

The rains came on April 2<sup>nd</sup>. It was the first day that we had anytime off. We did not have to be into work until 1:00. It rained all morning long, so I just stayed in my can. For the next 5 days we have had on and off rain each day. The rain caused a cancellation of one of our pours.

The rain has also caused other problems. The roads in this part of the country are not the best to begin with. When it rains here, the streams and rivers tend to swell and cause damage to roads and bridges. They also cause other problems. We lost 7 Marines to the storms when they tried to cross a swollen river with an MTRV and it got swept into the river. I did not know any of these individual, but I feel the pain of their families and the Marine Corps. It was an incident that did not have to happen. We had to send out a crew to do repairs on some of these washed out roads. All traffic was shut down for at least 3 days.

Most people back home know that I enjoy the game of softball. (Pause April 6<sup>th</sup>) We had Marines from VMA 513 that came to us and wanted us to help them fix there softball field. They had another unit grade the field and then it was left with 6 inches of powder. After the rains that came down, we went up to their field and rolled it with a roller. It turned out to be pretty smooth. My next mission will be to take my surveying instrument up there and locate the bases and the foul pole. Once we get the field done, we plan on getting a team together and challenge them to a game.

The concrete job that we are working on is a very exciting place to work everyday. The runway that we are repairing is 13,000 feet long. There is another parallel runway that is 14,000 feet long. The job site is like being at an air show every day. I have seen the following airplanes takeoff and land: C130 Hercules, C17 Globemaster, C5 Galaxy, AV-8B Harrier, AE-6B Prowler, F-18B Hornet and several civilian and other countries military plane. There are also many helicopters that fly around at the airport and around the base. They are the AH-1W Cobra, C46 Sea Knight, C53 Sea Stallions, UH-1N Hueys, Blackhawks and Chinooks.

(April 13<sup>th</sup>) It seems to take forever to get back to writing sometimes. My typical day goes like this. I get up at 0500 and take a shower and shave. I catch the bus at about 0545 and head to work. Work starts at 0700. I spend the first part of the day writing emails and check my favorite web sites. Every other day we are making a concrete pour, so I head to the runway by 0745 and am up there until about 1100. Then it is off to lunch. Lunch usually last about one and one half hour. Back to work to put out all of the fires that I missed in the morning. I am the Leading Petty Officer for my department. What that means is that I need to handle all of the problems so that my people can get their work done. At the end of the week, it seems that I do not get much done. I leave work and jump back on the bus at 1800. I head to Fleet Marine Force class at 1830 and leave there at about 2000. Sometimes I go to dinner. I usually get back to my can at about 2100 and relax until 2200. It all starts over the next morning.

On Sunday, April 9<sup>th</sup>, the bad guys decided to visit us during the day. I was on the phone with my wife when I heard four explosions. I have become very keen to how they sound.

I had to abruptly hang the phone up and get to the office for accountability. It only took us 44 minutes to account for all of our people. That is no bad. The rockets landed up on the airfield. Nobody was hurt, but one C130 had a little damage.

We had some guys go out with the Marines to help look for the ones that had drowned. They took an excavator to dig for them. They found one of them 20 Km down stream from the mishap. They only have to find one more. I pray for the family that they find him.

Things something started to get to me. On Tuesday night, I did not sleep very well. I woke up very tired. The concrete pour that day did not go the best. The first concrete truck ran out of fuel about ¼ miles away from the job. By the time it got to the site, we had to pour it in the bottom of the trench because it set up very fast. That truck did not have any shoots and it sprayed concrete all over the place. I got plenty of concrete on myself. That was the first and last time that we will be having that truck. When I got back to the office, all of the little things were bothering me. I had to go sit by the smoke pit for awhile to relax. I do not smoke, but it is a relaxing place to sit. Today was a much better day.

(April 23) Once again it has taken me awhile to get back to writing. Easter has come and gone. I did not get to look for my Easter basket this year. I have been getting plenty of jelly beans. It seems that everyone has been getting them in their care packages. I attended church on Easter. We have a chaplain that had deployed with us. He is a Lutheran pastor from Marshfield and is a very calm and settling person to talk to. We started off the service by singing "Christ the Lord is Risen". I had a very hard time singing. When the music started, I had instant vision of being back in the church choir. The tears started to roll down my face. I do not get very emotional out here, but some things trigger memories that get to me.

The rest of the day was pretty normal except of the meals. For lunch myself and some of my crew was invited up to VMA-513 for lunch. They were grilling out. The menu included T-bones, lobster and crab legs. Then it was back to work for the afternoon. We do not get to take holidays off here. Some people do not understand and think that the command is being insensitive, but that is how things work in a contingency environment. Supper also had a good menu. The dining facilities served prime rib and shrimp cocktails along with the rest of the meal. They also decorated the eating areas.

We finally got back out to work on the softball field for VMA-513. I took two of my engineering aids out and we surveyed the bases and the outfield fence. The equipment that I have to work with is at least 30 years old. I do not have any electronic equipment. It took me a while to refresh my memory to use the theodolite. It is nice to know that even when you do not use something for a while, it come back to you when you need it. I also coordinated with our Alpha shop to get an auger out to the site. We used a bobcat with the auger bit to drill holes for the foul pole, benches and volleyball poles.

Our runway repair job has gone very well. From April 14-20, we poured six out of seven days. The only day we did not pour was on Sunday. The crews have gotten more concrete

saws, so they are able to get a section ready in one day. Then we ran out of sand at the concrete plant. Apparently, Serka's sand convoy was in Fallujah and the Army highjacked them and took the sand. Now the convoyed do not only have to worry about the insurgents, but they also must worry about the Army.

The concrete plant fired their manager about 2 weeks ago. EA2 Miracle and I went down to the plant to meet with the new manager. They are very gracious when we go to the office. We are always offer coffee, tea or a soda. We meet for about an hour with the new manager, Isan. The people that work for Serka are from Turkey. We try to learn their culture and language. It makes for a better working relationship. On Friday, the older manager stopped by my office. He is now working for a different company who will also be setting up a concrete plant. It is good to see that capitalism is working fine here.

I got a new job this week. I am now a duty section leader. I am in charge of making up a duty section roster and make sure that the work gets done around camp every fifth day. I have a total of 40 people in my duty section. That might sound like a lot, but over half of the people can be outside of the wire at any given time. That leaves me with about 20 people to cover all of the duties. That many people can take care of everything, but it will start to get older after awhile. The complaining has already started and we have not had our first duty section yet. People have to realize that this is not Boy Scout camp. They need to suck it up and get things. Otherwise it will be a long summer.

The weather had been on and off. We have been getting rain showers, hot days and wind storms. I was coming home on Monday, April 17<sup>th</sup> and got hit with a down pour as soon as I got off the bus. In the five minutes that it took for me to walk to my can, I was soaked. In another five minute, the sun was out. The temperatures have started to get up into the 90's and then the next day it will be back down to the low 80's. It sure makes the 80's feel good. On Friday April 21<sup>st</sup>, it was 95 degrees in the shade, but it is a dry heat. If you want to experience it, turn you oven on and stick your head in. We also got a sand storm on Friday. We could see a wall of sand coming at us. It does not move very fast, so you can watch it for a while. The storm lasted only for about ½ hour when it reached us.

I also baked cookies on Friday. I have an oven in my lab that is used for dry soil samples, but it can also be used for cooking. Paula sent me a tub full of cookie dough that did not need to be refrigerated. I fired up the oven at about 2:00 and started to bake. It took me a couple of batches to figure out how long to bake them. Once I figured it out, I was tuning out a batch every 15 minutes. First, we enjoyed them in the shop. Then I started to take them around the camp. Everyone has been get cookies sent to them, but to have a fresh baked one was very enjoyable.

(April 28<sup>th</sup>) Vinnie, my roommate, got back from his planning and estimating mission on Tuesday. He took 3 other people to survey the condition at 14 battle positions. The battle positions are mostly located along the Syrian border. The battle positions are where we are training the Iraqi Army and Security Force. The condition the Marines are living in is not good. Most of the camps have berms surrounding them that were just pushed up from the existing materials thus creating a bowl for the rain water to collect. None of the

positions have air conditioning and most do not have reliable power. We looked at what it will take to get those items fixed and also what need to be done for their buildings and bunkers.

My first duty section day is almost over. I filled out a watchbill at 1200 yesterday and was making changes until 1000 this morning. We had a lot of people going out on convoys, so that cuts into my worker pool. I have very good people in my watch section. They did not complain at all today. Some of the like standing watches so it gets them out of the office. Hopefully, their attitudes will stay the same for the next 5 months.