

The North Star

Serving Task Force Marne
U. S. Division- North, Iraq



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Photo by Sgt. Chad Nelson, 135th Mobile Public Affairs Det.

Private Matthew Davis, 3rd Plt., 573rd Clearance Co., 1st Eng. Bn., 130th Eng. Bde., cuts metal rebar to size. The rebar was used to create a metal grate that now covers a culvert on a main supply route in Iraq. The grate ensures water flow and protection against unwanted access.

Engineers return city's water flow

130th Eng. Bde. uses tools to stop enemies, provide necessities

**By Sgt. Chad Nelson
135th Mobile PA Det.**

On a humid, overcast spring day in Iraq, six trucks driven by the combat engineers of 3rd Platoon, 573rd Clearance Company, 1st Engineer Battalion, 130th Engineer Brigade, roll down a main supply route, scanning the sides of the road for their next mission. Just a few years ago, improvised explosive devices riddled roads like these, threatening the safety of U.S. servicemembers and Iraqi civilians.

While still dangerous, these roads are now relatively safer. This is due, in part, to the efforts of previously deployed engineer brigades denying access to culverts – tubes that run underneath roads, which allows water to flow. Violent extremists used these culverts in the past to hide IEDs, resulting in the deaths of servicemembers and civilians.

U.S. Army engineers effectively denied access to

these culverts, but they did so hastily in order to quell the threat as quickly as possible. In their haste to protect fellow servicemembers and innocent civilians, the engineers installed denial systems that stopped the water flow through the culvert. This was the case with 3rd platoon's most recent mission. A large Hesco barrier filled with earth – surrounded by concertina wire and barbed wire – completely blocked the culvert, reducing the water flow to a mere trickle.

"The Hesco was very effective, but it was hasty," said 1st Lt. Matthew O'Shea, platoon leader, 3rd Plt., 1st Eng. Bn., 130th Eng. Bde. "It definitely worked but ... it's causing flooding."

To improve water flow and decrease flooding in the area, the engineers brought an arsenal of tools to combat this project. A high mobility engineer excavator first ripped the Hesco barrier to pieces and pushed

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the mountains of dirt away from the culvert. Once exposed, the culvert presented a new challenge: earth and tar plugged the hole.

The engineers used everything they had to clear the dirt and tar. The sound of shovels, jackhammers and a cement saw pierced the humid air as cars raced by on the nearby highway.

Large globs of oily, putrid tar mixed with mud and dirt came out in awkward clumps as the engineers took turns on the excavation project. Sweaty, exhausted and covered in tar and mud, the Soldiers took turns digging.

"We need to clear this out to allow free water flow of the culvert," said 1st Lt. O'Shea.

While the threat of IED placement is lower than in the past, the threat still exists and the engineers must deny access to the concrete tubes that run underneath the road while still allowing water flow. They accomplish this one of two ways: constructing and installing a grate or placing a new, specifically designed "Lapeer kit."

The hope for the mission was to use the new Lapeer kits. The kit is pre-fabricated and completely covers the culvert. Holes are large enough to allow water to flow, but small enough to deny access to the tube. Bright purple in color, the kit looks like it would belong in a carnival or children's museum instead of on the side of an Iraqi road protecting Soldiers and Iraqi civilians from IED blasts. While the kits and grates are equally effective at denying access to culverts, the kits are far more efficient to install, according to 1st Lt.

O'Shea.

After hours of digging, pounding and sawing their way through the tar and muck, the engineers discovered the tube was too small to support the Lapeer kit. The engineers have the capability to weld on site. A small trailer, pulled by their Mine-Resistant, Ambush Protected vehicle, acts as a portable welding station and the tractor-trailer, which hauls the HMEE Excavator, holds the metal needed for the job. Still hoping to capitalize on the efficiency of the Lapeer kit, the engineers tried to widen the tube further so that the kit could fit. After attempting this for more than an hour, the platoon leader decided to take measurements of the culvert and fabricate the grate at the engineer's motor pool on Contingency Operating Base Speicher.

"Pre-fabricating means better quality and stronger welds," said 1st Lt. O'Shea. Normally, the engineers recon the site and take measurements so they can pre-fabricate before going to the site. This was impossible for this site, as the Hesco barrier denied all access – even to the engineers' measuring tapes.

After a hasty denial system consisting of a huge pile of dirt was in place, the engineers headed home to construct the grate, and an already long day turned even longer. It took hours to construct, but the resulting grate was very effective: a large square of iron covered horizontally by iron rebar.

The bars are less than six inches apart, denying access to the culvert but allowing large amounts of water to flow through uninterrupted. Local Iraqis often come by

to thank the engineers for their work after a project like this, but none were present on this day. However, the Soldiers needed no thanks. The knowledge of a job well done was more than enough for these Soldiers.

They installed grates on both sides of the road in less than four hours, which is quicker than expected, according to Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Preski, 3rd Platoon sergeant, 573rd Clearance Co., 1st Eng. Bn., 130th Eng. Bde.

While this project may seem finished, the engineers will return to this site, and other culverts they have

denied, to make sure no one tampers with them. They will also be refitting and improving additional culvert denial systems that previous engineers have hastily emplaced – no less than 20 projects. During the height of the war in Iraq, engineers placed countless hasty denial systems.

Now, as U.S. troops prepare to withdraw from Iraq, they take special care to leave things right, to leave things as they found them. In this case, they are leaving things improved – offering an opportunity for irrigation while still protecting citizens from danger.



Photo by Sgt. Chad Nelson, 135th Mobile Public Affairs Det.
Staff Sergeant James Eric, 3rd Plt., 573rd Clearance Co., 1st Eng. Bn., 130th Eng. Bde., uses a jackhammer to loosen up the concrete in a culvert. The engineers attempted to make the culvert's opening larger so they could install a "Lapeer kit," which is faster and more efficient than creating a metal grate.

Zac Brown Band brings in masses



Photo by Spc. Dustin Gautney, 2HBCT, 3rd Inf. Div. PAO

The Zac Brown Band performs for approximately 1,000 Soldiers in attendance at FOB Marez/Diamondback as part of the band's USO tour, April 16. The band, a country southern rock group based out of Atlanta, Ga., won an award for best new artist at the 2010 Grammy Awards.



Photo by Spc. Gregory Gieske, 2HBCT, 3rd Inf. Div. PAO

Members of the Zac Brown Band play their number one hits like "Highway 20 Ride" and "Chicken Fried," April 16 at FOB Marez/Diamondback.

**By Spc. Dustin Gautney,
2BCT, 3rd Inf. Div. PAO**

The sounds of a thousand voices cheering in celebration filled the night air over the distant land, intermixed with musical southern hospitality.

For the Soldiers of Forward Operating Base Marez/Diamondback, being treated to a concert by the Grammy Award-winning Zac Brown Band, allowed an opportunity to relax from the pressures of deployment and enjoy a brief moment of home.

"I'll tell you what we tell the crowd every night back home when we play back in

the states. We tell them to remember people sleeping in a sandstorm, so that we can be free," said the band's front man, Zac Brown, to the crowd of Soldiers.

With successful southern-rock hits including five Billboard country charts and number-one singles such as, "Chicken Fried," "Toes," "Highway 20 Ride," the band said it was their duty as Americans to bring the troops overseas, "a little bit of home."

"They were great," said Pfc. Seth Geiger, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division. "Some of the songs really remind you of just being back home and hanging out with friends."

Similar to the bands' stateside shows, fans were welcomed to meet and talk with the band after the show, as well as received signed autographs.

"They said it was just part of southern hospitality, but it was awesome to get a chance to talk to them face-to-face; they really care about what we are doing here," said Pfc. Geiger.

During the various shows on their USO tour, the band recorded many of their performances for a music video for the band's single, "Free."

"The Soldiers at the shows were able to wave at their Families (during the music video footage)," Brown says. "We want to show our support of the military and just remind everyone that it's still real and it's still going on."

Despite the band's own personal success of being nominated for the Academy

of Country Music's Entertainer of the Year, the band elected to take part in the USO tour, instead of attending the awards ceremony.

"The war isn't front-page news anymore and a lot of folks forget that there are actually people over there, away from their Families, serving our country," said Brown.

"They've been giving up months and months of their lives, some of them years, so we're excited to get to entertain them."



Photo by Spc. Dustin Gautney, 2HBCT, 3rd Inf. Div. PAO

Zac Brown of the Zac Brown Band performs for a crowd at FOB Marez/Diamondback, April 16. Brown said he was excited to be entertaining those who have been deployed overseas for so long.

Task Force Marne Heroes of the North



Robert Traurig, of Dubuque, Iowa, is an accomplished finance and accounting professional who is an invaluable asset to the comptroller team for Task Force Marne. A 1983 graduate of the United States Military Academy, Traurig served for 12 years as a field artillery officer, including command in the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) during Desert Shield/Desert Storm. He joined CALIBRE in October 2009 and was deployed the following February as part of U.S. Army Central Command Enduring Cost mission to directly support the TF Marne G-8. Traurig assists in coordinating the United States Division -North manager's Internal Control Program. He also expertly coordinates the Joint Facilities Acquisition Review Board validations, which currently total \$15.6 million in ongoing actions. His keen oversight of the validation process ensures timely funding of all mission-critical requirements for the task force. For these reasons, Traurig is a most deserving Task Force Marne Service Provider of the Week.



Staff Sergeant Dennis Riehle, of Barrington, Ill., is with 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division. While on a dismounted patrol through an abandoned field, Staff Sgt. Riehle prevented a brush fire from spreading into adjacent orchards and the surrounding village. As the fire broke out, Staff Sgt. Riehle quickly grabbed members of his squad and raced around to the back of the fire using dirt and shovels to battle the blaze. The fire spread quickly and could have easily moved into the village, destroying homes and valuable crops if not for Staff Sgt. Riehle's quick actions and determination. He continued to battle the fire against overwhelming odds and repeatedly pushed into the hottest parts of the fire to beat back the flames. As a result of his actions and quick thinking, Task Force Patriots saved the villagers of the local town from catastrophic losses. His actions and quick thinking make him an excellent choice for today's Task Force Marne Hero of the North.

Iraqi government opens 5 English language testing sites

Cultural Tidbit Special to the North Star

The Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education has opened five Test of English as a Foreign Language sites across Iraq. Two are located in Baghdad and the other three are in Mosul, Basra and Najif.

The program is used as a barometer to see if Iraqi students are able to

speak proficient English to study at an American university. The test is free of charge to the students.

In order to pass the TOEFL, students across Iraq often take courses to prepare for the exam.

Some members of the Iraqi academic community think students who learn English, will have more opportunities to study abroad and to help improve the lives of all Iraqis.

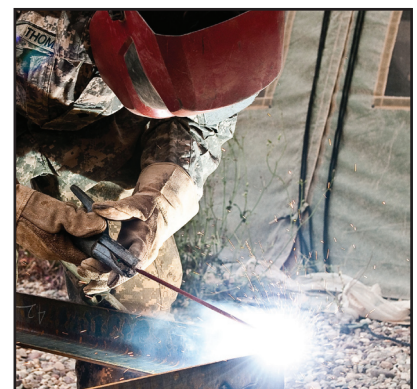
The impact that these facilities is not yet known, but they will be studied by the Iraqi government to see what benefits they will bring to both Iraqi education and society.

However, students as a whole seem to be happy about the TOEFL centers and look forward to studying English.

Editor's note: Nagim Jadou, a translator with Task Force Marne, contributed to this article.

Safety Thought of the Week: Unit Self Help Projects

- Read labels on all materials before starting the project.
- Review Material Safety Data Sheets if available.
- Ensure proper ventilation for paints, adhesives, etc.
- Identify Soldiers with experience and use them as subject matter experts.
- Ensure fire extinguishers are available if using flammable materials.
- Inspect tools for serviceability and the presence of safety features.
- Do not attempt projects beyond the scope of your ability or resources.
- Do not attempt any electrical self-help projects.
- Use composite risk management in order to identify hazards and mitigate risk.
- Leaders ensure Soldiers are properly supervised.
- Seek expertise/information from higher level organizations.
- Wear proper personal protective equipment as required for the project; eye pro, gloves, etc.



REGIONAL HEADLINES

Unemployed nonprofit worker gives \$10 a day

www.gnn.com

SEATTLE - Not long after Reed Sandridge was laid off from his job at a nonprofit in Washington, D.C., he remembered something his mother would say: When you're going through tough times, that's when you most need to give back.

So last December, on the third anniversary of her death, Sandridge started giving away \$10 a day to a different person for a year.

As he writes on his Web site, Sandridge acknowledges \$10 won't change anyone's life, even the most down-and-out soul. But he believes that the act of giving will hopefully inspire others to pursue the ideals of altruism, whether because they receive \$10 from Sandridge or from reading the stories of the people he's met since he began his project.

So now the 36-year-old businessman's day job is walking around Washington, trying to convince people to take \$10 from him.

As of today, Day 126 of the Year of Giving project, Sandridge has given away \$1260 and met 126 people he never would have met otherwise. Just yesterday, he said he spent three hours talking with a guy at Starbucks, just sharing coffee and talking with a stranger.

"I never envisioned that it would turn into what it has," Sandridge said by phone. "I'm really no longer in

control of it anymore."

For the most part, he has been giving away money within a mile of his home in Washington, something that has allowed him to get to know people in his own community better. Sandridge keeps track of the basic demographics of his recipients on the Stats page of his site, and where he also documents what people say they'll do with the money.

His Website includes photos, stories and videos of the people he's given \$10: Rob C., a waiter struggling to stay sober; John E., a man who lives out of two shopping carts and hasn't bathed in weeks or even months; Katy S., a documentary filmmaker who shocked Sandridge by destroying her \$10. Sandridge was impressed by the lively debate sparked by Katy's story, with people talking passionately about what she did with the \$10, something that Sandridge loves to see.

"It doesn't matter if you think it's something she should have done or shouldn't," he said, "but that people are talking about it."

When asked about the recipients of \$10 that he'll remember when the project is over, Sandridge names one after another. Like Day 103's Matt from southern Virginia, who took Sandridge's \$10, added \$90 of his own and used the \$100 to sponsor 10 kayakers taking part in a fund-raiser to save the James River.

Or the Georgetown grad student from Day 109, who used his \$10 to buy supplies to bake cookies. He then

gave them to the "unseen" people he encounters every day, such as the guy who gives away the free newspaper at the Metro station.

"Here's two cookies; maybe you'd like to give one away," the grad student told Sandridge he said as he passed out his homemade cookies.

"I almost hesitate to name only a handful" of \$10 recipients, Sandridge said, "because, really, every one of them is special." People, he said, have opened up to him and told him about suicide attempts, about drug addiction, about abuse in their past.

"For someone to sit down and open up to me is really amazing," he said. As amazed as Sandridge is about how his Year of Giving is turning out, he says his mother would have been its greatest fan.

Divorce Care Group

This group is for those For going through one of life's most difficult experiences. Meetings will be held Tuesdays from 7:30 - 9 p.m. at the Family Life Chaplain Office (Next to Troop Medical Clinic) on Contingency Operating Base Speicher.

Contact the Division Chaplains Office at NIPR 845-6209 for additional info.

Anti-Kidnapping tip:

Rehearse actions on contact taken if separated or isolated.

THE North Star

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2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team,
3rd Infantry Division

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