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Issue 1

THE MULESKINNER

“No Task Too Large”

Introduction

“THE MULESKINNER” is a publication focused on the Soldiers of the 35th Engineer Brigade (a.k.a. Muleskinners) and its engineer mission while deployed to Iraq in Support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The purpose of this publication is to keep our loved ones and friends at home informed about the Muleskinners in a combat environment. THE MULESKINNER will be produced exclusively by Muleskinner Soldiers to ensure accurate reporting and authentic information. THE MULESKINNER will be organized and edited by the Muleskinner’s Command Judge Advocate, LTC David Lowe, and his cohort in crime, fellow Judge

Advocate, CPT Kelly Parker. Paralegal SGT Jake Boswell will lend his technical assistance by overseeing the layout and design. THE MULESKINNER solely reflects the views and opinions of the Soldiers who contribute to its publication and is not endorsed or sanctioned by the U.S. Army, the Missouri National Guard, or the 35th Engineer Brigade.

It is our genuine desire to provide timely, insightful, and entertaining information to our readers. A special thanks to our Brigade Commander, BG Michael Pace, and our Command Sergeant Major, CSM Ray Harding, for their leadership and support in this endeavor. The Muleskinners are blessed to be under their command during our deployment to Iraq.

Deployment to Kuwait

~ LTC David Lowe

The 35th Engineer Brigade (a.k.a. Muleskinners) departed Fort McCoy, Wisconsin for Kuwait on the morning of August 19th. Our unit was transported on a DC-10 along with Soldiers from two other units. Two and one-half hours into our flight we arrived at Bangor, Maine where we were greeted at the gate by about 35 wonderful people from American Legion Post 200 from Hermon, Maine. These genuinely kind and loving patriots formed a line on both sides of the walkway and greeted us as we entered the lobby of the airport for a 90 minute refueling and re-supplying stop. Most of these patriots were Veterans of World War II and the Korean War and were accompanied by their spouses. As they shook each one of the more than

250 Soldiers’ hands and graciously thanked us for our service, the rest of the crowd gathered in the lobby and applauded us as we arrived.

I was overwhelmed with emotion as these veterans made us feel proud to wear the uniform and right at home in a place where most of us had never been. A nice lady took photographs of most of our Soldiers, which can be accessed on the internet at www.mainetroopgreeters.com. Simply click on “Troop Pictures”, then click on “To View More Pictures”, then go to the gallery you wish to view and then click on August 19, 2007. After some great fellowship, the Legion members treated us to some cake and again lined both sides of the walkway to shake our hands and tell us that they will be there again to welcome us

“FREEDOM ISN’T FREE”

home upon our return. I was deeply moved to see this tremendous support from so many of our nation's heroes who did not know one of our Soldiers before we arrived. I cried as I received hugs from the ladies along with heart-felt handshakes and warm remarks from these great Americans.

After a five hour flight, we arrived at our next refueling and re-supply stop in Shannon, Ireland. We were deprived of seeing the beautiful, green countryside since we arrived at 1:30 a.m. This is especially important since our destination is a country known for its extremely hot temperatures, desert, and sparse vegetation!! With only the Gift and Coffee Shop open, most of the Soldiers who owned laptops got them out to take advantage of the free wireless service provided in the airport. After approximately 90 minutes, we again boarded the plane for a six hour flight to Kuwait City. At 11:50 a.m., we arrived in Kuwait City approximately 21 hours after departing Wisconsin. We then experienced Southwest Asia as we walked down the stairs and onto the tarmac in the 110 degrees heat!!

After a lengthy wait outside for our luggage, we boarded three buses and traveled about 90 minutes into the desert to Camp Buehring, Kuwait. We all received our deployment briefing and then settled into our tents which accommodate about 45 Soldiers each. We quickly learned of our surroundings, which consists of pallets of bottled water, porta-potties, tons of sand, dust, dirty streets, tents, brown metal buildings, and the drone of generators and machinery of war. We often hear the sounds of Blackhawk helicopters since our tents are located across the street from the airfield.

We also learned that our stay at Camp Buehring would be longer than originally planned due to the troop surge and a temporary lack of housing for our unit in Iraq.

Aside from the environmental conditions, the first thing we experienced was jet lag. After many of our Soldiers stayed awake for 48 hours, getting back on a normal sleep pattern was challenging to say the least. It seems the majority of the Soldiers would sleep in the afternoon and not be able to sleep at night. The 90 degree afternoon temperature in the tent did not make it any easier to stay awake. While a serious matter, it became almost comical to see Soldiers regularly getting up at 3:00 a.m. and sleeping several hours during the day.

Some of the training we received while at Camp Buehring included individual weapons, simulated combat training on the M-16 and M-4 rifles, counter-improvised explosive device (IED), and electronic warfare. One day, we traveled even farther out into the desert to fire our weapons where it seemed the only life we could find were camels. Our Personal Security Detail (PSD) had two days of specialized training out in the desert at a Forward Operating Base where they conducted range training in a real-world combat environment.

With plenty of free time on our hands, our Soldiers began to adjust to life in Southwest Asia and quickly discovered the benefits of certain tents, trailers, and metal buildings on Camp Buehring. The largest tent contained the gymnasium, while other tents consisted of the Movie Theater, USO, and Morale and Welfare. It seems there are trailers everywhere on Camp Buehring, some of which became popular with our Soldiers. Those included the Morale and Welfare telephones, Calling Card telephones, Internet services, jewelry, gift shops, and various fast food restaurants. Most Soldiers agree the food is pretty good here although we understand it is better in Iraq. Some Soldiers utilized the metal buildings to play pool and ping pong, while others shopped at the gift shops owned by the local merchants just



"We then experienced Southwest Asia as we walked down the stairs and onto the tarmac in the 110 degrees heat!!"

outside of the Post Exchange.

We are anxious to leave Camp Buehring and begin our mission in Iraq. We should arrive in Iraq by September 3rd and begin the transition with the unit we are replacing. We are aware of the progress and difficulties facing our troops in Iraq and challenges that lie ahead. I am confident that our unit is prepared to meet those challenges. Our Soldiers are experienced and many are battle-tested. About 55 percent of our unit has already served one tour in Iraq. Many of these Soldiers voluntarily joined the Muleskinners to fight for freedom in Iraq, which underscores their sacrifice, selfless service, and patriotism.

Please remember that our Soldiers we will be able to receive mail in Iraq after September 3rd at the following address: Rank and Soldier's Name, HHC

OUR PSD: A WELL TRAINED TEAM FOR A CRITICAL MISSION

~ CPT Kelly Parker

They are a group of 17 diverse men brought together, trained, and given a very difficult but important mission. They are the 35th Engineer Brigade, Personal Security Detail (PSD). In Iraq, their primary mission will be to escort and protect their assigned principal when that person is required to travel "outside the wire." "That's job number one above everything else," said Specialist Scott Darby of Waynesville, Missouri. The PSD have endured many long, hot hours of training preparing for this mission. The PSD "training has been outstanding and intensive," said Brigadier General Michael Pace, Commanding General of the 35th Engineer Brigade. Training included mounted and dismounted security operations, shooting tactics and techniques, driver's training, route reconnaissance, room clearance, and close quarters combat, just to name a few. "I appreciate the zeal and enthusiasm these young Soldiers have

35th Engineer Brigade, APO, AE 09344. We genuinely appreciate the prayers and support of our troops as we fight for freedom in Iraq, Afghanistan, and throughout other parts of the world. May God bless each of you and may He continue to bless the United States of America!!

displayed," said General Pace.

Not only is the PSD well trained, they are also heavily equipped. The PSD will maneuver in up-armored (FRAG 5) Humvees mounted with either an M-2, .50 caliber machine gun or a 240-B, 7.62 mm machine gun. Each member of the team will carry a M-9, 9 mm pistol and either a M-16, .223 caliber rifle or a M-249, .223, belt or magazine-fed rifle. With each mission the PSD will take with them an absolutely awesome array of military firepower. They will strike fear in the hearts of any adversary in their path.

The men of the PSD are a premier example of the value of diversity. This diversity includes geographic residence, race, ethnicity, educational background, civilian employment, and personality. The PSD is a true cross-section of America.

Some of the men are quiet and reserved and keep to themselves. Others tend to be loud, boisterous, and full of bravado. The rest of the group



The PSD eating pizza after a hard day of training in the desert

"They will strike fear in the hearts of any adversary in their path."

“Sure we all joke around...but when we are actually out there on the trucks, it’s a whole different thing.”

seems to strike a balance between the two. No matter their differences, “It takes a special kind of character to do this kind of work,” said General Pace. The Muleskinner’s top non-commissioned officer, Command Sergeant Major Ray Harding added, “They are all talented when they are focused on their mission.”

Some of the men “need their own time to chill out,” said Specialist Darby. But, according to Darby, because the PSD “must have very high morale” the members with much bravado are “absolutely necessary” because they serve as “great motivators.” Team Leader, Staff Sergeant Michael Jacobs of Swedeborg, Missouri said, “Everybody is professional and proficient at what they do...and each brings something different to the table. Sure we all joke around...but when we are actually out there on the trucks, it’s a whole different thing.”

Through diversity, patriotism, experience, personality, and intense training a team has been born—our PSD. “In these three months we have come together as a team,” said Sergeant

First Class, Bruce Buscher of Union, Missouri, Commander of the PSD. “There is no doubt in my mind we can do anything we are assigned to do as a team.”

As the 35th Engineer Brigade moves forward to Iraq, we do so with extreme confidence in our PSD. The heart of these fine men was best expressed by Specialist Darby when he said, “Had I been given the choice in the matter, there is no other job I’d rather do, and no other people I’d rather do it with.”

The 35th Engineer Brigade salutes our PSD for their hard work and preparation for their critical mission.

Chaplin’s Corner

~ Chaplin Gary Gilmore



Rule number one about LDR’s: “Distance is between places... not people!”

I’ve got a new acronym for you. Now that we’re all in the Army life, we’ve got to learn this “lingo-bingo” to communicate. Acronyms are a kind of “linguistic shorthand” that intends to make communication easier, but often it just confuses people. Sometimes the acronym actually spells out a word, and other times it’s just the initials of the words of a phrase or an item.

Here’s the acronym we all are dealing with during this deployment: “L-D-R.” It stands for “Long Distance Relationship!” (This is one of those “initials” type acronyms!) No matter what your relationship to a Soldier, this deployment

has pushed you into an “LDR!” Whether its “Hubby” or “Honey” or “Daddy” or “Brother” or “Momma” or “Good Buddy” ... you’re in an LDR! And it’s just as true for the Soldiers! You see, with the exception of other Soldiers, EVERY ONE of our relationships became “long-distance!” If you remember our initial briefings, we’re learning a “new normal”-- and we may or may not like it!

Just this week I received an email from a Soldier whose wedding I performed. He was writing me from Korea (qualifies as an LDR to me!) and basically said, “Chaplain, we’re having trouble-- can we talk with you... can you

help?" We're now having electronic conversations! Long distance relationships are tough on everybody--newlyweds, old-e-weds, kids, and parents, too! I applaud the courage and commitment it takes to fight a little harder to keep relationships steady and strong in spite of "long-distances."

One of my goals during this deployment is to learn more about LDR's and how to make them work FOR us! There is a whole body of literature out there on this very topic, and we can learn what works and what doesn't work from the experiences of others. Additionally, as a part of my ongoing professional education, I'm working on a project intended to go beyond the Army briefings and equip you with some additional skills to use during phone calls and emails. I might even ask you to complete a survey or two!

Relationships have challenges and growing pains no matter where we are, but it's a bit different and more difficult when we're separated geographically. So if this "LDR" is

causing you and yours some trouble, I encourage you to "reach out and touch someone!" Your Family Readiness Group is filled with fellow LDR's, and my email address is gary.gilmore@us.army.mil. Don't pretend it will get better if you just ignore it-- talk to somebody!

The amazing thing about LDR's is that they have the potential to make our relationships stronger... if we use them well. So I invite you to check out this column in future newsletters to learn more about LDR's and to learn and practice some communication skills that will benefit your relationship with your Soldier. Rule number one about LDR's: "Distance is between places... not people!"

Now go impress somebody by using your new Acronym!



Chaplin LTC Gilmore

Muleskinner Sports

35th WELL REPRESENTED AT STREND COMPETITION

On 26 August 2007, SPC Bobby Everett and CPT Scott Zimmerman represented the Muleskinners by competing in the STREND (STrength and ENDurance) Competition on Camp Buehring, Kuwait. SPC Everett placed 2nd in the 24-29 age group and CPT Zimmerman placed 2nd in the 30-39 age group.

The competition included the following events: Bench press (body weight), Pull ups, Military press (half body weight), Chin ups, Dips, Dead lift (70lbs), Lunges (w/25lb dumbbells), and two mile run. Each weight lifting event lasted for three minutes where each participant performed as many repetitions as possible. The two mile run was conducted on treadmills where each

participant set their own pace. The winners were determined by the total seconds it took to complete the two mile run divided by the total amount of repetitions conducted during the weight lifting portion of the competition. The lowest scores won their respective age category.

SPC Everett said, "Overall, this was a great experience dealing with a combination of weightlifting and endurance. It definitely showed where you stood with your athletic ability."

CPT Zimmerman summed up his experience by saying, "The STREND competition seemed like a fun test of my current fitness level. Plus, it seemed just crazy enough to be worthwhile. Although I'm pretty sore now that it's over, I will definitely do this type of competition again."

"Although I'm pretty sore now that it's over, I will definitely do this type of competition again." ~ CPT Zimmerman

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THE "OVER-THE-HILL GANG" OVERWHELMS PSD IN BASKETBALL

"It's on!!!" said SGT Larry Mills of the Personal Security Detail (PSD) referring to the basketball game between the PSD and a group of officers. On 16 August 2007, the PSD challenged a group of officers nicknamed the "Over-The-Hill-Gang" to a friendly game of basketball at the Rumpel Fitness Center on Fort McCoy, Wisconsin.

The "Over-The-Hill-Gang" who averaged 37 years of age, served notice on the PSD, who averaged 28 years of age, that experience matters on the basketball court. When it was all said and done, the officers team consisting of LTC Andy Rogers, LTC David Lowe, LTC Tony Adrian, CPT Matt Bacon, CPT Jeff Crane, CPT Kelly Parker, and 1LT Seth Nelson, dominated the PSD in all

three games.

The "Over-The-Hill-Gang" winning scores in each of the games were as follows: Game One - 42 to 22; Game Two - 42 to 20; and Game Three - 42 to 18. When asked about the experience of playing the younger PSD team, LTC Andy Rogers said, "Too easy, baby!!"

LTC David Lowe asked SSG Kevin Zimmerman of the PSD to report the results of the games later that evening at the Muleskinner Barbeque. SSG Zimmerman said, "I have to admit, those guys beat us fair and square, but it will be different when we play them in softball." With that challenge being made, look for this story to be continued in future editions.



Participants in the 5k "Fun Run" at Camp Buehring. From Left to Right: SPC Everett, CPT Parker, MAJ Goodwin, MAJ Mickan, SGM Porter, and LTC Lowe

The Muleskinners Make Their Mark



SGT David Porter (shown above) and other Soldiers made their mark at Camp Buehring, Kuwait. These troopers spent several hours in the hot sun creating this piece of art, which depicts our unit motto, insignia, and mascot.

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