

23 Mar 91

Continued Greetings from Saudi Arabia:

I get in a writing slump and then have to resort to a mailgram to catch up. We've been busy with redeployment actions so my corresponding has suffered. The most important redeployment - mine - is still to be determined. Without a cease fire it's hard to just pack up and go home. And there are still sizeable forces here who have facilities requirements associated with redeployment so we have full days. But then again there are other factors which could come into play and result in a plane ticket to Tampa...we'll see.

Spent the 14th of March at a desert "picnic" hosted by the Saudi Joint Forces Support Unit. The JFSU was created to serve as the military interface for the provision of the majority of the host nation support functions within the Kingdom. This was the crew we "hooked and jabbed" with to get construction projects contracted and executed. Other U.S. personnel worked with the JFSU to arrange for leased facilities, heavy equipment transporters, supplies to support enemy prisoners of war, food contracts for U.S. forces, and a myriad of other details. Overall we had our share of frustrations but the system was successful. (By the way, we frustrated them a few times ourselves by changing requirements late in the game and by poorly-thought-out demands.)

At any rate, about fifty of us got on two buses and we were driven out of town. As we travelled, we saw numerous Saudi families parked just off the side, anywhere from 200' to a half-mile off the road; some just sitting by their car or pickup, and others with fairly large tent complexes, some even with fence and lighting. We found out later that the Saudis go to the desert like we go to the beach. Some go elaborate with portable generators and refrigerators, and some go basic: a blanket to sit on.

In our case, the Saudis had set up three tents, one 40'x100' for socializing, one 30'x60' for food layout, and one 30'x40' for cooking and food preparation. The large tent had rugs covering the floor area, and had a liner so it was comfortable inside, not too hot. The food consisted of an number of Arabian dishes: cooked goat and sheep on rice, stuffed vegetables, cheese and meat-filled rolls...all good. We carried the food from the dining tent to the socializing tent, and there had our meal. There were no chairs, but throw pillows were available to lean against. Prior to eating we played volleyball, where the winning team was generally the one with the most Saudis. Overall a nice relaxing day.

Colonel Charles Ingram has been in Riyadh a couple of times lately. He commands the 926th Engineer Group which supported the 3rd Armored Division during the ground attack, and did well. They were recognized by the Division Commander for excellence in support. He talked about the challenges of navigating in the desert. Had to use LORAN ... the ship navigating system that triangulates by radio signal off known coastal stations. Still works inland if you are not too, too far from the water. The featureless terrain virtually precluded traditional map reading techniques. He noted that even though LORAN could get you within 10 feet of your destination, if you were out at night without night vision goggles it was probably best to "park it" until morning because of the total black of the desert night. (You might also be

aware that many of the DESERT STORM troops used Global Positioning System for navigation. Just like LORAN but triangulates off of satellites - somewhat high tech and well worth the taxpayers' investment.

Attended an engineer after action review at King Khalid Military City on the 17th of March. A good session, with all of the major engineer commands and activities represented down to engineer brigade level. Some of the items we discussed:

- * Personnel

- ** Troops fought hard, with valor, and to close with and destroy the enemy; but when it was clear that the Iraqis were surrendering they treated them with dignity and compassion...a good mark of discipline.
- ** Morale remain high despite typical sustained engineer work efforts going three to four days at a time.

- * Equipment

- ** The armored combat earthmover (ACE) and the small emplacement excavator (SEE) ...new systems...worked extremely well. The SEE was used to dig in everything and everybody. SEE operators will never have to buy themselves a beer for the rest of their life. The ACE's armor protection was extremely valuable on a battlefield with large amounts of unexploded enemy, and friendly, ammunition. The ACE was a bunker buster as well as a berm breaker.
- ** Plows mounted on the front of tanks worked well for clearing minefields; rollers weren't that popular.
- ** We needed a lot more matting than we had...for heliports, hardstands, maintenance areas, expeditionary airfields, etc.
- ** We also needed a lot more earthmoving capability. Road building for logistics across the desert was a major undertaking.

- * Training

- ** Previous combined arms training at the National Training Center in California paid off greatly. Would not have been able to anticipate the tempo and ferocity of the modern battlefield otherwise.
- ** Engineer battle drills were very valuable, especially in minefield breaching.

Did hear a funny story from one of the brigade commanders. Seems like they were in Iraq and approached by an Iraqi in civilian clothes, who said, "I surrender." They replied, "Sorry, we're not taking prisoners today." The Iraqi said, "Okay, then I defect." The Americans told him he couldn't defect because he was an Iraqi in Iraq. So he went away mad. Shortly a beduoin comes up to the Americans and wants to know why they told the Iraqi to take his truck. Evidently the Iraqi scammed the truck to go find some Americans who were taking prisoners that day.

The sky over Riyadh was gray yesterday. Not from clouds but from being downwind from the oil fires in Kuwait. Can you imagine the scope of the fires considering we are 300 miles away?

Continued best wishes from the Kingdom; hope to see you all soon.