



# The Desert Voice



23 – 30 May 2004

## Commander's Corner

TIKRIT, IRAQ & AO DANGER – Another week has sailed by us here in the Sunni Triangle and we once again enjoyed a very good week operationally. The highlights this week were the Commander's Conference, a visit from Major General Batiste, the Division Commander, and Rick Taylor and SGM Vandertie's birthday party on the island.

The Commanding General (CG) visited us on Wednesday. He spent some time at the Headquarters and visited Node Center 30 from A/115<sup>th</sup>. Originally, he was scheduled to come on Tuesday, a day earlier, but had to reschedule for Wednesday. Thus, being the Army, with the knowledge that the big boss was coming to visit, we ensured everything was nice, neat and prepared for Tuesday morning. Over at Node Center 30 they had prepared for the CG's arrival like only they can! SSG Behel had made a big pot of his highly sought after 15-bean soup, fried cornbread, fresh "maters", fried "taters" and freshly brewed ice tea, sweetened of course. With a spread like this how could we go wrong?

When the CG postponed morale soared! Not because he wasn't coming, because it meant more chow for us! So, a few of us gathered around SSG Behel's dining table and dug in. For a few minutes on Tuesday I forgot I was in a war zone, and felt like I was at Grandma's house for a holiday

dinner. Well, not exactly...SSG Behel is a very good cook, but sorry, you folks don't have the pleasure of knowing my Grandmother.



*SSG Behel from NC 30*

We also had a grand time at the Commander's Conference. All eight company commanders and their First Sergeants joined us here in Tikrit for a day of professional development. I'll spare you the boring business part, but we had a cook out for dinner on Wednesday and Thursday nights thanks to HHC. PFC Duran our culinary expert from B/125<sup>th</sup> served up some very impressive steaks. I



*PFC Duran and SGT Macias grilling delicious steaks and chicken at the commander's conference.*

have no idea where they acquired the steaks, but Duran can make anything taste good. We were entertained by Sandbox 20, a band comprised of members of the 11D band. The "dirty" horns were particularly enjoyable to listen to.

The week ended with a big bash on the island to celebrate some birthdays. Rick Taylor and SGM Vandertie's birthdays offered a good enough reason for many of their friends to enjoy grilled

mutton and chicken with pita bread in celebration of Rick turning 40 something and we won't even bring to mention SGM Vandertie's

age. Just joking guys! Once again

we were entertained by a live band with the added bonus of Rick's petting zoo on the island. Yes, they have goats out there. The two "Billies" and one "Nanny" serve as their Iraqi lawn care plan.

Before you begin to believe that we're living a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of M\*A\*S\*H, we are an Army at war. We haven't forgotten that by any means. This war just happens to come with a few luxuries. Thank you for the thoughts and prayers. It does make a difference!

## A/115th SIG

Company A Basketball Classic

This week at Forward Operating Base Danger, Alpha Company of the 115<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion has been in the street...literally. The soldiers of Alpha Company are



*Rick Taylor in his new birthday shirt...must be nice to be a civilian!!*

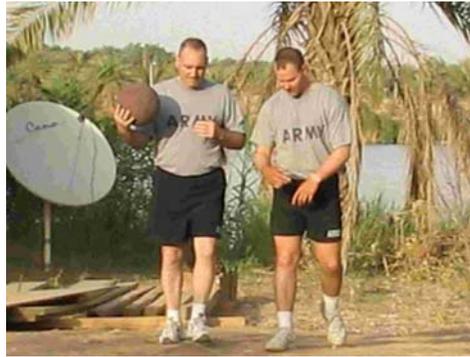
taking part in their own 2 on 2 basketball competition. It is being held in front of building 212. The contest, which was put together by Staff Sergeant Otto Nance and Sergeant Danny Vaughn, started this week. So far, 8 games have been played.

To begin the competition, teams were selected at random...drawn from the sign-up list. Once the teams were set, seeding was chosen randomly as well. Teams play to 13 points (1 basket = 1 point) to win. 13 was chosen because, "it's long enough to be a good game and both sides get to touch the ball," according to Sergeant Vaughn. There are no officials – players call their own fouls. Sergeant Vaughn believes that participants are "doing all right with 'call your own fouls'". All in all, it's been good."

A total of 22 Alpha Company soldiers are taking part. Sergeant Vaughn reports a "great response" not only from the participants, but all of Alpha Company. He says, "we used to play ball here in the evenings, but now that it's a contest, people are showing up to watch."

The winners of the Company A Basketball Classic won't go away empty handed. The American Red Cross has donated: "\$30.00 in AAFES gift certificates, 2 pairs of sunglasses, and one cup," according to Sergeant Vaughn. Start to finish, the double elimination competition is expected to last a couple of weeks.

*Specialist Sonya Harris  
26 May 2004*



*SFC Robbie Triplett and SGT Danny Vaughn discuss their strategy.*



*SFC Chris Stokes puts the moves on SSG Marty Jones.*

## **C/711th SIG**

The Transmission Section for NC15 has been hard at work since arriving at FOB McKenzie on 14 March. This section is made up of some of the finest soldiers in the National Guard. SFC Stanberry, the section supervisor, with 21 years of service, is their leader and motivator. SSG Odom and SSG McGrew are his right hand men, serving as team chiefs. SGT Miller and Specialists Hussar, Freemon, Berry, Glass, Floyd, Drinkard, and Hurd serve as the diligent and tireless operators of the V3s and the local RAU. When it comes to erecting a 30 meter antenna, installing a radio shot, or loading a frequency plan they are second to none. At least they believe it and that's all that matters to them. When not on shift, working on links or radio shots, they are tasked with the additional duties of KP

and Guard Duty at the Joint Operations Center outside the gate of the FOB. Though they may debate it at times, we think they really enjoy the guard duty. Now KP, that's another story. They don't believe that even their mothers like working in the kitchen!



*From Left to Right: SFC Stanberry, SPC Hussar, SPC Floyd, SPC Freemon, SSG McGrew Not pictured: SSG Odom, SGT Miller, SPC Berry, SPC Drinkard, SPC Hurd & SPC Glass*

## **(ON CONVOY.....AGAIN!!!)**

If they are not on shift or pulling extra duty, the priority is finding a cool and dustless spot to take in a movie, listen to tunes, write a letter home, hit the gym, or sleep. Sleep usually wins out, especially for SPC Floyd and SPC Glass. You would probably find SPC Freemon washing clothes somewhere. She hates dirty clothes. SSG Odom, SPC Drinkard and SPC Hussar have seen just about every movie made in the last ten years since they've been here. SFC Stanberry, SSG McGrew and SPC Berry prefer listening to music and relaxing in privacy. Privacy? Is there such a thing around here? Not when SGT Miller's around! He's always looking for someone to hear him say, "When I was in the Corps...". You will usually find SPC Hurd a pickin' and a grinnin' the lyrics to "I'm Gonna Be Somebody". We just agree with him! No, actually he's pretty good.

Well, they all miss home greatly but are proud to serve their country

with dignity and honor. If you don't believe it, just ask them!

## **B/125th SIG**

This past week we focused our time on Home Improvements. We have been working in old Iraqi Buildings along one side of the Airfield and living in NEW sardine can containers on the other. Neither side is what I would call NICE. So several weeks ago we set in motion an ongoing plan to improve where we live and work. This is an update.

Beginning with what is important, our physical safety, I will update you on the status of sardine can homes and what we have done to improve them. As we have spoken of in previous newsletters, our homes are thin walled aluminum containers made from the many soda cans recycled in the US. This is a result of a new government debt reducing plan, soda cans to soldier's homes initiative that may be making the news back home.

In a blinding case of the obvious, and as you may know from personal experience with a soda can, it is quite easy to poke holes in our homes. That is a BAD thing when we constantly have a group of bad guys lobbing large explosive devices at us. With that in mind we set about to HARDEN our homes.

A multi-million dollar study was conducted by the military and a group of rocket scientists on how to reduce the ability to easily poke holes in our new homes. Never mind that it was the same military genius that decided to have us live in soda cans in a war zone in the first place. Anyway, after much debate a consensus was reached that we needed to have thicker walls and a thicker roof. The military study complete, we

quickly moved to set their ideas into action. To harden the wall, we set up 6 foot by 6 foot by 8 foot large gray bags and brought in Engineers to quickly fill them with a ton of dirt each. This was an interesting event, with basically a construction crew working outside our NOT so sound proof homes for the past weeks.



This first task was just completely accomplished a few days ago and we now have a maze of large grey bags to navigate around to get into our homes, but the ability to poke holes in our walls has been basically eliminated. Our next chapter has us completing the on-going job of hardening the roofs of our homes with twelve hundred sand bags per home. The roof hardening project will be complete in a few weeks and we will write an update when it is completed.



Moving on to our other Home Improvement projects, we want to update you that we are actually installing a sit-down toilet for the first time in both the motor pool and the company command post. We figured it has been over ninety days and that we have suffered enough. We have always been privileged enough to have a toilet,

but an Iraqi toilet is just a hole in the ground with a small tank to flush water down it. Now we are living in high style. And just so everyone knows, the mechanics in the motorpool scammed a deal to get gold plated toilets instead of regular ones. For some people, mechanics in this case, nothing is too nice for their a\$#, literally. We also installed air-conditioning in our buildings and are working hard to get a company lounge stood up.

Overall, living conditions are improving. We have a lot of work to do to complete our projects but each day brings us closer to making our lives here better. We appreciate all of the support we continue to receive and all of the letters and packages, from all of the families of our many soldiers. It is truly a relief to know we have such a strong family support group. We appreciate everything that you do.

## **Alpha Company**

Alpha Company enjoyed another exciting week in the Sunni Triangle. We all know that summer is rapidly approaching and that can mean only one thing; more critters. The inhabitants of Iraq that we have the most day to day contact with are camel spiders, mice and wild cats (house cats, not anything cool like Bengal tigers). I like to think that we offer these citizens a safe refuge from the crazy world outside and an air conditioned place to enjoy a quiet respite just like any other Iraqi, but many of the soldiers feel differently. And therein lies the crux of the problem and the fodder for this week's newsletter.

Alpha Company soldiers are the most hardened warriors in the world, bar none. They have made the dangerous journey from Kuwait to Iraq by vehicle on

highways rife with danger. They operate every day in an environment that is considered hostile. They conduct combat patrols on those same dangerous highways daring any who would impede them from arriving at their destination safely to attempt to do them harm. But at the site of one little camel spider they all become screaming little girls.

Our first case in point comes from SGT Welch and SGT Williams from Node Center 51, here on FOB Speicher. SGT Welch is combat patrol veteran. He serves as a MK-19 gunner and can often be found at the free weights adding to his muscular girth. When he's not pumping iron he supplements his diet with the latest weight lifting supplements to ensure maximum muscle growth. While on night shift in the Node Center (camel spiders are nocturnal) SGT Welch and SGT Williams spotted a camel spider at which point Mr. Muscle Man, MK-19 gunner, became a screaming little girl and fled the tent in such a manner you would have thought Andre the Giant had appeared for a No Holds Barred Cage Match. The camel spider, which had entered the tent to enjoy the air conditioning and a little quiet time, was able to surmise after hearing high pitched screams and seeing a man 1000 times his size running like his back side was on fire that there must be something really scary in the area. He promptly fled the area and could not be interviewed.



***Macho Man SGT Welch***

This brings us to Node Center 50 at FOB Remagen. You'll remember stories in past editions of the nutritionally enhanced camel spider that was unceremoniously dispatched from the world by his captors when it was run over by a chair. Well, the night crew at NC50 got together and decided that they needed another pet. Wild cats, with the operative word being wild, are abundant here in Iraq. SGT Carter managed to corner one of the wild cats, with the operative word again being wild, in the platoon office. Up to that point, the cat was apparently enjoying refuge from the world outside the FOB, but being wild, had no desire to enjoy the air conditioning. When the cat started to dart around in an attempt to find an exit, SGT Carter decided the best way to calm the feline was to chase it with a stick. The cat apparently did not understand SGT Carter's intent and began a crazed attempt to find any exit possible.

It had only been recently that PFC Her decided to start shaving his head as he had no need of hair in the Iraq heat. The wild cat, with the operative word again being wild, caught a glimpse of PFC Her's head and decided it would be a good high point from which to search for an exit. As SGT Carter neared the cat, swinging this stick to calm it, the cat launched itself onto Her's head. PFC Her apparently did not understand the

cat's intent and immediately began batting at it with his hands. The wild cat, with the operative word again being wild, who never wanted to enjoy the air conditioning with SGT Carter and PFC Her in the first place, then jumped off Her's head and bounced into a wall. SGT Carter then gave up trying to calm the cat by chasing it with a stick and opened the door so that our fury friend could solace somewhere outside the FOB.



***Mr. Catapult - PFC Her***

And then we move to FOB Dagger. PFC Dickerson arrived one morning to find PFC Jagdar placing soggy pretzels into a box. PFC Dickerson then asked the question you're probably thinking right now, "Jagdar, have you captured a hedgehog and put it in that box?" "Why, yes I have" replied Jagdar. Dickerson then noticed that the hedgehog, apparently not a fan of soggy pretzels, was trying to climb up the side of the box to escape. Wanting to be helpful, Dickerson lovingly kicked the box thinking maybe the hedgehog hadn't seen the soggy pretzels and being jostled around would somehow help him find his breakfast. As luck would have it, the box tipped over and the hedgehog made his escape. He now lives with the camel spider and the wild cat, with the operative word again being wild, outside the FOBs enjoying refuge from the soldiers within.



*Hedgehog's view of PFC Dickerson before finding freedom*

However, Jagdar wasn't done yet. While on shift in the SEN, PFC Keuma spied a camel spider that was coming to join him in the hopes it could watch a true master operate his equipment. PFC Keuma, apparently misunderstanding the camel spider's intent, began screaming like a little girl and ran out of the shelter. Knowing just what to do, Jagdar went and got a can of bug spray. Meanwhile, the camel spider, hearing high pitched screams and seeing a man 1000 times his size running out of the shelter as if a ghost had appeared, decided something dangerous must be in the shelter and decided to hide in the wiring behind the circuit panel. And so Jagdar began his vigil of waiting for the camel spider to come out of hiding so he could lovingly douse it with bug spray.

Now according to Keuma, the camel spider was the size of his hand. Jagdar waited patiently for the oversized insect to appear. What he eventually did see, when the camel spider decided that whatever had scared Keuma so bad had left and the area was clear, was a much smaller camel spider than what Keuma had described. Jagdar, still stinging from the loss of his hedgehog, not only lovingly doused the camel spider with bug spray but began beating the camel spider with a magazine while

screaming a stream of profanities that would make a sailor blush. Unfortunately, the camel spider will never be able to join his camel spider friend, the wild cat, with the operative word again being wild, or the hedgehog in a refuge safe from Alpha Company soldiers. But we know he's in a better place now, safe from Jagdar.

The newest member of Alpha Company arrived this week when SGT Davis from "World Famous Remote RAU 50" became the proud father of Patrick Davis Jr. Pat Jr. arrived a healthy 7 lbs 1oz. and both Hannah and baby boy are at home and doing fine. Also, on 28 May 04, PFC Acosta was promoted to Specialist at FOB Remagen. His actual promotion date is 1 June, but since we were in the neighborhood we thought we'd promote him a little early. Don't tell anyone. We don't want it getting around he was wearing his rank a few days before his actual promotion date. He's been doing a great job supporting 9<sup>th</sup> Engineers at FOB Remagen and his promotion is well deserved.



*SPC Acosta and his team chief SGT Ryder at FOB Remagen*

Everyone here is doing well. The Fighter Management Pass Program is in full swing and we are looking forward to receiving more R and R slots for the month of June. Mail delivery has been great coming this way but somewhat slow going back. We're not sure why that is, but getting

mail is always better anyway. The weather is always wonderful and supply lines are staying steady ensuring we enjoy only the finest gourmet meals. Life in Iraq can't be beat. Wish you were here, XOXOXO

## **Bravo Company**

Greetings from FOB Warhorse!! Well it has been a week that we all appreciate here, "Nice and Quiet". All is well for us, as we continue to prepare for the increasing temperatures. It has been well over 100 degrees, and the temperatures continue to climb. As for 1SG Johnson and I, we traveled to Tikrit for a conference with the other Company Commanders and 1SGs and LTC Garrison. It was nice to see everybody, and have a relaxing moment.

It also gave me the opportunity to re-enlist SSG Aaron Wilson and SPC David Martin while we were



*CPT Donley re-enlisting SPC Martin.*

there. They were my first as a Company Commander, so it was special event for all involved. I was proud to re-enlist these fine soldiers, they have been performing magnificently everyday of this deployment, the Army and the Company are definitely better off with these young men around.



*CPT Donley re-enlisting SSG Wilson.*

I also had the opportunity to visit with some “long lost” family members, not any that are related, but in the family of Bravo Company, I had a chance to sit down and hang out a little bit with our brothers and sisters of NC53, that are currently attached to Charlie Company(keeping them straight I might add). It was very good to see 1LT Barry, SFC Harrise, SSG Manning, and SSG Washington, and they assured me that all of their soldiers are working hard and doing great things, but miss their loved ones and being home.

We also welcomed a new member to our Bravo family, we welcome LT Tibor Bagoosi to the company, he is taking the helm of NC52, he is a very welcome addition to the family and with his prior service experience and his experiences in 2-2 IN(where he was a BN S-6), he will bring new ideas, that will help keep this company successful.

I also want to welcome another member to our family. Now this new member is not your ordinary person, it is actually a thing. It is a “tree”. To some it looks like a bush, to me and others it is a tree. No what makes this tree special, is the fact that it is located in the company area. Also it is one of only a few trees that are on FOB Warhorse. It is a special tree, it seems to be thriving in the desert heat. To me it represents everything that all of us here want

to come home to, our families and friends. The trees we are used to seeing are in Germany or in the States, where we all had better times. At least when we get to look at our tree, we can all stop for minute and think of a better place we want to be, and near our loved ones.

## **Charlie Company**

Greetings from Charlie Rock! Temperatures are now hovering around 110 degrees on a daily basis. However, the heat has failed to affect anyone’s resolve and eagerness to perform their duty well.

Some would think that being deployed thousands of miles from home, to a combat zone, in the middles of a god-forsaken, 110-degree desert would make some soldiers think twice about a career in the military and that the Army would struggle to reenlist quality soldiers. Not so. This week we had the opportunity to reenlist SPC Deller, a mechanic, for 4 more years and an assignment at FT Hood, Texas. Reenlistment here in Iraq means a number of things for soldiers but the biggest draw can be the tax-free bonus.



*CPT Poston reenlists SPC Deller for 4 more years!*

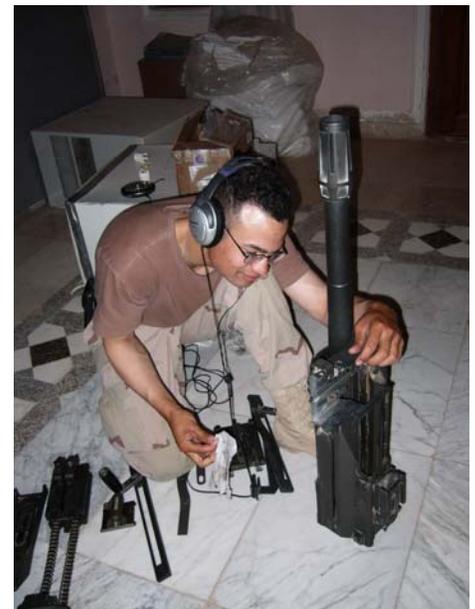
We also continue to have the opportunity to promote deserving soldiers while we are here in Iraq. PFC Stadtler was promoted to the rank of specialist after returning

from 4-days of R&R at Lake Dokan.



*PFC Stadtler is promoted to the rank of SPC.*

Charlie Company is also leading the way in the area of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) as well. PFC Wallace has started a FOB Danger Poetry Reading night each week at the MWR Palace. 1SG Brown and SSG Armstrong won the FOB Danger “Spades” championship. 1SG Brown and SFC Harrise’s basketball team finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in the post basketball tournament and SPC Alvarez won the FOB Danger “Mortal Kombat” tournament.



*Before a big “Mortal Kombat” tournament, SPC Alvarez likes to get pumped up by listening to some tunes and cleaning his MK-19 Grenade Launcher.*

Besides all of these other events taking place, Charlie Company has not lost sight of our mission to provide communications to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. Since we arrived in Iraq, LEN 54 and Node Center 53 have processed nearly 1,500,000 calls between them with a call completion rate of 95%.



*SGT Coss and PFC Luna work hard to provide outstanding communications support to the 1<sup>st</sup> ID.*

Although the situation here has improved remarkably, Iraq is still a dangerous place. A few local nationals who we hired to clean our area discovered a grenade (an old one) behind the company HQs. As the Company HQs and F54 both live and work within 20 meters of the outside wall this is the third grenade we have encountered. Two have not exploded and the third damaged no equipment or personnel.



*The grenade and the members of the C Company "EOD" Team (SPC Haselhorst, PFC Jones, SPC Holster) help the explosive ordnance disposal expert run his detonation cord in order to safely dispose of the grenade.*

As you enjoy your Memorial Day weekend please remember all those that have fought and who continue to fight for the freedoms we all enjoy. CHARLIE ROCK!

## HHC

Good morning ladies and gentlemen from the beautiful hot and sunny Iraq. The temperature is a wonderful 92 degrees and it is only 10:30 am. This week I have a special edition on the Commanders Conference held here at FOB Danger. Unfortunately, cameras were banned for part of the festivities, so you will have to take my word for it. ☺ The conference began with everybody arriving here from their respective FOB's scattered throughout Iraq. Our first evening, we had a wonderful dinner put on by HHC (Headquarters and Headquarters Catering). Well, that is not entirely true but it does seem like HHC does cater an awful lot. Anyways we all talked and had a grand ole time with a late night movie on the roof top with The premier movie being "Kelly's Heroes!"

On Thursday morning we had briefings covering topics from the network, redeployment, and the future of the signal corps as we know it. That night we grilled out. Here is a picture of all the Bn Cdr,

CSM, Commanders and ISG's.



*All of the Commanders and ISG's with the LTC Garrison and CSM Butler at the commander's conference*

Now, you ask who is taking the pictures? The Chaplin?



*CPT Gilmore doing ?? at the commander's conference*

Nope there he is doing ?? Well you can decide what that other hand is doing on his? Yes, okay it was CPT Miller taking the pictures. Oh, here is a picture of her! She really is not working, just ordering some more stuff on the internet. You know girls can shop, because if you look closely there is SFC Vinson behind CPT Miller ordering something on Amazon.com.

Back to the good story that needs to be told. Now we all know that we are not allowed to have alcohol here, only Non-Alcoholic Beer and drinks. We carefully replaced the labels on the near-beer so it looked like it was the real thing. Thanks go out to the



Chaplain from his buddies sending him all of those Budweiser Labels intact, must have been fun drinking the real ones. Anyways we tricked CPT Jon Long into believing it was the real thing. If you do not know him, here is a picture of him hydrating before the big event.



*ISG Johnson (standing), CPT Sweeney to the right of CPT Long and CPT Onufrak to the Left at the commander's conference*

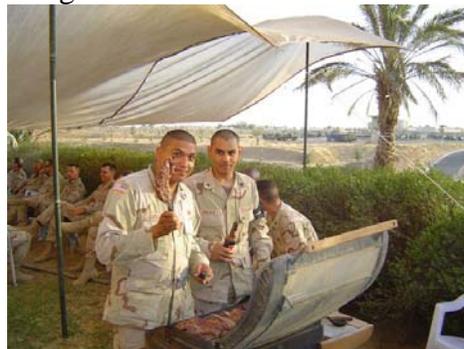
So, the night was young, sorry cameras were now prohibited for most of the evening. CPT Long took the first long neck and began to drink. He said "Damn this is the real deal!" of course we told him we got it from the local nationals. Beer after beer he drank. Then all of the sudden he started acting loopy and his face turned red and before you know it....it got out of control. The live band we had seen here:



*Sandbox 20 performing at the commander's conference*

included the lady in the pink shirt with the red scarf and the rest of the band. Well, Jon thought he could sing and dance better. So, up on the stage he went, stole the

scarf, wrapped it around his neck, grabbed the microphone and began to sing. Before you knew it the whole FOB was asking for an encore. CPT Long, did not suck, apparently, Mindy (Jon's Wife), had schooled him in the arts, must have been all of those Karaoke lessons in downtown Augusta, Georgia. After a few songs and his wacky dancing we all decided it was enough for the night. I drove CPT Long home and he was acting like he was drunk. Of course I could not break it to him till morning. Morning came and off to breakfast we went, I sat down with him and the first thing he said to me is: "Man, you have any aspirin I have a hang over!", "I don't remember anything that happened last night!" The best thing is that he still does not know! Other than that we all had a good conference and accomplished all of the goals we had set forth. Till next week see you all later. Jon hope you enjoyed this?!?!? Gottcha! ☺ Tough 6 out!



*PFC Duran and SGT Macias showing off their grilling skills.*

### **Chaplain**

You might remember that a few years ago, Timex Social Club came out with the hit single, Rumors. The chorus starts off: *Look at all these rumors surrounding me everyday. I just need some time, some time to get away from all these rumors. I can't take it no more.*

We all know and many of us have experienced the effects of rumors gone out of control. Yet, it is so easy to hear something and repeat it without thinking of the consequences or legitimacy of what we're saying. One of the most basic lessons taught by our parents is that we shouldn't repeat gossip. The Bible also has something to say about how troubling rumors can be. We're told in James 3 to be careful to control the tongue because, while it is a "small part of the body, it makes great boasts."

During this deployment, there've been plenty of rumors going around both at home and here on the front lines. The Battalion Commander tries to clarify many of them coming from our end in the Desert Voice, like R&R for instance. However, careless people often spread rumors about personal matters that can be devastating to relationships already strained by separation. To help you deal with people like that, here are few lessons we all learned from our grandmothers: 1) If it doesn't concern you, don't repeat it. 2) Even the truth shouldn't always be repeated. 3) Tell them you're not interested in talking about other people and change the subject.

Our marriages and other relationships are already under enough strain without the effects of rumors gone awry. We should all be careful to follow the advice of Thumper's Mom in the movie Bambi, "If you can't say nothing nice, don't say nothing at all."