



# The Desert Voice



10 – 16 May 2004

## Commander's Corner

TIKRIT, IRAQ & AO

**DANGER** – It was a slow news week from the Signal Task Force perspective. However, in our line of work this is a good thing because when we're not too busy it means everything is working. To paraphrase Gordon Gecko the character in the movie Wallstreet, "Green is good."

Conversely, it wasn't at all a slow news week in Iraq. The Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse story dominated every media publication and outlet. The story has affected us too. It is a classic case in how the actions of a few, leveraged by the power of the media can influence public opinion about why the American military is here and U.S. policy in this region. The actions of these few make us all look bad. It provided false propaganda to our enemies, and impugns every soldier, sailor, airman and marine. It undermines our effort to provide a safe and secure environment for the good people of Iraq.

The most powerful weapon the U.S. military has here is the support of the American people. Without your support our mission here is doomed for failure. The prison story may cause some soldiers to question that support. Thus, I encourage you to reach out to your soldier and reassure them that you're still behind them, and their efforts here are appreciated. The events that occurred in the Abu Ghraib prison will be dealt with expeditiously through our military justice system.

I'd like to thank the Stuttgart USO for their generosity. Since we've been deployed they have sent several boxes chalked full of goodies, phone cards, stamps and other useful items. Hundreds of people made donations. The quantity was quite overwhelming and the soldiers are truly appreciative. We've distributed the items equitably amongst the companies. Each letter, care package and prayer makes a difference. So for all of your support, the soldiers of the 121<sup>st</sup> Signal Battalion would like to say thank you.



CPT Poston, CPT Dooley, LTC Garrison, CPT Steyer and CPT Long on FOB Danger

## Alpha Company

Alpha Company has completed another splendid week in beautiful Iraq. The thermometer only managed to climb to a chilly 90 degrees most days this week. Woe be unto him who was caught outside without cold weather gear these past few days. We are counting the days until the shamals, which are blinding sandstorms arrive. I compare it to Christmas day, you know it's coming and you just can't wait for it to get here.

This week we traveled to splendid FOB Summerall. For those who haven't had a chance to visit, I honestly believe it is the garden spot of the Sunni Triangle. It has lots of trees and vegetation and an overall ambiance that can't be beat. I highly recommend a relaxing afternoon spent reading or napping under the trees. The SEN team F71 can be found there proudly providing communications for the First Infantry Division Artillery.

During our visit, PFC Navarro professionally known as Mario, related a tale of how during a recent indirect fire attack, he and PFC Wyrembeck, professionally known as Worm, managed to leave the dining facility, report in for accountability and take shelter in a bunker, all while simultaneously consuming breakfast. It's an accomplishment any team chief would be proud of, and SGT Miller, professionally known as Jake the Snake, is no different.

When we stopped in for our visit, PFC Bond, professionally known as Bulldog, had just returned from an escort mission he participated in with Division Artillery to escort howitzers from Kuwait. Why would an Artilleryman, professionally known as Cannon Cocker, want a Signal guy to help them with this task? Our guess is that to an Artilleryman, howitzer is a very big word, and they only know how to spell simple words like, gun. Obviously the paperwork to sign for the artillery pieces would say "howitzer", so they needed Bond

to read it over and make sure they were signing for the right equipment.



**Jake the Snake, SGT Welch, 1SG Frasier and Mario at Summerall**

Also on our travels this week, we journeyed to storied FOB Remagen, home of the nutritionally enhanced camel spider. When I entered the platoon headquarters area for Node Center 50, I noticed a hushed sadness in the room. I looked over to see SPC Turner with a tear running down his cheek. Almost at once I knew what a happened. I felt a weight in the pit of my stomach. "He's not here anymore, is he?" I asked. "No", replied SSG Jones, preparing his Black and Mild cigar to be smoked, a process professionally known as "freakin' a black." "But don't hate SPC Smith, he didn't mean to do it." I didn't want to believe it, but it was true. I grew dizzy as I learned the details of what had happened. During the night shift, SPC Smith and SGT Carter had put some ants and the platoon mascot camel spider on the floor to allow it train for its No Holds Barred Cage Match by chasing and devouring its prey. At some point, in the excitement of watching the food chain in action, SPC Smith rolled over the camel spider with his chair. If you remember, SPC Smith was standing on a chair screaming when the camel spider was originally captured. I guess there is some deep meaning here...

SEN Team F13, professionally known as the Wrecking Crew, has returned to the tourist mecca that is FOB Danger. I'm happy to report that they have returned from their travels in good health and spirits. In the short time since their return, they have managed to break two generators (one of the reasons we went to Remagen was to get them a replacement generator) and had a flat tire. You can't beat this team's ability to provide communications to the war fighter or their ability to destroy equipment.



**Jake the Snake, SGT Welch, 1SG Frasier and Mario at Summerall**



**F13: PFC Burns, PFC Escobedo and SSG Reese (SGT Hubbard, SPC LaCaille and PV2 Pirak are probably off destroying something)**

Recently, SGT Feerksen received a letter from a second grade class who had read the book Flat Stanley. They story goes that Flat Stanley was a seven year old boy who had a bulletin board fall on him while he was sleeping. Through some freak of nature, he was flattened paper thin, but managed to live. His apparently abusive and sadistic brother then tied a string to him in order to fly

him like a kite. As luck would have, the string broke and Flat Stanley began circling the world. Unfortunately for Flat Stanley, he ended up at FOB Dagger with the likes of PFC Rodriguez and SPC Dupree. Once he has completed his visit with F12 and F72 he'll be sent back to Mrs. Reuss' class in Missouri, where he will quickly come to the conclusion the world is full of insane people and he shouldn't leave home again. PFC Keuma, who didn't know the whole story, apparently believed that a mob tough named Flat Stanley was looking for him to get even for a past incident involving someone being hit with a board. Makes you wonder about Keuma's past...



**SGT Freeksen and Flat Stanley at FOB Dagger**

All in all it's been a good week. Next week we'll be doing a bit of traveling to do some promotions, which is always a great thing. We'll probably also need to take more replacement equipment to F13 at Danger. Summerall is slated to have a contract dining facility on 1 June, which means one thing; no more MREs for lunch. Hopefully soon Brassfield-Mora and McKenzie have the same setup. Mail is running steady and is the one thing that can always brighten an otherwise gloomy day. As always, wish you were here.....

## Bravo Company

Greetings from FOB Warhorse!! As many of you know CPT Dooley and I changed command on 10 MAY 2004. Let me begin this by telling you a little about myself, I grew up in Pittsburgh, PA, and I graduated college with Bachelor of Science degree in Management Information Systems from Gannon University in 1998. I have been stationed at Fort Bragg, NC, and at Camp Greaves, Korea before arriving in Germany. Well enough about that boring stuff, you want to read about your loved ones serving here in beautiful Iraq.



**B CO standing tall and looking good**



**Me giving "guidance" to LTC Garrison and CPT Onufrak**

Before the Change of Command Ceremony LTC Garrison was on hand to re-enlist SSG Kevin Johnson for 6 years. I like many others are proud to serve with SSG Johnson and salute his commitment to excellence and desire to serve in the Army.



**LTC Garrison re-enlists SSG Johnson**

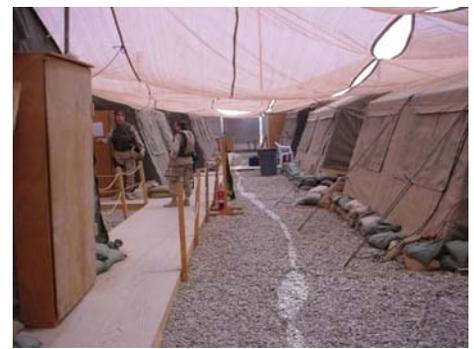


**CSM Butler here tires to sell "Contra-Band" to SSG Johnson**

The soldiers of Bravo Company continue to drive on and perform their mission with excellence, and many are coming up with ways to beat the extreme heat that is right around the corner. They are using every air conditioner they can find and are using the solar shades to the extreme. These soldiers are innovative, they are finding new places to put air conditioners for our shelters. Many of the ideas are being sent to the SYSCON so they can pass the ideas on to the other companies.



**Picture of solar shades. I Swear D12 at FOB Normandy is under there**



**NC22 all covered up**

We also got to welcome back some of our soldiers that were lucky enough to go on FMPP to Qatar. Qatar has a lot to offer the soldiers as they go on the four day pass. There is access to a PX, food court, swimming pool, and access to American style mall with many stores and shops that you would find in the malls in the states. Also we wish safe journeys to SPC Burnis Johnson and SPC Alvin Collins as they are the first from the company to receive some much deserved R&R.



**PFC Taylor Broussard and PV2 Wade Scherger in Qatar**



**SPC Hanif Abdur-Raheem hams it up in Qatar**

We are in a point of transition in the company this week. Not only did I accept the opportunity to command this great company, we also said good-bye to LT Michael Prudhome. He is on his way to 1-

18 IN to be their BN S-6. If Mike's performance in the company is any indication of the job he can do, 1-18 will be in great shape for the future. Filling LT Prudhomme's shoes is a big task, but LT Kato is ready to step and take the challenge head on. LT Kato has served this company well as Platoon Leader for NC52. We are eagerly awaiting LT Kato's yet unnamed replacement to lead NC52.



**LT Prudhomme and SFC Teriipaia discuss where to get some "Beer"**

I am also happy to report that life at FOB Warhorse continues to improve, we are now back to four hot meals a day. Also our own DJs in the company are beginning to make a big impact on the Saturday night club DJs SSG Hogan and SPC Jackson are bringing in more and more people every week to the club affectionately called the "Boom Boom Room". The success of the Saturday night club as extended to Fridays, SPC David Martin and PFC Joseph Sofia now play host to country and rock music fans and now on Sunday night with a Salsa Night

That is all for now from FOB Warhorse, all of the soldiers appreciate all of the support, packages, letters and everything else all of you do for those serving. Please continue the great work and have great week.

### **Charlie Company**

Greetings from Charlie Rock!  
This week was a rather quiet one at

FOB Danger with the company mainly focusing on sustainment operations and preparing for the warmer weather.

This week I wanted to focus on some of the additional duties that soldiers are doing outside of their normal job description. Soldiers continue to perform force protection missions here at FOB Danger to include Tower Guard and providing overwatch at the front gate.



**SPC Edwards on guard duty**



**SPC Lopez serve as a Tower guard at the FOB Danger.**



**SPC Dunlap provides overwatch with the .50 cal machine gun at the front gate.**

The Company XO, 1LT Nagelvoort, and the Supply Sergeant, SSG Reina, have almost daily contact with some of the local nationals as they hire local

nationals to perform work for the company. This work involves everything from filling sandbags and policing our areas to building add-on armor for our vehicles.



**1LT Nagelvoort and SSG Reina speak with local nationals.**

Some members of Charlie Company also took part in classes this week involving the fielding of new equipment that will help the unit provide better communications to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division.



**SPC Ogelsby and SFC Harrise learning about our new equipment.**

We also continue to improve our living standards through creative construction projects around the company. Our latest project was to build a small Internet café for the soldiers to check their e-mail and managing their bank accounts. Although the service is slow, it is 100 times better than what we had before – nothing.



**SPC Vanya, PFC Holster and SPC Wilkinson patiently wait for their e-mail to arrive.**

The soldiers in Charlie Company continue to provide outstanding communications support to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division here in Iraq. Your cards, letters, e-mails and packages continue to inspire and motivate us. Please keep them coming.

### **HHC**

Ladies and Gentlemen this week's article will concentrate on the buildings of FOB Danger. A little back ground on the palaces. Many of these have running water, plumbing, bathes and toilets. Now if you were to use any of them you would most likely flood out the floor underneath you or worse you living quarters. So, we use either the wonderful portalet which have



wonderful poems and artwork scattered randomly along the walls or trailer units converted to toilets and shower facilities.



Below is a picture of the wonderful Water Palace.



The water actually does flow underneath the structure. I am told that this is one of the best fishing holes on the FOB Danger. Don't worry we do not eat the fish; it is only a competition on who can catch the biggest one.



This palace is our MWR (Moral Welfare and Recreation) facility. The MWR facility has a dance floor, recreation, weight, cardio, bazaar, and movie room. Also, there is a pool inside, but currently it is broken with no real date on the finished repair work.



On FOB Danger we also have a few mosques. Here is one of the few mosques that are inside the complex. The next picture is the famous horse gate now without the two Saddam statues. 4<sup>th</sup> ID removed the statues shortly after the war ended.



Across from our palace is of course another palace belonging to 101 MI. This palace is mostly on the lake and has a wonderful lakeside view.



And finally here is our wonderful palace that we are calling home for our stay here in Tikrit, Iraq. The building is technically on an island since it is surrounded by water and connected

by a bridge.



Many of your loved ones live in this building. Don't worry they are all like Tim Allen and have built their own dividers and rooms to make them feel more at home.

If you have not heard from your soldier yet, the heat is on. That is right it is getting hot, hot, hotter and hotter. The other day temperatures almost broke the 100 degree Fahrenheit mark. Then Mother Nature gave us her first true sand storm. Winds gusts and sand at over 35 knots all combined with temperatures above 90 degrees. We were all thankful it decided to hit at night. Good day to you all and I wish you all the best of luck. My last picture is the sole thing responsible for our hot summer days to come.



Tough Six out.

## Chaplain

**How are you doing on the goals you set for yourself during this deployment?** We all did it. We all set some sort of goal or set of goals to reach while we were separated. It may have been a financial goal whereby we

determined to pay off this bill or that bill or maybe save up a certain amount of money. The goals we set may have been physical; something like, "I plan to lose \_\_\_\_ lbs and lift weights in the gym everyday." Or your goal may have been relationship oriented. "My spouse and I need to work on deepening our intimacy," may have been what you said. Maybe your goal was spiritual. Realizing you need God's strong presence in your life, you determined to grow closer to Him during these months. What WAS your goal? Can you remember?

This weekend marks the three-month "anniversary" of our deployment to OIF II. To some of you it has flown by and to others it has crept by. Whatever your experience has been, this three-month marker is a good time to sit back and reflect on what we've accomplished in working toward our goals. Have you paid down, if not off, that bill? Have you argued too much with your spouse? Have you grown spiritually? Have you trimmed down or increased your strength? Are your goals too lofty or have you reached them and need another goal? Have you forgotten that you even set a goal?

If you're not doing so well, let me give you a little encouragement to refocus on what you hope to accomplish. It's not too late to start again. Here are a few pointers to help you reach your goal. (1) Forget about your failures. We all have them and they can be an impediment to success if we don't let them go. Even the Apostle Paul failed, so he said in Philippians 3:14 that he has to forget "what is behind" in order to move forward. (2) Set realistic goals. Luke 14:28 tells us that the one who wants to build a tower should "sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has

enough money to complete it. (3) Place yourself around people who share your goals. Proverbs 13:20 says, "He who walks with the wise grows wise."

Goals can be a wonderful way to envision ourselves the way we want to be. Be disciplined and smart, but be successful in setting and reaching YOUR goals.

## A/115 SIG

Battalion staff of the 115<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion visited Alpha Company this past week here at Forward Operating Base Danger. MAJ Richard Curtis, Chaplain Mark Thornton, CSM Steve Boatwright, and Specialist Chad Willingham convoyed south from Mosul for 3 days. CSM Boatwright reports the trip was "to get out and visit our soldiers, let them know we're thinking about them."

The majority of the 115<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion, headquartered in Florence, AL is stationed in Mosul; along with a small number of Alpha Company soldiers. CSM Boatwright says the entire battalion is doing "exceptionally well." He credits the longevity of the battalion for the success so far during Operation Iraqi Freedom II.

CSM Boatwright has had the opportunity to visit several bases throughout Iraq. When asked how Danger compared to other locations across the country, he says: "bases are very similar and at the same time totally different. Each has its own uniqueness." While at danger, the group "made an effort to visit every section of Alpha Company." In addition, he and other battalion members were able to visit Forward Operating Base Summerall and Speicher where five remote teams are stationed.

The soldiers of Alpha Company continue their drive toward mission

completion, not only here at Forward Operating Base Danger, but in many locations throughout Iraq.

Specialist Sonya Harris  
14 May 2004



**CSM Boatright and MAJ Ricky Curtis of the 115<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion.**

## **C/711 SIG**

Charlie Company 711 is National Guard and we are proud to say we can hold our own, no matter the situation. Deep within the walls of the bunker that houses the C/711 CP, there works a soldier.



This is no ordinary soldier. He displays the true meaning of a Soldier in the Alabama National Guard. His history is long and his experience is vast. This is a person that would go to bat for any Soldier, whether in his chain of command or not. This man is 1SG Teddy Taylor.



Here at FOB McKenzie, 1SG Taylor can always be found taking

care of or seeing to the needs of his Soldiers. Although he stays extremely busy he always finds time to return to his roots, and when this happens you are guaranteed to get a taste of what your Mama might have placed on the table.

You see, 1SG Taylor has accumulated 31 years in the Army and the Alabama National Guard, 18 of which he spent as a cook. He has also worked as a Drill Instructor, OPFOR and Cadre Instructor for the NCO Academy and the Officer Candidate School with the Alabama State Military Academy. 1SG Taylor, when he is not dodging Mortars, Rockets and Convoys he can be found behind a teacher's desk or on the football field at Millry High School in Millry AL. Coach Taylor, as he is known in his other life, has been teaching school and coaching football for 25 years. When we return to the United States, 1SG Taylor or Coach Taylor's plans will be to continue his career in the Alabama National Guard until he meets the mandatory retirement age, which will be in two years. BUT, C/711 knows that 1SG Taylor will be taking care of Soldiers long after he leaves. So long as it does not inter

## **B/125 SIG**



Another week in sunny, hot, and dusty Iraq has gone by. We would like begin with an update on combat action here in our province to both quell rumors and make sure the facts are put out. It was a sad

week for 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry. At the beginning of the week, 1-21 Infantry was ambushed and we lost one soldier and had ten other soldiers wounded. It was a terrible event and some of the soldiers of B Company were involved in caring for and treating the wounded. Treating wounded is a traumatic event and I personally get that painful heartache just thinking about it. Keep that in mind when speaking with your loved ones and encourage them to open up about any stress they may be feeling while here.

On a more positive note, we are moving along on several of our projects to both improve our quality of life and our force protection. We have started work on the new company day room. We will write more on that project later, but suffice to say we will have our own company Starbucks and/or Sports Bar. We are even working on a plan to even bring in an interior decorator and get furniture from Iran. We have filled most of the protective barriers around our sleep areas now and are working on our plan for overhead cover.

We also need to catch up on some promotion announcements and some new babies in the Hele On Family. We promoted several people in the last few weeks, all highlighted below:



**CPT Campbell and SFC Harbst promoting PFC Duran at FOB OBJ Midland**



**SGT Vankampen prior to his promotion to SSG.**

James Vankampen, SSG  
Octavius Miller, SGT  
Jesse Biesiada, SPC  
Seth Brown, SPC  
Chad Kelly, SPC  
Mark McBurney, SPC  
Teresa Owens, SPC  
David Peabody, SPC  
James Short, SPC  
Frank Duran, PFC  
George Holten, PFC



**PFC Owens promotion at FOB Warrior.**

Each promotion was a lot of fun and I really enjoyed looking and each soldier and raising them to the next level. With all of the work ahead of us we will need all them and the work that they do for us.

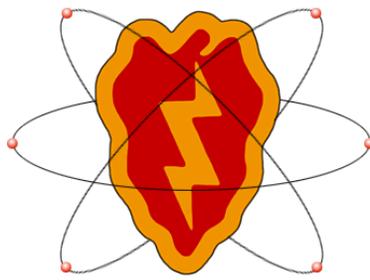


**SGT Miller's promotion on FOB OBJ Midland**

New additions to the Company's family in the last few weeks include:

Christopher Busby – Baby Boy - May  
Joshua Pratt – Baby Girl – April  
Pedro Correa – Baby Boy – April  
Jamie Heuring – Baby Girl – May  
We have had many new additions since arriving in Iraq, and each one is a special. Each soldier with a new child is PRIORITY for the two week leave program. Several soldiers are either already on leave or have taken it and returned. I must apologize for senior leaders, platoon leaders and platoon sergeants, being exempted, however. Leave slots have been restricted with the increased tensions in Iraq and we want to focus on our younger soldiers.

We appreciate all of the support that has been coming our way from the FRG. We have reports of care packages headed our way and that lots of funds have been raised for our return and those are both great things. We appreciate the support.



### **B/279 SIG**

The wind can blow hard enough so that one has to lean into it while walking in order to keep it from knocking you down. Signal antennas have to be reinforced with stranded wire to ensure they don't bend and break under the strain. And sometimes the wind blows so hard that the antennas must be lowered to prevent the eventuality

of breakage. Now when the wind blows even a little in the desert, sand and dust is whipped up in its path and takes on the distinct unmistakable characteristics of an industrial sand blower – peeling paint from vehicles and skin from faces.



Such is the life of a signal relay team in OIF II. In out of the way places, typically high enough to ensure signal capability, desolate enough that the majority of soldiers stay clear and barren enough to make getting out of the sun and into the shade as important as the signal mission itself, these relay teams endure the harshest conditions the desert has to offer.

Company B, 279<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion's Zulu 23 Alpha shot is in just such an environment. Team members, SGT Tim Otinger, SPC Alfred Principe, SPC Kermit Jackson, and SGT Richard Taylor bare witness to the harsh realities of the desert. Their wind blown faces and suntanned skin attest to the trials and tribulations of a signal relay team. Aside from the God given environmental challenges, the soldiers use burn latrines, have to depend on weekly LOG PACs for hot meals, water, fuel, and mail - and most importantly they rely on each other to keep themselves motivated.

But as grim as this may seem to the casual observer or the couch potato who dares not venture into the depths of duty, honor, and country – Zulu 23 Alpha's team

members will tell you, “It ain’t all that bad.” Yeah right! It is all that bad. The fact that these team members are able to make the best of a bad situation is testimony of their commitment, esprit de corps, and willingness to adapt and overcome.

This week we salute the team members of Zulu 23 Alpha. Their contribution to the successful mission accomplishment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Nodal Platoon, Company B, 279<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion, in support of the 30<sup>th</sup> BCT during OIF II, is greatly appreciated. Good job guys!



## SOLDIER SPOTLIGHT



**Soldier Spotlight:** SFC Susan Green

**Duty Position:** C/711, Platoon Sergeant

**Forward Operating Base:** Danger

**Home State:** Alabama

**Family:** Married to Ray and one child: Parker

**What she has to say about serving in Iraq:** This is a country that needs a lot of help but also needs to learn to help itself. I'm glad we're a part of helping them move toward that.



**SPC Sheppard having some fun at OBJ Midland**



**CSM Butler, 1SG Johnson, 1SG Brown and 1SG Frazier at FOB Danger**



**1LT Sutton and SGT Crumbly at NC 62 on FOB Speicher**



**CW2 Davis and MAJ McCaffery**