

The North Star

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Soldiers build bridge across Tigris River

By Spc. Dustin Gautney,
2BCT, 3rd Inf. Div. PAO

The roar of boats cutting through the swift waters of the Tigris River filled the air as U.S. Soldiers worked tirelessly, scraping away years of rock and dirt built upon a once-temporary bridge.

The bridge, which stood for nearly four years as a temporary fixture after the original was destroyed by a terrorist truck bomb, disappeared overnight as the local populace slept.

The permanent bridge was reconstructed and reopened June 20.

The removal of the temporary bridge in Qayyarah, Iraq, was over in an instant for the of the 239th Multi-Role Bridge Company, as well as Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment, 2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division.

The operation proved to be an example of military efficiency, as all evidence of the bridge was removed within 24 hours of arriving to the site.

"We stay pretty busy constantly building, repairing,

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Photos by Spc. Dustin Gautney, 2nd HBCT, 3rd Inf. Div. PAO

Above: Soldiers from the 239th MRB Co., from Granite City, Ill., pump water from the Tigris River to clear rocks and debris from the temporary bridge before removing it during a 24-hour operation in Qayyarah, June 20.

Right: Soldiers from the 239th MRB Co., from Granite City, Ill., prepare engineering boats to be used to move sections of the Qayyarah Bridge during a 24-hour operation, June 20.



Deployment reunites brothers after 17 years

By Pvt. Zachary Zuber
3rd SBCT, 2nd Inf. Div. PAO

The best memory I had of my brother was going to the airport when he left to live with his dad when I was four," said Spc. Joshua Wagner, a cook from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 296th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division.

After saying goodbye at the airport, the two brothers lost contact. With his own father not around, Spc. Wagner was placed in a foster home for a year until he was able to return to his mother.

Specialist Wagner spent the years afterward in and out of foster homes and learned to adapt to the new environments in which he was placed.

While he moved, his younger brother and sister were separated and Spc. Wagner did his best to stay in contact and support them through their difficulties.

This is a quality he may have gotten from his older brother, who demanded they stay together until the two were separated.

Once Spc. Wagner was on his own, he spent much of his time finding his own path during his youth.

He discovered activities, like wrestling, that he enjoyed throughout middle school and high school, but he could never quite decide on what to do after graduation.

"When I got done with school, I tried the whole college thing but couldn't really stay focused," said Spc. Wagner, a Red Bluff, Calif., native. "So I decided to join the Army because I always liked to cook and figured I could get more experience there."

Meanwhile life for his brother, 2nd Lt. Justin Wagner, was in many ways the exact opposite. Living with his father in Pennsylvania provided a more regimented childhood filled with chores, curfews, and an emphasis on school work.

"With my dad, there were a lot more rules on what I could do, which kept me from getting in trouble like we did when we were together," said 2nd Lt. Wagner. "It was a great childhood,

but I still always missed the old lifestyle with him [Spc. Wagner]."

As he got older, 2nd Lt. Wagner wanted to help kids growing up in situations similar to what he and his brother faced. When he started college, his goal was to obtain a teaching degree, but later his focus switched to criminal justice.

After he received his degree, he first worked in social services, but realized it was not what he truly wanted to do and started considering the military.

By this time the younger Wagner brother was a step ahead, working through the initial entry phase of his military career.

Shortly after Spc. Wagner graduated from Advanced Individual Training, he learned that his little sister had reconnected with their older brother through MySpace, an online social-networking site.

"When my sister and then my mom started talking to him about a year ago, I got his information because I just wanted to know how he was doing," said Spc. Wagner. "I found out that he was about to graduate from college and he wanted to know what my time in the Army was like."

Among many topics, the two discussed Spc. Wagner's career in the Army, and whether or not it would be a good choice for his older brother.

"At first I recommended he look into the Air Force, but I told him that with a college degree, being an officer [in the Army] would be great," said Spc. Wagner. "After a couple months he told me that he signed up, which made me really proud."

Since his commission, a congressional appointment to an officer, the two have had plenty in common to discuss during their phone calls and e-mails. Both went to the same training base, at Fort Jackson, S.C., and they were even in the same battalion. Now they find comfort and entertainment in hearing about each other's daily duties.

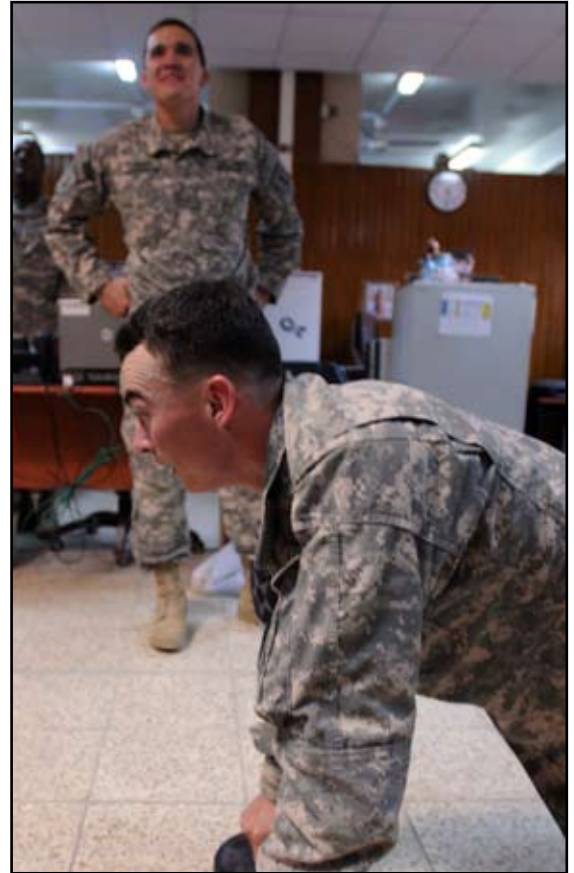


Photo by Pvt. Zachary Zuber, 3rd SBCT, 2nd ID, PAO
Specialist Joshua Wagner, a cook from HHC, 296th BSB, 3rd SBCT, 2nd ID, does pushups as part of his brother's office challenge. He visited his brother, 2nd Lt. Justin Wagner, an executive officer for Co. E, 1st ARB, 1st CAB, 1st ID, after they had been separated for nearly 17 years.

"He has told me a lot about what he does, and though a lot of it is different because he's an officer, we still have a lot of things that we understand," said Spc. Wagner. "When he graduated [Officer Candidate School], we were kind of hoping he would get stationed at [Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.] so that we would get to see each other."

Instead, 2nd Lt. Wagner was stationed at Ft. Riley, Kan., with the 1st Infantry Division. That did not dampen their spirits though, because soon after he found out he would also be deployed to Iraq.

"When I found out he was coming here, I immediately went to my leaders to see if we would be able to meet," said Spc. Wagner. "I never thought that I would be in Iraq when that happened, but my command said they

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Photo by Spc. Dustin Gautney, 2nd HBCT, 3rd Inf. Div. PAO

Soldiers from the 239th MRB Co., from Granite City, Ill., work to replace a bridge that was destroyed four years ago during a 24-hour operation in Qayyarah, June 20. The original bridge was destroyed by a terrorist truck bomb.

or even removing bridges," said Spc. Matthew Ellard, 239th MRB Co., and a Granite City, Ill., native.

Based out of Balad Airbase, in western Iraq, the unit is currently one of only two multi-role bridge companies currently active in Iraq, said Spc. Ellard.

"Basically, in covering all of western Iraq we're constantly travelling, and our vehicles already have over a million miles combined on them," Spc. Ellard said.

The Qayyarah Bridge, a military pontoon bridge, was meant to be a temporary fix until a more permanent structure was constructed, said Spc. Andrew Chetta,

239th MRB Co., and a Granite City, Ill., native.

"Because this is a floating bridge, it required us to use about a dozen boats to move each individual section across the river to be loaded onto the trucks," said Spc. Chetta. "The difficulty is before moving each section, they must be cleared of all debris before it can be folded."

"This can be an arduous process," agreed Spc. Ellard. "Because the bridge is covered with four years of sand and rocks, we have to pump water from the Tigris River to loosen the impacted debris before we can separate the bridge.

It's pretty tough work, but this is just another day for us," said Spc. Ellard.

After clearing the bridge, the support cables holding the bridge in place were detached and removed. Each section was then controlled by the boats, Spc. Chetta said.

"Doing this by moonlight is a tough and dangerous job. However, everyone takes safety extremely seriously. Everyone works in buddy teams, wears life vests and has chem-lights, so the divers can spot them from the water," said Spc. Chetta.

The workload and mileage shows no sign of letting up for the bridge company,

which soon will be the last remaining unit of its kind in Iraq.

"Starting next month, it'll only be us in Iraq when it comes to anything having to do with bridges, so we'll probably put another million miles on our trucks before we return to the states," said Spc. Chetta.

However with the daunting task of providing bridge support for the entire country of Iraq, Spc. Chetta is not discouraged.

"We aren't too worried about the upcoming workload.

We all love our jobs, and wouldn't trade that for anything," Spc. Chetta said.

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would definitely try to make it happen."

Second Lieutenant Wagner received a warm reception to the idea as well.

"My superiors basically told me that they would do anything I needed to make sure that he could come visit me, or I could go see him," said 2nd Lt. Wagner, executive officer for Echo Co., 1st Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Combat Aviation Brigade, 1st ID.

"We even set it up so that I would be able to go see him in Kuwait before his brigade goes home if he couldn't come here."

With the approval they needed, the brothers simply had to wait for an opportunity to reunite. After working with his command, Spc. Wagner was able to pack his bags and take a flight

to his brother's duty station at Contingency Operating Site Taji, June 18.

All those years separated did not change the fact that these two share an obvious bond.

Both have reserved personalities but were beaming with excitement to see each other. Quickly the stories started spilling from each brother, conversations that were 17 years in the making.

Those close to 2nd Lt. Wagner continually made comments about how his younger brother acted just like him. Specialist Wagner had the same outgoing personality his older brother remembers from their childhood.

"He seemed to get along with everybody he met here really well, and it showed he hasn't changed much from

when we were kids," said 2nd Lt. Wagner. "He always used to be the one that wanted to make everyone smile, and would do anything to get it done."

It didn't take much to get a smile from the siblings as they spent two days catching up on family, friends and work.

Though it was only a short reunion, they were able to make plans for their next visit and agree to take a family vacation when they both return to the United States.

"I'm still going to try and go to Kuwait to see him again, and we'll keep up through e-mail for now," said 2nd Lt. Wagner. "But we are also planning ahead for when we are both home because we have decided we want to take a vacation somewhere."

Task Force Marne Heroes of the North



Private First Class Jacob Bernier, of Taunton, Mass., is with 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division. He was a late addition to his team. Initially he served as a dismount, then trained as a gunner. He learned these positions very quickly, and immediately made a significant contribution to his team. As a gunner, he always displays a keen sense of situational awareness. He communicates consistently with his vehicle commander, alerting him of any possible threats. On one specific occasion before and during an emergency mission, he quickly prepared his truck for the mission and assisted the driver and vehicle commander in their duties, reducing the team's response time. As the lead vehicles gunner, Pfc. Bernier effectively used non-hostile means to clear traffic from the convoy's path to ensure quick movement and alerted the rest of the convoy of any possible threats and obstacles. His performance under pressure, exemplary situational awareness, and boundless initiative make him an excellent choice for today's Task Force Marne Hero of the North.



Private First Class Joseph Bobbitt, of Kansas City, Mo., is with 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division. He distinguished himself as the platoon medic during combat missions in Iraq. His commitment to the care of the members of his team distinguished him as a key member of his unit. Private First Class Bobbitt's quick decision making led to prompt treatment to relieve a possible life-threatening head injury to a fellow member of his platoon. Private First Class Bobbitt consistently ensures his platoon's medical equipment is fully operational, that the team is aware of his medical treatment capabilities, and that evacuation locations and capabilities are known throughout the platoon. His actions instill trust and confidence in him by the members of his team. Private First Class Bobbitt's commitment to the mission and the members of his unit set a sterling example of excellence for others to emulate and make him an excellent choice for today's Task Force Marne Hero of the North.

Crossword Puzzle

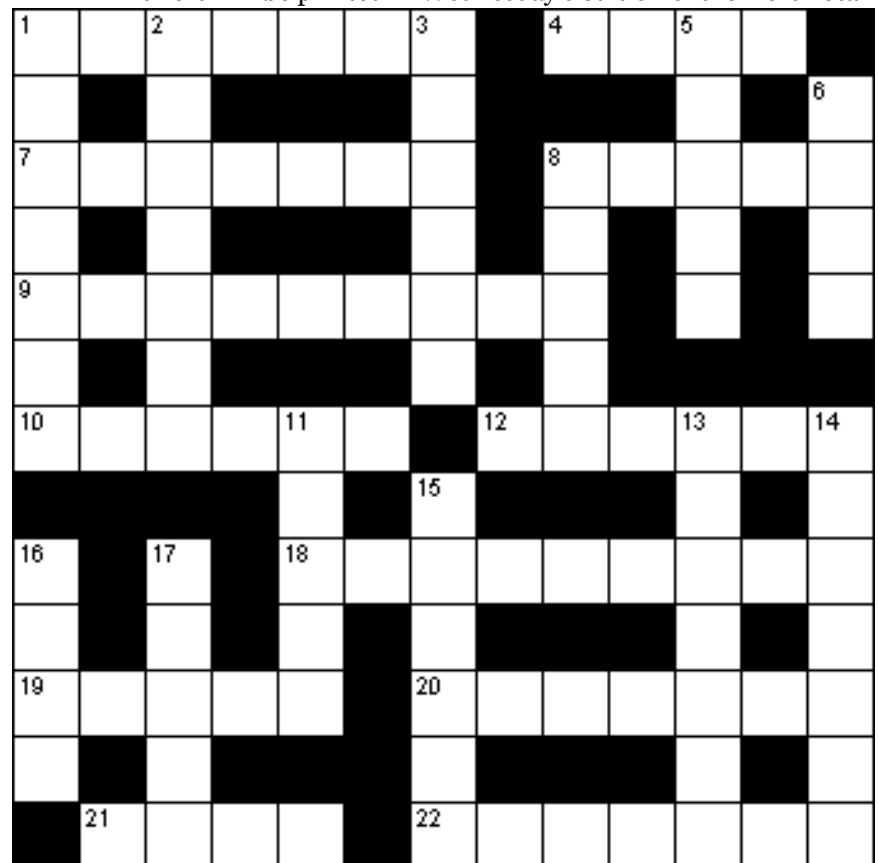
Answers will be printed in Wednesday's edition of the North Star

Across

1. Hamilton is the capital of this Atlantic island group
4. Continent
7. African river, aka Crocodile River
8. South American mountain range
9. Caracas is the capital
10. America's largest state
12. Island, southern Indonesia, east of Bali
18. Biblical town, near Jerusalem
19. Located in 9 Across, ____ Falls
20. Montgomery is the state capital
21. Tehran is the capital
22. Tirana is the capital

Down

1. Country in central South America
2. Bucharest is the capital
3. Group of Portuguese islands in the Atlantic Ocean
5. Asian river, flows from Tibet to the Arabian Sea
6. Capital of Norway
8. Historic San Antonio mission
11. Capital of Afghanistan
13. Manama is the capital
14. Capital of Uganda
15. Capital of Canada
16. Muscat is the capital
17. Mountain peak in the Bernese Alps, notorious for its North Face



USD - N WORLD CUP COVERAGE

Soccer brings Soldiers, Speicher together

By Spc. Michael Adams
TF Marne PAO

On the night of June 26, I was at the Main Morale, Welfare and Recreation Center on Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq. I watched the United States play against Ghana in the Round of 16 in the World Cup.

The atmosphere was something I had never seen before. Soldiers and civilians from many different nations around the world and all walks of life gathered to watch the game. There wasn't an empty seat. All of the TVs had people huddled around them. I have watched quite a few sporting events in my life, but I have never seen a group of people anywhere not at a stadium watching a game as intensely as they were this.

Fans were cheering the entire time. Except for halftime, almost nobody moved away from the TV. On a little outpost in the desert, the people there created so much excitement and energy, it was contagious.

There were many Americans there, that naturally cheered for the U.S. team. I have casually paid attention to the World Cup since I first saw World Cup games in person in 1994, when the games came to America. Fans in the United States never quite seemed to like the World Cup the way other countries did.

This time it was different. There

were Americans that were screaming and cheering for their team as much as Ghana fans were. Prior to this game, all over Task Force Marne, service-members were buzzing about the U.S. team, in the opening round.

To open the World Cup, the U.S. played a big game against heavily favored England, which ended in a tie. Then they lost against Slovakia, in part, because of what many felt were bad calls against the U.S. Then they won a hard-fought game against Algeria, securing a spot in the Round of 16.

People were sitting and waiting for the match to start close to an hour before the game began. It was a very intense, high-energy match, one of the best in the World Cup so far. But the U.S. team allowed a goal in the opening minutes, something they had done consistently over the last few years. Landon Donovan tied the game with a penalty kick against Ghana. But when the game went to extra time, Ghana won, 2-1.

Many American fans, including myself, went home heartbroken that night.

The Americans played a great game, but overall Ghana played better defense and played a better all-around game.

Still, it was fun to be there with my fellow Soldiers and people from all over the world to watch two teams from opposite sides of the globe play



Photo by Spc. Michael Adams, TF Marne PAO
First Sergeant Ronald Charles, the first sergeant for FSC, 1st Eng. Bn., watches the America-Ghana World Cup game, June 25, at COB Speicher.

against each other.

There is a saying soccer fans have: "Soccer isn't life and death, it is much more than that."

After that night, seeing people from almost every continent around the world watching that game, I have no doubt that's true.

That night I watched the America-Ghana game, to be one of many Soldiers and Americans to come together to cheer for our nation on the world stage. It is an experience I won't soon forget.

THE North Star

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1st Infantry Division
2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team,
3rd Infantry Division

3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team,
2nd Infantry Division
1st Heavy Brigade Combat Team,
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