

(May 8) As usual, it takes me over a week to get back for my next entry. Things have gotten busy. Today was my duty section day. The people that are working for me are the best. I do not have one person who complains to me about the duty. They will complain about the whole duty sections idea. But when I assign them to do something, they do it without saying a word.

We have started to pick more surveying job. We started another AM2 matting job for the Marines. We had to stake out a 156' x 252' area for them to regrade. This was a bigger job than my equipment could take. I went in search of someone with more up to date survey equipment. I found the Marine surveyor of MWSS 274. They loaned us a Trimble 5600 total station and a TSCe data collector. This stuff was more like I was used to using. After we got this equipment, our supply department found a distance measuring kit. This kit includes a Topcon total station. It does not have a download cable, so I have to input the data by hand. It is still better than pulling a tape.

We surveyed the AM2 matting project about six times now. They finally got it graded good enough today. Corporal Hill has been the main operator for the Marines on the site. He is a good guy to work with. He joined the Corps at the age of 29, so he is a lot older than most Marines with the same rank. Without us, these guys would have not gotten this job done. Some of our guys would expect to get something from these guys for all of the help that we gave them. I look at it as these are the guys we work for.

Another project that has come into the picture is to build a fuel farm. The Army graded a site last year and built berms for 200,000 gallon fuel bladders. The only problem is that they are going to use 50,000 gallon bladders. We estimated that we will have to grade another 4 acres and then move the 17,000 yards of berm material and build the new berms. My crew and I went out and surveyed the site to get the location of the existing berms. It is a good thing that we did, because the location that the Air Force had them show on the base site map was wrong. Sometimes, I wonder how the other branches of the service get anything done.

I have an upcoming project to go to outside the wire. There is a Mabey Johnson Bridge that was blown up with an IED that we are going to fix. We will have to crib and jack up the bridge and then replace two sections of the bridge. It will be a long and hot mission. We received the parts for throughout Iraq. The only problem that we have is that some of the parts do not fit. The bridge is an older model so they do not make parts for it anymore. We are going to have to fabricate the parts out of the pieces that we have. If they do not fit when we get there, we will have to field adjust. This will make for an interesting mission.

The moral at the camp is low. There are too many upper management people who can not keep their hands out of everybody's business. The officers and chiefs always tell us that the First Classes are the one that need to make things happen, but then they do not let you do your job. We have a lot of good jobs coming up. All they have to do is get us the materials and equipment and then leave us alone. The projects will be built to the highest quality of any thing on this base. It is difficult when I hear everybody's concern and a lot

of the problems come from the people that I work for. I listen to everyone's concerns and see if I can get things changed. Sometimes it is like beating your head against the wall.

Our concrete runway job has hit a snag. The concrete contract with the supplier has run out. Senior Chief Cooper told the higher up weeks ago that they needed to get working on a new contract. Apparently, some body up a Regiment is too busy to take care of it. Just when things were starting to get into a good rhythm, we hit a snag. The crew will continue to cut joints and get them prepared for the concrete. Once we get the new contract, I am sure that we will pour more than one joint a day to get caught up.

(May 25) I can not believe that I have not made an entry in over two weeks. Things have been busy around here. Since the last time I wrote we have started a lot of projects and finish a few. I received a new survey vehicle two weeks ago. We got an old ambulance out of storage that I have turned into my survey vehicle. It is a 1993 Chevy 3500 pick up with an ambulance topper. We figure that if we wanted to, we could get about 12 people stacked into the back. It is a great vehicle because it has air conditioning. I also do not have to have an assistant driver with me. All of our tactical vehicles require two people to operate. It was a pain if I had to go to a meeting somewhere on the base, because I always had to find someone to go with me. It is also nice because I am able to leave my equipment in the back and lock the doors.

Our fuel farm project got started on around May 15th. We have bulldozers, graders, scraper, excavators and dump truck moving and hauling dirt all over the site. I am not sure if I should call it dirt. The ground around here is very hard on the surface but once you disturb it, it turns into dust. There are times when I am walking around the site and am up to my knees in dust. We have to haul water to the site all day to try to compact the dirt. It is a very dirt job but our guys are doing a great job there.

We have started to do a lot more surveying around camp. There is a possibility that we are going to have to build new buildings to live in. Most of the planning was done off of sketch maps that were inaccurate. I had my crew go out and survey the site and our officers discovered that most of their plans would not fit on to the site. Sometimes people need to take a step back and gather up all of the preliminary information before they expend precious time coming up with schemes that won't work. We also have done some surveying for drainage problems around the Iraqi Security Force camp. I was not the most pleasant place to work because their hygiene is not the greatest. I will leave it at that. There is also plenty of surveying to be done on the fuel farm.

Not much action has been happening on our runway repair job. The guys are still cutting out pieces of the runway. We finally got a new contract with the supplier, but now they do not have any gravel to make the concrete. They did not order any more because they had to have the contract first. When other people do not do their job around here, it makes life difficult for others. The job should be totally up and running soon. In the meantime, it keeps getting hotter out and makes it more difficult to pour the concrete.

The proudest thing that I have done so far was to work on the Mabey Johnson bridge repair. We finally got all of our bridge parts made on May 16th. On May 17th, we got everything loaded up and ready to go. We took a total of 6 tractor trailers full of parts and equipment out to the site. I made my first trip outside of the wire on May 18th. It was only a 9 mile trip, but it took us 80 minutes to get there. One of our Convey Security Element escorted us along with 24 Marines out to the job site. The Marines brought out four tracked vehicles for our security.

The job start off with taking apart some of the blown up pieces of the bridge. I had to evaluate the bridge in its current state to find out what elevation the bridge was at. One of the sides of the bridge was 1 3/8" lower than the other side and there was a large bow in the bridge. Once we took out the blown up sections, it seemed to help straighten things out. We started to install our wooden crib that would be used to support of jacks for jacking the bridge up. All of that was done on day one.

The accommodations at the site were great if you like to camp. We pushed up some dirt berms to establish a berthing area. That is were we spent the next six nights. We had cots along with bug netting for our beds. No frills. You have to be very comfortable with your self, because there is no privacy. The only showers that we got were with baby wipes. I went through plenty of them everyday because of the dust. Most days it would get up into the 100's so I would be sweated through my t-shirt, shorts and coveralls by 9 in the morning. Everywhere you were outside of the berm, you had to have your helmet and protective vest on. This adds about 40-50 pound of equipment to move around in all day. I was very smell when I got home.

The next day, we were able to get all of cribbing and jack installed. Then came an important part in the whole job, raising up the bridge. I figured out that we were going to have to jack the bridge up about 1 1/2 inches. That might not sound like much, but we were supporting about 104,000 pounds onto our cribbing and 4 jacks. I monitored the bridge as it went up to make sure that each side was going up at the same rate. It took us about 45 minute before we finally got it up to where we needed it. Then we installed additional block around the jacks and prayed that it would not fall down.

Day three we started taking off the rest of the older parts. We were going to replace two panel section of the bridge. Each panel section was about 16 feet long. After a lot of pounding on pins and turning out old nuts and bolts we had the bridge disassembled. During this whole time, we had other people installing missing part on the remainder of the bridge. A total of 24 Seabees worked on this project. We even had our corpsman drive the bobcat around getting parts and supplying us with water and food.

Water and food were a very important part of the whole job. Due to the high temperature and the strenuous work, we had to stay properly hydrated. We brought out ice with us but it was melted by the end of the second day. The water was getting very warm. We finally got a resupply of ice on the third afternoon. That did not last very long. We also got some more ice from one of our convoys that was going by on the fifth morning. We had mostly MREs to eat while we were out there. They do not taste very bad but I could not wait to

get back and sit down at a table to have a meal. Our supply department also sent us muffins, breakfast bars and Gatorade.

Day four was spent preparing the bridge abutment that was damaged from the bomb. We had some mix ups with our gasoline on the job site so our builders had to mix all of the concrete in a wheelbarrow. It was a good thing that we only had to pour ½ yard of concrete. By noon, we were starting to install the new bridge parts. I was not having a very productive day. It was my son Cal's birthday. I had called him before we left and told him that I was not going to be able to call him on his birthday. We brought out a satellite phone with us, so I got permission to give him a call. After a few tries, I finally got a hold of him around 4PM. It was great to be able to talk to him. After that, I was full of energy and the rest of the day flew by.

My surveying expertise once again came into play on day five. I had to get the feet ready for the bridge to rest on. We only received four new feet for the bridge so we had to reuse the best four of the existing feet. Some of them were blown apart, so I had to mix and match pieces to get the four best ones. One problem was that the old and the new feet were not made to the same height. I determined that we had to raise the side with the new feet up 2 ¼ inches. We had some large plate steel along. After we stacked up some of the steel, we got the feet to match within 1/8". Not bad. We finished installing the rest of the bridge by about 5 in the afternoon and then started to set the bridge down. Once again, the bridge had to be set down at the same rate. The only problem was that with all of the additional weight that we added, one side was already lower than the other one. I had one set of jacks lower their side to make it equal and then we lower the bridge down slowly. There was a lot of metal creaking, but it finally came to rest. We were successful. The only thing left to do was put on the decking and some additional bracing. That would come on the next day. We finished this portion one day ahead to schedule.

Late on that afternoon, we had more Marines show up. Nobody knew what they were doing here. They informed us that they were our new security. Our existing security force knew nothing about this. After a lot of radio transmissions, it was finally cleared up and our 24 Marines and tracks were replaced. The new guys really scared us. They were driving around at night with their headlights on which is some thing that you do not do. I had radio watch that night, so I slept in the next morning. I woke up to a lot of commotion. A civilian vehicle drove right past our job site. The Marines never saw them. That morning we were left with 6 Marines for security, 3 on each side of the job setting up road blocks. The rest of them left to go look for road mines. They were on a glory mission. We got two of our vehicles sent up with radios and machine guns to provide our own security. Since I did not have much going on the day, I provide security that day. The motto of the Seabee's is "We build, We Fight". One day I am build the bridge, the next day I am protecting it.

We got the remainder of the bridge put together that day and got the all of equipment loaded up and ready to go for the convoy in the morning. The convoy was supposed to get to us at about 9 in the morning. It did not show up until 10:30 because of some snags back at the base. Once we got the remainder of our equipment loaded up, we had to wait.

There was a sandstorm going on back at the base, so we did not have our helicopter support that we needed. We finally got rolling about 12:45 and made it back to the base at about 2PM. After we unloaded all of equipment, it was back to my can for a long awaited shower. It took me a few scrubblings to get clean and it felt good. Then it was off to an FMF class. I did not make it to a dining hall in time to eat so my first meal back was a Double Whopper Meal from Burger King.

I had today off after the week long project. I knew that I would not get the whole day off. I went into the office around 9:30 to look at all of my emails. After lunch, I had to finish paper work on the bridge and attend a meeting for the fuel farm. I tried to call my family at around 3:30 but the phone center satellite was broken. I finally got all of my gear cleaned up and my laundry turned in. It will be back to a normal schedule tomorrow hopefully.