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Double Deuce deployed

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Desert Issue

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Double Deuce

NMCB-22's bi-weekly newsletter
Al Asad, Iraq

CAPT Steven L. Young
CEC, USN
Commanding Officer

LCDR Michelle Breaux
CEC, USN
Executive Officer

CMDCM(SCW) Gilbert Jordan
Command Master Chief

YNC Kevin Murray
Editor

JO1 Leslie A. Shively
NMCB-22 PAO/Editor-in-Chief
Photography/Graphic Design

EA2 Jeffrey D. Boyd
Camp Moreell PAO

NMCB-22 Seabees share the stage with Vice President Cheney

Story by JO1 Leslie A. Shively

AL ASAD, Iraq – Vice President Dick Cheney recognized Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) Twenty-two's hard work in Iraq during a surprise visit to the Al Asad Air Base, Dec. 18.

During his pre-holiday message to over 600 Seabees, Marines and Army personnel gathered in a hangar at the flight line, Cheney said he wanted to let deployed service members know their sacrifices are noticed, that they have his backing and America's support.

The vice president took time to point out several Seabee accomplishments in Iraq, while he shared the stage with several NMCB-22 members with whom he met and shook hands.

"Seabees all over the country, day and night, (are) preparing runways, fixing water pumps and doing a hundred other tasks – Americans serving in Iraq have been absolutely superb," Cheney said.

Originally not part of the vice president's agenda, twenty NMCB-22 Seabees and their two Marine advisors were able to attend the event because of two days of intense work to ensure its success.

Three days prior to Cheney's visit, NMCB-22 leadership was notified that a stage, two heavy-duty camera stands with stairs, partition walls for the backstage area, benches and a table along with frames for two large ceremonial flags needed to be built in a very short time span, to facilitate a visit from an unnamed, but high-ranking American political figure.

Photo: USMC Cpl. Cullen J. Tiernan

Vice President Dick Cheney delivers a speech to an audience of over 600 at Al Asad Air Base during his first visit to Iraq while in office.

"I love challenges," said Builder 1st Class Ricardo Trevino, NMCB-22 carpenter shop supervisor. "I had 48 hours to build, but had to wait 12 of those hours in order to coordinate the materials arrival. So that first day, when we got the word at 4 p.m., we created a plan."

Materials arrived the next morning and volunteers pre-fabricated parts to the main structures. Thirty more volunteers jumped in to help assemble at the hangar, working for over 16 hours.

On the following day, the group spent another 16 hours putting the stairs on the stage, hanging the flags, placing partition walls and putting finishing touches on the set.

As a reward for the Seabees' work, one of the vice president's staffers invited the group to attend the speech. Ten lucky Seabees were selected to share the stage and shake Cheney's hand.

"I shook his hand and he asked me where I was from. I told him El Paso, Texas," said Personnel Specialist 1st Class Jose Mendoza, who handles disbursing and administrative duties for NMCB-22. "It was an honor. I can tell my kids I got to meet the vice president. You don't get many chances to meet and shake his hand."

"His visit was a great morale booster for troops and his acknowledgment of Seabees and their work nationwide was a long-awaited public recognition of our role in the history-making birth of a new democratic nation," said Trevino.

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Camp Moreell hosts CNR

Story and photo by EA2 Jeffrey Boyd

CAMP MOREELL, Kuwait -- The Navy's top reservist, Vice Admiral John G. Cotton, Commander, Navy Reserve Force, spent Thanksgiving with Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 22 Seabees stationed at Camp Moreell and Sailors stationed at the neighboring Navy Customs Battalion Papa, located at the U.S. Army's Life Support Area (LSA) in Kuwait.

Both units are performing duties in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Arriving early Nov. 24, Cotton first addressed Seabees and Sailors, briefing them on the Navy's current mission in Southwest Asia and various topics related to the future of the Navy Reserve. After the brief, Cotton held a lively question and answer session,

Cotton then toured the customs facility and before departing, he enjoyed Thanksgiving Dinner at the air base's dining facility.

GM2 Stacy Lindley, left, listens while Vice Admiral John Cotton answers questions from the audience.

Step aside, McGruff: the Navy working dogs are in town

Story and photo by EA2 Jeffrey Boyd

The transient population of sailors passing through Camp Moreell can sometimes be a colorful mix. On a given day, the camp may be hosting any combination of the following: onward theater-bound battalion personnel, homeward-bound personnel and those traveling on emergency leave, staging for medical evacuation or transiting between Navy commands.

In early November, a camp census revealed over 300 sailors including two dogs, Rico, a five year-old male Belgian Malinois and Hassle, a seven year-old male German Shepard.

Rico and Hassle were traveling with their handlers, Master At Arms 2nd Class Elliot Fiaschi from Naval Station Norfolk and Master At Arms 1st Class Arnold Fisher from Naval Station San Diego. Both dogs are trained for explosive patrol and bomb sniffing and were beginning a six month deployment to Southwest Asia.

According to the Navy Liaison Office at Camp Moreell, the foursome was not permanently assigned to a particular unit – meaning that they would most likely be traveling around the theater extensively.

Fisher, Fiaschi and the dogs were accompanied by 500 lbs of gear for their deployment, a good portion of which was dog food. Fiaschi commented that excess baggage fees charged by the airlines were a major hurdle in making the trip to the theater.

The recollection of the camp staff is that this was the first known instance of canine sailors berthed at Camp Moreell.

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Cheney visit

Cheney met with several of Iraq's top military and civilian leaders and toured an Iraqi Security Force training facility before delivering his speech.

The vice president also visited the air base to award Bronze Stars to two Marines, Corporal Jeffery A. Firman, a light armored vehicle crewman from 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion and Corporal Jaret M. Radimer, a rifleman with 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment.

Safety is our responsiblity

Story by UTC C. E. Crozier, Safety Chief

UTC C. E. Crozier

The safety department in the battalion has a critical role. All construction projects have to abide by NAVOSH (Navy Office of Occupational Safety and Health) and OSHA (the federal office of Occupational Health and Safety Administration) instructions. These are put in place to protect Seabees who deal with the controlled chaos and inherent dangers of a construction site on a daily basis. It is the Safety Department's job to review safety plans for the construction projects large and small, investigate mishaps and to make recommendations to provide a safe atmosphere in which work is to be performed.

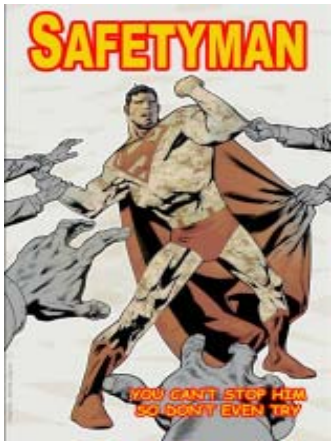
Our goal is to make sure our Seabees have all the safety equipment necessary to complete the job and it is performed in a safe manner. We want everyone to go home in the same condition that they arrived.

The Safety Department has a vast array of resources for use by the battalion, from five minute briefs and inspirational safety posters to the Naval Construction Force library. We encourage members to come by if they have a question or need some resources for an up-coming project. If we don't have it we can get it.

Although the battalion has a Safety Department, safety is everyone's responsibility. Many people think "Safety" is a person but really it is a program, a program that all hands are charged with being aware of and enforcing. After all don't you want to work in a safe environment?

Remember what the sticker on your hard hat says, "Safety is my Responsibility."

The poster at left is one of the many occupational safety tools available to help the Safety Department encourage safe working habits among Seabees. Humor is a big part of the message and many posters use WWII-era photos and artwork to spread the word about the importance of safety in the work place.



The Oasis: a visit to a sacred site

- photos JO1 L.A. Shively, YN2 J. Fearn

MEMORIES AND MUSIC

BY IT2 CHENWAI WONG

We all have a favorite song or tune that reminds us of a certain period or event in our lives. Some of those memories may be happy and some sad, but nevertheless music always seems to be a part of them.

Music has helped me get through some very tough and trying times throughout my 37-year lifespan and most recently since I've been on deployment. It has helped me smile, made me laugh, made me reflect, uplifted me in worship and praise of God, dance, and even inspired me to compose and write my own songs.

Construction Electrician 1st Class Christopher Roberts (yes, he made E6!) and I, with a few other Seabees, have been writing some songs about this deployment, starting off with "Hunter Liggetville," "Runaway MTVR," and "Muster Without a Cause." We wrote the lyrics and used the music from some popular '80s and '90s songs. Our goal is to provide keepsakes of some memorable moments of our deployment over time through music.

LIMA SIX IS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND
I THOUGHT THEY SAID THEY WERE NORTHWARD BOUND
THE RADIO'S DEAD AND ALL I HEAR IS A CRACKLE
I WISH I HAD SOME CHIPS AND A SNAPPLE
THE COC IS SEARCHING FOR US
HOW DO YOU MISS THIS BIG GREEN BUS
ALPHA SIX IS GOING MAKE A BIG FUSS
AND I DON'T THINK THEY'RE GOING TO COME FOR US

SO WE MIGHT AS WELL JUST CAMP RIGHT HERE
AND MAKE BELIEVE THAT WE HAVE SOME BEER
AND ROAST MARSHMALLOWS IN THE FIRE…

Above excerped from "Runaway MTVR" written by CE1 Christopher Roberts and IT2 ChenWai Wong, sung to the tune of "Runaway Train" by Soul Asylum

I love music. I love music so much that before I left home for deployment, I stayed up two nights in a row trying to put music from my favorite cds onto my MP3 player. I succeeded in adding about 1500 songs.

I also purchased a travel guitar (a Martin LXL for you guitar fanatics) to bring with me so I could keep practicing. At first my wife frowned upon the idea of me buying another guitar (I have 8 so far!) but I finally got her approval when I told her that this one was easier to take on the airplane since it is not full size but rather a travel size guitar. It actually fits into the overhead luggage compartment.

The other night I was talking to IT2 Dion Worley who is about the same age as I am and also a guitar player/aficionado. We both were tired and had been having "one of those days." We started talking about music and eventually ended up specifically talking about '80s music and mullets. Yes, I confess, I am an 80's child with some roots from progressive rock bands of the '70s (YES being one of my favorites. Steve Hackett and Steve Howe are my guitar heroes), and no, I never had a mullet!

By the end of the conversation our mood had changed and we were laughing and listening to songs from the Psychedelic Furs, Level 42, The The (yes, there was a group by that name!), Rush, Duran Duran and Electric Light Orchestra (ELO) to name a few. I even did the '80s shuffle … if you don't know what that is I might show you later (of course, for a small fee!).

Later that night while I was on watch, I thought of a couple of songs that marked two significant events in my life: "Onward Christian Soldiers" a hymn which was playing as my father-in-law walked down the aisle with my wife on my wedding day and "Apple of Your Daddy's Eye" by Peter Cetera that I sang to my first daughter Malia the very first time I put her to sleep.

It is now 0545. I am in the 4th hour of my watch and the COC is still quiet. I've been listening to Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nacht Musik" (A Little Night Music) after finishing Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons."

Suddenly the sound of an F-16 blasting off the nearby runway breaks the early morning calm. Then I hear the whine of the engines coming to life off a CH-47 helicopter. I step out briefly into the morning chill and catch a glimpse of the afterburner of the second F-16 zooming by as it takes off into the dark sky. More choppers warming up for take off. Wagner's "Flight of the Valkyrie" comes to mind.

The COC comes to life once again. Radio communications and chatter, tasks to be tackled and completed. Deadlines to be met. The hustle and bustle of the Seabees has once again begun.

I smile as I quietly begin to hum the tune from Quentin Tarantino's film "Kill Bill" performed by the Japanese group the 5,6,7,8s: "Woo Hoo"…

The earth isn't FLAT, Stanley

Story and photos by CAPT John Delcambre

Stanley was a little boy who loved to read about interesting places that were too far away to visit. Traveling around the world was a lot of money and a lot of trouble. One day Stanley was climbing to reach a book at the top of a very tall bookcase, when the book case toppled over on him. The book case was soooooo heavy that when it fell on poor Stanley it flattened him. Stanley was very sad because now he was flat and would not be able to handle the heavy books.

HM1 Rick Donahue, left, Capt. John Delcambre, center and HM3 Ricardo Pacheco each hold a Flat Stanley. The figures were cut from paper and colored by Delcambre's children, Alyse, Teddy and Christianne who sent them to their father to carry to all of the places he travels.

One day Stanley had a great idea! With his new flat shape he would be able to fit in an envelope and be mailed to all the interesting and far away places that he'd only been able to read about before! Stanley got together with his friends who were very happy for him and they all agreed to help Stanley get mailed to visit people all over the world.

When Flat Stanley arrived at Al Asad, Iraq he made a lot of friends very quickly. The Seabees liked him so much they invited him to join them on their missions. Of course, Flat Stanley had never been able to do more than read about the Seabees now they were teaching him how to be a Seabee and even help with their work!

Flat Stanley rode in helicopters and on convoys. He got to help build SWA huts. He learned and helped with temporary electric power sources. He stood watch in the CP. Stanley even helped the Hospital Corpsmen with sanitary engineering and house calls around the outpost. And every week – just like he promised – Flat Stanley would send his second grade friends pictures and stories of his adventures.

Stanley worked so hard and became so popular that all of his new friends decided he should be made an Honorary Seabee at the rank of 3rd Class Petty Officer and take on the military title of PO3 Stanley, Flat F.

Editors note: Capt. Delcambre dedicates this story to his three children, Alyse, Teddy and Christianne. The eight-year old triplets attend Frost Elementary School in Richmond, Texas and are participating in the Flat Stanley project, so sent their father, who is deployed to Iraq with NMCB-22,three Flat Stanleys to carry with him.

In the book, "Flat Stanley" by Jeff Brown, the character of Stanley Lambchop is flattened by a falling bulletin board. Since he is flat, his parents decide to put him in a large envelope and mail him to various places to visit friends.

The story was impetus for a group of teachers in Calif. to begin the Flat Stanley Project and presently over 1000 classes around the world participate.

According to the project's website, students make paper Flat Stanleys and begin a journal with him for a few days. Then Flat Stanley and the journal are sent to another school where students there treat Flat Stanley as a guest and make entries in the journal. Flat Stanley and the journal are then returned to the original sender. Students plot his travels on maps and share the contents of their journals.

For many young students, these journals are the first meaningful opportunities they have to use writing as a communication tool, motivates them to produce their best work and they eagerly look forward to responses. The project also helps students keep in touch with one another. Check out www.FlatStanley.com for more information.

CEC Lauro Garza, left, and an assistant hold Flat Stanley while they cook barbeque at an outlying project in Iraq.

Above, a U.S. Army soldier holds a Flat Stanley figure while he travels in a helicopter with other members of his unit.

Right, a Flat Stanley figure sitting in the sand in Iraq.

THE SANDS OF CHRISTMAS

I had no Christmas spirit when I breathed a weary sigh,
and looked across the table where the bills were piled too high.
The laundry wasn't finished and the car I had to fix,
My stocks were down another point, the Dolphins lost by six.

And so with only minutes till my son got home from school
I gave up on the drudgery and grabbed a wooden stool.
The burdens that I carried were about all I could take,
and so I flipped the TV on to catch a little break.

I came upon a desert scene in shades of tan and rust,
No snowflakes hung upon the wind, just clouds of swirling dust.
And where the reindeer should have stood before a laden sleigh,
eight hummers ran a column right behind an M1A.

A group of boys walked past the tank, not one was past his teens,
Their eyes were hard as polished flint, their faces drawn and lean.
They walked the street in armor with their rifles shouldered tight,
their dearest wish for Christmas, just to have a silent night.

Other soldiers gathered, hunkered down against the wind,
To share a scrap of mail and dreams of going home again.
There wasn't much at all to put their lonely hearts at ease,
They had no Christmas turkey, just a pack of MREs.

They didn't have a garland or a stocking I could see,
They didn't need an ornament— they lacked a Christmas Tree.
They didn't have a present even though it was tradition,
the only boxes I could see were labeled "ammunition."

I felt a little tug and found my son now by my side,
He asked me what it was I feared, and why it was I cried.
I swept him up into my arms and held him oh so near
and kissed him on the forehead as I whispered in his ear.

There's nothing wrong my little son, for safe we sleep tonight,
our heroes stand on foreign land to give us all the right,
to worry on the things in life that mean nothing at all,
instead of wondering if we will be the next to fall.

He looked at me as children do and said its always right,
to thank the ones who help us and perhaps that we should write.
And so we pushed aside the bills and sat to draft a note,
to thank the many far from home, and this is what we wrote,

God bless you all and keep you safe, and speed your way back home.
Remember that we love you so, and that you're not alone.
The gift you give you share with all, a present every day,
You give the gift of liberty and that we can't repay.

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Author's Note: Christmas tugs at the heart more so than any other time of the year and in 2003 I found myself watching the news and reflecting on the young men and women facing a very different Christmas than those we knew here at home. Once again, I wrote with the hope of sharing how much America appreciates the service that keeps us safe, and how much we pray for the safe homecoming of all who serve.

- Photo: Sandstorm in Camp Moreell, Kuwait
JO1 Leslie A. Shively

...celebrating the holidays...

... with sand
in our boots
and home
in our hearts
...

- photos LCDR M. Breaux, SKCS L. Johnson, JO1 L.A. Shively, EO3 D. Verret

ON POINT: Western Iraq

photos by

DOC Pacheco