chadwick in a Caiman when he was the distribution platoon leader. As the distro PL, he conducted multiple convoy logistics patrols all over the battalion's area of operations. The getaway pilot (aka the burrito delivery guy), Jimmy, who transported the burrito the farthest leg of its journey.*





was running fewer missions as he had started to take over the Executive Officer position of the Forward Support Company. This could not wait until Mike's birthday in June on the off chance he wasn't going to be running missions anymore. Operation Burrito was all set to take place in May.

## *Phase II: Delivery Within Iraq*

By 1LT An Vu

Let's go back a little to right before the burrito came to JBB. Jimmy had told me that the burrito would arrive sometime late Sunday night or early Monday morning. While I wanted to be part of this super exciting mission, I had no intention of losing sleep over it by waiting with uncertainty for it to come. In order for a smooth hand-off and continue to keep the burrito cold, I asked Jimmy to give me a call at the office when he had arrived or just drop it off at the front desk of the PAX terminal and have them call me. At the very least, if I was not in the office when he called, I would have a missed call and realize it was here at JBB for pickup.

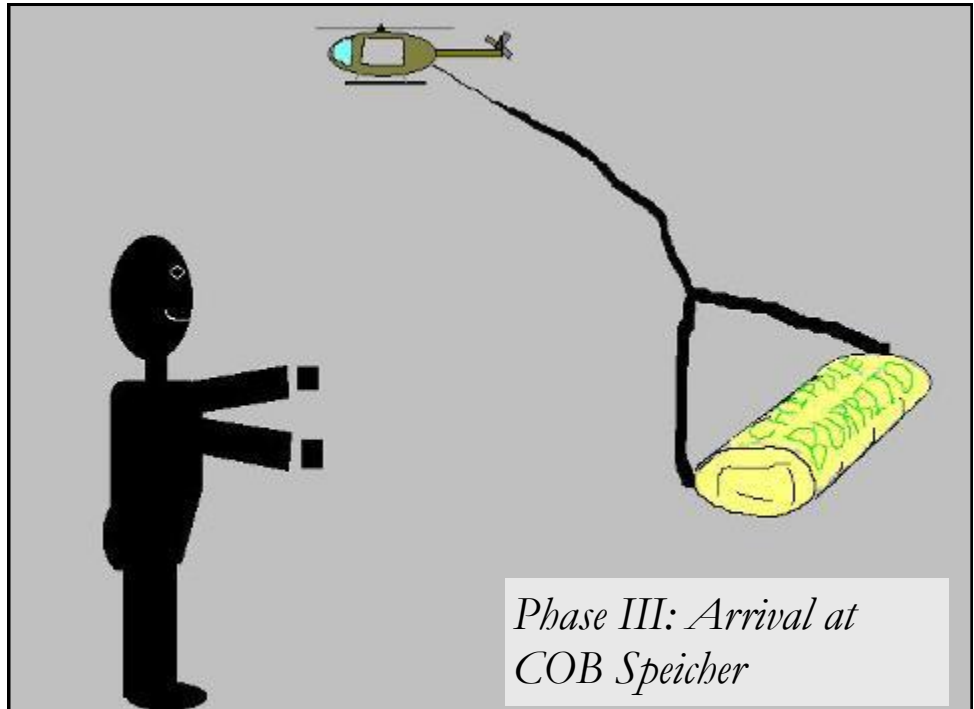
Well, SSG Gomez (FLE NCOIC) and I stayed at the office that Sunday until about 2200 waiting and hoping for the much anticipated call. Nothing. We came in around 0600 the next morning. Still nothing. Noon rolled around and finally we received a call from the PAX terminal asking if anyone is coming to get a cooler with ice that had been melting for the pass few hours! So, when we came to the front desk for pickup, a female Air Force Master Sergeant asked me if I can describe the package. "It is a blue cooler that has the name Sarah all over it with flowers and butterflies..." I think I was embarrassed as much as she was impressed.

Now that we had the cooler with the burrito in hand, we had to find a way to get it to Mike before it spoiled. Our first thought was to SHERPA it! SHERPA flights are cargo flights where we are able to send parts and equipment by air if the Battalion isn't able to come pick it up by convoy. Having built a good relationship with the people, we asked them if they could deliver this very special package...by hand. After some convincing, they agreed.

Seeing that this burrito has been in-transit since Friday, I called Mike to see what he

I am terrible at keeping presents a surprise so it was a huge relief to me when I got the text on Friday, May 22. The burrito would be leaving California that night and was scheduled to arrive late Sunday night in Iraq, with a stop in Germany first. The operation seemed to be going smoothly. It

arrived; Vu picked it up, but now what? Mike was no longer running missions and no missions were scheduled for that week. How was this burrito going to get to Mike? It was out of my hands. I was just glad that the burrito made it to Iraq.



wanted to do. He had two options: 1) SSG Gomez and I eat the burrito for him and tell him how good it was or 2) He'd have to go to the SHERPA terminal at 9:30pm Tuesday night and pickup his burrito. Although, I was pretty disappointed, he se-



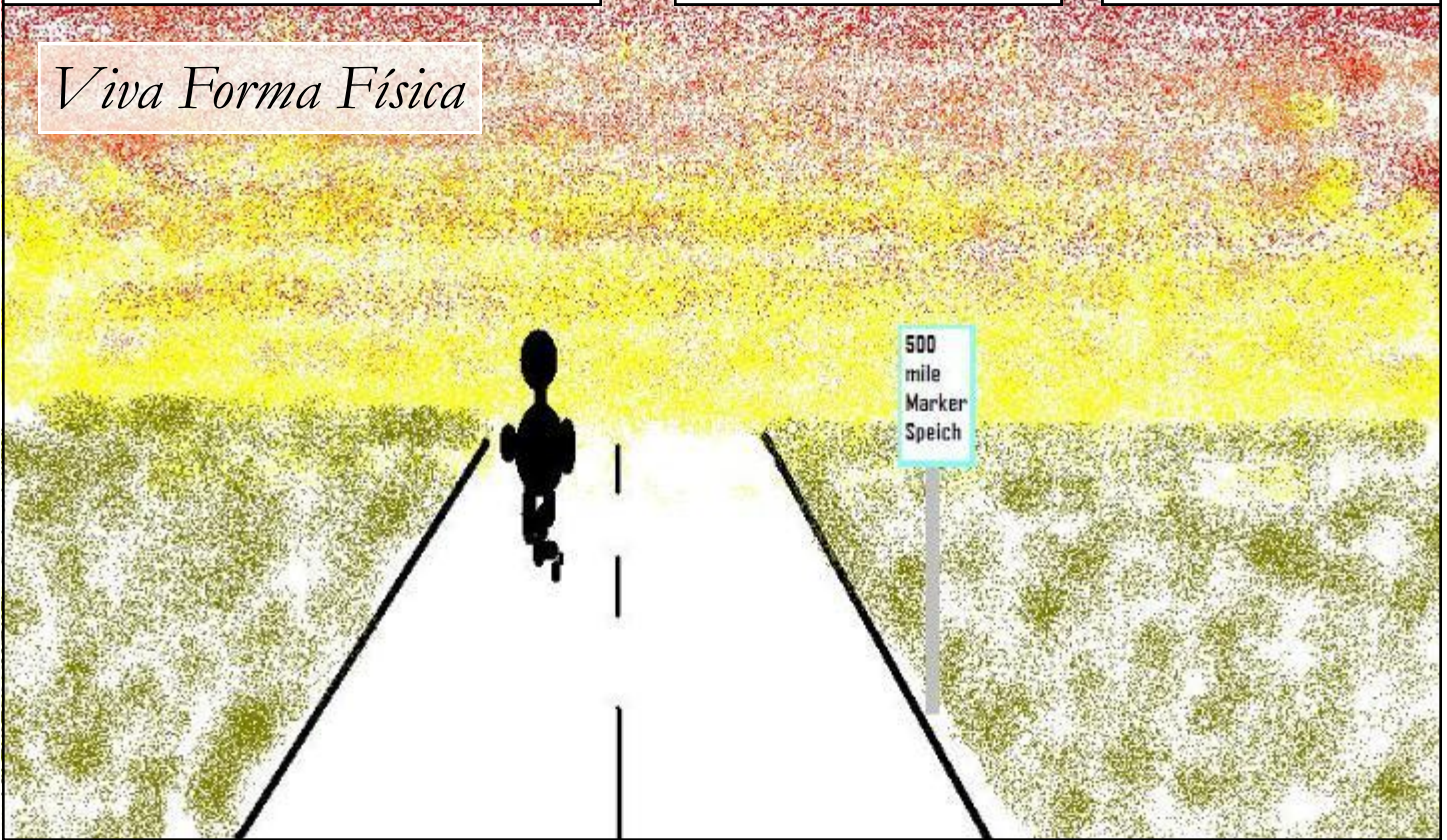
Above: CPT A. Biggerstaff's picture, "Burrito"; 1LT Chadwick plays the waiting game.

By 1LT Michael Chadwick

I arrived at the SHERPA terminal at 9:29pm. The flight was arriving later than expected, but still scheduled to get in before 10:00pm. Minutes felt like days as I looked down the flight-line. As we approached the hour mark I started to get frustrated, thinking the flight wasn't going to make it. I heard footsteps behind me. It was 2 civilians and 1 Air Force Airman. I zeroed in right on the Airman; the blue cooler was in her hand. Embarrassed with all the girly flowers, I requested the cooler by saying, "Oh, the heart finally made it." The Airman became visibly uncomfortable.

Back at my Centralized Housing Unit (CHU) I was overwhelmed with the size of this burrito. It felt heavier than usual. Of course; it had to be frozen! I went to sleep hoping it would thaw out by morning. I did not intend on using a microwave, knowing that, often, microwaves can distort the taste of good food. I woke up at 0424, participated in PT with my company and immediately ran back to my CHU. The burrito had thawed!

## Viva Forma Física



By CPT Adrian Biggerstaff

*"Long live Physical Fitness"* One would think that Soldiers in a combat environment would not need to worry about physical fitness and it would just come naturally. Forced ruck marches, patrolling and other physical combat activity would cause Soldiers to maintain peak physical conditioning. Well, in today's OIF things are not quite like they were in the Civil War, World War I & II, Vietnam, and in the early years of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In today's conflict, the majority of Soldiers that go on "patrols" or "movements" often find themselves riding in an air-conditioned vehicle. I don't mean to paint a picture of Soldiers not doing anything physical in Iraq. Many Soldiers in the 65<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion get extremely good work-outs each day just building SWAHuts, performing maintenance on equipment, or moving around all day in their body armor, especially in this hot summer period. However, many Soldiers, NCO's and Officers encounter very few physically demanding tasks throughout their day. In addition to the reduced physical activity, every person has to subject themselves to the modern dining facility which tempts every person here with a fully

stocked desert bar, row after row of fried food, and more carbohydrates and sugars than you can shake a stick at. Therefore, it is important to find time to maintain a healthy work-out schedule while here in Iraq, especially for guys like me who live behind a desk for the entire deployment.

In hopes of motivating myself and others in the 65<sup>th</sup> EN BN to break away from their computer, video games, DVDs, all the other seductively lethargic temptations we are faced with on a daily basis, and the empty calories the dining facility throws at you, I began organizing physical fitness competitions. Thus far, we have successfully completed one competition and two more are being launched as you read this article.

The pilot program was a 90-day competition that tested the competitors single repetition bench press max, maximum number of pull-ups, and maximum number of dips (an exercise where you hold yourself up by parallel bars approximately shoulder width apart and lower yourself down to where your elbows bend at a 90 degree angle, and

then you push yourself back up). There were many fierce competitors in this competition that cared as much about improving themselves as they did about beating the competition. Unfortunately, a few competitors had to drop out of the competition in the final days due to increased workload, injury or going on R&R leave. None the less, I think all participants gained a lot from the level of healthy and friendly competition the program created. On the spread sheet labeled "Fitness Challenge Summary," you can see the results of the first competition. Once the scores were in, I scored each event and awarded a Bronze, Silver and Gold Medal (I actually just colored in their cells) for the top three scores in each event. Two honorable mentions in the competition were MAJ Dale Snider and Chief Randy Holley. Both gentlemen were two of our older competitors, but they took home many of the medals.

Back by popular demand is a similar strength focused competition that I call "Fitness Challenge 2.0," which will have many comparable events to the pilot program. We should be kicking this competi-

CPT A. Biggerstaff's picture, "The Great Race".



## Fitness Challenge Summary

Name		Baseline					Day 90 Results					Body Fat %			
		Weight	Bench Press	Pull-up	Dips		Weight	Bench Press	Pull-up	Dips		Initial (%)	Final (%)	Chnge (%)	Fat Gained (Pounds)
Rank	Last	Pounds	Pounds	% BW	Reps	Reps	Pounds	Pounds	% BW	Reps	Reps				
MAJ	SNIDER	192	205	1.0677	12	22	202	240	1.19	20	29	21.3	17.0	-4.3	-6.56
CPT	SIVLEY	185	255	1.3784	8	37									
CPT	AMSDELL	185	245	1.3243	18	37	185	260	1.41	22	43	15.7	15.2	-0.5	-0.93
CPT	BIGGERSTAFF, A	164	265	1.6159	24	45	169.5	290	1.71	31	60	10.0	11.1	1.1	2.41
CPT	BIGGERSTAFF, J	113	75	0.6637	5	9	113	90	0.80	8	21	15.2	13.2	-2.0	-2.26
1LT	HALLETT	168	225	1.3393	18	36	179	260	1.45	22	46	11.5	10.8	-0.7	0.01
1LT	JONES	190	275	1.4474	19	30	193	295	1.53	28	42	14.1	13.0	-1.1	-1.70
CW1	HOLLEY	184	255	1.3859	12	30	179.5	305	1.70	15	51	17.1	13.6	-3.5	-7.05
2LT	DOTY	192	275	1.2557	11	28									
MSG	MONTANO	187	225	1.2032	11	22	196	235	1.20	7	29	19.3	18.0	-1.3	-0.81
SSG	INCH						184	250	1.36	21	31			0.0	0.00

Name		FINAL STATS														
		WEIGHT GAIN				BENCH PRESS			PULL - UPS				DIPS			
Rank	Last	Base	Final	Increase	% Inc	Base %	Fin %	% Inc	Base	Final	Increase	% Inc	Base	Final	Increase	% Inc
MAJ	SNIDER	192	202	10	5.2%	107%	119%	12%	12	20	8	66.7%	22	29	7	31.8%
CPT	SIVLEY															
CPT	AMSDALL	185	185	0	0.0%	132%	141%	8%	18	22	4	22.2%	37	43	6	16.2%
CPT	BIGGERSTAFF, A	164	169.5	5.5	3.4%	162%	171%	10%	24	31	7	29.2%	45	60	15	33.3%
CPT	BIGGERSTAFF, J	113	113	0	0.0%	66%	80%	13%	5	8	3	60.0%	9	21	12	133.3%
1LT	HALLETT	168	179	11	6.5%	134%	145%	11%	18	22	4	22.2%	36	46	10	27.8%
1LT	JONES	190	193	3	1.6%	145%	153%	8%	19	28	9	47.4%	30	42	12	40.0%
CW1	HOLLEY	184	179.5	-4.5	-2.4%	139%	170%	31%	12	15	3	25.0%	30	51	21	70.0%
2LT	DOTY															
MSG	MONTANO	187	196	9	4.8%	120%	120%	0%	11	7	-4	-36.4%	22	29	7	31.8%
SSG	INCH						136%			21				31		

tion off sometime in July, and all Soldiers, NCO's and Officers are encouraged to participate. However, it will be difficult for some members of the 65<sup>th</sup> EN BN to participate due to their work schedule and inability to attend the set time of the evaluations.

The second competition I am running over the next six months is a cardiovascular based event that I affectionately call "The Great Race." This competition sets the competitor up against one person: himself. It challenges the person to run, ruck march, or ellipticize (my new buzz word for using the elliptical machine) the driving distance from COB Speicher to Kuwait City International Airport (the airport we redeploy from). The actual distance is 500 miles, and the competitors have approximately six months to successfully complete the distance. The program will force the competitor to run, ruck or ellipticize approximately 18 miles a week. It is a game of endurance and long-term motivation, and the competitor is trying to "reach the airport" before the rest of the battalion does when we redeploy. If your spouse or loved one is participating in either of these upcoming events, I ask that you check their status often, give them a nudge when they are feeling lazy, and possibly take on the same competition in Hawaii (or wherever you are) so you all can track each other's progress. The worst thing that can happen is that you both get in

better shape and you have an additional topic to discuss over the phone! However, if you are new to working out, please start slow and increase the difficulty of your work-outs gradually to prevent any injuries that may result from over-working your body.

Just like eating, sleeping and breathing, exercise and being physically fit is a neces-


sity for a healthy body. With the distracters Soldiers in the 65<sup>th</sup> EN BN face each day while deployed, I hope that the programs I am running will at least remind them of the importance of maintaining a high level of physical fitness, regardless of one's location or circumstance.

Viva forma fisica!

# THE GREAT RACE

## Tikrit, Iraq to Kuwait City International Airport

The 65<sup>th</sup> EN BN has 6 months remaining in Iraq.  
Can you make it to KCIA before they do?



**Event:** Run, Ruck or Ellipticize over 500 miles between 14 June and the day you fly home (~18 miles/week).

Exercise	Ground Rule
Running	Outside: Walking/Sports do not count Treadmill: at least .5 incline and 5.5 mph
Rucking	Ruck must weight at least 35 lbs.
Elliptical	Must have resistance of at least 8.0

**Additional Information:** E-mail CPT Adrian Biggerstaff for sign-up, distance tracking procedures, and prize information.

Above: This is the challenge that was distributed amongst the past participants of CPT Biggerstaff's physical challenges and also served as a gauntlet thrown down towards all officers within the battalion to accept.

## *The Emotional Toll of War*

By 1LT Brandon Darroch

It is widely stated that the excessiveness of violence in modern media has desensitized us, as a society, to the malice of the world. But can one ever truly be prepared to witness firsthand, and deal with emotionally, the true destruction that war is equipped to bring?

One of the Soldiers in my unit has a father who served during Vietnam. Growing up, the Soldier and his father were close, however the Soldier knew very little about his father's time in the military. When he would ask his father about his experiences in combat, the father would simply say, "Those are my stories." Even after the Soldier returned home from his first combat deployment and shared the bond of combat veterans with his father, the Soldier's father continued to guard against revealing certain events about his life in the military. This is not an isolated occurrence. Many veterans are reluctant to share their past combat experiences, even with the closest of loved ones.

As a Soldier, I had the unique experience of seeing, firsthand, the effects of close combat after my unit found, fixed and finished the enemy. I ordered the shots fired that took the life of an enemy combatant; however, it was one of my Soldiers who ultimately pulled the trigger. It was surreal, and it was not until the completion of the mission that I was fully able to grasp the enormity of the situation.

As Americans, we have an emotional dilemma when we take the life of another. In the end, it does not matter whether or not that individual possessed the soul intent of achieving the same demise upon you; we still feel a sense of remorse. Some Soldiers are blindly led to believe that they are degraded by these feelings; weaker for mourning the death of the enemy. As leaders, we need to

ensure that we are not pushing our Soldiers to feel nothing upon taking a life. On the contrary, we need to embellish these feelings and appreciate that they are all a part of being human. Our Soldiers need to understand that these feelings are proof of their conscience, and a conscience is a necessity of a moral person.



Soldiers will deal with experiences like these in a wide variety of ways. Some will gloat to everyone about their new-found war story. Others will deal with it on a much more personal level, opening up to only the closest of battle-buddies. As leaders, it is our responsibility to know each one of our Soldiers and their particular type of coping technique-how will they deal with this? This being a new experience for me as well, I was in my own process of dealing with the situation while trying to grasp at how my Soldiers were feeling. Growing up with very straightforward parents, I believe that the best way to handle a situation such as this is to plainly have an informal talk about what happened. By stressing that the Soldier conducted himself professionally and carried out his duties, we attempted to sweep away any self doubt. Furthermore, by embellishing feelings of remorse, we were able to fall back on our morals and values for added support. However, nothing eases emotional pain more than time, and as leaders we must continue to stay involved and vigilant, not just during the aftermath, but throughout the entire

process.

Just as toxins in an organism multiply as they move up the food chain, does too responsibility grow exponentially through the ranks? Or do we as leaders simply like to believe this because it makes us feel more significant? Yes, when a Soldier under our command eliminates an enemy, we are ultimately responsible for ensuring that all events took place in the proper order and if unlawful activity was conducted, it is usually our heads right there on the chopping block. In contrast, when everything goes right, we seem to get the biggest pat on the back. But 99 times out of 100, it was not us who pulled the trigger. We are not the ones who must live with the experience and deal with the emotional consequences. At the end of the day we are all human, and as leaders it is our responsibility to never underestimate the emotional toll of the Soldier who pulled the trigger.

*Center: Soldiers from the 511th EN CO prepare a steel cutting charge on a demo range; Below: The author supervises the demo range which was conducted to ensure all Soldiers in the platoon maintained proficiency at this critical task.*





## *Clean Sweep!*

### *FSC wins 18th EN BDE Soldier and NCO of the Quarter*

Late last month, SGT Erik Iwai and SPC Daniel Vickers, both from the Forward Support Company (FSC), won the NCO and Soldier of the month boards for 3rd Quarter FY09, respectively. The boards were held in Cruserville, the 18th Engineer Brigade HQ at Contingency Operating Site, Marez in Mosul. Their actions demonstrate the professionalism and dedication of FSC and Task Force Trailblazer Soldiers. Following are the bio's of the winners:

**Sergeant Erik T. Iwai** is from Torrance, California and happily married to Melissa Iwai. As a SGT in the United States Army, he has set goals for himself to become the best Soldier possible. His short term goals are to max the APFT, have a platoon average of 270 on the APFT, become proficient enough in 92G knowledge to win a Cook of the Quarter board, and achieve the rank of Staff Sergeant. SGT Iwai's long term goals are to earn a Bachelor's Degree in English, attend Ranger School, and attain the rank of Command Sergeant Major. He has completed U.S. Army Airborne Course, WLC and BNCOC Phase 1. SGT Iwai has set valid goals for himself and shows outstanding dedication to reach them. His greatest achievement is graduating Airborne School. This is of particular distinction because he is afraid of heights and went Airborne to get over his fears, which he has, now, successfully accomplished.

On the civilian side, SGT Iwai has his high school diploma and attended the University of Bucknell for three years. He has a plethora of experience in his MOS, to include: Food Service Specialist, First Cook, Shift Leader, Operations NCOIC, Squad Leader, Section Sergeant, and Platoon Sergeant. During his first deployment (2006-2008), SGT Iwai set up two field feeding sites and was put in charge of four field feeding sites feeding over 400 Paratroopers of the 3-509<sup>th</sup> and 1-501<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> BCT, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Airborne). SGT Iwai still manages to do the things that he enjoys the most, which include fishing, watching movies, sports, writing, and reading.



Top: COL Matthew Russell, 18th Engineer Brigade Commander (left) presents the winners plaque to SGT Erik Iwai during the NCO of the Quarter ceremony at FOB Marez; Below: Left to right, COL Russell, SGT Iwai (with plaque), SPC Vickers (with plaque), and CSM Clark pose for a group shot with the Board winners and runners-up.

Pictures provided by 1LT Patricia Connolly, 84th EN BN







**SPC Daniel M. Vickers** is from Killeen, Texas, and married to Melissa S. Chingren. As a Specialist in the United States Army, he has set some attainable goals for himself. His short term goals are to become an outstanding Non-Commissioned Officer, to have various degrees for experience, finish learning Rosetta Stone German by the end of the August and to finish Rosetta Stone Spanish by the end of his tour in Iraq. Lastly, he would like to attend three of the most extreme military schools; S.E.R.E course, Drill Sergeant Course, and Pathfinder School. His long term goals are to become a well-rounded Senior Non-Commissioned Officer, attend and ultimately be inducted into the Sergeant Audie Murphy and the Sergeant Morales Board, and to keep working with Soldiers. Eventually, he would like to retire as a Senior Non-Commissioned Officer.

SPC Vickers has an abundance of experience that will further help him achieve his goals. He has knowledge and experience in the handling of the counter IED/ UXO FAS-TAC Robotic System; US Army Combative training and tournaments; Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck Load Handling; Petroleum, Oil, and Lubrication handling; HAZMAT Familiarization and Safety in Transportation; HAZMAT 11 certified, Experienced M2 (.50 cal) and Bravo M240 machine gunner; Recovery and supply, load handling and hauling for Heavy Equipment and Truck and Transport (HETT), Tactical evasion driving and defensive driving; Leadership in Six Sigma, experience as an Information System Security Specialist, and lastly Combat Life Saver. Using what he learned in a Combat Lifesaver Course, SPC Vickers saved someone's life involved a motorcycle crash with just a first aid kit, a splint, and two Army tourniquets in October 2007. He graduated from high school and completed college courses at Thomas Edison State College in New Jersey. SPC Vickers is interested in furthering his civilian education and aiming to expand his military career by studying for military boards.

*Clockwise from Top Left: SPC Vickers, 1SG George, and SGT Inwai pose for a post board photo and display their winnings at Crusherville on FOB Mareq; COL Russell pins on the Army Commendation Medal on SPC Vickers as testament to his achievement; COL Russell, SPC Vickers, and CSM Clarks pose with the trophy ARCOM certificate.*

*Pictures provided by 1LT Patricia Connolly, 84th EN BN*





# TFTB Best "Quote" Contest

*The following vehicles were spotted on FOB Warrior earlier this month. Since the Newsletter staff were unable to identify the model or type, and they were so strikingly different then the BN's vehicles several quotations were made to describe the sight:*

From the Editor:

*"It looks like an up armored Ecto-1 from Ghostbusters"*

From the CST Commander:

*"It looks like an Iraqi DeLorian"*

From the Editor in Chief:

*"What the..."*

*"After 12 years and \$2.8 billion dollars, the Air Force finally has an MRAP of their own."*

From the Battle Captain:

*"A chariot Master-Blastar would be proud of."*

Send your comments to the editor at  
[Miguel.lima@iraq.centcom.mil](mailto:Miguel.lima@iraq.centcom.mil)

The best quotes from across the Taskforce, friends, & family will be posted in the next newsletter. Prizes will be awarded for the most creative!!



## 95<sup>th</sup> Takes the Lead with Joint Route Clearance

Team Wolfpack has made huge strides in their partnership efforts. Most importantly, they have trained, drilled, and conducted the first joint route clearance patrols in the Salah Ad Din province, Iraq. Upon arrival in theater, the 95 Engineer Company has conducted unilateral patrols aimed at finding and clearing IEDs, UXO, and other hazards from the main and alternate supply routes across northern Iraq. One of the BN's goals was to integrate our Iraqi partners into the patrols, so in time, they would build the capacity to conduct their own operations. The photos below depicts scenes from a joint patrol and give credence to the challenges that the 95th have overcome. The Iraqi's have different vehicles, radios, and weapons, not to mention the ever-present language barrier. Despite these challenges, Team Wolfpack successfully carried out several patrols each week for the past few months and continues to develop the individual and collective skills of their Iraqi Field Engineer Company (FEC) partners. [EIC]



*Top Left: View of a joint patrol rolling down an access road as seen through the lense. Two Page Spread: A route clearance patrol leave the Contingency Operating Location for a joint patrol. The Iraqi Badger takes the lead followed by a Buffalo and is followed by the second Badger.*





*Left: An Iraqi Badger rolls through the “Stairway to Heaven” gateway along one of the joint US-Iraqi Route Clearance patrol routes.*







Left to Right: SSG Bryant, PFC Keedy, SGT Salavea, PFC Wallace

## Geospatial Spotlight: 70<sup>th</sup> EN CO at 172<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade

By 1LT Kathryn Walker

Last week I had the pleasure of visiting one of the busiest teams in the 70<sup>th</sup> at FOB Kalsu as they provide support to 172<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade. Traveling there can be quite difficult and unpredictable, so I don't get to drop in as often as I would like. I arrived to find the team in high spirits, working hard, and showing their excitement for the end of the deployment.

172<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade now patrols 5 provinces in southern Iraq – an increase from patrolling just one half of Babil province when it first arrived in October. The Blackhawks now oversee Babil, Karbala, Najaf, and Qadisiyah provinces. As violence wanes, these troops can focus on reconstruction and humanitarian assistance programs. They provide emergency response and they work with provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs). With its constantly changing boundaries and with its interaction with local communities, 172<sup>nd</sup> relies heavily on its geospatial team to provide a picture of its operational environment. Led by SSG Andrew Bryant, these five Soldiers of the 70<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company work long hours on one of Iraq's most isolated FOBs to give commanders the visualization tools and the decision-making aides they need to be successful. I asked SSG Bryant, SGT Salavea, SPC Campbell, and PFCs Keedy and

Wallace to answer a few questions about their mission, their day-to-day lives, and each other.

*The contribution I'm most proud of is...*

PFC Wallace: Being part of this team.

SPC Campbell: I'm most proud of having captains and majors request me by name when they need quick turnarounds on important projects. I'm extremely proud of our work during the elections and the fact that our products went to US, Iraqi, and Coalition Forces, and there was no violence as a result. I am also *very* proud of the work we've done with the HUMINT team regarding tribal maps. From what I hear, the Brigade Commander has forwarded PDFs to the AFRICOM Commander as an example of what can and should be done for that [part of the world]!

SSG Bryant: I'm most proud of being able to work and teach my team about the important part of what we do and our mission. I'm proud of **all** the work we've done.

PFC Keedy: Helping with the creation of the tribal maps.

No matter where you work, there is always one person who everyone can count on to keep the whole group entertained. Coming in at Number One as the craziest person

on the team is PFC Keedy. PFC Keedy is crazy to work with because:

SSG Bryant: Everyday is a different PFC Keedy!

PFC Wallace: She's a blond star.

SGT Salavea: She's just...special.

SPC Campbell: She has a great sense of humor; always knows how to laugh at herself and lighten the mood.

There is a saying at some of the larger, older, and more established FOBS in Iraq that goes, "We went to War and Garrison broke out." PT formations, saluting, luxury CHUs and Rockband Tournaments have become the norm for a lot of deployed Soldiers. However, FOB Kalsu remains true to the destitute image of de-



SPC Campbell chilling out.





ployed life most envisioned by family and friends back home. The geospatial team agrees it is the best place to work because...

PFC Wallace: It makes you appreciate the little things because there isn't much here.

SPC Campbell: Because it sucks. That sounds weird, but I mean it. I feel/think I'd have too much free time in Baghdad and Balad. Kalsu feels like a deployment 'should feel.' It's rough, we lose power, we lose water, we lose internet, we don't have vehicles, we just **now** got a Pizza Hut [author's note- they were also extremely proud of and eager to show me their new sidewalk. It is the pride of the town.] I'm glad I'm here because it's made me a better Soldier in my opinion [sic].

SSG Bryant: Because it's so isolated from the garrison environment of FOBS like VBC and Balad. It lets us focus on our mission.

PFC Keedy: We really are busy making products all the time, which helps the deployment fly by.

Everyone knows the adage "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach." Well, the same rule applies to Soldiers. Many like their food a particular way, and anything that tastes like home instantly becomes a favorite. The winner at the Kalsu Dining Facility (DFAC) is hands-down the Tony Burger. According to SSG Bryant, "It's the closest thing to a real hamburger." As any good investigative reporter would do, I asked to meet Tony, but no one seemed to know who he was, which made me wonder if there really is a Tony. SGT Salavea loves, "crab legs and shrimp with a bowl of butter, seasoned potatoes, cocktail sauce, corn, and two glasses of ice tea with limes." He follows that with "a

scoop of cookies and cream, a scoop of French vanilla ice cream, and pumpkin pie with whip cream." [SGT Salavea's second favorite place on Kalsu is the gym]. Coming in at a close third was the rotisserie chicken.

*When I go home the first thing I'm going to do is [G-rated please]....*

SGT Salavea: Go to the beach in A.C.U.s.

SSG Bryant: Love my family.

SPC Campbell: The first thing I'm going to do is just spend time with my wife. She is the reason I joined the Army, the reason I do what I do, and the only thing keeping me going out here. Each day is one day closer to her. The next thing is to take **full** advantage of island life and go to the beach, get SCUBA certified, snorkel sharks cove, hike Diamond Head; in short, just live it up.

PFC Wallace: Get my car painted and relax on the beach.

PFC Keedy: Go to the beach and finish the command sponsorship paperwork to get my daughters.

*Some closing thoughts...*

SPC Campbell: One thing I've learned is to always **try** and remain optimistic. As I said earlier, everyday is one day closer to going home, one day we've "survived." Also network, network, network! Every contact you make is another helping hand, another potential for one more resource. One more thing, treat everyone with respect. We are all in the same boat, no matter what you're going through, someone has it tougher.

PFC Keedy: This deployment has taught me a lot about the job and has made me appreciate the little things in life.

SGT Salavea (on 172<sup>nd</sup>): I'm proud of this unit's dedication to their mission. They have helped this portion of Iraq with each tribe, province, and city.

SSG Bryant: I'm just glad it's almost over!! Can't wait to see my family!

I enjoyed my time FOB Kalsu. It is heart-warming to see Soldiers proud of their contributions and excited as they help their supported unit to succeed. The next time I see them will probably be in Kuwait during redeployment. After that, it looks as though I'm bound to run into them on the beach- if that really is the first thing they're going to do.

And, to the Trailblazers, don't worry.

We will save some sun for you!



*Above: The Iraqi Geospatial School, one of the 70th missions while in theater; SSG Bryant, SPC Campbell and PFC Keedy at work in the office.*



# 511th Org Day



*Camaraderie*



*Games*

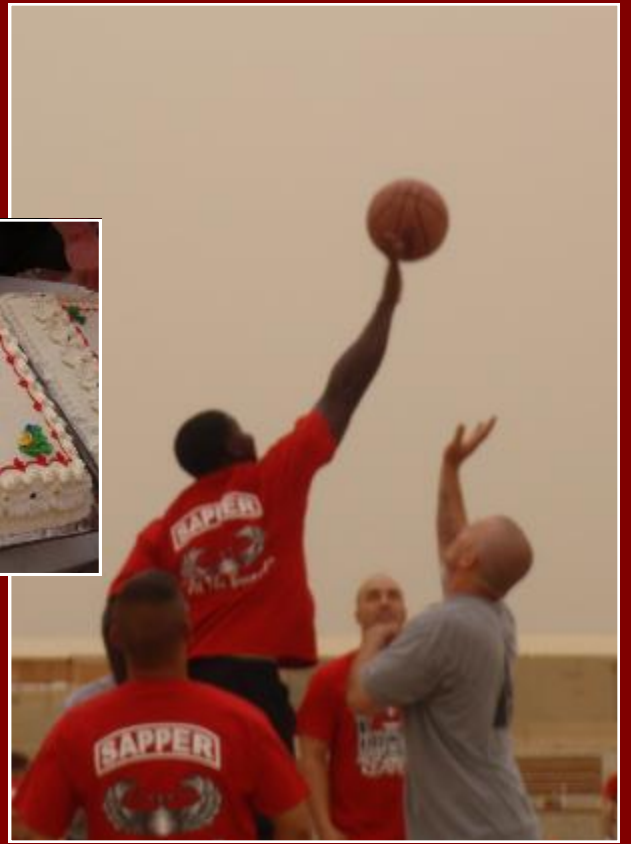
*Skits*







## Barbecue



## Sports











*511th Engineer Company (Sapper), FOB Warrior, Kirkuk, Iraq, June 2009*

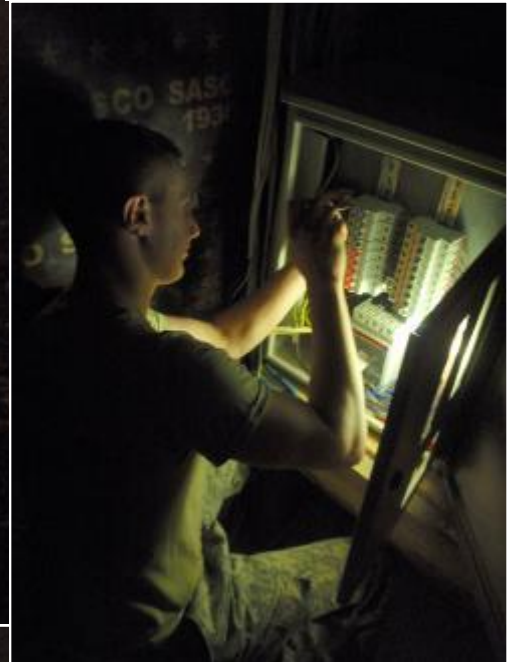
**FOB WARRIOR CONSTRUCTION UPDATE**

EM Platoon from C/84 begins work on the construction of a new Life Support Area (LSA) at FOB Warrior, Kirkuk for 6/6 CAV. Top Right: CSM Morse presents a BN coin to PFC Murphy for his outstanding efforts operating the grader through the fields of moondust; Left to Bottom, Left: D7 dozer in action; the 2 1/2 yard scoop loader empties it's load of fill into a 20 ton dump truck for transport to the fill site; PFC Murphy works through a field of fill as he works the motor grader; the 20 ton dump spreads one of the many loads of fill required to raise the ten acre site 8 inches required to set the CHU footers. [EIC]



Next Page: 1st Platoon, C/84th Vertical works on several additional projects at FOB Warrior to include a SCIF facility and a Kennel for military working dogs. Clockwise from Top Left: A team of Soldiers install split unit A/C systems on the 30'x100' SWA Hut Kennel; taking a break—working nights under lights to beat the heat where temperatures have been upwards of 118 degrees; SPC Hines wires an electrical panel into the temporary SCIF facility; a Soldier consults the building plans under the lights of the HEMMT cargo.





C/84th Photo Showcase

## Snapshots by Your Soldiers



Above: ***'Dust Storm'*** By SFC Jason Lynch

Left: ***'Leaving it in the past'***

By SSG Rodolfo Silva



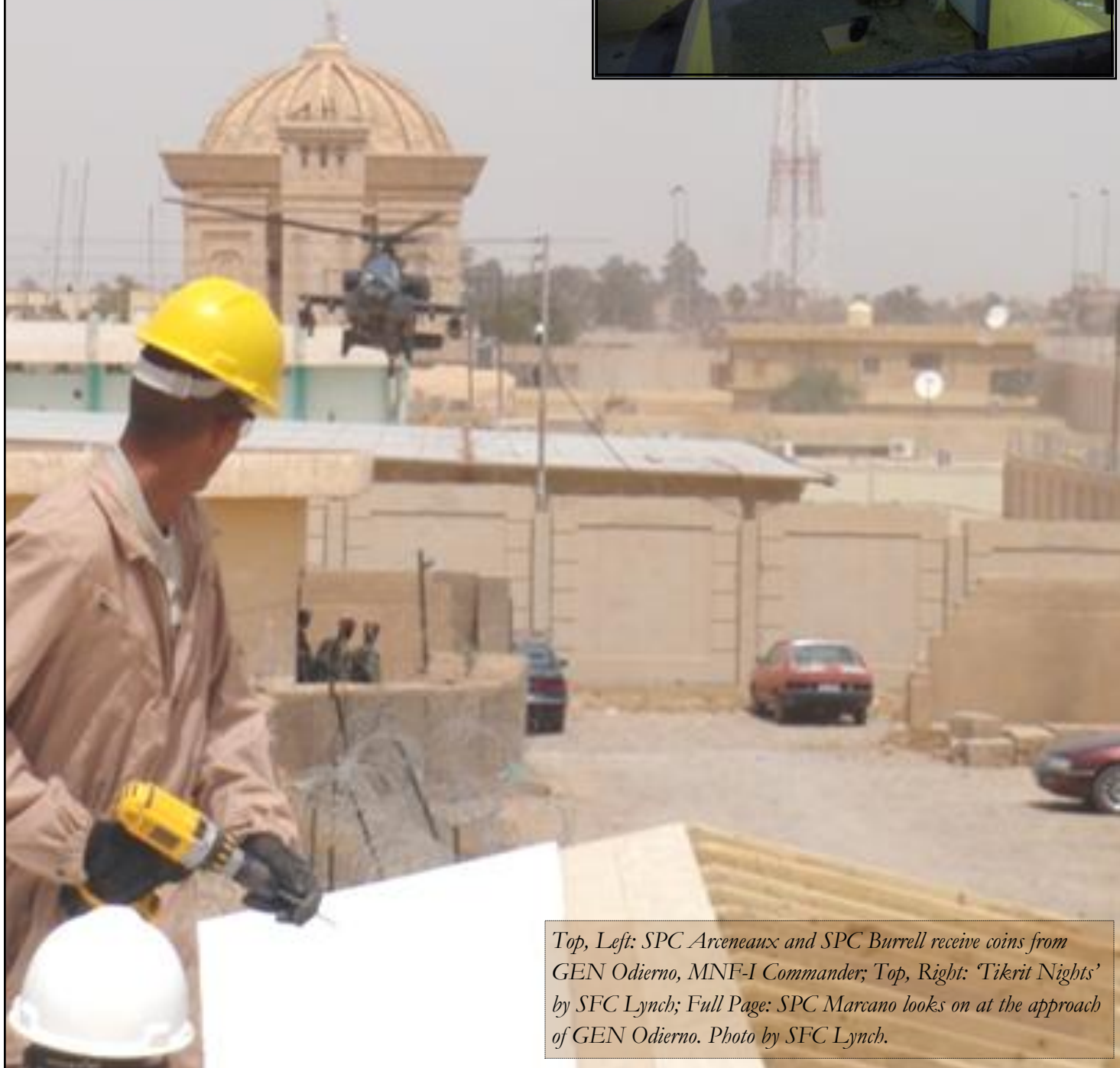
Below: ***'Partnership and Construction'***

By 2LT Ian Clowes





# Snapshots Cont.



*Top, Left: SPC Arceneaux and SPC Burrell receive coins from GEN Odierno, MNF-I Commander; Top, Right: 'Tikrit Nights' by SFC Lynch; Full Page: SPC Marciano looks on at the approach of GEN Odierno. Photo by SFC Lynch.*

04 July 2009

Weather Forecast:: Cool, Highs 107°-110°, Visibility 50',  
Accumulating Dirt & Dust 1-3 mm



*Top: Vehicle are cloaked in the dusty fog; insets: Photos from inside looking out of the BN's pick-ups with messages scrawled in the dust; Left: SPC Filmore bundles up to avoid breathing the dust despite the heat; view of the main road in front of the DEAC—it looks like a snowy morning—except brown!*



## *From the Press: Severe Sandstorms Blanketing Iraq*

### *Aircraft can't fly; People hospitalized*

By Aamer Madhani, USA Today

BAGHDAD — Unseasonable sandstorms have been blinding Iraq for about 10 days, sending people to hospital emergency rooms with breathing problems and grounding U.S. military planes and helicopters. The intense series of storms, more common in April than July, have colored the sky a hazy brown and made life here generally miserable. Fine sand seeps through the tiniest cracks in windows and doors and coats everything with a khaki-colored patina.

"These storms are unlike anything we've experienced in recent memory," said Haider al-Araji, a physician at the Ibn al-Nafees Hospital in central Baghdad, where hundreds of patients were treated in recent days for respiratory problems caused by the sandstorms. "I am healthy, and I've found myself having difficulty breathing in this weather."

For the U.S. military, the poor visibility has limited troop movement and the use of helicopters on missions, hampering security efforts at a critical time following the withdrawal of combat troops from urban areas last week. Sandstorms forced Vice President Biden to scrap a scheduled trip to northern Iraq to meet Kurdish leaders during his visit to Baghdad last week.....



CSM Morse and MAJ Snider trek through the dusty abyss

## Chaplain's Message: Salad for the Soul

By CH Keith Ferrell

Let me state this from the beginning as emphatically as I can, if God had meant for me to eat green things he would have made me a rabbit. Rather, the Almighty, in His infinite wisdom, saw fit to bring me into being in the great country of Texas. This intrinsically implies that I am, of all things, a 'steak and potato' type of man.

So imagine my chagrin when several of my well-meaning friends and associates, in their desire to 'help' me in my quest to shed a few pounds from around the ol' waistline, suggested that I have less of the fried chicken and occasionally substitute in a nice green salad. Lord help me! From my point of view there is nothing 'nice' about a salad. My philosophy is simple: the cow eats the green stuff, I eat the cow. Walla! I have my veggie intake. But according to our resident nutritionist and well-doers, that alone is not enough.

So, with that being said, I embarked on a quest to better my health by adding a salad...but for a price. For the longest time I have been after a certain 'agnostic' friend to come join us for Sunday morning church services, to which I often received the reply: "Chappy, I don't want the church to burn down if I come." And, honestly, he meant it. Thankfully, fate intervened and over a conversation during chow he stunned me by stating that if I would eat a salad, he would come to church. I replied back, "You come to church, I eat a salad. In fact, I'll eat one for each service you attend." And there, ladies and gentlemen, was the beginning of 'Salads for Souls' day.

Suffice it to say I still hate salad with a passion and compromises have been made. I now prepare my salad Texas style: three leafs of lettuce, ½ pound of ham, several scoops of croutons, and ample dressing. When available I also add in the occasional sprinkle of cheese. Now, I am not a nutritionist, but I can't see the nutritional value of this salad I eat, but I eat it none the less and each Sunday, my friend the agnostic, joins us for the message. We now agree that the thing we once avoided is indeed good for each of us. I look forward (Sike!) to many more salads as I see my friend in more services.

As a challenge to the remainder of the Battalion, the day that we have over ¾ quarters of the seats (35 of 50) filled for a Sunday Service, I have agreed to have my good friend make the salad for me, of his size and discretion.

See ya on Sunday!



*"Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. For instance, one person believes it's all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don't. And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them."*

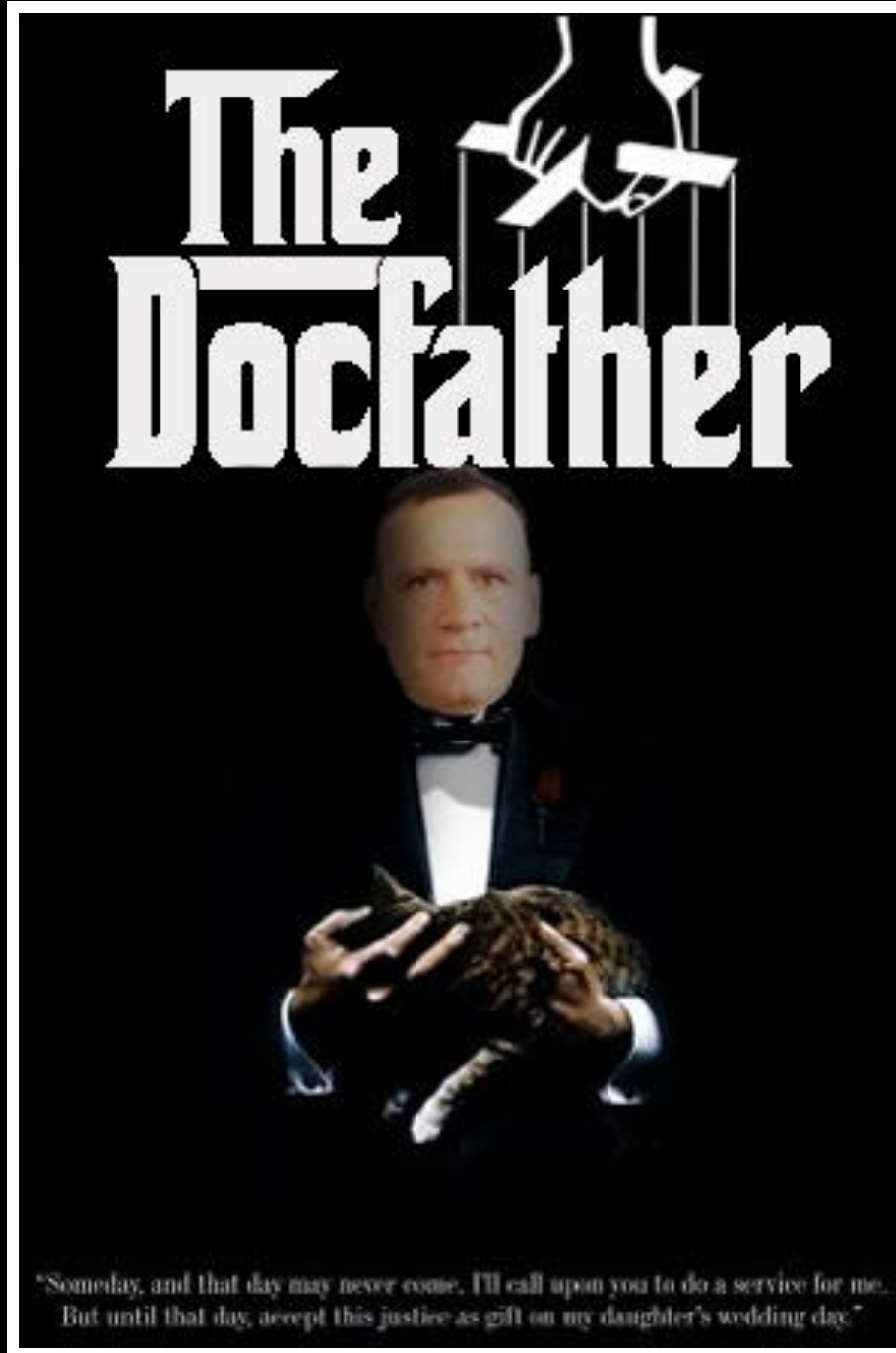
- Romans 14:1-3



Chaplain Ferrell "enjoys" a salad at the dining facility.



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



The story begins as "Doc" Arben Vuthi, head of a COB Speicher's Trailblazer "family", calmly oversees the 65<sup>th</sup> Engineer BN's aid station. His beloved medic, SSG Johnson, has just come off mission, and needs a break from route clearance. As SSG Johnson's soon learns, the business of the aid station is to take care of the "family". Kind and benevolent to those who give respect, but ruthless whenever anything stands against the family, the business of the family is similar in nature to it's patriarchal head. Doc Vuthi lives his life in the way of the old country, but times are changing due to the Security Agreement. When a rival unit starts selling used Land Rovers on COB Speicher, it starts to reduce the Don's influence at IBIZ and across the COB. The clash of the Doc's fading old world values and the new mindset will demand a terrible price...especially from SSG Johnson and the rest of Trailblazer family.

## *Saving the Conto Family*

By SSG Joseph Conto and CPT Miguel Lima

*SSG Conto currently serves in the 511th Sapper Company. His amazing story of how he was able to get his family safely to the United States out of Liberia during its second civil war has been reported once before but not through his own words. Below is his account and some Q&A with the man who thanks COL Russell for saving his family.*

COL Russell was my Battalion Commander when he was a LTC. I was in B, Co, 8<sup>th</sup> EN BN in Fort Hood, Texas. That was 2003. [I came] immediately from basic training as an E-2. There was a war going on in my country. Fighting was going on. We had a NTC rotation and I was down in California.

News came in that my dad got killed by the rebel forces of the former [Liberian] President Charles Taylor. And, then, my wife also suffered injury from knife attack. Our house got burned down and they were looking for my family. They were looking for my wife and children to kill them. Because I was accused of 'training' rebels to fight against, then, the President Charles Taylor. Which, of course, wasn't true since I left Liberia [in] 1997. So, how could I train people when I'm in the US?

A sister of mine, Cosabina, she went to get my wife and my son to safety. They took my wife to a hospital, Joint African Medical Center in Monrovia. My daughter, Leemu, was missing for over three weeks and they had the International Red Cross trying to find her all over Monrovia. When news came, I was so downhearted and disturbed, I didn't know what to do to and I talked to my company commander. It went COL Russell, then. COL Russell took the initiative to help me seek out the welfare of my family as a humanitarian worker instead of being a military man. That's how I look at him and I portray him. He got in touch with the State Department asking questions. They tried to do some background investigation to see if I could actually go home; to see if I can get my family out. They said, "No" [stating that] if I was to go, I wasn't going to make it back.. So, COL Russell tried. He did everything he can. He got in touch with the embassy in Liberia and by then, the US military. They wanted to send



*A 2003 photo of SSG Joseph Conto with his wife, Sharon, three of his kids Sabina, Leemu and Michael.*

Marines into the battle zone for my family and find them and take them to safety. They [found them and] took them to the embassy. They were there for about a month and they left from there September 2, 2003 and went to Senegal and then, from Senegal they went to Spain. From Spain they finally arrived in the states at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware. That was September 4, 2003.

I don't even know how to thank COL Russell. You know, I don't...I don't know. He did a wonderful job. Me and my family, we are very grateful. Not just to COL Russell, but the American people [and] the United States of America. Because America is a country, the only country in the world, that will send her people to die for the sake of other people. I'm very proud. I'm proud to serve. And, I'm going to be here for a very long time.

*What was going through your mind when the situation seemed to be out of your hands? Was there hope that you could find help?*

Yeah, I was hoping...actually, at that point, I didn't care. I just wanted to go. If my family and [I] would [have to] die together. Let me just go and just be with them. I didn't want to have any [regrets] behind me. I used to make phone calls. My phone bill used to be like \$1700 a month just calling to find out how my family was. 'Cause they were hunting for my family all

over the place.

*What do you think was LTC Russell's motivation to do this?*

Well, I think COL Russell believes in freedom. He believes in equality because as a private...a private, you know...my family remembers him so much and we're always talking about him. It happened while I was here and he showed up and I [was like] "Oh, God. This...this is the guy. This is the man right here." But that day I was going on mission and I didn't have the time to talk to him. So, the next time around, when he came over here, I actually caught his attention and I told him, "Thank you for what you did." He was kind of shocked. He was like, "Oh, God." It was very amazing because he was making phone calls throughout the night even off-duty. He wanted to get me through AER. He wanted to get me some money to help me out to get my family out of there. That's wonderful.

*How do you think this experience has shaped you as a leader?*

Well, it has caused me to focus more, not just on me, but everybody else. People in general. That anybody's situation is pretty much mine. My focus is to help everybody else. Anybody. As much as possible because you never know when someone will help you out. Because what comes around goes around.



## *Farewell from the Commander, 18th Engineer Brigade*

Trailblazers,

It has been an honor to have served in combat with the best Combat Engineer Battalion in the United States Army. You've upheld the highest standards and honor of your unit and the Engineer Soldier. Standards I knew in 1983's as a second Lieutenant assigned to Bravo Company, 65<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer Battalion (Light). As your brigade commander in a war time deployment, it has been a great privilege of mine to witness the tremendous performance, dedication and tenacity displayed each and every day by the Soldiers, NCO's and Officers assigned to the 65<sup>th</sup> Engineer "First in Last Out" Battalion. Your daily actions set you apart and above other units, who only wish they could obtain your quality and professionalism. You are the Engineers – the best Soldiers on the battlefield bar none. On the eve of the 18<sup>th</sup> Engineer Brigade's departure from theater, I can truly state that the best part of my fifteen months here has been spent working and fighting along side the 65<sup>th</sup>. I ask that you carry on as you have, with honor, high standards and as professional Combat Engineers. I pray that each and every one of you will soon be reunited with your families and that this war will soon come to an end. I praise you for your sacrifices throughout this conflict and for the tremendous sacrifices made by your families, as well.

Colonel Matthew H. Russell

'Crusher 6'



*Clockwise from Above: COL Russell speaks at the NCO/Soldier of the Quarter award ceremony; LTC Kamel, COL Russell and SFC Ramsey at the Al Sharqat bridge site; COL Russell gives a coin to SPC Vega; COL Russell explains how to emplace a float bridge to 2LT Bruzek.*



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## Commander's Corner

Aloha Families and Friends of Task Force Trailblazer,

Trailblazer 5 filling in for Trailblazer 6. Trailblazer 6 is on R&R and enjoying some well deserved time off with his family in Hawaii.

During his absence, an important calendar date passed, and this date, 30 June was attributed to a change in mindset for the US forces stationed in Iraq. The date, set forth in the Security Agreement (SA) signed last year, by President Bush, called for all US forces to leave Iraqi cities and cease all unilateral operations within their boundaries. This has meant a number of changes for the Trailblazers. Collectively, we must ensure 100% compliance as strategically, Iraq is a sovereign nation and the SA is an agreement between two sovereign nations.

So what does that really mean for us— not too much; most of what we'll continue to do is business as usual. However, there are routes that we can no longer use, facilities that we'll no longer do construction at, and missions that we'll no longer conduct. For the most part, we rarely work within the confines of the cities so the impact will be minimal. In the bigger picture, the goal to our success within the battlespace lies with the quality of the BN's partnership efforts. Partnership is the BN's main effort and thus, this newsletter has dedicated a lot of effort and print to showcase the progress made on all levels. It is truly a joint effort and it includes contributions from all five companies in the taskforce.

The BN staff conduct weekly visits to our Iraqi Regiment HQ counterparts for teaching, coaching, and mentoring. Each week, the staff works through planning and targeting to syn-

chronize joint US-Iraqi operations, permissible under the SA. HHC has just recently finished the latest iteration of an NCO leadership school aimed at building individual skills such as basic rifle marksmanship and physical training.

FSC has taken the lead on maintenance front, and is helping the Iraqi's conduct services on their vehicles. C/84th has recently finished working on two joint construction projects including a small rifle and pistol range, booby-trap house, and PT area. They eagerly await the next project training with the 12th IA.

The 511th Sapper Co has taken the lead with the 12th Field Engineering Regiment and has stood up a robust training program on robots, IED reduction, map reading, and other individual Soldier skills. Since most the Jundi are new to the regiment, the Sappers are focusing on basic skills and anticipate moving onto mounted operations and Route Clearance (RC) in the coming months. Lastly, the 95th has been busy refining their joint route clearance Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (ITTPs) with the 4th FER. They are currently conducting joint RC patrols with notable successes based on the newly established joint targeting meeting.

Overall, the BN's success and collectively that of the coalition forces stationed in Iraq is to build a steadfast relationship with our Iraqi partners. The quality of our partnership efforts will directly correlate with our level of influence and will determine

whether our Soldier's efforts will be enduring once we depart for home station.

The BN has also reached another important milestone, this one a little more personal. Since the last newsletter, we have crossed the mid-point threshold of the deployment. Although the BN is now on the proverbial down swing, there are still many important missions to conduct and challenges to overcome. I encourage all those who read this publication to provide encouragement and further support to your loved ones, friends, sons, daughters, wives, and husbands as we head down the backstretch. It is your support that helps us find the strength and resilience to finish the job we set forth to do.

The other news is that we are now witnessing the transition of the our higher HQ. The 18th EN BDE from Germany is ready to relinquish control after 15 months in country early next week to the 130th EN BDE from Hawaii. Once they take the reigns, the 65th and 84th EN BNs will fall under their home station higher HQ for the remainder of the deployment.

From the hot and dusty conditions in Iraqi,

MAJ Aaron Dorf

"Trailblazer 5"

First In, Last Out

