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65th Engineer Battalion, US ARMY

**Double Movie  
Spoof Issue**



*Above: It was a full house in the 4th IA Engineer Regiment's Joint TOC but everyone was present for both Iraqi and American briefs.*

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## *The Staff Experience*

By Miguel Lima

A staff exercise is meant to test the ability and cohesiveness of the battalion staff to accomplish the goal of successfully running the support and operations that a mission-capable unit needs to succeed. A STAFFEX was organized between the staff of both TFTB and the 4<sup>th</sup> IA Engineers so that each staff could spend a prolonged amount of time with their counterparts and work through some issues with more time and details than was previously afforded in a regular half-day partnership visit. The very notion

could have been more appropriately deemed the staff experiment. While some had spent the night at COL Spider in our patrol base, Wolf, located within the compound, this would be most of the staff's first time sleeping outside a major CF base. Plus, for some of us, this would be the first time we'd even see our counterparts or interact with them for more than an hour per visit. It was a unique opportunity for all.

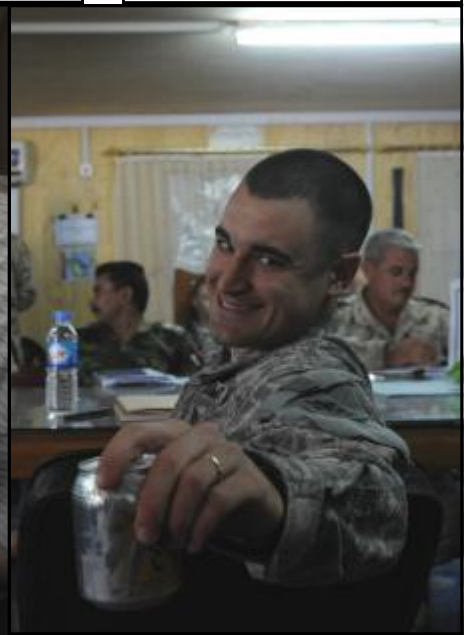
We travelled down to Spider in several convoys. While these convoys would bring the bulk of the TFTB staff out for the day,

the primary staff would stay for three days based out of Wolf to conduct the full STAFFEX. The first day was set for a complete meet and greet as well as a partnership lunch and finally, an Iraqi and American commander's update brief. Once on the ground, we



*Above: A box of baklava offered by MAJ Ghalib.*





*Top Left to Right: 1LT Thorell and CW2 Davis assemble fans. TFTB brought the fans with them to help cool down the sometimes stifling TOC; On the Interpreter advanced the Arabic slides during the briefing; CPT Hallett offers up a meeting staple: caffeinated drinks; Below: The two screens for the BUB. The left is in English while the right is in Arabic. Notice the fans that*



moved into our temporary housing at Wolf. Most of us had been at the meeting when we began planning the layout of Wolf back in February. Now, for the first time, we'd be staying overnight in the accommodations frequented by Soldiers of 95<sup>th</sup> and C/84<sup>th</sup> while working on partnership training and joint missions. After dropping our bags we moved toward the Joint TOC to start linking up with the IA staff and set up the TOC's meeting room for the briefings. Soon after, the lunch spread was ready. It was a crowded in their Officer's Mess and so some of us spilled into the TOC to eat. Food is an integral part of our partnership.

As part of the planning process, we actually had to deconflict who was going to provide the food and for which meals. It was decided that we'd split the opportunity amongst the two units. It's part of the Iraqi culture to accept when invited to a meal which is coupled with being treated as an honored guest. The officers and jinood of the 4<sup>th</sup> certainly lived up to this cultural rule in spades as they were always willing to treat us to a meal.

After our luncheon reunion, we set to finish setting up the TOC and our living area. We all reconvened later that afternoon for a brief by the Iraqis. We sat as each of the



officers and the Regimental Sergeant Major spoke about their duty responsibilities and reported on their respective statuses. It was a once-around-the-table status report that we could have benefited from back in January when we took over the partnership. It was informative to hear from them what was in their lane and what issues they were having. It was also a once in a partnership opportunity when we would have all the Iraqi staff officers in one room like this. Often times, our Iraqi counterparts were not available during partnership visits due to missions or their leave schedule. The briefing proved to be unexpectedly longer than was planned so it was decided we



*Top: LTC Hameed's small grassy area was perfect to have a casual conversation;  
Above Left: MAJ Snider and CPT Hallett enjoy fruit from the fruit bowls;  
Above Right: LTC Petersen and others enjoy chai and a smoke after dinner;  
Below: LTC Hameed reviews the Heroes of the Week in the BUB report.*



would conduct the American briefing after dinner. Dinner was different than lunch. The majority of staff and commanders were invited to sit down and eat with LTC Hameed. Just outside his office in a small but well maintained grassy lawn, he entertained LTC Petersen and a select few. As more folks walked up he invited them to sit and enjoy some fruits laid out. As the sun set he had a table readied for everyone present to enjoy dinner outside. As we sat and had dinner, I realized how much of a good host LTC Hameed was. During our visits where we may sit and talk in his office or occasionally have lunch, he was always hospitable but this was a whole new level. Here he had planned ahead on treating us to dinner and had the different phases of the dinner readily available. The fruit was the appetizer and then, the main course. Afterwards, chai was served and then a very strong Turkish coffee. All the while, the conversation was diverse and pleasant. Sometimes the conversation was spurred by LTC Hameed and other times by a dinner guest asking something of him or another.

As dinner concluded, we made our way back to the TOC to complete the day with the American's brief. This was what we called a Battalion Update Brief (or BUB, for short) and we typically hold it three times a week. This is a time for all company commanders and staff elements to report to the battalion commander regarding their current and upcoming mission(s) status as well as their mission readiness. The brief was an actual BUB that we had conducted roughly a month ago. It was vetted







*From Top to Bottom: Santiago the Interpreter helps CSM Morse out with a translation; CPT Amsdell brief ESCs report as Ben the Interpreter translates it into Arabic for the Iraqis; CPT Painter turns to Jerry the Interpreter to ask a question during the briefing; MAJ Snider, CSM Morse, CPT Hallett, CPT J. Biggerstaff; 1LT Swartz, 1LT Thorell with 2LT Oney in the background listen as WO1 Whipp (not pictured) reports.*



for sensitive material by the S-2 and then, translated by Huda the Interpreter so that we had both an English and Arabic presentation. Each were projected up on their own screens for the meeting's attendees to view. As we went through each of the briefings, we paused to allow the translators time to repeat our reports in Arabic. At the end of the briefings, there was time allowed for LTC Petersen to ask questions as he might have during the actual a present day BUB and time allowed for the Iraqis to ask questions regarding our system of reporting. It was a slow process and although most loathe long meetings, this one was so different than any other we had attended in the past. It was a chance to relive a BUB, yes, but it was also a time to show someone else our method to conducting business and pass on practices. There were light moments of laughter as we pointed out foibles in the context of our reports or in the rare case (unfortunately mine) where my report was omitted from the slide presentation. After the briefings, we all left the TOC and split ways. The Iraqis dispersed to their offices and bunks. Some of our staff boarded awaiting Caimans to head back to Speicher while the remaining staff retired to Wolf for the evening.

I have to say that when I heard about the exercise, one thought resonated in my mind more than anything else: I'll see the sun set on Spider. I always wondered what it was like at night at Spider. We had heard stories from 95<sup>th</sup> and C/84<sup>th</sup> about stuff that they had heard from the nearby main roads. While we had a feeling of security within our Engineer partners' compound, we added to their security by setting up the vehicles of the CST in strategic points around Spider. The ACs in the CHUs





worked (for the most part) very well. But even so, some of the Soldiers pulled security in the middle of the CHU area, opting to slept outside. After freshening up and readying ourselves for bed, we racked out for the night. It was a long day and tomorrow was going to be another full day of partnership activities.

We woke up to a sunny morning. We put on our PT's and started to walk out to a recently created field for some exercise. It was very odd to be wearing a PT uniform at Spider but we had scheduled sports with the Iraqis. Ideally, we were to play the American officers against the Iraqi officers but their team was a mix of jinood and officers. This morning we were going to play soccer. It was widely accepted that we were going to be humbled by their skill. As they took the field in matching jerseys and filled the sidelines with anxious spectators, our assumptions that we'd be





playing more seasoned players were, in fact, realized. Far from turning from a challenge, we played. They were graceful and showed a real aptitude for the sport. We were clumsy and had no real experience to bounce off of one another. Of all the times I can remember we've played soccer for Officer PT while I have been stationed in Hawaii, I can count them all on one hand and only one had stuck out as resoundingly fun amongst the masses. That said, we played and lost. We would have lost by much more if not for MAJ Snider's excellent goalie skills. With every goal that the Iraqis scored, the sidelines cheered with such passion and genuine support of the home team, you'd have thought that it was an Olympic event. The score was so badly

pitted against us, 2LT Davis hiked up his ACU pants and took off his top to help us nab our only point during the entire game. Even though we lost, we consoled ourselves with the fact that this simply wasn't our game and it was OK that we had lost playing a much more experienced opponent. The Iraqis pride was riding high that day and you could tell that every one of them, whether they played or not, was proud that they had won. It was certainly a partnership moment where we had to excuse the fact that so many times before, we were better prepared and equipped for any given mission. But, this one time, even though we knew it was coming, the culmination of our preparation and equipment didn't help us land a win that day. Gloating Iraqis didn't

smooth things over any, but they were well entitled to boast their achievements. We all knew we had one more day of sports and that was consolation enough.

FSC brought us breakfast that day. They would also later bring us dinner. This was the same for the following day. Along with food, they were our link to our supplies and resources at Speicher in case we needed anything delivered out to Spider. While this was their task, it was our pleasure to see the friendly faces several times a day if only for a brief time. After the meal, we began our one on one partnership. Each staff member broke off with his or her own counterpart to work on better understanding the Iraqis' way of conducting business, do some training and/or work out some





ways to improve their system. This was the first time I would work with a counterpart. It was his first day on the job and I was glad to finally be a part of the club. We broke midday for lunch provided by the Iraqis and went back to one on one interaction. That afternoon, there was a brief meeting amongst the TFTB staff to check on progress. Soon afterwards, we began to congregate outside LTC Hameed's office for dinner. All American partnership officers were invited for dinner. I was the last to arrive and they had already set the meal. It was a delicious spread of rice with chicken and tomato based soup. Flat bread was served on the side with some pickled vegetables. Again, after



*Clockwise from Opposite Page, Upper Left: Team TFTB gets ready to defend a penalty shot; spectator jinood dance in celebration as their team scores; the Iraqi Team huddles before the next play; the sideline was crowded with jinood, officers and extra players in support of the Iraqi team; MAJ Snider prepares for a block as an Iraqi player goes for the goal past CPT Amsdell defense; CPT A. Biggerstaff "pele-kicks" the soccer ball to his teammates behind him.*







dinner, we were treated to chai and Turkish coffee. Since we didn't have any planned engagement after dinner, we stayed at the table and conversed about a great deal of things. As we relaxed after dinner, some of the officers sat back and enjoyed a smoke. I offered LTC Hameed a cigar and together we smoked while MAJ Snider, CPT Hallett and 1LT Thorell smoked thier pipes. Much like the soccer game, we weren't as good as smoking as the Iraqis and as he did with his goalie skills, MAJ Snider stole the show once more with his decidedly unique tavern pipe.

The smoking and conversation happened to coincidently end as a sand storm rolled in at the close of the evening. We hastily thanked LTC Hameed for his hospitality once more and headed back to Wolf. We could see the wall of dust moving like a giant curtain being pulled towards us by the wind. It was difficult to see as most of us didn't have anything to cover our eyes and squinting wasn't enough to keep the

*Clockwise from Upper Left: Jerry the Interpreter, CPT J. Biggerstaff and MAJ Ghalib discuss logistics; 1LT Thorell and 1LT Mohammed talk radios; MAJ Snider and his tavern pipe; 2LT Oney and CPT Conley lean into the picture during dinner; a full table at LTC Hameed's dinner*





sand blast out of our eyes. Once back, everyone hoped that the ACs would work as they had the night before. Much to our disappointment, the generator was unable remain on for more than 3 minutes at a time. This disappointment was relived at least five times as the power kicked on as the generator could be heard roaring to a start in the distance, and then, minutes later, the generator would sputter out and the power would fade. With it, our hopes for sleeping comfortably would fade as well. Eventually, though, everyone got some sleep that night.

A less than bright and sunny morning greeted us as we awoke to another morning of sports with the Iraqis. The tables would be turned as we would be playing Ultimate Frisbee. Unlike

the day before, the Iraqis were less than excited about coming out to play. They showed up 30 minutes later than we said we'd start. Even so, we set the clock for an hour and played. Surprisingly, they played better than I had assumed. They were particularly good at defense and blocking our throws. They were weak on their throwing capacity and that was exploited to great effect. In the end, it was a crushing defeat against the home team. They met the challenge and played and I consider that very bold. They had never even thrown a Frisbee before, and here they played the game against us, anyway. At the end of the game, the talk mostly centered around the day prior when the Iraqis were victorious and how they won at a game that was more widely accepted as a sport the world over.

Our last day at the STAFFEX included more one on one counterpart time but there was also a particular mission that was to be completed. The S-2 and S-3 section had a goal of teaching the Iraqis how to better defeat IED threats. As the day went on, there were discussions and brain storming sessions to apply this wholly American system to the Iraqi way of conducting route clearance missions. By the end of the day, they had settled on some productive results. These products would help the Iraqi route clearance teams perform their mission and provide better security for the Iraqi people. A final meeting between both staffs would outline the way ahead after these products were jointly created. The Iraqis explained their understanding and expressed their thanks for our efforts during the last few days. We in turn expressed our thanks for their hospitality and lessons that we had learned during our stay. It was unusually lengthily but welcomed as we each spoke to the group and individual counterpart. And at the end of all of that, we gave each other gifts of gratitude and friendship. The Americans' selections were more diverse with a humorous spin and all of the counterparts accepted the gift grinning gratefully.

The scope of this exercise was new to us. It may be one of the first of its kind. Trail blazing isn't easy but we earn that moniker on so many occasions. The STAFFEX is just one of the many events that we've been a part of that would be left behind as one of the many blazes marking the trail of our deployment.



*Above, Left: MAJ Adnan, CPT Hallett and Mike the Interpreter laugh as CPT Hallett preps the room for his gift of a coffee maker. The coffee maker was the most popular gift accepted by the Iraqis. Above Right: LTC Petersen gives LTC Hameed a mini T-wall with an inset coin. It was a novelty item sold at the local Speicher PX. Group shot of the entire participants of the STAFFEX.*



## Chaplain's Message: Games for the Soul

By SPC Amanda Conway

David McKay once said, "The most important of life's battles is the one we fight daily in the silent chambers of the soul." For the past several months, Big Army and the Chaplain's Corps have been taking great strides to help soldiers be victorious in this very battle because it has become clear that soldiers who are not able to take care of the battles within themselves and their families will not be effective on the physical battlefields of war. The TFTB Religious Support Team is entirely committed to helping every soldier in TFTB win this very battle within themselves. By now, every soldier here most likely knows who we are, and that we are here for them and care for them. Our mission goes a lot farther than making sure that soldiers have the religious support they need to practice whatever faith they choose to follow. We are also here for soldiers who are struggling with the stresses of being here, being away from family and friends. A lot of that is seen through our ministry of presence and through one-on-one counseling with the Chaplain. But we also take a step further to try to offer opportunities for soldiers to decompress, such as the movie nights that were discussed in a previous newsletter. We also host "game nights" once a month, offering a space for officers, NCOs, and junior enlisted to level the playing field for a couple hours and decompress from their individual stressors and just try to enjoy the moment. We have several games here in Lahmann Hall; board games, card games, trivia games, and several others, but it seems that Monopoly and Phase 10 have become the battalion favorites. I'm not surprised at the choices, as these were also among the favorites of my friends in college when we needed a chance to decompress from all of our studying and paper writing. Although we have not had swarms of people attending these game nights like some of our movie nights, I'm sure that those who do come would admit that they enjoy themselves. It may not seem like stress relief as we are playing a simple game of Phase 10 and jovial threats are made across the table from someone who needed just one more card to finish her phase when someone else "phased out" and ended the round, leaving her a phase behind and 70 points ahead. Or when we just can't seem to get through the first phase while everyone else is racing towards the 10<sup>th</sup> phase. And then there's the frustration of the monopoly game where we build up Boardwalk and Park Place only to have our opponents land on "Luxury Tax" every time they come to that side of the board. But in the end, no matter who wins, or





how many times our turns were strategically skipped just because we were winning, we are all smiling and unconcerned with having lost our fortunes just because we landed on Boardwalk one too many times. For a moment, we are not worrying about whatever stresses we have going on at work. And then, when it's all said and done, and we wake back up to the daily rituals of our jobs, we have a little bit more of a fighting chance in that battle within the silent chambers of our soul.

*Opposite Page from Top to Bottom: 1LT Vassar, CPT Jeeves, 2LT Bruzek, CPT Lima and CW2 Holley play Phase 10 during Movie Night; CH Ferrell, 1LT Vassar, CW2 Holley, 2LT Bruzek and 1LT Thorell sit down to play Monopoly; the accursed to some and welcomed to others "Luxury Tax" spot; CW2 Holley double checks the rules; a Monopoly board; Current Page: CH Ferrell, 2LT Johnson in the foreground with SPC Conway and CPT Jeeves in the background hanging out during game night at Lahman Hall.*



## Ultimate: The Battalion's Sport

*Rarely do we get the odd chance to discuss the same topic by different authors. Below are two accounts regarding two distinct impressions from the one sport that is universally accepted as the battalion's pastime : Ultimate Frisbee. Before, in the old days as the 29th, we used to play Australian Football. But now, as the 65th, we've revived an old tradition of playing Frisbee. There were urban legends that surrounded the old 65th's passion for this sport like how Battalion Commanders that used to rate officers on their ability to play this game. They even had their own Frisbees made with a "65" and an engineer castle on the disc. Nowadays, rarely is another sport played other than Frisbee. We've played company versus company. We've played against our sister battalion. We've even played against the Iraqis. From the isles of Hawaii to the sands of Iraq (where you can't even buy a Frisbee in country), we like to play Ultimate—win or lose. Here are the stories to prove it...*



By 1LT Casey Jones

Ultimate Frisbee is generally associated with drum circles, hacky-sack, grassy college quads, and low personal hygiene standards. But this simply isn't the case. Ultimate Frisbee, or "Ultimate" for short, is definitely treated as a bona fide sporting event in the 65th Engineer Battalion. Weekly, officers, and some NCOs, of the battalion clash in a fierce battle of "Ultimate" in the harshest conditions at Bowen Memorial Field, COB Speicher, Iraq. Officer Physical Training is conducted weekly in Hawaii as well, however, playing in Iraq presents different challenges including: oppressive heat, uneven ground, 3/25 guys trying to play softball on the same field, and absolutely no vegetation to break your fall/slide.

This game is a delicate balance of brute force and physical grace and finesse. All jokes aside, Ultimate Frisbee is a very physically demanding game; players are constantly sprinting, jumping, and throwing. The rules are pretty simple, although they are sometimes loosely interpreted by certain players. The game begins with a kick off, where the burliest individual (usually CPT Sivley or MAJ Snider) tosses the Frisbee to the other team. The object of the game is to pass the Frisbee down the field to your teammates. If the Frisbee is dropped, goes out of bounds, or is intercepted by the other team, it is now the other team's offensive possession. One point is awarded when the Frisbee is caught in the end-zone by the offensive team. It's really a lot like football without all the stopping, resting and physical contact; at least it is most of the time.

During my first Officer Physical Training (OPT) session with the 65th I learned the deep devotion to "disc" that is

## Ultimate Frisbee: Not Just For Hippies



*Above: A flashback to a game against our sister battalion, 84th EN BN, in Hawaii's own Central Oahu Park. LTC Petersen and CPT Chen (red shirts) each jump up to grab the Frisbee as players from 84th (black shirts) go for a block.*





ever present in the battalion. I didn't even know the difference between regulation size Ultimate Frisbees and unsanctioned Ultimate Frisbees. I now look back on those days and laugh at how uncultured I was. In the battalion we have various skill and experience levels of "disc" players. At the experienced end of the spectrum we have 2LT Ian Clowes, who actually played inter-collegiate Frisbee on the Yale Ultimate Frisbee team. I've seen his jersey and it's very impressive. Then we have players like 2LT Keith Douglass, who was a horrible Frisbee player at the start of his career, but through his dedication and perseverance he has become very mediocre. LT Douglass practiced countless hours, while at work, tossing a disc into the wall to improve his arm strength and stamina. Doug you're the man!

The 65<sup>th</sup> has a long history of disc throwing/catching excellence dating back to when they were the 29<sup>th</sup> Topographic Engineer Battalion. Although the 65<sup>th</sup> suffered a crushing defeat at the last BDE Organization Day, thanks almost entirely to CPT Tom Darrow's (7<sup>th</sup> Engineer Dive Team Commander) ill-fated clearance in the waning moments, we will rise from the ashes. Additionally, CPT Darrow will have likely PCS'ed so we can finally beat the 84<sup>th</sup> EN BN in a much anticipated rematch. CPT Darrow if you're reading this, I'm sorry man, it's just *real talk*.

Frisbee is also a great motivator for a lot of officers and Soldiers in the battalion. It breaks up the monotony of normal workout regimens of lifting weights and doing cardio in the gym. It brings most of us back to our sporting roots and lets that competitive fire burn on the field, if only for one hour a week. When we're out there on Bowen field each Saturday participating in sport, it feels just like we're back at home playing at Schofield Barracks or Central Oahu Park. For certain officers of the battalion, once a week "Ultimate" is not enough to quench the competitive thirst. Generally about 8 of us will meet mid-week in an impromptu pick-up game, scheduled by e-mail of course, to remain sharp.

So I urge all of you to go to your local discount store and pick up a disc of regulation size, 175 grams, and begin the "Ultimate" journey, because after all, Frisbee is not just for Hippies.



*Above: CPT Gray performs one of his famous "between the legs" throws as CPT Kubar, CAPT Barry Mulligan, LTC Petersen, CPT Vashon, CPT Moniot, 1LT Vu and CPT Kevin Horrigan watch; CPT Darrow and CPT Chen run up and keep eyes on 1LT Dusty Turner as he stretches upwards for the Frisbee.*



## *The Ultimate Experience*

By 2LT Taylor Oney

Being a late deployer to the unit, I came with many questions and uncertainties. When I arrived in Hawaii in mid-November, the 65<sup>th</sup> EN BN was all set to deploy, and the majority of the Soldiers were on block leave. That being said, I didn't get a chance to meet many of the officers before they deployed. In mid-February, about one month after the main body left for Iraq, I finally arrived with the rest of the Battalion. I was greeted by 1SG Juan Azucena, CPT Miguel Lima (my sponsor), and the Chaplain, CPT Keith Ferrell. After a brief tour of Town of Vengeance, they escorted me to meet my senior rater, MAJ Snider. Being new to the Army, I was really unsure what to expect. Would I be getting counseled on what my job was going to be? Or would I be subject to some humiliating, new Lieutenant initiation ceremony? With a million things going through my mind, I could have never thought of the first thing MAJ Snider asked me. "Are you any good at Frisbee?" he said. This threw me off a little bit, but, without hesitation, I replied, "No, sir, not at all."

Every Saturday morning, from 0700-0800, the officers of the 65<sup>th</sup> EN BN get together at the Engineer Field, which is an old dirt softball field, and play Ultimate Frisbee. To me, this was a disaster. I grew up playing all kinds of sports; baseball, football, basketball, and even a little soccer, but never Frisbee. Still, I kept being optimistic, thinking to myself, "It can't be that hard, right?" I was dead wrong. The first Saturday morning Ultimate Frisbee game for me was terrible. That game, I dropped all the passes that came to me, threw the Frisbee the complete opposite direction I intended it go, and couldn't guard anyone on the other team from catching the Frisbee. I left the field that day thinking to myself, "I really, really hate Frisbee."

The rules to Ultimate Frisbee were easy enough to catch onto. The game starts with each team lining up in front of the end zones, and one team 'kicking off' to the other, which one person will throw the Fris-







bee as hard as possible at the opposing team. The receiving team will then attempt to get the Frisbee into the defending team's end zone, which will result in one point for that team. However, the individual who is holding the Frisbee may not run or move around, or he/she will be forced to 'turn the Frisbee over' to the opposing team. You will also 'turn the Frisbee over' if a member of your team drops the Frisbee, or if it hits the ground. Sometimes, the individual guarding the Frisbee thrower will begin a countdown. If the defender gets to 10 seconds without the offence throwing the Frisbee, that is also a 'turn over' (I was also unaware of this rule the first time playing, and turned the Frisbee over a few times this way).

A few more weeks went by of playing Ultimate Frisbee, and I began to catch on a bit better. I discovered better techniques to catching and throwing the Frisbee, and with

that, I was developing better on defense. Over those weeks, I also began to understand how important Frisbee was to the other officers. It doesn't matter if there is a massive dust storm that morning, pouring rain the night before, or almost 90 degrees at 0700, we will play. Not even a General coming later that day can make them cancel Ultimate Frisbee. I also started to understand the significance of Frisbee. It isn't all about who wins and who loses (although winning is always better than losing), or who is good and who is not so good, but more about building friendships and cohesiveness amongst the officers within the Battalion. Not only was Frisbee becoming fun to play, I was also meeting all the officers I didn't meet in my short stint in Hawaii, and making friends with all of them. I believe that if it hadn't been for these Saturday morning get-togethers, it would have taken me much longer to become part of

the team.

I still struggle every Saturday morning, but I am steadily improving my game. I still drop the Frisbee every now and then, and I still am awful at judging how to throw the Frisbee where I want it to go, but I am much better than my performance on the February 21<sup>st</sup> game. While Ultimate Frisbee still isn't my favorite sport by far, I do enjoy getting out and having a good time with my fellow officers. I am thankful that the Battalion has this sport every week, and it continues to help us build camaraderie and life-long friendships.

*Opposite Page: 2LT Oney flings a Frisbee up in the air; Inset: CPT Amsdell and WO1 Whipp show off their throwing styles; Above: CPT Hallett and 1LT Thorell play Ultimate against the Iraqi team at COL Spider; MAJ Snider reaches to catch a Frisbee during a warm up to the game.*





## *R&R—An Essay on Military Travel*

By MAJ Aaron Dorf

Rest and Relaxation at is usually referred--Rest and Recuperation as it is formally known, is one of the most important highlights for Soldiers during their year-long deployment to Iraq. R&R is an entitlement that all Soldiers serving a 12 or 15 month tour are authorized, and it serves as a mid-point break from the mundane reality of FOB life and the rigors of combat stress. For many of the families residing at home station or elsewhere, R&R is a time to catch-up and reestablish old bonds, but few know the process and steps it takes for the Soldier to actually complete their R&R journey. Recent returned from R&R, I'll attempt to shed some light for the family members and fellow travelers on my complex, yet surprisingly efficient R&R journey from Iraq.

Shortly after arriving in Iraq, I was required to fill out a unit form that identified my top three choices for R&R. I was required to identify three, three week windows that I wished to travel and note if there were any key family events that would necessitate a particular time slot. I filled out my form requesting a leave window in mid-May and quietly put R&R into the back of my mind as five months seemed so far into the future. A month prior to the actual leave window, a group of leave dates came back from Brigade in order to fulfill the company's authorization of 10% travelers for the month. I was offered the date May 17<sup>th</sup> and happily accepted. This afforded my wife and I enough time to do some quick planning as she hurried to her laptop in order to purchase herself and

our daughter online plane tickets to the UK, the location that we'd previously decided to meet up for R&R. We had chosen on Europe for several reasons, the first being that it would help my minimize my jetlag due to minimal time zone differences, and secondly, act as a holiday rather than heading back to the routine in Hawaii [although for many it



is hard to call Hawaii routine].

I was forewarned by a number of R&R veterans that the hardest part of the R&R process was actually getting out of COB Speicher due to the ubiquitous dust storms that often plagued the area. As I will soon learn all too well, this warning foreshadowed a leg of my travel. It was rumored that it may take 50-60 hours to make it to or from my destination, but that failed to concern me at this juncture. On the night before my official leave date, I headed with bag and baggage over to the ADAG or departure airfield at 2200 and mustered in a large circus tent with approximately 70 other folks from COB Speicher and the

surrounding FOBs. Most travelers were awaiting R&R, while a few were on standby, waiting for available seats to take emergency leave or conduct mission essential travel. After approximately 30 minutes, several civilian contractors dressed in bright orange reflective clothing approached the tent and called the R&R trav-

dependant, in the morning. I promptly grabbed my gear and headed back to my CHU to try and get some sleep.

The next morning I mustered back at the same tent from the previous evening until roll call was taken—and again, I had made the list of flyers. The crowd was larger with the addition of folks that had transited from other locations late during the night which included a more robust group of emergency leavers. A chalk leader was selected from a group of volunteers and our ID cards were collected and scanned—this was another positive sign that we'd make it out of COB Speicher today. After milling around for another several hours at the holding tent, another final manifest call was taken, and our group of 60 or so headed towards a group of minibusses staged outside. Before boarding the busses, baggage was carried out to the pallet yard and placed on an Air Force 463L pallet. The pallet would be built by contractors and placed on the back ramp of the aircraft, and in our case, a C-130 Hercules. Wearing body armor and toting my carry-on assault pack, I front-loaded my pack and crammed into the bus to await transport to the flightline. It was approaching 1500 and our group was dropped off at the staging point; it was about 100 degrees, but bearable knowing the reality of getting out of Iraq was getting closer with each subsequent movement.

elers to attention and proceeded with the roll call. They called off your last four and this was in reference to the last 4 of your social security number. The response was simply to answer with your last name. It was like a scene from the 'Quick and the Dead'—those who either didn't answer, were not present, or on cloud-nine were promptly skipped and would ultimately miss the first R&R bird the next day. After about 55 names, the caller stopped the roll call and told those travelers who had been called to meet back at 1000 hrs the next day for 'Showtime'. I was good; my name had made the list and I would fly, weather

*Continued NEXT Page* ➡



*R&R Continued*

Walking to the aircraft, I quickly realized why humans don't hang out in saunas too long: with engines turning, the heat blast behind the aircraft was stifling and probably upwards of 145 degrees. Wearing full PPE or Personal Protective Equipment consisting of body armor, Kevlar helmet, gloves, eye protection, ear protection, and a flame retardant uniform, I felt protected except I for the fact that sweat was now profusely running down my chest and back. Entering the aircraft was orderly with two lines quickly filling in the side-facing jump seats. After fastening my seatbelt and a listening to a quick safety brief from the loadmaster [which was really an orientation to where the air sickness bags were located], the ramp door closed and the aircraft taxied down the runway.



The take-off—steep and abrupt—usual and expected for transport planes in a combat zone, eventually leveled off for the approximately 1.5 hour journey to Kuwait. At cruising altitude, the A/C started to crank and the inside of the plane finally cooled below 100 degrees. This was further helped when the loadmaster gave the signal for us to remove our ballistic helmets. The ride was typical for a C-130 except for the odd fact that one of the crew members descended from the cockpit and gave the impression of putting what looked like cookie dough into what appeared to be a small oven across from the cockpit stairs. Now, it had been a long day, it was hot, and I was probably delirious, but I am sure of what I saw. My suspicions were quickly confirmed by the smell

of warm melted chocolate that permeated the cabin. Sitting in the front jump-seat on the left side inboard row, I had good visibility of the in-flight cooking experiment and watched in earnest as I was still flabbergasted at what I saw. I had no earthly idea that these aircraft even had ovens or why anybody would want to cook on an aircraft designed to make you hurl. Most of my C-130 journeys in the past ended up with me jumping out the side door or walking off the back ramp, in full combat gear, into the blackness of night counting to four thousand.

When the crew member reappeared, she pulled the cookies from the oven, placed them on napkins, and walked over to the cargo, I mean passengers, and passed them out. At first, I had absolutely no intention of eating anything on a C-130 ride as I

had learned and relearned many times before that low-level flying and a full stomach were not a great combination, but the thought of a hot, partially melted, chocolate chip cookie seemed too hard to pass up. Cookie consumed, I quickly realized that was not the best idea, as the plane started its equally steep descent into Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait. Fifteen minutes of nap of the earth flying, we had landed and surprisingly I survived, although queasy—stomach intact. Exiting the plane, we loaded onto coach busses and traveled to Camp LSA on Ali Al Salem. Camp LSA or 'Life Support Area' is the main transit hub for Iraq and Afghanistan and is also referred to as the Theater Gateway. All the personnel from the flight retrieved their baggage from the pallet yard and formed into four

ranks outside of a large tent—simply called 'Tent 3'.

We were given some instructions by a Soldier with a bullhorn and told to follow him over to the Individual Body Armor (IBA) Warehouse. The group crowded through the door and packed in around a chest high countertop that contained piles of forms and shoe-tags. Once the room was sufficiently crammed, explicit instructions were provided on how to fill out the forms and tags. Forms completed, it was back into line to get stamped and drop off the body armor and Kevlar helmet combo. The IOTV with ballistic helmet attached were placed into a large white sure-pack box that was staged at the end of the counter. These crates were ultimately filled to capacity and palletized awaiting our return. Sans gear, I was relieved that I wouldn't have to lug this lot of 45lbs around for the next several weeks. Soaked in sweat, I headed back to 'Tent 3' to continue out-processing.

I moved inside the large air-conditioned circus tent to receive one of the many briefings that were required to start the R&R process. I always wondered how this process worked, as each of my last two previous times in theater, I had not transited through this hub. Instructions, I pulled out my leave form for validation and then filled out the preferred destination ticket.

*Previous Page: The starting point—The COB Speicher ADAG; This page: The large McDonald's sign at Camp LSA which lights up the desert and is the beacon for many weary & famished travelers who find themselves camped at Ali Al Salem..*





*R&R Continued*

The destinations were broken into two categories, CONUS and OCONUS; for those unfamiliar with these terms, they normally refer to Continental United States and Outside the Continental United States. The local definition differed slightly from the norm, as anything in the Western Hemisphere was considered CONUS. All destinations whether in the US or not would entail flying first to a US hub city on a government chartered flight. Since I had already decided I would travel to the UK, I was moved to the back of the tent and was briefed again by the OCONUS liaison on the requirements for obtaining an itinerary. Interestingly, there were several Soldiers in the group that were still undecided on where they want to spend their leave but embraced the concept of 'have passport will travel.' There was one Soldier who was still unsure decided, and on the spot, based on several glowing recommendations from the group, determined that he would travel to Australia—

although not sure what airport he should fly to. Where should I go? "Sydney." It was decided—he seemed content with this choice and proceeded to fill out his paperwork and turn over his passport. Others were headed to Greece for a Mediterranean cruise, South Africa, Paris, and Thailand—every destination seemed like a brilliant way to spend R&R. I moved from station to station and acquired a robust collection of inked stamps and signatures on my outprocessing form.

I moved from Tent '3' to '2' to '5' before completing the full complement of requirements required for the final check. It was 1930hrs, I reached the counter and I handed in my stack of papers. The Soldier on duty scanned then into the system and told me to go back to Tent '2' the following day at 1630 to pick up my tickets and itinerary. I proceeded to the billeting trailer, received my tent number, and wandered into tent city. Camp LSA is essentially one gigantic holding pen for the myriad of travelers moving into and out of the CENTCOM

AOR. Row after row of tan colored tents in tidy rank and file labeled alpha-numerically best describe the site. Twenty Soldiers to a tent, plastic mattresses on steel frame bunk beds, and air-conditioning pumped through a large tube illustrate my new home. I wandered through the rows and columns until I found Tent 'J5', located an empty a bunk and dumped my bags. I decided to explore the camp.

The camp was abuzz with activity, Soldiers, Airmen, Marines, Aussies, and many other coalition partners and civilians dressed in a variety of duty and PT uniforms. There was a 24hr PX, assortment of Kuwaiti gift shops, and a fast food row. McDonalds, Subway, KFC, and Hole in One Doughnut lined the fast food area and each trailer-style take-out only restaurant had a long of Soldiers awaiting a tasty [?] treat. Behind the shops was a stage and seating area where MWR sponsored events were held, and on this particular night, it was a music and dancing show. Ironically, two local bands from Hawaii were hosted to perform a

range of local favorites. Complete with four dancing hula girls in Hawaiian print sarongs, it felt like a traditional luau, barring the fact that the air was bone dry, it was still over 100 degrees, and the landscape was devoid of anything green. Show complete, shops visited, I still had 18hrs to burn before I could catch my freedom bird.

Soldiers heading back to Hawaii or any other stateside destination followed a slightly different sequence of events. Based on their final destination, whether home station or any other regional airport of their choice, all leavers would take a chartered flight back to one of two domestic stateside hubs, Atlanta or Dallas. They were provided a muster time early the next morning and were divided into two groups based on their designated regional hub. The groups were large and consisted of hundreds of Soldiers from around Iraq and Afghanistan travelling for a variety of reasons—R&R, emergency leave, redeployment, TDY and the like—all however, eager to leave Kuwait. →



*This Page: Band shell and MWR pavilion with frequent visits by travelling shows to include the Hawaiian band and hula dancing.*





hamburger and small drink about \$10 bucks. This was the first money I had spent on food since deploying to theater and well worth it. Five hours to Frankfurt and a quick hop to London Heathrow, I had arrived at my destination to start my R&R. R&R was relaxing and a great time to catch up with family and I have provided a few photos for showcase my trip.

Fast-forward fifteen days. The journey back to KCIA from London Heathrow was uneventful arriving in Kuwait at 2200. I proceeded to customs with a large yellow card in Arabic with several lines translated to English. This was the Kuwaiti Health Survey card that was new and an added precaution to help mitigate the effects of the Swine Flu pandemic that was affecting worldwide travelers. ➡

*Top Left to Right: The 53 story high London Eye on the South Bank of the River Thames; A scene from the famous London Portobello Market; Center Left: The coolest building in all of Wales—located in the capital city Cardiff, it states something but lacking an understanding of Welsh, I couldn't tell you...but if you can read Welsh... Below: Big Ben, one of the most recognizable sign in Great Britain*



### R&R Continued

After being manifested, they were led into the lockdown holding area for the dreaded US customs check—or better known as the 'dump your bags' drill. Free of contraband and prohibited items, several additional hours of milling around, these Soldiers, dressed in ACUs, boarded coach busses and where taken to the military terminal at Kuwait International Airport (KCIA) and loaded onto a chartered plan for their long journey back to the states. Upon arrival at their respective hubs, they would receive their tickets and itinerary for the remainder of their journey and could finally change into civilian clothes if they desired.

1630 finally arrived! I entered

Tent '2' in civilian clothes and picked up my itinerary. When flying commercial from KCIA, civilian clothes are mandatory in addition to ensuring no military markings or logos were visible on both clothing and body [tattoos]. This is somewhat contradictory as most travelers are toting OD green duffelbags for luggage and camouflage assault packs as carry-ons. Civilian clothes had been designated on our packing list prior to deployment so I was prepared, but surprisingly, many Soldiers were unprepared and were subsequently required to borrow or buy. This led to interesting combinations as the small Camp LSA PX only sold a full complement of what I refer to as 'contractor' clothes: an assortment of tan

Dickies tops and bottoms and a full range of Dockers cargo pockets. These limited choices coupled with clothes available: a plain sand colored T-shirt and tan combat boots—not only looked bad but combined with a high and tight screamed GI. Itinerary in-hand, I was given a new time of 2100 and told to link-up in the Tent '5' bus terminal. Two more steps, three more stamps, and I was ready to board the bus for the 1.5 hour ride to the civilian terminal at KCIA.

Bright lights, expensive shops, and throngs of travelers dressed in traditional Arab garb filled the main KCIA terminal. As I passed through the smokey air and along the rows of duty free shops selling 'top shelf' liquors, I was quickly thrust back into a different world that I had left six months prior. I stopped off at one of the fast food joints and ordered a snack, as it was going to be an all-nighter to Germany and wasn't looking forward to traveling on an empty stomach. The official exchange rate was 3.3 US dollars to one Kuwaiti Dinar which hardly seemed fair, as this made the cost of a plain



# Kuwait International Airport

## R&R Continued

Several large thermal cameras were set up to measure the body temperature of travelers in an attempt to identify and quarantine any sick individuals attempting to pass through Kuwait. Temperature normal, I proceeded to the Health Officer, received my signature and stamp, and then proceeded to the immigration and customs counter. Soldiers travelling through Kuwait do not use their passports and are only required to have to their military ID card and orders. Passing through the turnstile I grabbed my luggage and headed to the US Military travelers checkpoint at the far side of the baggage terminal. I signed in, had my ID card scanned and was told that I could catch the bus back to Ali Al Salem if I hurried. It was scheduled to depart in three minutes. Scurrying through the ever-busy airport, I located the two large numbered doors at the far end of the terminal and jumped onto coach that was getting ready to depart.

On the bus ride back to Ali, I noticed a number of travelers who were in my group on the way out. It was interesting to hear their stories, especially the ones who travelled to more exotic destinations than I did. What surprised me were the ones that traveled to the depths of Central Africa and were hanker for an adventure in a country more disadvantaged than Iraq. The term fobbit quickly came to mind, but heck, it was their R&R. Through conversation, I soon learned the French Riviera was expensive and crowded with Italian holiday-makers, Cairo was hot and bustling, and the Great

Pyramid at Cheops is a world class tourist trap. I confirmed the Mona Lisa was still hanging in the Louvre, you actually have to cross through Palestine to get to Jerusalem, and it is a long damn flight from Frankfurt to Sydney, Australia on top of it being the dead of winter.

After arriving at Camp LSA around midnight, I hoped my next leg of travel would be a complete reversal of the steps that got me out on R&R, and at this point things were on track. The group of travelers from the bus gathered their gear and formed up; we were again given a flurry of instructions from a Soldier with a large bullhorn. Individuals were grouped together based on their end destination and I was placed into a small cluster travelling to Tikrit, the city name closest to COB Speicher. Some individuals were lucky enough to have flights out later that night and thus quickly scrambled towards the IBA Warehouse to retrieve their gear. For the bulk of us, we were scanned in, signed in, and were told to meet behind one of the many large destination signs behind Tent '3' at 0730 in the morning. Back to billeting and into tent city hoping for a few hours rest.

Kuwait is hot. Significantly hotter than any other place that I have been stationed. It is early June and already 115 degrees Fahrenheit by midday which helps to put into perspective why there are no plants or greenery for a thousand miles in any direction. This would later hasten my disdain for Kuwait and further my hopes for a quick flight back to Iraq, as ironic as



that may sound. The last time I was in Kuwait, barring R&R, it was freezing cold and I wore long-johns, a fleece jacket, and balaclava—talk about extremes. By the time the 0730 roll call came around, it was already 95 degrees and I was ready to leave. Roll call started, approximately twenty names were called off by the NCOIC in-charge of manifesting. She abruptly stopped and stated, “If I called your name, report back with all your gear at 1300.” There were some cheers and high-fives from those called. Roll call continued with another twenty or so names called, and again, “Be back at 1800.” This was followed by the dreaded, “If I didn’t call your name—be back at 1930 for roll call.” This is when my hopes for a quick exit began to vanish and my hermit life began—sleep during the day, wander the camp at night.

At the 1930 muster, the forty or so lucky folks who were given manifest times where back with the group which was not an encouraging sign. Although the weather was calm here, the ever-present dust cloud had apparently descended on COB Speicher and all inbound flights had been cancelled, and I later learned that this was the scenario for three days running. The group of individuals travelling to

Speicher was growing larger with each muster. Luckily it was first in-first out [unlike the unit motto], so I had a dedicated place in the queue, but it was something like number 85 and would require at least a C-17 for me to depart on the first pass. Everybody gathered around the NCO with the clipboard and she promptly belted out with a big grin, “No flights tonight, roll call at 0730.” Annoyed, I headed back to tent city.

Sitting in the tent for most of the day, I did my best to evade the penetrating heat. I had an interesting conversation with a fellow Marine who was transiting back to the states after a year in the Al Anbar province of Western Iraq. Finishing his third tour of duty, he too was tired of the desert and longed to see something green, and was excited about getting back to Camp Lejeune to start recruiting duty. He had been at Camp LSA for 4 days already and likened his experience to living on a ship. When underway, your life revolves around your rack, the galley, gym, and head. Translated—other than eating, lifting, or using the latrine, he could be found on his bunk reading or sleeping.





*R&R Continued*

This was probably a true statement for most residents of Camp LSA, but in it's defense, there were a number of MWR facilities to pass the time. There was a phone and computer center, albeit, the line could be quite long at times, some ping-pong tables, several TV's with 'B' movies and AFN, and lastly an area to play cards or dominos. These facilities were open 24 hours a day and were designed to cater to a host of individuals on different and varied travel timelines.

Returning to the large 'Tikrit' sign at 1930, I again hoped that tonight would be the night I would return back to COB Speicher. The ever-growing crowd of R&R returnees gathered patiently awaiting the NCO with the clipboard in hopes of getting good news. Again, the same forty names were called off for the two available flights scheduled for sometime in the middle of the night. Everybody else was instructed to be back for the 0730 roll call. This was starting to get old—I wandered back to the tent. One of the difficulties with getting a good night's sleep was that most travelers moved in and out of Camp LSA at odd hours, and a majority of the flights either arrived or departed during the middle of the night. For example, at 2200 your tent may have only two or three people designated as residents, but by 0300, it would likely fill to full capacity. With the lights burning bright 24/7, local maintenance crews showing up periodically to generate a dust cloud while sweeping the floor, and Soldiers banging around oversized rucks, it was not the ideal conditions for deep REM sleep.

The 0730 roll call seemed more positive with approximately 60 names getting called off and given manifest hard-times. I didn't make the cut, and again, 1930 was the next roll call; the group had grown into a company sized element so I was no longer in the bottom half of the queue. Unfortunately, the first forty or so names called were the same forty who were supposed to fly out the night prior. This time they had actually manifested, gone through lockdown, palletized bags, and moved out to the flightline before being scratched. I guess I really couldn't complain—they had gone through hours of gyrations with all of their gear, and I had simply gone back to the rack and gone to sleep—and ultimately we were both in the same predicament, stuck at Camp LSA in Kuwait. This time I made a point to check the weather forecast which showed that the COB Speicher weather should start clearing within the next 18-24 hours, so I set my sights on tomorrow and wandered back to my tent.

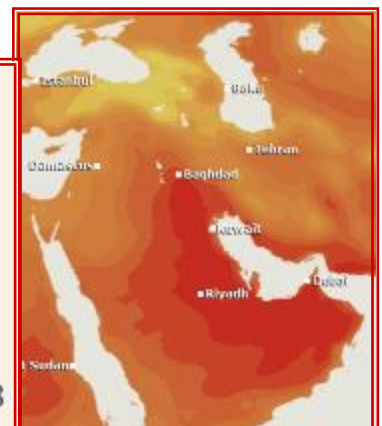
With time to kill, I decided that while it was cool, I would retrieve my IBA from the warehouse. I had wondered how this would work, as my IBA was thrown into a large surpack box with hundred like it without a care in the world on my way out on R&R. Would I have to dig through hundreds of boxes to find it or wait hours for somebody to locate and recover it? Upon entering the warehouse, I was directed to the back of the facility and gave my hand receipt to a fellow who was standing next to row upon row of IBA neatly stacked up again the side of the building. They were stacked alphabetically and each letter had at least three rows,

forty to fifty deep. Within several minutes, he had pulled my gear from the stack and I was ready to roll. This process was surprisingly efficient, but when you think of the volume they handle, upwards of 250,000 sets of IBA each year, they had better have a good system. The whole process only set me back about 15 minutes which gave me around eleven and a half hours to kill before the next roll call.

I had run into a number of Soldiers from our unit, some of which had been at Camp LSA longer than me and thus were looking for more creative ways to pass the time. A few had picked up bus tickets for the 1.5 hour journey to Camp Arifjan in Southern Kuwait. Camp Arifjan was built in 2000/1 as a replacement for Camp Doha and paid for initially by the Kuwaiti's in order to get their port back. Camp Doha was a legacy of the Gulf War and was limiting economic growth in Kuwait. Camp Arifjan serves as a logistics hub and is an anomaly. It can be classed as one of the few true permanent facilities in the region and is considered easy duty by those stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The buildings were constructed under the supervision of the US Army Corps of Engineers, the roads are paved, it has running water, and porta-potties are not found on every corner. It has the full gamut of amenities with a large well

stocked PX, swimming pool, movie theater, and housing with something other than a canvas roof. A side visit to Camp Arifjan, time permitting, was probably not a bad way to spend the day barring the bus ride.

I feel both compelled and obligated to comment on the bus rides, whether to Camp Arifjan, Buering, Ali, or KCIA, as this is most likely the most dangerous leg of any journey in Kuwait. Driving in Kuwait is manic and without a doubt less regulated than in the United States. The Kuwaiti roads are generally very good with the major ring roads into and around the city that are wide and modern. To take advantage of these roads, Kuwaiti's like to drive fast! The speed limit is posted at 120 km which equates to roughly 75 miles per hour but it is not enforced nor does anybody seem to pay any attention to it. Additionally, Kuwaiti's like big vehicles with the staple automobile being the Chevy Suburban. Large American cars of all vintages dot the roads with some of the favorites being the mid 80's Old Delta 88, the early 90's Chevrolet Caprice Classic, and of course, the venerable Ford Crown Victoria. Large Mercedes sedans and a full suite of SUVs make up the remainder of the traffic as well as the usual compliment of blue and white 'bongo' trucks.





*Re&R Continued*

Traffic moves along at least 80 mph with some cars cruising well in excess of 100 mph. This in itself is not to disheartening except that the Kuwaiti roads are busiest at night when visibility is restricted. This coupled with high volume makes any trip a knuckle biter, especially when hurtling along in a 25 ton bus cruising with traffic. Lane change signals appear to be optional and undertaking is the norm, but despite these shortcomings, traffic seems to flow. The busses are led and trailed by black or gold Suburban's with two mandatory shooters per vehicle, a precaution in place since about the time of the USS Cole incident in 2000. My two bus trips were uneventful, however; I am convinced that at least half of the bus's brake pads were consumed from several high-speed braking incidents and abrupt full-stops on the motorway.

It was starting to feel like groundhog day, the first forty as I am now referring to them, had actually began to memorize the order of manifest, as they had done this drill too many times before. The 1930 roll call started with the familiar, "Han—LaFlamme—Wittig....", and sadly, I too was learning a sequence of names consisting of random individuals who were getting paid to be doing something more productive than participating in a twice-daily roll call. They were again given an early morning manifest time with the remainder of the group, including myself, being relegated back to Camp for another 12hrs. Most of the Hawaii leavers who I had travelled from Iraq to Ku-

wait with had caught up with the group. Based on their leave destination, their travel was approximately three days longer due to the multitude of time zones they crossed and the physical distance they had to travel. They added to the growing number of individuals awaiting transport back to COB Speicher.

Two books down, I linked up with the group for the 0730 roll call. I looked around in earnest and didn't see the 'first forty'. This was a good sign and would ensure that my queue number should put me on the next thing smoking north. Roll call was started, my last four called. A few names later, the NCO with the clipboard stopped and stated, "Be back at 1230 with all your gear." That was the response I had been waiting for for three days. The weather was good and things looked promising. The transporter would be a C-17 Globemaster and it was going to be a full flight.

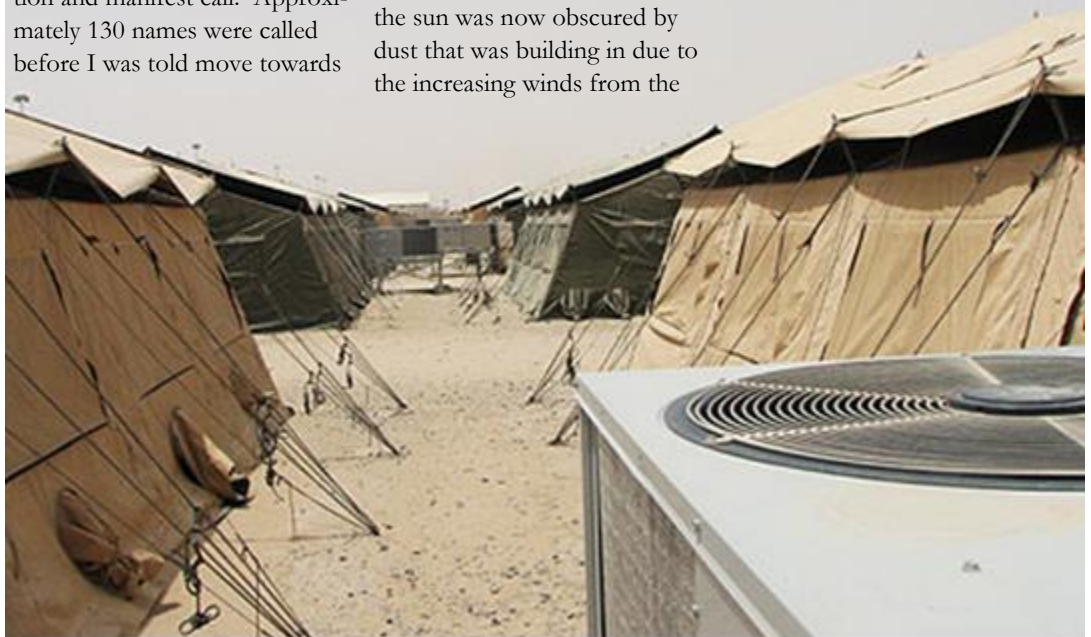
At the prescribed time, I toted my gear to the rally point by the aforementioned sign, formally checked out of my tent, and waited for the flight conformation and manifest call. Approximately 130 names were called before I was told move towards

several large tents on the edge of Camp LSA. This was the lockdown area and we were required to move inside the tents and await further instruction. It was 117 degrees outside and the quick influx of 65 personnel into each of the two tents causes the temperature and humidity to rise to levels far greater than the sauna we have just come in from. We were given our 'show time' and 'wheels-up' time hacks along with a quick briefing on where to palletize bags. A majority of the folks moved outside of the tents and sat outside under a shaded gazebo or trickled into the Space 'A' terminal, both of which were cooler than the tents. The Space 'A' contained a mini-canteen with cold Gatorade and snacks, all free of charge. With the temperatures nearing 120 degrees, a stiff wind picked up adding a dusty haze to the sky. I best equate this to sitting under a blow-dryer which was by no means was comfortable or remotely refreshing. After another 1.5 hours we were directed to suit up and file into the coach busses that had pulled up outside of the terminal.

The sky had become darker and the sun was now obscured by dust that was building in due to the increasing winds from the

west. The busses pulled up to the flightline and moved into position near the aircraft. We sat for 15 minutes and the busses started to move again—there was an uneasy feeling that we were going to be a scratch due to weather. I really didn't want to have to repeat this procedure like the 'first forty' had done for the five consecutive days prior to today. The busses circled and stopped behind a different C-17 and the rear doors opened. We were a go! I offloaded the bus and negotiated my way through a large group of Soldiers digging for their assault packs that were stowed in the baggage hold of the bus. I walked towards the aircraft and followed one of the two lines of personnel that had formed on the ramp and entered the aircraft. ➡

*Previous Page: Snapshot from the Weather Underground: 47 degrees Centigrade or 117 degree F on the first day back in Kuwait; Below: Snapshot from the CAMP LSA Tent City—Row after row of tents with large ECU's [environmental control units] or better known as A/C.*





*R&R Continued*

The C-17 was rigged with two rows of red jump seats facing inward along the outboards sides of the aircraft. Additionally, there were approximately thirty rows of seats, very similar to a commercial aircraft, placed in forward facing rows, five seats across. The jump seats were the first to fill as they offered the most leg room and ample space to stow your carry-on. The rest of the group packed into the airline seats and wedged their gear between their legs. I had strategically placed one water

bottle in my cargo pocket and two more easily accessible in my assault pack. This paid huge dividends as we sat on the ground, engines off for an additional 50 minutes in a rather warm aircraft.

Engines finally turning, I readied for takeoff and prepared for a short 1hr flight to COB Speicher. The C-17 is not only much larger than the C-130, but being a four engine jet rather than turboprop, it is considerably smoother and faster. The trip was uneventful touching down at Speicher at 1830 hrs. I piled

into a small shuttle bus that took me from the aircraft to the flightline, and then a Bluebird bus that travelled from the flightline to the departure terminal, better known as the ADAG. I was home. Home is probably not the best choice of words to describe the hot, dry, and dusty Iraq desert, but this was my place of duty and where my unit was stationed. There was a sense of obligation that allowed me to get back on the plane after leaving the comfort of my R&R destination. The air was at least 20 degrees cooler and the sun was setting as a silver Ford F-

150 rolled down the dusty gravel road to pick me up. It felt like it was only yesterday that I was here, and that in a blink of an eye I was back. Was I really gone for nearly three weeks? Was it all a dream? I collected my gear from the baggage pallet and headed back to camp. Since leaving London Heathrow it had taken slightly longer than four full days to get back to CPOB Speicher or just over 100hrs—regardless of the journey, it was well worth it. ■

*Top: Shot from inside a C-17 Aircraft showing the seating configuration for the ride back to COB Speicher; F-150 rolls down the typical Speicher gravel road.*





## TRU That!



*Above: Steps leading to an installed, in-ground water tank. The tank now provides running water to a CF Patrol Base in Northern Iraq.*

By SGT Kenneth Wise

What does TRU mean to you?

To C/84th, it is the Tactical Repair and Utilization team (TRU). It was designed to take on special projects around northern Iraq. CPT Painter stood up the TRU team on 1 May 2009 for small repairs and upgrades on surrounding COB's, FOB's, and patrol bases in Iraq. The TRU team has four members with varying skill sets, enabling their combined expertise to take on almost any project. They have an earthmover for horizontal expertise, as well as a carpenter, plumber, and electrician to provide vertical construction assets. The TRU team is headed up by SSG Johnson (equipment operator) with his TRU side kicks, SGT Wise (plumber), SGT Manzo (electrician), and CPL Bryant (carpenter).

Shortly after its creation, the TRU team started off with an upgrade to a sewage system at an old Iraqi Palace currently serving as a small base for CF.

They then moved onto creating walls for a kitchen area and a director's office for a JCC (Joint Coordination Compound) which benefits both CF and Iraqi security forces. This particular JCC is located in the city of Tikrit which is called by some, "the heart of Iraq". The project included emplacing some doors and insulation in certain working areas. The TRU team also completed a two-tier tactical operations center (TOC) complete with walls, framed imagery maps, mounted TV's, and radio communication boxes for the Iraqi security forces.

The TRU team is currently preparing a three-phase upgrade to a living, dining, and medical center located near COB Speicher. This will greatly improve the quality of life for CF that will be based out of there.

*Below: Pictures of the upgrade work completed on a Command Center to include a two-tier operations cell.*







# Through the lens....



Left to Right, Top Row: Taking a break—95th Soldiers beat the heat in the RG33's shadow; waiting for the next patrol—95th & their partner Iraqi's await show time; Center Row: Senior NCO's from across the battalion take part in a framing exercise and construct a wall section of a 20x30 SW Abut; 1SG Azucena squares up a board during the CSM's NCOPD session on vertical construction as MSG Montano supervises; Bottom Row: C/84th preps concrete from the concrete mobile as part of a ToV project; SGT Nunez from C/84th vibes the concrete with a 2x4 as his team mix the next batch





*Left to Right, Top Row: LTC Petersen promotes 2LT Vassar (FSC) to 1LT at the Sapper Tab in ToV; Mass Production....of maps, SPC Mass and 2LT Johnson print and laminate maps at the TOC; Center Row: 2LT Clowes looks through surveying equipment on COL Spider; SSG Silva coordinates with Jerry the interpreter and their Iraqi counterparts for a vertical construction project; Bottom Row: C/84th works hand in hand with Iraqi Jundi during the construction of a training facility at COL Spider; FSC Soldiers pressure wash a HMMWV in preparation of a scheduled service.*





## *Thanks from a Soldier*

By CPT Arben Vuthi

It was the beginning of our deployment to COB Speicher in Salah Ad Din province Iraq. We were trying to adjust to the new “Battle Rhythm” as we had (to use an Army slang term) “hit the ground running”. One day as we were having lunch at our dining facility, I overheard two foreign nationals that were speaking Bosnian to each other. Their words immediately brought memories from another one of my deployments to the Balkans

from 1995 to 1996. I usually make it a point to “soak” in as much of the local culture and language as I can. I had been quite proficient in that language. I summoned the courage to use “my language skills” and I approached the two men in their own language. I asked them whether they knew of any Albanians that worked here at COB Speicher. With a look of surprise, they replied in broken English and pointed over toward a large group of people that were dining together. The two

men noted they were all Albanians. “Yes!”, I whispered (not unlike Napoleon Dynamite). I was very happy that I had found people that speak my native language.

The foreign nationals that provide services to deployed US soldiers come from a variety of different countries either as KBR employees or its sub-contractors like the “Eco-Log” company that provides the sanitation services on our camp and throughout most of the theater.



*CPT Vuthi provides the opening address as an honored guest for a group of Albanians workers on Camp Speicher during the first anniversary of Kosovo's Independence.*



I approached the group and greeted them in Albanian. Much like the two men, they too were surprised to see somebody wearing a US Army uniform speaking their language. The familiar last name on the uniform also caught their interest. The rest of the lunch time was accompanied by numerous questions about where I was from, what I do in the Army, how long I had been serving in US Army, and such.

Most of my Albanian friends had worked at Bondsteel Camp in Kosova. They were hired for their skills as translators, electricians, plumbers, logistic specialists, heavy machinery operators, some of them even as administrators. Those “birds of migration” follow the Army in far away campaigns and provide useful services. They live and work seven days a week in a “home away from home” so we may have working facilities with running water. They are separated from their families and risk their lives so we may have clean clothes and other luxuries.

In spite of economical hardship in

their war ravaged counties, for Albanians, this is not just a job that they do in foreign lands. It is also a matter of pride and gratitude for America. In their minds and hearts, the US, which they truly consider “the greatest county in the world”, helped them achieve an independent nation’s status.

The workers from Kosovo and other Albanians that live in the territory of the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia have forged new friendships with their American liberators in

this war.

Since that day, in addition to my Army friends and coworkers, I made hundreds of new friends. I am invited in their/our holidays and always given a position of honor in their gatherings. When time permits, I visit them and we exchange the news of the day. They have made a great difference in my life and morale during this deployment. I am sure their presence makes a difference for all of us in Iraq and Afghanistan.



*Top: CPT Vuthi joins in a traditional Albanian dance; Above: Group photo of the participants at the first anniversary of Kosovo’s Independence.*





## *Partnership at K1*

The 511th Sapper Company continues to make great strides in their partnership efforts with the 12th Iraqi Army Division's Engineer Regiment. While they have mostly focused on individual skills such as robot operation, IED interrogation techniques using the Husky's "Ferret" arm, and land navigation, they have begun to add new tasks and conduct some collective training. They have added dismounted patrolling and actions upon finding an IED. The following pages are a picture gallery from several recent training events and these photos illustrate the quality and professional training they have provided their Iraqi counterparts. [EIC]

*Top: SSG Smith from 2nd Platoon, 511th teaches and assists an Iraqi Engineer how to calculate map distances using a protractor; Left: 2LT Kraus helps Iraqi Engineers improve their map reading skills at K1; Bottom: Jinoos are learning actions upon locating an IED while dismounted.*





*Top: SFC Reed from 3rd Platoon, 51st1th teaches Naqeeb (CPT) Jaffer, the Company Commander from the 1st Field Engineer Company (FEC), 12th LA EN Regiment learns how to use the Talon robot.*



*Above: SFC Reed coaches CPT Jaffer and an un-named jundi on how to use the arm of the Talon robot to pick up a water bottle and place it on a large orange highway cone; Left: Honing his skills, CPT Jaffer grasps the bottle with the claw while SFC Reed and his team watch from the control box.*







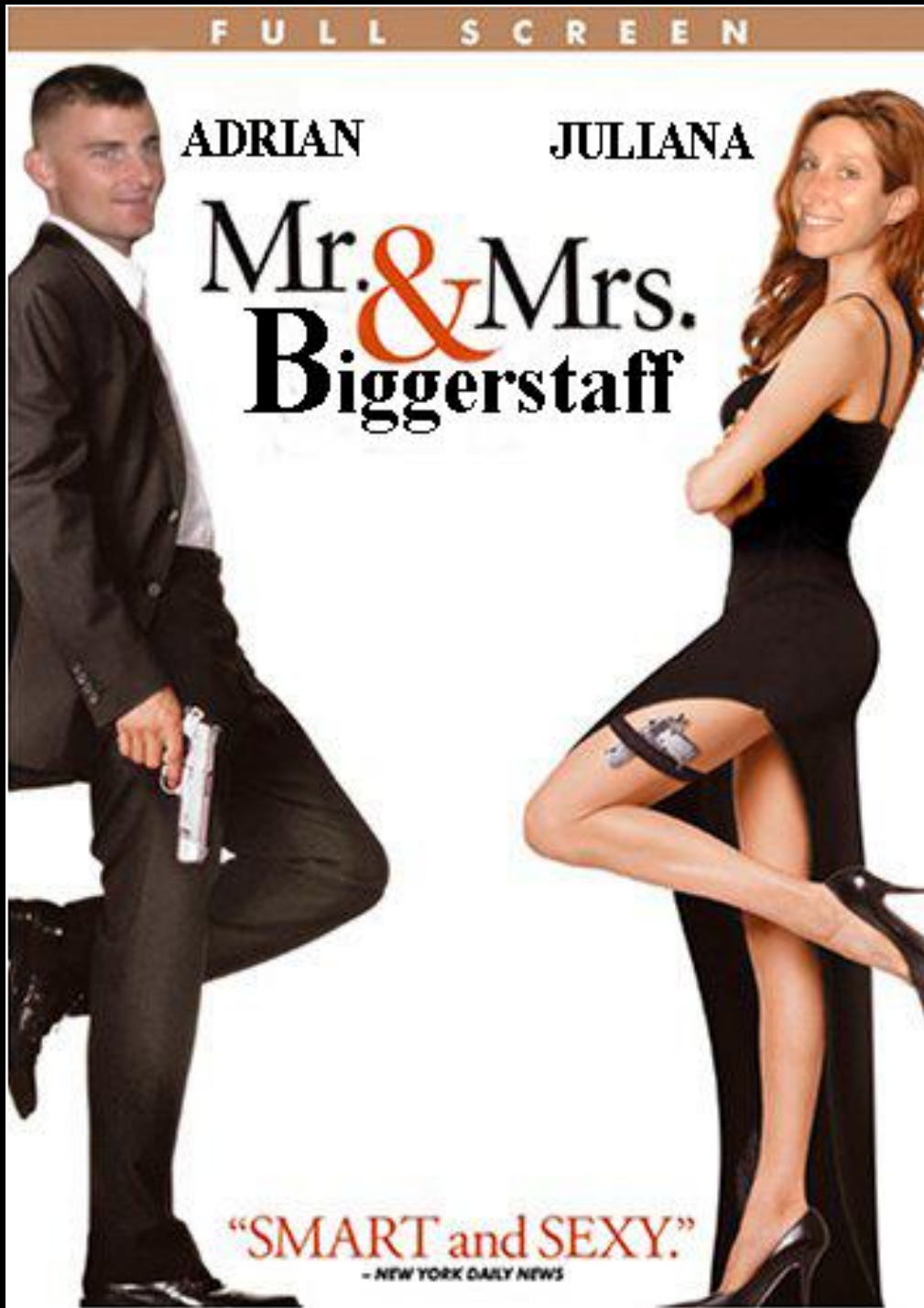
*Top: An Iraqi engineer spots an IED and relays his observations to the patrol leader as the 511th Sapper trainers facilitate the training; Left: SGT Cox and SSG Turley teach a group of jinood how to perform a 9-line UXO report in preparation for conducting training on an IED lane.*



*Above: SGT Cox conducts an After Action Review (AAR) of an IED lane successfully completed by the Iraqi Engineers; Left: The Iraqi patrol leaders call a security halt after spotting a possible IED as part of the training exercise.*

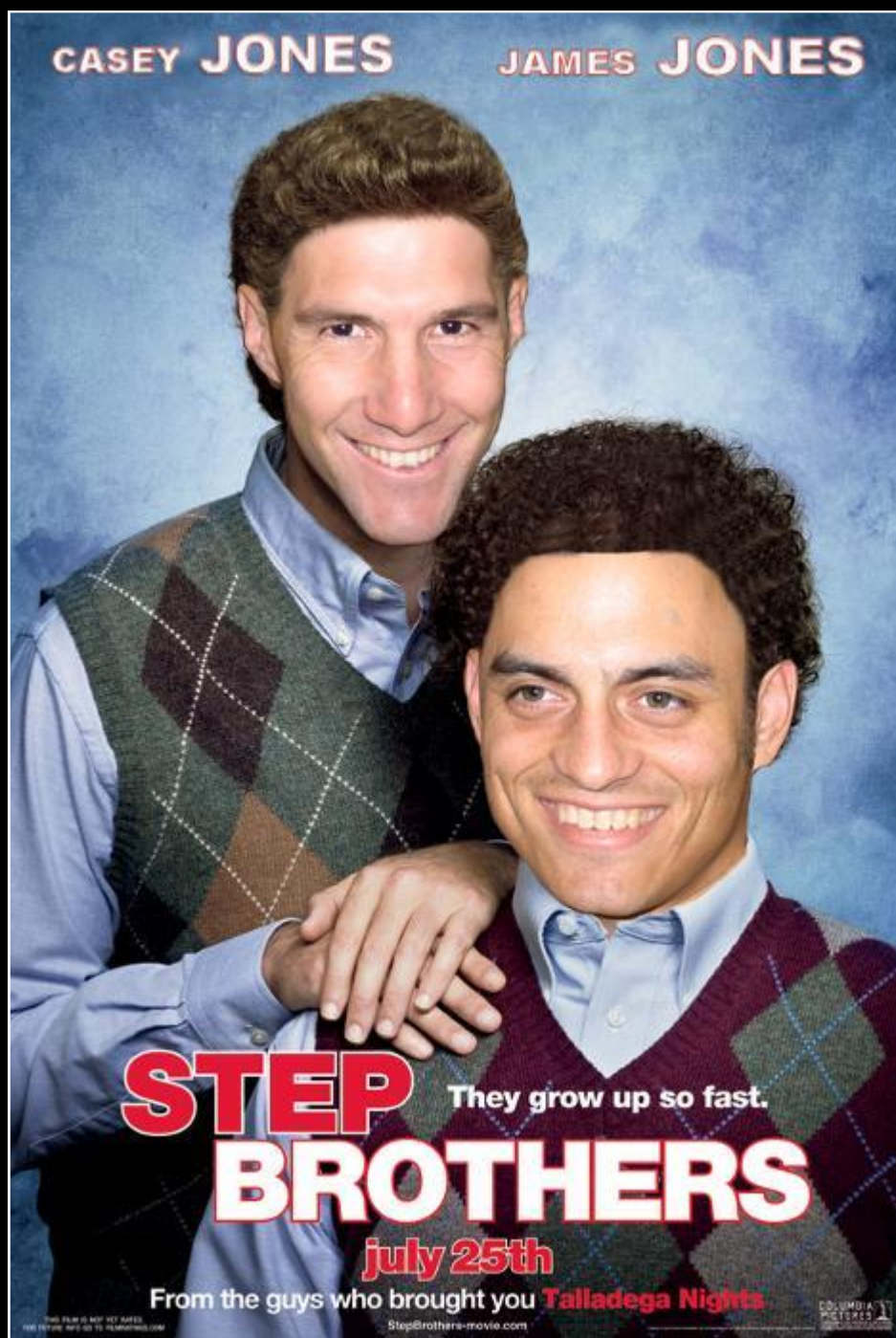


*The lighter side of Iraq.....now showing...*



A married couple, Adrian and Juliana, are getting bored with their quiet domestic life. What they don't know—is that they're both on orders to deploy, secretly helping to rid the world of IEDs and aid the development of the Iraqi Army. But, their exciting lives in the Town of Vengeance are about to collide when they find out they are tasked with emplacing an Improved Ribbon Bridge at Al Sharqat.





CPT James E. Jones and 1LT Casey G. Jones were both about 25 when James' mom and Casey's dad marry. The sons still live with the parents and they must now share a CHU. Initial antipathy threatens the household's peace and the parents' relationship. Dad (MAJ Snider) lays down the law: both slackers have a week to get a construction job. Off of the job site and with their respect for the 65<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion comes a pact that leads to friendship at the old fusion cell building in ToV. Hovering nearby are James' successful, [much, much] older brother Mark Kuhar and his XO Megan who want to demolish the building and build a proper TOC. Wolfpack 6 and the 95th team wants Casey with them to hunt IEDs in MND north. Can harmony come from the discord?



*Above: Sinks are thoroughly covered in a layer of dust from the strongest dust storm that we've seen here at COB Speicher since we've deployed; The floor of the bathroom sports footprints where someone recently walked. The dust storm raged on overnight as most of folks stayed in and called it an early night. Several convoys that were incoming to Speicher had to slow down or even halt outside the wire to wait until they could see far enough in front of them to proceed. Everyone spent a day that following week to clean their CHU.*

***June 17, 2009—The Dust Storm from Hell***



***Ladies and Gentlemen,  
This month, Task Force Trailblazer  
has been fortunate to snag two  
wins in the 18th Engineer Brigade  
Photo Contest.  
Congrats to the winners!***

***Third Place  
SPC William Rule, HHC 65th***



**"River Recovery"**

***First Place  
PFC Antonio Graham, FSC 65th***



**"Pause for a Cause"**

***Lets go three for three this month!  
Good luck, TFTB!***

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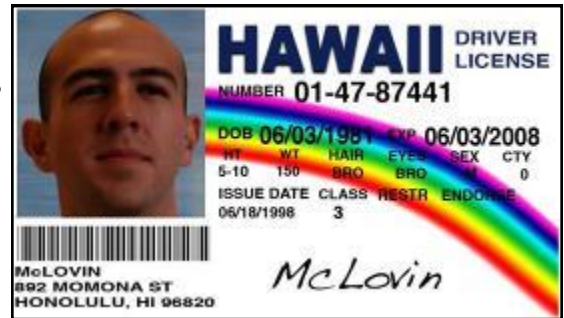
## Editor's Notes

Salaam,

Well this was a long newsletter and more are on the way. Inspiration seems to have swept the battalion as we near the half way point. I can't believe its really been 6 months. Time isn't exactly flying but chugging along well enough. A lot of that is due to the many missions that we have to keep us pretty busy. Even so, we all like to cut loose and have a good laugh every now and then.

While out at Al Sharqat, I was looking for Soldiers to join some of us for a meal with the IPs in their riverside tent. Due to the fact most every Soldier on site had already eaten lunch, it was difficult to find someone willing to join in the lunch invitation. I more or less tricked SPC Rule into coming out and eating with us. We both got a good laugh out of that one. We still do. SPC Rule promised to get me back and the "McLovin" license is the result. This is proudly displayed in the S-6 office and makes me laugh every time I see it.

The missions keep us busy, but the people definitely help lighten the mood and make time go by. Like I said, we all like to cut loose every now and then. Keep it up and the next 6 months will go by just as fast.



## Commander's Corner

Aloha Families and Friends of Task Force Trailblazer,

As I mentioned in the last installment, we are at a milestone in Operation Iraqi Freedom. After 30 June, the next phase of the security agreement begins—with US Combat Forces out of the cities. Although it doesn't change our mission or focus on developing the Iraqi Army Engineers that we partner with, it does change a lot of perceptions and how and when we do things with them. No TFTB units have been in the cities since we've been here, but we do travel through the cities. The main difference is that the mission for US Forces no longer includes combat operations

in the cities, but is focused on stability operations in support of the Iraqi Security Forces and the Government of Iraq. We are able to do this, because of the hard-earned security gains we've made in the past years—often at the cost of American lives. In short, this is a great news story. A story that many would not have believed possible even a few months ago. I'm proud that we are here to contribute, witness, and ensure the success of this milestone.

As testament to these gains, we recently completed a battalion staff exercise with one of our Iraqi Partner units that was a huge success. The insights and sharing of

information and camaraderie was a resounding success in improving perceptions and confidence in each other. Despite some difficult weather (heat and sandstorms), we stayed fully engaged throughout, and even had some fun along the way. The engineer regimental commander, LTC Hameed, takes every opportunity to share the fact that his team beat our staff officers at soccer; but I of course remind him that we outscored them by twice the margin in Ultimate Frisbee. All in good fun.

The next few months will be quite busy—especially in our construction efforts. Related to some of the out of the city moves, there is a high demand for C/84th, especially. We also are beginning to see Soldiers from the 130th Engineer Brigade arriving to take over as our higher headquarters. Change is constant during deployment. It keeps us on our toes and allows us more opportunities to share the lessons we have learned and the great things our Soldiers have accomplished. Thanks for all you do to support us; stay safe this summer; and take care of each other as we do!

First In, Last Out,

Trailblazer 6

