



DEFINING OUR HUMANITY

SUPPORTING THE  
DEFENDERS OF PEACE  
CAMP AS SAYLIYAH, QATAR

**OCTOBER**  
**2014**

**THE**  
**DESERT**  
**MESH**



## A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

October is a month we all experience in different ways. For some, it's crisp air and football. For others, it's PTA meetings and getting the kids off to school. For others, inexplicably, it is the beginning of the winter holiday season.

While we all experience the world in different ways, we have much more in common than we sometimes realize. This month, we have focused on the theme of our common humanity, and how that applies to taking care of ourselves and of one another.

Command Sgt. Maj. Reddock helps noncommissioned officers with preparation for centralized promotion boards. Chaplain Atkinson has valuable words of advice for finding inner strength, and Maj. Englert helps us to care for one another by understanding the principles of consensual relationships. On the following pages, you will also see Soldiers making a difference in the fight against ebola and helping to preserve the health of the planet.

The important takeaway from this edition is that these concepts are not independent of one another, and that we - as public servants - have a responsibility to willingly embrace the responsibilities accompanying that role. Understanding of our own flaws and weaknesses helps us to understand those of others, helps us reserve judgment, and points us toward the first steps in correcting our deficiencies.

Every day, we have an opportunity to make a real difference in our own lives and in the lives of others. Many of us make the most of that opportunity, and it is vital we continue to do so with eager spirit. We can only do that if we recognize each other's needs and remember who we are.

Hopefully, you will find the articles in the October edition of the Desert Mesh more enlightening than this brief introduction. We do this for you, our uniformed service members, because we value your dedication to the principles that make our country great.

Please enjoy this issue, and - as always - we appreciate any feedback that will help us make this publication the one you want it to be.

Levi Spellman  
Editor

ON THE COVER:  
1ST LT. MICHAEL  
SEGGER OF THE  
1ST BATTALION,  
114TH  
INFANTRY  
REGIMENT,  
SGT. CIRILO  
DeJESUS OF  
AREA SUPPORT  
GROUP - QATAR,  
AND CPL.  
DUSTIN LYONS  
OF THE U.S.  
ARMY MEDICAL  
MATERIEL  
CENTER -  
SOUTHWEST  
ASIA HONOR  
THOSE LOST IN  
THE ATTACKS  
OF SEPT. 11,  
2001.

US ARMY  
PHOTO BY  
LEVI SPELLMAN

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# SENIOR ENLISTED PROMOTION BOARDS

BY  
COMMAND SGT. MAJ. EARLA REDDOCK  
SENIOR ENLISTED COMMAND ADVISOR

When is the best time for a non-commissioned officer to start preparing for the centralized promotion board? My advice is to start preparing as soon as one gets promoted. There really is no "right" time, but one can easily run out of time and not prepare well enough.

After many years of preparing for several centralized promotion boards, I have come to the conclusion that there is rhythm to the preparation. Below are five definite steps, in order, that will prepare NCOs for success.

## 1 READ AFTER ACTION REPORTS FROM PREVIOUS BOARDS

For NCOs aspiring to be promoted, the first order of business should be to read the after action report and board analysis from the previous board for that grade. Produced by Human Resource Command, I have found those documents to contain everything an NCO may need to get the next level.

The board AAR identifies the attributes by which one stands apart from their peers, broken down by military occupational specialty. These include: accepting difficult jobs, maintaining high performance when moving between warfighter and support units, requesting schools and follow-on assignments for drill sergeant, recruiting, equal opportunity, advanced individual training instructor, and assistant inspector general school.

These difficult positions are considered to broaden the understanding and abilities of NCOs and are one of the ways the centralized boards separate high performers from the rest of the pack. On a parallel note, it is also important to continue civilian education by attending college while off duty.

These reports are invaluable. Make sure to read them, and ask a senior NCO to help you understand anything that isn't perfectly clear.

## 2 THE NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER EVALUATION REPORT

The second step is to print out the last six copies of your noncommissioned officer evaluation report. Yes. I said six. There are several things you want to look for.

Adults rarely grow after age 20. Check the height and weight section. If you are growing, stop it.

Next, make sure to check your NCOER for duplicate bullet comments. Some raters have a tendency to repeat comments if the ratees are doing the same job. Remember: each NCOER must stand on its own merit.

Lastly, ensure that your duty position and MOS match what is on your enlisted record brief.

## 3 THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY PHOTOGRAPH

The third step is scheduling and taking a DA Photograph. Make sure to take a senior NCO with you, preferably a supervisor. There are specific reasons you should NOT do this alone.

The senior NCO will be able to assist you with preparation, uniform adjustment, and can provide honest, on-the-spot feedback before you leave the photo lab.

Secondly - and more importantly - by involving your NCO support chain, it helps build trust between supervisor and subordinate, which ultimately leads to an investment in each other's success.

## 4 REVIEWING AND REVISING YOUR PACKET

The fourth step is to review your ERB, Photo and NCOER packet. Everything should match: awards, duty stations, MOS, rank, height and weight. Any discrepancies will cause what is known as a "bubble." Also, an NCO must be properly slotted; no extra information should be in that block, like "Known Loss." All military schools, such as Warrior Leader Course, Advanced Leader Course, and Senior Leader Course must be properly documented. All military honors should be properly documented (your S1 can do this for you, with proper documentation). Ensure your civilian education is updated; this is just as important as military education. If there are any doubts, make an appointment with the S1 human resources professional, and update your ERB.

## 5 MENTOR REVIEW AND SUBMITTING YOUR PACKET

The fifth and final step involves your command sergeant major. Make an appointment with your CSM to review your records (NCOERs, photo, ERB, awards (MSM or higher), letter to the board (if needed)). Make two copies of everything: one for the CSM and one for you. Make the appointment for 30-45 minutes. Send a copy of your entire packet to someone in your trusted circle of mentors and ask for candid feedback.

The above steps have worked for my subordinates and me. The key to success is preparation, and attention to detail.

- CSM E.L. Reddock



# ARMY HELPS FIGHT WORST EBOLA OUTBREAK IN HISTORY

US ARMY STORY BY  
RICH BARTELL  
US ARMY, AFRICA

MONROVIA, LIBERIA  
(OCT. 7, 2014)

More than 50 personnel from U.S. Army Africa are on the ground in Liberia responding to a request from President Barack Obama to assist in the fight against an Ebola outbreak in the region.

A 25-bed clinic for aid workers and two mobile labs have arrived in the country to diagnose the disease, and U.S. Army Africa is also setting up training for health care workers.

On Sept. 16, President Obama issued the following directive:

"At the request of the Liberian government, we're going to establish a military command center in Liberia to support civilian efforts across the region -- similar to our response after the Haiti earthquake. It's going to be commanded by Maj. Gen. Darryl Williams, commander of our Army forces in Africa. He just arrived today and is now on the ground in Liberia. And our forces are going to bring their expertise in command and control, in logistics, in engineering. And our Department of Defense is better at that, our Armed Services are better at that than any organization on Earth."

"President Obama has made it clear the U.S. is committed to all governments in the region, and Liberia has the full backing of the U.S.," United States Ambassador to Liberia Deborah R. Malac said.

Currently, U.S. Army Africa, or USARAF, personnel are working under the direction of the U.S.

Agency for International Development, known as USAID, and through U.S. Africa Command in an international humanitarian effort known as Operation United Assistance.

Williams, USARAF commander, explained his command's involvement in Operation United Assistance.

"We are partnering with the Armed Forces of Liberia and they're eager to help their fellow countrymen. Our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines, are working side by side with our Liberian host and will build on our already special relationship," Williams said.

Key in USARAF's mission is the establishment of a 25-bed clinic for aid workers.

"The construction of a 25-bed expeditionary clinic for aid workers, multiple Ebola treatment units and a facility for training Liberia medical health workers is under way. As I speak, successive teams are spread throughout Liberia conducting site surveys and have begun construction already," Williams said.

"With the arrival of the hospital over the weekend, we will continue to expand our efforts to accomplish our mission," he said. "This weekend also saw the arrival of two mobile testing labs. They're bound for the Island Clinic and Bong County [Ebola treatment units]. These labs are a huge step in the fight against this disease. I cannot overemphasize the importance of our mission and we're glad to be on the team," Williams said.

According to information

provided by the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, the clinic and lab equipment delivered by U.S. Air Force C-17 aircraft is bound for two locations in Liberia, and is expected to be operational this week.

The mobile labs are a huge step in stopping the spread of Ebola, as they should reduce the wait time for test results from several days to just a few hours, officials said. The labs will be operated by members of a U.S. Navy Medical Research Unit.

The 25-bed hospital arrived just as the U.S. military broke ground on a site in Margibi County. Originally designed to treat military Service members in combat zones, the facility will be staffed by the U.S. Public Health Service and will provide support to all health workers in Liberia.

Williams praised the work of the Liberian government, and affirmed the role of USARAF in Operation United Assistance.

"From a tactical standpoint as a Joint Force Command, I owe the best means to move this thing as quickly as possible. This is about urgency and speed. That's what I'm about -- urgency and speed. What you're going to see here pretty soon, are forces flown in relatively quickly," Williams said.

USAID is the lead U.S. government agency overseeing the overall response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. The U.S. military response, led by U.S. Army Africa, is acting in support of USAID by providing expertise in command and control, engineering and logistics.



PHOTO BY COMMAND SGT. MAJ. JEFFREY T. STITZEL

[ABOVE] BRIG. GEN. PETER L. COREY (LEFT), A DEPUTY COMMANDER OF U.S. ARMY AFRICA, ALONG WITH BRIG. GEN. DANIEL DEE ZIANKAHN, ARMED FORCES LIBERIA, TOUR AN EBOLA TREATMENT UNIT SITE. THEY MET WITH THE BOMI COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT, THE ARMED FORCES OF LIBERIA ENGINEERS AND U.S. NAVY SEABEES AT THE SITE. U.S. AFRICA COMMAND IS SUPPORTING THE EFFORT BY PROVIDING COMMAND AND CONTROL, LOGISTICS, TRAINING AND ENGINEERING ASSETS TO CONTAIN THE EBOLA VIRUS OUTBREAK IN WEST AFRICAN NATIONS.

[BELOW] SURROUNDED BY EBOLA PATIENTS, A HEALTH WORKER GIVES THUMB-UPS TO VISITORS NEAR THE HOT ZONE. THE HOT ZONE IS DEFINED BY THE DOUBLE-BARRIER ORANGE FENCE; IN THE EVENT A SICK PERSON FALLS, THEY CANNOT CONTAMINATE THE CLEAN ZONE. U.S. AFRICA COMMAND IS SUPPORTING THE EFFORT BY PROVIDING COMMAND AND CONTROL, LOGISTICS, TRAINING AND ENGINEERING ASSETS TO CONTAIN THE EBOLA VIRUS OUTBREAK IN WEST AFRICAN NATIONS.

PHOTO BY CMDR. PETER NILES



# AND WHY IT MATTERS

ANALYSIS BY  
LEVI SPELLMAN

AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

The ebola hemorrhagic fever outbreak in western Africa is the worst the world has ever seen. But, it is important to understand why the time has not yet come to completely freak out.

This analysis is an attempt to put it into perspective and to let you know why the U.S. Army is getting involved.

First, let's educate ourselves on the virus:

- *It can only be contracted by coming into contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person.*
- *Of those who contract the virus, the vast majority are friends and family members who try to care for their loved one without proper medical equipment, medical training or even a thorough knowledge of the disease.*
- *The rate of transmission is far less than influenza, which kills an estimated 49,000 people a year, many of whom are normally healthy before contracting the virus.*
- *During an outbreak, it is still nearly twice as easy to contract HIV, or SARS, and almost 10-times as easy to catch other diseases, like measles.*

However, the virus is usually fatal, quickly killing the majority of those who become infected. The sheer deadliness of the disease can often cause panic in areas where it is discovered.

This is especially true if the people in those areas are uneducated about the disease or if they do not have access to soap, running water, hospitals or trained medical personnel.

Oddly, the deadliness of the disease and the panic it causes usually help to contain the virus.

It sounds counterintuitive. But, the

quicker people succumb to the symptoms of the disease, the less opportunity the virus has to spread.

The panic it causes also helps to raise awareness, which allows many cases to be diagnosed early, increasing the survival rate. An additional result of early detection is an increased effectiveness in quarantine procedures, preventing the spread to others.

So, what does this mean to Soldiers serving in the Middle East?

Don't panic. The heart of the epidemic is on the far side of Africa. Africa is a continent, not a country. It's HUGE. To put that into perspective, it's about the same distance to the Arctic Circle. Think about that the next time you step outside into the heat.

Many airports with direct flights to countries in that region are stepping up detection procedures and have on-site quarantine facilities ready and waiting.

Education, soap, running water, and modern medical services are the reasons we don't have outbreaks in the U.S. They seem like small details, but they make more of a difference than we often realize.

To combat the spread of these outbreaks, those elements are the first line of defense. Yet, very few organizations are prepared to mobilize effective, modern facilities and trained personnel into remote areas.

However, the U.S. Army is one of them.

Stopping the disease in its tracks is the only way to prevent the chaos that accompanies such an epidemic. When you consider the chain reactions that can be set off by social and political instability, you can begin to see why intervention makes a lot of military sense.

So, do your part: wash your hands, and stay current on your MEDPROS.



# UNFADED UNFATED

## HONORING THE FALLEN

STORY AND PHOTOS BY  
LEVI SPELLMAN

AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

When the reports first flashed across our screens, many of us were unsure of what was happening. There was a plane? Or an explosion? It was somewhere in New York. Confused words tumbled through the air, and were suddenly silenced by what followed.

It was a trying time for us all. Still, thousands of our countrymen answered the call to service. Voluntarily, they carried that enormous burden across deserts, over mountains and – too often – into the secret places of their hearts.

The times since have not been easy. But, 13 years later, we now stand astride the flow of history. Proud, yet still grappling with all that has happened, and all it has cost.

It has taken more than a decade for the dust to settle on the events of Sept. 11, 2001. For most of that period, we have been at war with the ideologies responsible for those attacks.

However, in conflicts of ideology, victory can be difficult to define. Unfortunately, the costs are easier to quantify. Some estimates place the total loss of human life as high as 225,000 – and the projected monetary expenditure as high as \$4 trillion.

Despite these staggering figures, and all they imply, the United States manages to endure much as it had before 2001. Perhaps we have been resilient and adapted to this new world, a hallmark character-

istic of our nation's strength. Or, maybe we have simply moved on.

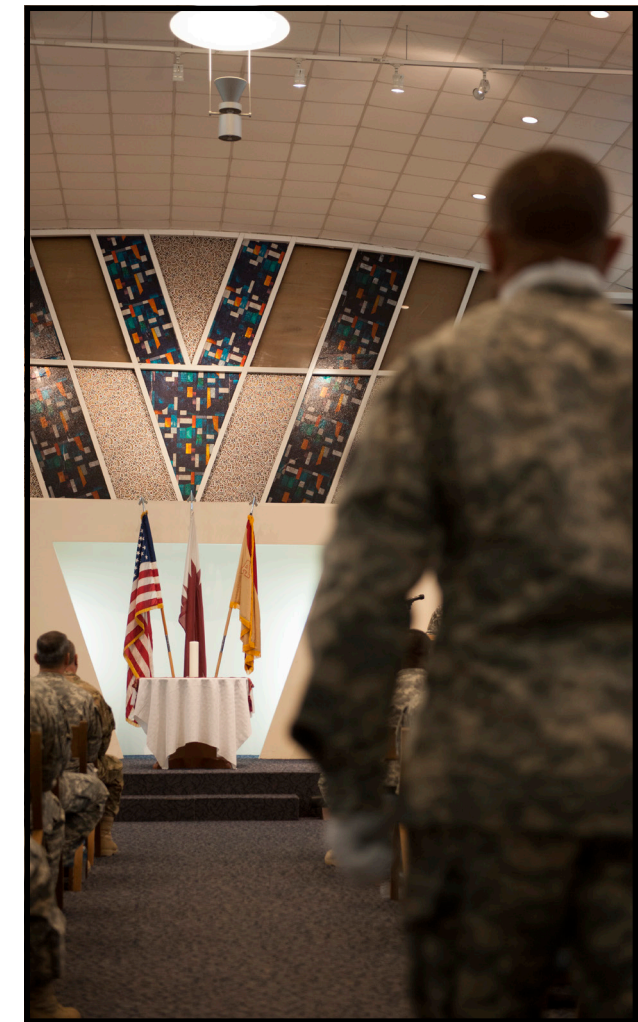
With time, it is said, everything fades. As we honor those we have lost, we must acknowledge we are being called to shoulder a burden of our own: we must never let their sacrifice fade. We must never fully move on.

The memory of a tragedy, the memory of our response and the understanding of its full cost – these are the burdens to be borne by the living. They are cause for introspection, humility and vigilance, mechanisms by which we distill meaningful lessons from catastrophe. They remind us not only of the cost of death, but of the value of life.

True resilience requires more than picking up the pieces and gluing them back together. True resilience requires us to improve ourselves. It requires of us a better understanding, and an attempt to avoid the evils that caused our world to shatter. Resilience means nothing is fated.

So, as we remember the chain of events that has brought us to this place, as we grieve for what was taken and for what was lost, we must embrace the turmoil in our hearts and the lessons we have been offered. To do any less would be an insult to those who have sacrificed so much, and a grave disservice to those who remain.

We owe this to the fallen – for the tomorrow they have given us, and for the one they will never see.



[LEFT] 1ST LT. MICHAEL SEGCEL OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 114TH INFANTRY REGIMENT, SGT. CIRILO DeJESUS OF AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR, AND CPL. DUSTIN LYONS OF THE U.S. ARMY MEDICAL MATERIEL CENTER - SOUTHWEST ASIA LIGHT A CEREMONIAL CANDLE IN HONOR OF THOSE LOST DURING THE SEPT. 11 ATTACKS, AND IN MEMORY OF SERVICE MEMBERS FALLEN IN THE WAR ON TERROR.

[TOP RIGHT] THE CEREMONY TOOK PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY ACTIVITY CENTER AT CAMP AS SAYLIYAH, SEPT. 11, 2014.



[BOTTOM RIGHT] AIR FORCE CHAPLAIN COL. RONALD HARVELL EXPLORED THE MEANING OF HONOR, FOR BOTH THOSE WHO HAVE SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES, AND FOR THE LIVING WHO ARE CHARGED WITH EARNING THOSE SACRIFICES.



# INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM RESILIENCE

STORY BY  
LT. COL. TIMOTHY ATKINSON  
AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR  
COMMAND CHAPLAIN

If the history of warfare has taught us anything, it would be that an army cannot fight without supplies. If living in the desert has taught us anything, it would be that life rapidly becomes impossible without a constant supply of water.

In ancient times, slingers were soldiers tasked with destroying an enemy city's water supply. Using rocks from the besieged city's walls, these specialized units would attack the city's wells in order to clog them up. The enemy knew if they could clog up the city's water source that, eventually, the people who lived there would have to come out. Death and surrender soon followed.

Spiritual resiliency involves keeping our wells pure. But, who are the ones who try to contaminate the wells of your life?

Slingers are not always people. It could be an organization or a situation that seems to be trying to poison our wells. Slingers will always throw stones; that's what they do. But, we must not sink down to their level.

One way to defeat a slinger is to shake it off and to keep moving forward in life. If we focus on our goals instead of the slinger, we can live above the pettiness of the situation and are victorious. Then, our wells are clear and we are able to keep our joy and happiness.

We must not let the actions or attitudes of others poison our hearts with resentment, fear, criticism, etc. We must not let the politics or the backbiting keep us from keeping our perspective clear. We must shake it off and keep our eyes on the Lord and His will for our lives. He's in control and will work all things together for our good.

Once, when I was in a crisis situation, I went for pastoral care and counseling. I also have found that being self-aware and constantly learning and growing is a way to keep my well clean and pure. Chaplains and other professionals can help us in times we need assistance. Don't hesitate to reach out to a friend in need or get help yourself. We all need to be nurtured.

Keeping our perspectives also involves having good boundaries. If we enforce good boundaries between ourselves and the slingers, we will ensure improved happiness and healthier living.

Remember, people make their own choices. They then must face the consequences. Contin-

uously rescuing them from those consequences can sometimes rob them of the valuable experience those consequences can bring. We need to keep that in mind.

Of course, this does not mean we neglect one another. But, it does mean that we must make wise choices in regard to how we help them and how they must help themselves.

One way I like to keep perspective is through the serenity prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr:

*"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."*

I trust that with a clean heart you and I will continue to make a significant difference by our faithfulness and attention to detail on the things that affect our lives and community. A great read on this topic is a book called *Become a Better You*, by Joel Osteen.

I can think of a quote from Rex Hudler that helps to clarify this point:

*"Be a fountain, not a drain."*

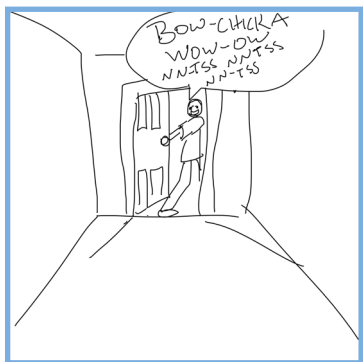
As well-meaning and productive members of the Camp As Sayliyah community, I'm sure we can all make a meaningful impact by faithfully adding support and not taking it away. This vital task falls on all of us. We must ensure those who do our war-fighting for us get all the support they need.

I think U.S. Army Central Chaplain, Col. Marc Gauthier, sums it up nicely:

*"In order to be effective in this, you must cultivate your own soul and guard your own heart, as the wellspring of life. If you're not firmly attached to the vine, the life of God will not flow through you. Neglect this, and you will cease bearing fruit."*

In the end, spiritual resiliency is the result of both the individual and the community. However, it starts with the individual, not only in offering support, but in asking for it when it is needed.

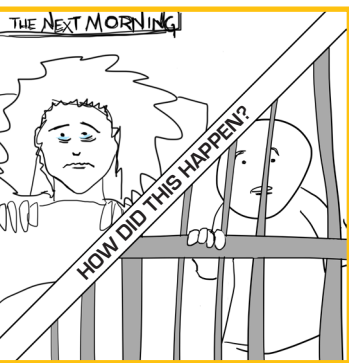
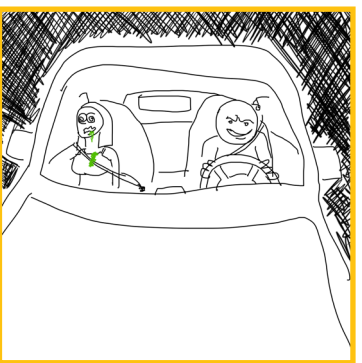
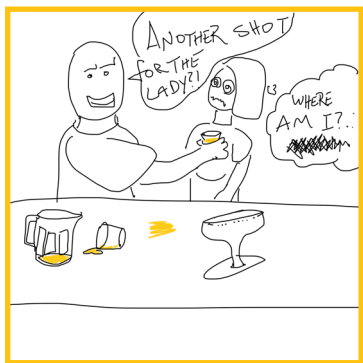
I encourage you to be a fountain, to remain resilient against the slingers and to help one another bear fruit.



[LEFT] AN EXAMPLE OF CONSENT.

[BELOW] AN EXAMPLE OF THE ABSENCE OF CONSENT.

COMIC STRIP BY  
ALFRED TRIPOLONE III  
AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE



# IS IT CONSENT?

STORY BY  
MAJ. ALISA ENGLERT  
AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR  
SARC & SHARP ADVISOR

## WHAT IS CONSENT?

## HOW DO YOU GET CONSENT?

## HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE CONSENT?

THESE ARE JUST A FEW QUESTIONS THAT CAME UP DURING A RECENT TRAINING CLASS, AND I THINK THE ANSWERS MIGHT BE BENEFICIAL TO ALL.

THIS ARTICLE IS GOING TO ANSWER MANY OF THE QUESTIONS WE ALL - AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER - HAVE HAD ABOUT THE ISSUE OF CONSENT.

### What is consent?

Consent is a verbal or overt act indicating a freely given agreement to the sexual conduct at issue, by a competent person. Without that, there is no consent.

### If he/she does not say No or fight back, is there consent?

Consent will not be deemed or construed to mean the failure by the victim to offer verbal or physical resistance. Consent is not given when a person uses force, threat of force, or coercion or when the victim is asleep, incapacitated, or unconscious.

### When is a person not able to consent?

A person cannot consent to sexual activity if he or she is substantially incapable due to:

- Mental impairment or unconsciousness resulting from consumption of alcohol, drugs, or a similar substance.
- Mental disease or defect which renders the person unable to understand the nature of the sexual conduct at issue.

- Physically declining participation in the sexual conduct at issue.
- Physically communicating unwillingness to engage in the sexual conduct at issue.

### Why can't I have consensual sex when I've been drinking? What if my partner and I both want to have sex, but we have consumed alcohol—why is that not considered consensual?

When alcohol is introduced into the situation, it becomes increasingly more difficult to determine if sexual activity is consensual because alcohol tends to cloud our ability to clearly communicate consent and interpret cues from our partners. This is why explicit, verbal consent is important.

The important things to keep in mind when we are thinking about alcohol and consent are:

1. How much alcohol has been consumed and,
2. To what extent am I familiar with my partner.

When a person has consumed so much alcohol that they are blacked out, browned out, very drunk, or

in an otherwise altered state, that person cannot legally give consent. Sex under the influence of alcohol is not automatically nonconsensual, but it does raise certain challenges in terms of assessing the extent to which we can give and interpret consent. And there is no such thing as consensual sex with a blacked out, browned out or very drunk person.

### Does asking for consent ruin the mood?

I think when we hear the word consent, we tend to think of formal dialogues (and perhaps even legal contracts!), but in fact, consent can look like a lot of things—for example, asking someone, "are you okay with this?" or "do you want to keep going?" or "is it okay if I ...?"

Asking questions like these do a number of different things. First, they provide an individual the opportunity to say "yes" or "no" to a particular act or situation. This ensures when the person does say "yes," they likely want to be engaging in the behavior at hand.

Secondly, asking questions - such as the ones I mentioned above -

allows people to express their sexual needs; it provides a gateway for communication.

This way people can communicate about more than just consent—they can talk about their desires and wants.

For example, if someone asks, "are you okay with this?," a person can respond to that question with more information about what they like, what will turn them on, or what their mood is. Without someone creating that opportunity, such information may be left unsaid, and thus the sexual experience may be less enjoyable or satisfying.

Finally, communicating about sex while in the moment helps individuals meet their sexual needs and creates trust in the relationship. It helps the individuals involved feel more comfortable with other aspects of the relationship and facilitates continued dialogue.

Whether the relationship lasts one night or one year, having your immediate and future needs met, and being able to communicate, is a good thing and will enhance the sexual experience.

# US ARMY RESERVE SOLDIER NOMINATED FOR NOBEL PRIZE

STORY BY  
STAFF SGT. DEBRALEE BEST  
COURTESY OF DVIDSHUB.NET

Sometimes people share their knowledge and experiences without knowing the impact of their words.

Army Reserve Sgt. Randy Sandifer is one such individual.

Sandifer, a Pinola, Mississippi, native, joined the Army Reserve's 412th Theater Engineer Command December 2001, as a personnel services specialist, his junior year of high school, completing basic training between his junior and senior years, and Advance Individual Training immediately following his graduation. Sandifer dreamed of being a scientist, so began his schooling with that goal at the University of Mississippi, as a forensic chemistry major. Then, just barely into his 20s, Sandifer received deployment orders to Iraq.

"At first, it took me off guard, but at the same time I had to answer those orders. I was very young. I was 21 or 22 when I got those orders," said Sandifer. "Once I got over there, I had to find a role and my role was at first supporting the detachment as administrator, but I ended up volunteering to work here, work there. I ended up working in the soil laboratory, and on the environmental team."

Sandifer didn't know it at the time, but volunteering in the laboratory and on the environmental team would result in future opportunities he wasn't expecting.

"I knew by being in those two laboratories that my time would go by faster, because I was keeping myself occupied, plus I was gaining experience in the laboratory," said Sandifer. "I knew at the end of the day I wanted to be a scientist, so working in those two laboratories helped me build my foundation."

Sandifer taught himself how to use the equipment and the proper techniques to support the mission.

The mission he and the environmental team were given was to clean up environmental hazards at Abu Ghraib prison, and ensure these hazards were not present at other locations.

To complete this, Sandifer and his team collected and tested soil samples for hydrocarbons.

size0 (1) "Before you are able to exit [an area of operation], it has to be to a certain standard, and that standard was the hydrocarbons in the soil couldn't be over 1,000 parts per million, so this was a huge task," Sandifer recalled. "Within this task, I had to test for the presence of hydrocarbons, then I had to go back and test for the parts per million of hydrocarbons, from my tests they wrote recommendations to

excavate the soil and put down new soil or just clean it up.

"Then I had to go back and test again for the parts per million, making sure it was under that threshold of 1,000 parts per million," he continued. "Once it was under 1,000 parts per million, then the prison was able to be closed down. It was a significant factor because they were waiting on my testing."

Sandifer completed his mission and returned home. Once home he began giving speeches about what he did in Iraq, and the environmental impacts.

"I talked about the things I did over there, but not only the immediate understanding of what I did, but also how in the future, the benefits of the things I did over there and how it showed the United States, in a good eye, to the rest of the world," said Sandifer.

During a speech at the University of Mississippi, in 2006, unbeknownst to Sandifer, there was a graduate student in the crowd taking his message to heart. In 2014, that student, now a professor, nominated Sandifer for the Nobel Prize.

size0 (2) Professor Jonathan Hutchins, assistant director of the Social Justice Initiative said, "Consequently, understanding the complexities of Mr. Sandifer's efforts can easily be measured if he had not provided such level of environmental analysis for global environmental sustainment. The environmental effects would have been horrific if it were not for the non-violent scientific dedication exhibited by Mr. Sandifer," in his nomination letter.

Sandifer hadn't realized someone had embraced what he spoke about, in 2006.

"(Hutchins) just heard (the speech) and I guess he just kept it in mind," said Sandifer. "Now, most recently 2014, given all the things surrounding global warming, I was talking about that back in 2006, and not being environmentally aware of our footprint, how it will be detrimental. Not just detrimental in the United States but the United States being in other countries, for world purposes how it will contribute to global warming."

At the time of his speeches, Sandifer felt it had probably fallen on deaf ears, and it wasn't until recently he came to believe people are finally listening.

"As I was talking about it, I knew it could happen, but in that time frame most people didn't believe in global warming," he said. "It was not until recently people were like, 'This is something we really need to pay attention to. This is real.' But, oftentimes, when you can't see it, can't smell it, but you can see

the effects of it, then there is something there, but you don't know exactly what it is. You are seeing the climate change and the weather change, well, there is a reason for that. And that reason is global warming."

Sandifer never expected to be nominated for such a prestigious honor.

"I was (surprised to be nominated), because I didn't think someone would hear the things I was saying, and remember them years later," said Sandifer. "Sometimes, when you're talking about something, in that time frame in 2006, there were a lot of other scientists in the crowd and they were like, 'Oh, no, that's impossible. There's no such thing.' But then some were like, 'Oh, yeah, that's a good point.' And now in 2014, here we are, and they're seeing, yes, global warming is real."

While Sandifer appreciates the nomination, he said just being an Army Reserve Soldier and serving his country was enough for him.

"Just a small amount of hydrocarbon being in the soil can throw an ecosystem completely off," he explained. "Dealing with the Iraqis, and how they function, their ecosystem feeds directly to their livelihood because they raise livestock, they farm, they do so much in the environment they are in. They still live off the different rivers that run through there. Those hazardous materials being in the soil could seep into the water supply and go into the individuals' natural resources so it was just keeping with the whole theme of we're trying to leave Iraq better than the way we found it. I did so environmentally."

The opportunity to help the Iraqis was important to Sandifer, but that opportunity also opened other doors for him.

"I went on from the 412th to the Army Crime Laboratory, which was always a dream of mine to work in forensic science at the Army Crime Laboratory, and July 2010, I was very fortunate to become a member of the Expeditionary Forensic Division under the United States Army Criminal Investigation Laboratory. Under this particular division, I deployed overseas to Afghanistan and provided capabilities."

"Without my start in the Army Reserve, that wouldn't have been possible," he explained. "Being able to complete my deployment, my duty to have that level of responsibility at the time, being in those two laboratories, propelled me in terms of my job candidacy, in terms of getting a position with the Army Crime Laboratory."



RANDY SANDIFER, A PINOLA, MISS., NATIVE, JOINED THE ARMY RESERVE'S 412TH THEATER ENGINEER COMMAND, DECEMBER 2001. SANDIFER HAS BEEN NOMINATED FOR A NOBEL PRIZE FOR HIS ENVIRONMENTAL WORK IN IRAQ. (COURTESY PHOTO)

Sandifer also acknowledges the Army Reserve paved the path for his Nobel Prize nomination as well.

"I really appreciate it, and just being able to have the opportunity I would have never gotten if I wasn't a part of the Army Reserve," said Sandifer. "I'm very fortunate to have been a part of the 412th, and even more fortunate to be a part of the Army Reserve. I could have been in a whole different unit in a whole different [military occupational specialty] and ended up in a whole different situation, but things happen for a reason, and it put me in a situation where I could show my skills and my desire to learn and to work and to produce. That's what I did when I was overseas."

Sandifer said if it wasn't for the foundation built by volunteering in the laboratories in Iraq as an Army Reserve Soldier, he doesn't think he would have had so many opportunities to fulfill his dreams of being a scientist. He is very thankful to his leadership in Iraq in allowing him the chance to work in the laboratories and build his skills as a scientist.

Upon finding he was nominated, Sandifer

worked to improve his chances.

"I've had multiple letters of endorsement and multiple letters of nomination, because after finding out I was being nominated I wanted to see if I could get other letters of nomination to support my case," said Sandifer. "It was a short amount of time, but a lot of people sent in letters of recommendation, which solidified me being there. I don't know what the results are going to be."

Sandifer may not be in the running this year as the Nobel Committee can hold nominations over until the next year for a variety of reasons. Sandifer also will not know if he made the cut because the committee does not release nominees who were considered for 50 years. But, Sandifer is content just being in the running.

"It could be this year or it could be next year, but just being nominated is a blessing in itself," said Sandifer. "The chance I win, I think that's huge because it really just put to the forefront the things myself and the [Army Reserve 412th TEC] team that I was with, what we were doing and how significant it was."



# ASK A CIVILIAN

## ANSWERS TO LIFE'S DEEPEST QUESTIONS

BY  
HANK BRAUGHTIGAN

SPECIAL GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

**L**ast month, you Soldiers sent me some pretty crazy questions - most of which I didn't really understand.

I'm not sure if it's me, or if it's you, but I get the feeling there was some kind of miscommunication.

This month... better? Maybe? I don't know. Look, I tried my best.

**Q:** *You're a civilian? Do you know my cousin, Steve? He's a civilian.*

**A:** I'm not sure if you know how many people are actually civilians. There are a lot of us. So, before you start thinking we must all know each other somehow, just take a second and think about it.

But, yeah. I know Steve.

**Q:** *Have you ever been to Iraq?*

**A:** Do one gig in the Middle East and it's always the same questions.

Whatever. Here we go.

**Q:** *How hot is it there?*

**A:** I'm sick of this question. It was really, really, really hot. It's the desert. Deserts are almost always hot. OK? It was hot.

**Q:** *Is it like Call of Duty?*

**A:** Going to work is nothing like sitting around and playing video games. There

are real consequences and there's no reset button.

I swear, it's always video games with you people. How do I get questions about video games every month?

**Q:** *... Have you ever killed anyone?*

**A:** While there may come a time when any of us might be called upon to do something like that, just going around and killing people is not normal behavior.

What kind of an individual would even ask another person something like that?

I think you're probably playing too many video games.

**Q:** *So, you're not - like - brainwashed or anything, right?*

**A:** Coming from people who ask me if real life is anything like video games... I should take that as a compliment.

But, no. I'm not brainwashed. I have a degree and a job and I pay taxes. But, it seems like all of that goes out the window once you see me with a beard.

Listen. I'm a person, man. The same as you. My beard doesn't define who I am.

**Q:** *You went to college? What's the matter... couldn't get into the Army?*

**A:** What makes you think I couldn't get

into the Army? That absurdity of that question is matched only by the sheer volume of faulty assumptions required to arrive at the kind of conclusion that would necessitate that question.

However, to answer it: I thought about joining. But, I got into college. So...

**Q:** *What rank are you?*

**A:** I'm a manager at a construction firm. But, to put it in army terms... maybe a master chief? Whoever that guy is in that video game. I'm utterly certain you know the one.

OK. So, we all survived another edition of Ask a Civilian, which I was a little worried about.

As usual, I'll be taking your questions on Facebook, and answering the most popular ones in next month's Desert Mesh - if I don't poke my own eyes out first.

*This feature is satire and Hank Braughtigan is not even a real person. This is unfortunate because he would probably be fun to hang out with.*

*Nothing in this column should be taken literally, nor should it EVER be construed as actual advice.*

*Seriously.*

*Don't do these things.*

## ACCORDING TO THE INTERNET

Each month, our Facebook followers will have a chance to be published in the Desert Mesh.

This month's winner of our caption contest:

**"Alright, guys. 'SURPRISE' on three! OK?"**

*Submitted by Jesse Aguilar.*

