



The Sunburst Sapper



Volume 1, Issue 2

July 2006

The Resident Engineer Office for Najaf and Karbala

By Major Gene Griffin

I am Major Gene Griffin, the Resident Engineer for Najaf and Karbala. I'm responsible for the Resident Engineer Office, where all provincial re-construction projects are managed. Every province in Iraq is assigned a resident engineer office to provide the on-the-ground management for re-construction projects. Some resident offices manage multiple provinces.

The Resident Engineer Office at FOB Duke is located about 160 KM (75 Miles) South of Baghdad near the city of Najaf. I have two Air Force Non-Commissioned Officers, two Army Corps of Engineers Civilians and myself working here. We are responsible for the construction in Najaf and Karbala provinces. We work directly with the provincial governments to build projects intended to benefit the largest population possible. We build roads and bridges, schools, clinics, hospitals, water treatment facilities and networks, electrical production and distribution systems, communication facilities, police and Iraqi army facilities, fire stations and similar projects.

Sharing the joy of Iraqis getting power, water, and community facilities for the first time is a rewarding experience; the interaction with the residents and officials of the region is pleasurable. Actually living in the rich history of Iraq is at times awe-inspiring. I saw

Editorial Staff

Commander: COL Michael Herman
Michael.L.Herman@tac01.usace.army.mil

Command Sergeant Major: CSM Richard Mefford
Richard.mefford@tac01.usace.army.mil

Executive Officer: LTC Ken O'Connor
Robert.K.Oconnor@tac01.usace.army.mil

Chief of Staff & Editor: LTC Robert Spano
Robert.spano@tac01.usace.army.mil

G1 NCOIC & Assistant Editor: SFC Kimber Smith
Kimberlee.Smith@tac01.usace.army.mil

the ruins of Babil the other day! Even the provinces I serve have historical significance. Each province was thoughtfully named after their capital city. The capital of the Najaf province is the city of Najaf; the capital of Karbala is Karbala. Both cities are on the western bank of the Euphrates River – or the Forat as the Iraqis call it. Najaf and Karbala are the two holiest Islamic cities in Iraq. Najaf contains the shrine of Mohammad's cousin and one of the largest cemeteries in the world – I mean it is BIG. Some Muslims believe if buried there, they will enter paradise. Karbala has two shrines, each dedicated to one of Mohammad's grandsons. Each year, about three million Iraqi, two million Iranian, and one million other Muslim religious tourists go to Najaf and Karbala to visit the three shrines/mosques and traditionally walk the 75 KM between the cities. Most visit during the first ten days of the Muslim New Year – starting 18 January 2007 for the upcoming year.



MAJ Griffin on the road to Najaf



"So maybe we have a little work cut out for us to show them proper construction techniques"

Video Teleconference with Governor Schwarzenegger

It took a lot of coordination, but in the end it was all worth the effort to participate in a video teleconference with Governor Schwarzenegger. The Governor took time out of his busy schedule to speak to California National Guard troops deployed to Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom, to tell them how much he appreciated their service and sacrifice. After delivering an inspirational



SFC Dave Johnson poses with Governor Schwarzenegger, while the Governor addresses California National Guard troops deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.

message to everyone, he then took questions from California National Guard troops participating in the video conference at 6 different locations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The most popular topic of discussion was an invitation for the Governor to visit his deployed soldiers, and a request for the Governor to send some of his favorite cigars to everyone overseas. The Governor responded favorably to both requests, saying he will definitely send cigars, and try everything with in his power to pay the troops a visit. Overall, it was another successful mission for all those who participated.

Troops from Mississippi, New Jersey and Georgia round-out the "Sunburst Sappers"

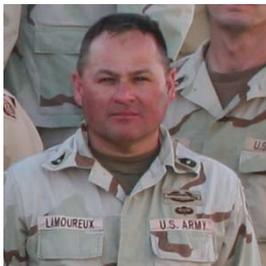
In a tradition that dates back to the beginning of the National Guard in 1636, the Engineer Brigade filled key positions in its structure with soldiers from other States. All of them have been an excellent addition to our team, and are now transitioning to be known as "Californians." The final phase of the transition will be complete when MAJ Ron Ford, a native from Mississippi, can say "dude" without the southern drawl.



MAJ Ron Ford, is from Tupelo, Mississippi and has been a member of the Mississippi Army National Guard for 19 years. Prior to deployment he was assigned as the commander of Camp McCain Training site in Grenada, MS. He has been married to Lisa Ford for 23 years and they have two daughters, Mallory 21 years old and Morgan 20 years old. MAJ Ford said, "When I found out I was going to be deployed with the 40th EN BDE to Iraq I did not know what to expect from the command or the troops. It did not take long to figure out that COL Herman is an outstanding leader and he had assembled an outstanding group of soldiers. I think the best compliment to the 40th EN BDE is I am proud to serve with them and would serve with them again in any environment." He is currently assigned as the OIC at the Victory Resident Engineer Office.



CPT Curt Keppeler was born in State College, PA, but grew up mostly in Stone Mountain, GA after his dad retired from the Army. He studied Chemical Engineering at MIT on an ROTC scholarship. After graduation and commissioning, he went on Active Duty and went to Engineer Officer Basic Course at Ft Leonard Wood, Missouri. After serving in Germany for three years as the XO of HHC, V Corps in Heidelberg and as a platoon leader with 82nd EN BN in Bamberg he returned for ECCC (Engineer Captain's Career Course) and CAS3, then served with FORSCOM HQ at Ft. McPherson, GA. In September 04, he came off active duty and began working in Philadelphia at a Sunoco refinery as a Maintenance Project Supervisor and Contractor Administrator. He had just taken a new job as a Maintenance Reliability Engineer at the refinery when he was called back from the IRR to deploy. CPT Keppeler was quoted as saying, "My post-Iraq future is a little unclear, but I am seriously thinking of moving to California." CPT Keppeler is assigned as a liaison officer with the 101st Airborne Division in Northern Iraq.



MSG Robert Lamoureux, originally from the great State of New Jersey currently resides in Manassas, Virginia with his wife and two children. He transferred from the Virginia National Guard to the California National Guard to participate in this deployment. In his civilian career, he works as a police officer with the Airport Authority in the Washington D.C area. MSG Lamoureux recently returned from a tour in Afghanistan where he worked as a senior NCO training the Afghan National Army in Infantry tactics. He also did a tour at the Pentagon as part of a security detail. He is currently assigned as an Operations NCO at a District Office in the southern part of Iraq.

Faces from around Iraq



SFC Leai Toele is caught in the act of cooking a whole grill of hamburgers for himself 😊



MSG Heple peeks through the door of Saddam Hussein's underground bunker entrance. This bunker was made famous on CNN, when it was reported that Saddam hid here during multiple missile attacks.

Arnold Schwarzenegger pays a surprise Father's Day visit to the San Pedro family of Angel Ortiz Sr., a National Guardsman serving in Fallujah, Iraq.

By Andrea Sudano
Daily Breeze

With their National Guardsman father away in Iraq for 18 months, the Ortiz children expected Father's Day to be just the start of a string of dad-less holidays



Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger visits with Mary, left, and Mariluz Ortiz at their San Pedro home

But Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger provided a pretty decent substitution Sunday, the kids said, when he made a surprise visit to their San Pedro home. "I was in awe," said Angel Ortiz Jr., 16. "He's a big superstar. I've never seen anyone that important in my house before. "The Ortizes were one of two Southern California military families to welcome Schwarzenegger into their homes Sunday. On active duty with the National Guard since 1997, Angel Ortiz Sr. was deployed to Fallujah in May. He's expected to return to his wife and three children in October 2007. The governor also visited a Westminster family whose father is taking care of the children while his wife serves in the armed forces in Iraq. Mariluz Ortiz had been tipped off to the surprise Friday by her husband, who called to wish her a happy birthday. "I thought he was joking," she said. "(My husband) said, 'No, really. He's going to go to your house.' I started crying. That's a good birthday present. "After the details fell into place over the weekend, Mariluz kept the children corralled in the living room Sunday morning before Schwarzenegger showed up to the military housing along 25th Street." The doorbell rang," said 9-year-old Mary Ortiz, "and then Arnold Schwarzenegger was standing there. I couldn't believe it. Oh my gosh, I can't believe it. "Schwarzenegger chatted with the Ortiz family in their cozy living room, packed tightly with neighborhood friends, photographers and men wearing blue blazers and earpieces." (Your father is) so far away, and to think your mother has to run this ship for a whole year," he said. "Are you helping with chores?" The governor gave the children presents -- gubernatorial pens and paperweights, promotional T-shirts for "Terminator 3," an autographed copy of his 1990 film "Kindergarten Cop," and a soft teddy bear for Mary. And he didn't leave without ingesting his daily carbohydrate allotment, loading up on homemade chicken and rice as the children looked on. "It's the 'governator,' " said 12-year-old Michael Ortiz. "When I was little, I went to Hollywood and put my hands in his hand prints (at Grauman's Chinese Theatre). I finally got to meet him. "Mary couldn't wait to tell her fourth grade class at White Point Elementary School about her eventful Father's Day. But she said Schwarzenegger was just a special guest star in her life. "It's sad, but I know (my dad is) doing something good," Mary said. "I love him very much and even though (Schwarzenegger's visit) was a great surprise, I was still kind of sad that my dad wasn't there."

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger plays a regular-guy role when he hangs out with a Westminster family whose mother is in Iraq.

By VIK JOLLY
The Orange County Register
WESTMINSTER –

Joshua Potes was a little intimidated by the Terminator. But, hey, on Father's Day, with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger standing in his family's living room shaking hands and talking with his two older brothers and dad, any 7-year-old might be a tad shy. The governor's visit was his Father's Day gift to Carlos Potes, whose wife, Blanca, is serving in Iraq with the California Army National Guard. Schwarzenegger later spent time with a family in San Pedro. Both stops were meant as gestures of support for the military. Carlos Potes, 38, a maintenance supervisor at an apartment complex, has had to take on the job of Mr. Mom, dropping off and picking up his three boys - the other two are 14 and 10 - from school daily, cooking, doing the laundry, vacuuming, washing the dishes and tending the garden. He's gotten some help on the weekends from his sister Ernestina Ceballos, a medical assistant who lives in Corona." So you have your hands full," Schwarzenegger said. "It's tough to do a job as a father when the mom is not around." Sporting a casual open-collar cream shirt and tan pants, Schwarzenegger had stepped out of his SUV on sleepy Shrewsbury Avenue, walked up the front steps of the Potes home and rung the doorbell around 10:30 a.m. The visit was supposed to be a surprise, but by then, the family and even a few neighbors knew about it. Potes had to coax Joshua out of his room, and the governor softly patted the boy on the head." Is this the Terminator haircut?" Schwarzenegger asked him, noticing the spiky 'do. After a few moments, the media were whisked outside as the governor met alone with the family. Just then, Blanca Potes, a staff sergeant for the National Guard at the Joint Forces Training Base in Los Alamitos, telephoned from Iraq. Carlos Potes said her call was unplanned. Blanca Potes has been in Baghdad for about a month, and her tour will last about a year. She is assigned to the Army Corps of Engineers and works in human resources. Carlos Potes said he put the governor on the phone with her first." She was very optimistic and just wonderful," Schwarzenegger said. "She said what a great honor it is for her, even though she's missing out on Father's Day. But she's over there, and she loves doing her work. She doesn't regret one minute." Schwarzenegger got a quick tour of the house immaculately clean - and privately talked with the children about their mother, school and homework.



Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger visits Westminster father Carlos Potes, far left. Joining them are Potes' sister Ernestina Ceballos, center, and Potes' three sons, Joshua, 7, Carlos Jr., 10, and Alex, 14. Carlos Potes works and raises the boys, and Ceballos pitches in on weekends.

Carlos and Blanca Potes - he's an immigrant from Palmira, Colombia, and she's from Tijuana, Mexico - have been married about 12 years. They immigrated to the United States in the 1980s. She voted for Schwarzenegger in 2004; he's in the process of getting his citizenship, Carlos Potes said. The governor's office offered to visit National Guard families, and the families he met were picked from dozens of guardsmen who responded to a request for a visit. Blanca Potes wrote this in an e-mail: "I have to tell you without my husband. I wouldn't be here. He is the acting mom, dad, babysitter, you name it. I have a long mission here in Iraq (of) which I am proud. If my governor can take a little bit of time for my family back home, he'll make a big difference in a soldier's life." The visit appeared to lift spirits." It's been very hard to be a father and a mother and pretty much a baby sitter as well," Carlos Potes said. Even though the kids knew the governor was coming, they were still in disbelief as he towered over them." I was really shocked when he came here," Carlos Jr., 10, told reporters later. Alex Potes, 14, said he has no trouble distinguishing between the governor's roles." I (see) him as a Terminator and Kindergarten Cop when I see him on TV, but when I see him in person, like, wearing his outfits or suits, I see him as a real responsible governor," he said. All three brothers sought and got autographs from the governor. Schwarzenegger brought them a "Kindergarten Cop" DVD, and each boy got a "Terminator 3" T-shirt. Joshua scored a teddy bear. Dad got a pen and a paperweight with the governor's seal and signature. It'll be awhile before it sinks in that Schwarzenegger actually stopped by their home one Sunday morning."This is the best gift for me on Father's Day," Carlos Potes said. "It's amazing to me that the governor took the time to come to my house. He said he came to visit me not as a governor, but Arnold. It really means a lot to me."



Engineer Brigade, 40th ID

(Photo taken at Fort Bliss, TX) names are not in order

SFC Adlard, David
SFC Breaker, Brian
CSM Cady, Randall
MSG Cain, Charles
MAJ Delwiche, Zach
MSG Dupree, Dale
SFC Eckert, David
CPT Espinoza, Jacob
SFC Figlietti, Richard
MAJ Ford, Ronald
MSG Freeman, Curtis
SSG Fulton, Wesley
SFC Garcia, David
SFC Garcia, Javier
MAJ Griffin, Gene
MSG Heple, Michael
COL Herman, Michael
SFC Johnson, David
CPT Keppeler, Curt
MAJ King, David

MSG Lamoreaux, Robert
MSJ Lyda, Charles
SSG Martens, Zane
MAJ Martinelli, Steve
MSG McKim, Stephen
CSM Mefford, Richard
1SG Mohon, John
LTC O'Connor, Ken
MAJ Ortiz, Angel
SSG Potes, Blanca
SFC Salinas, Paul
1LT Satele, Jubilee
1LT Secor, Jessica
SFC Silva, Thomas
SFC Smith, Kimber
CPT Soliz, Albert
LTC Spano, Robert
SFC Toele, Leai
SFC Torres-Del Valle, Harvey
SFC Wong, George

A Message from The Brigade Commander



Your Sunburst Sappers are spread all over the country of Iraq and are continuing to establish the reputation of the California Guard. We have members spread at every level of the Reconstruction Program here. They range from the lowest levels, such as SFC Dave Eckert, serving as a Quality Assurance representative at Victory Base, to the highest, such as LTC Bob Spano, serving as the Division G-5. We provide the Command Sergeants Major for two of the three Districts within the Division. Five of our members are office OIC's, and another seven are NCOIC's. There are more Army National Guard soldiers serving within GRD than any other single component.

The mission here is much larger than anything any of us has ever experienced before. The total Iraqi Relief and Reconstruction Fund (IRRF) is over \$18 billion; that is larger than the combined total budget of all the Corps of Engineers Districts in the states. Of that total, about \$10 billion is dedicated to the repair and rehabilitation of existing facilities and the construction of new ones. Much of that effort goes to the provision of essential services: generation and transmission of electricity; treatment and distribution of potable water; and collection and treatment of waste water. Other, more visible projects include the construction and repair of schools, medical clinics, hospitals, courthouses, police stations and prisons. We are repairing roads, railways, seaports and airports. All of these projects taken together will leave a legacy for generations of Iraqis to come.

In a very real way, every day here feels like Christmas. Not from the weather, which is hovering well above 100 every day, but from the spirit. When we reach adulthood, we realize that the best part of Christmas is not receiving presents, but giving them. Here in GRD we are privileged to be able to give a present to the Iraqi people every day. As soldiers, as patriots, and as humans, we couldn't ask for any better.

COL Michael Herman

Sunburst Sappers!