

(June 5) Today was the **BEST** and the **WORST** of my deployment. I received my Fleet Marine Force Specialist Warfare Pin today. It was a great accomplishment. I started taking classes for this back on March 20th. It was a long process. There were a few bumps in the road along the way. I did a final board today with Master Chief Walker who is the Command Master Chief of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force. He is the head Navy enlisted personnel in our chain of command in Iraq. I qualified for the pin along with EA2 (SCW) Miracle. We were the first Seabees from NMCB 25 to receive the pin. That was the great part.

I also lost some fellow Seabees today. One of our Convoy Security Elements hit an improvised explosive device (IED) on the way back into camp. Two of our Seabees were wounded and two of them came in as **ANGELS**. This place sucks some days. They are the first people that we have lost. I pray for their souls and for their families. I do not have all of the details on what happened.

Some people wonder why and how I can be over here. I sometimes wonder what drives people like me to serve in the military. During my studied of the FMF pins, I had to learn the six articles of the Code of Conduct. I was studying them the past few days. They discuss what our responsibilities as member of the armed forces. The first and last articles to me make very powerful statements. Today's events help to reinforce them and will help me get through this situation. The first article states "**I am an American, fighting in the armed forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense**" and the last one states "**I will never forget that I am an American, fighting for freedom, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and in the United States of America**".

Since my last entry, we have also had another sand storm. I occurred on May 26th. I came out of FMF class and was wondering I was going to go to dinner. My decision was made when I turn to go to the dinning facility and was looking at a wall of sand. I turned and headed to my can. I made it back just when the sand storm hit. Within minutes, you could not see more than 100 yards. Sand storms are very cool looking when they are coming in, but leave a big mess when they come through. After every one we have, we have to dust everything off around the office.

Our projects are going very well. Our fuel farm project is a very dirty and dusty place. We had some of the clients come up to the site and tell us that our berms had to be built higher than what we were building. Our design for the project came from the Air Force. It calls for 4'6" high berms. Once these questions were raised, I had to find out what the proper height should be. I drove by the MWSS refueling site. They have 6' higher berms. I talked to the people that run the refueling and they gave the Marine Corps bulk fueling manuals. They call for 6' high berms. I also reached the designs that the Navy has. Our drawings state that the berms should be at a minimum of the height of the full fuel bladder, which is 5'6" high. I brought this information to the engineering officer. We discussed the heights and decided that we needed to talk to the Air Force regarding the difference. We went to meet with the Air Force at 8:10 in the morning. Nobody was

around. We came back at 8:30 and they were finally getting there. After talking to the Lieutenant, he showed us what the Air Force design standards were. He said that everyone had agreed on the 4'6" height. I decided that I could live with the decision to build them that high base on there design. Today, Master Sergeant Brown from the Army told our crew that the berms should be 6' tall. It is a little to late now.

(June 9th) On Wednesday, Miracle and I had lunch with VMA-513. It is always nice to get an invite from MSgt Ryan. They have there food brought up to them from the dinning facilities. Since it was Wednesday, they were grilling T-bones and lobster. That is the menu for every diner on Wednesday. Some days, I get tried of eating steak and just have chicken wings.

Later that day, we headed to the fuel farm to start staking the last two rows of berms. The wind was blowing at least 50 MPH. It was like being in a snowstorm. The sand was blowing off of the top of the berms just like off a snow drift. I had to have all of the machines stop working up wind from us. It was white out condition if you moved any of the dirt. We should finish the job right on time.

Politicking and bidding for jobs is no different here than it is in the states. We had to get a new contract for the last phase of the runway project. For the past 2 months, we have been told that the supplier that we have was going to get a new contract. We found out that the contract was let out for bids and Serka did not get the contract. A company named Lara International got the contract. They are providing concrete to us at another base, but do not have a facility set up here yet. They will be subbing out the contract to another company until they get their plant up and running. We will have to start from square one to develop a working relationship with the new company. I figure it will take us about a good two week to analyze there system and materials to determine if we can get good concrete from these guys.

Things have started to get back to a normal routine somewhat. We have Rear Admiral Phillips come into town tonight. He is the commander of the First Navy Construction Division. Everybody was running around today making the place look extra special. It is a good thing the he is only here for a few days. I think some of the upper management would go crazy trying to make everything perfect. I hope that he comes into my shop so that he can see how the real people work.

(June 10) Today was a tough day. We had the memorial service at 1300. I had work to do before that. Sgt Major Klien of the Army Special Forces needs some elevations taken at their compound. He stopped by yesterday and I had to meet him at 0830. When I was leaving for work today, there was a group of two CH-47 Chinooks and two CH-60 Blackhawks that flew in. Those choppers take the Sgt Major and his boys out to their missions. The Seabees and the Special Forces have developed a very good working relationship. I will accommodate what ever they need from me and my men. Those are the guys that are out doing the dirt work and never get the credit for it. They do not want the credit. That is the way that they operate.

The memorial service was a meaningful tribute to Equipment Operator First Class Gary Rovinski and Hospital Corpman Second Class Jamie Janhke. The Marine Corp band had a brass ensemble from the band to play music. BU3 Scanlon played guitar and sang a song which was beautiful. BU2 Ludwig and EO1 Coakley spoke about our two fallen Seabees. They were both on their team. I do not think if I was in their shoes that I would have been able to compose myself to speak to everyone. There was a good representation from the Army and Marines. CE1 Heib did the final roll call for the team. It was very powerful. We all filed by there boots, weapons, helmets and dog tags to pay our final respect. Admiral Phillips greeted everyone outside of the theater. Sgt Major Klien stopped to shake my hand on the way out. I can only imagine that his fallen soldiers do not get this kind of ceremony. This was closure for us. We must know carry on with the rest of our mission.

I found out the details of the event that took Gary and Jamie's lives. They were the second vehicle in the convoy. Their vehicle drove over an IED in the middle of the road. It was a pressure switch IED which used a piece of surgical tube as the switch. The bomb consisted of five 130mm mortar shell. It destroyed the vehicle. I saw pictures of the HMMVE. It does not even look like what it is supposed to. We are luck that we had two people that made it out alive. BU1 Berlin and UT1 Hendrickson are back in the states recovering from their injuries.

My very good friend, BUC Hutchins, is the convoy commander. He was riding in vehicle three and saw everything happen before his eyes. I have not asked him anything about the details of what happened. He knows that I am here for him if he needs to talk. Any friend of mine, EO2 Shane Johnson, was riding along with the convoy. Chief Hutchins told me that he Shane jumped up on top of the HMMVE to lift the roof so that they could get Gary out of the vehicle. Shane is taken the whole situation very hard. He is a 285lbs man but is as gentle as a teddy bear.

(June 10th 2300) We got the rest of the day off after the memorial service. I had to go to the Post Exchange to get a few things. Some of the guys were having a cook out tonight at the cans, so we decided to pick something up to eat. When I opened the freezer, Miracle asked if I was going to get some steaks. I took a look and said no. Instead, I said that we were getting hot dogs and a loaf of Wonder Bread. I can get a steak anytime around here, but I have not had a hot dog cooked on a grill. We all agreed that they tasted awesome.

We had movie night tonight. It was going to be "Outlaw Josie Wales". Tonight we needed a drink with the movie. We are not allowed to have alcohol in Iraq, but sometimes it comes in the mail and we would hate to see it go to waste. We are very careful and only have one or two. Tonight, we had a mix of Wild Turkey, premixed Long Island Ice Tea and premixed Margarita. After a few toasts, we started to enjoy the drink and the movie. We decided to have one more drink. I opened the bottle and discovered that it was not Wild Turkey, it was Captain Morgan. CE1 Heib, assistant convoy commander for BUC Hutchins team, asked me yesterday if we had any Morgan. I told him no. But as soon as I opened the bottle, I knew who I had to go get. I went to his can and he was there with

EO2 Johnson. I told them that they had to come over. We shared that small bottle of rum and let the two of them tell stories. They left after an hour or so, but it was a great time. They were able to relax and start to move on. Things have started to change already on how they run their teams and missions. God bless them all.

(June 20th) Our fuel farm projected finished on June 14th, one day ahead of schedule. I calculated that we moved about 45000-50000 cubic yards of material. There was a lot of it that blew off of the site. It is a dusty place right now. Everyone that was there on the final inspection day say it looks great. Some other entity will be putting down the gravel for the roadway. Once that job was done, we were able to clean our truck.

We finally got a new contract to provide our runway job with concrete. The contract was awarded to Lara International. There are a lot of politics that go into contracting in this country. Our government does not want to give an unfair advantage to any one corporation. It is just like back home around here. Low bidder gets the job. The only problem with the contractor is that they have not produced any concrete on this base yet. They finally got their batch plant set up on June 18th. They have all of the raw materials and the equipment to produce a quality product.

Yesterday, EA1 Kramer, EA2 Miracle and I witnessed the first concrete pour to come out of the new batch plant. The 84th from the Army is pouring concrete pads for helicopters. We were on the job site at 0200. The Army had 32 people to place a 20'x60' pad. A job that size would take us about 8 people. The Army just throws a whole platoon of people at a job to get it done. It was a very interesting morning. The concrete from the first two trucks was good. The concrete supplier said they had 4 trucks when really they only had two trucks. The rest of the concrete trucks came at varying time and with varying mixes for the next three hours. I needed to put a tent up over the pour because it was a real circus.

We poured a sample concrete pour this morning. I inspected the plant before they mixed any concrete. They had a mixture of sand and gravel in the gravel bin. When I asked why they did that, the answer was that the sand is on the bottom and the gravel was dumped in by accident. I knew that this was not true, but let them mix it. The Army and the Marines do not have quality control for the mixing of the concrete at the plant. I will have one of my guys at the plant for every pour and will refuse a truck if it does not meet our specs. We will have to wait until tomorrows pour to see what happens.

I have started to give myself a new nickname. I am calling myself "Elmer" because it feels like I am the glue that keeps this place together some days. When people want answers regarding the concrete, they come to me. I am the liaison between our unit and the concrete supplier. This is second company that I have had to do this with. I just wish that I got paid in according to the amount of responsibilities that I have.

Sunday was somewhat of an interesting day. We only work a half day on Sunday. I finally got my FMF pin pinned on by the CO. I have been signing my name along with FMF since I passed the board, but now I have the hardware to go along with it. I will

have to get my patches sewn on this week. Later that day, the power went out in our building. That is not a usual occurrence. Some times, the generators run out of fuel or trip a break. That was not the case this time. We had a fire above the generator on the shed that is built to protect it. The shed slid over so that the wood structure was touching the exhaust pipe. Eventually, it got hot enough and caught on fire. Once we saw this, it was a regular bucket brigade, except we used water bottles. After a couple of cases of water, the fire was out.

(June 21st) Another beautiful day in paradise. The morning started off at the concrete plant at 0500. The supplier was going to try to mix us a different concrete recipe. The materials that they are using look substandard so we took a sample of the sands and gravels to test it. They mix a truck for themselves and then started to mix ours. The first meter of concrete had to be pushed into the truck by hand and their computer sensors broke while mixing the second meter. There were a lot of people speaking Turkish so I do not know what they are talking about, but I can read the computer screens. We decided at about 0630 to try to pour again tomorrow. This plant needs to produce us 1600 cubic meters of concrete and the Army 3000 cubic meters. Sometimes the low bidder is not always the best. At this rate, we will not have the runway repaired by the time we leave.

We received a machine about one month ago that is supposed to be used to test compaction for the gravel fill on our project. It is based on using electronic conductivity in the soil. I am sure that Cal could look at it and figure out that if there is no moisture in the soil, that electricity will not be conducted in it. Obviously, there is no moisture in the soil around here. Nobody over here has made it work properly. It might work great back in the states. When the Admiral was here a few weeks ago, somebody told him what we have been telling of regiment. It does not work over here. He wants to know why it does not work and why somebody told him to buy these machines for \$7,000 if they did not work.

EA1 Glasper, from the 9th Regiment, was tasked with making this thing work. He wrote a paper stating why it does not work and provided papers from other people in country that say the same thing. That is not good enough for the regiment. The high ranking officers at the regiment do not have the balls to the admiral that it does not work. Now I have been specifically name in an order to test this thing and try to get it to work. I have to fly EA1 Krause in from another base with some of his equipment and waste our time on this thing. We will have to try to make it work in a controlled environment to prove that it does work and then take it to the field and see if it does. What a colossal waste of money and man power. Glasper has tried to contact the company back in the states, but they will not return his calls. They do not even show the machine in their online catalog.

(June 27th) My time has been spent trying to get our latest concrete plant up and running and producing good concrete. I have spent a lot of time in meetings this past week. I have become the expert in concrete materials and production on this base. I am briefing Marine and Army cornels and majors regarding the materials and how the plant is

working. I spent Friday night through Saturday morning watching the Army pour two more pads and taking concrete samples.

We pour two test batches for ourselves the past two days. Today, I had to take 12 sample cylinders to break. That is three times what I normally take. We break the cylinders after 3 days, 7 days, 14 days and 28 days. The Regiment, our next higher command, wanted us to break 3 on each day. I told my officers that this was ludicrous, but I did it anyway. Either we will have samples that tell us that the 2 meters of concrete that we got was either really good or really bad. If the Regiment wants to start testing concrete, they can come on down and do my job. If not, say out of my business. I have been doing this for 3 months. I think I know what I am doing.

These past few days have been a breaking point for me. I am sick and tired of people whining that they do not want to do this or that. I am also tired of trying to make reasonable decisions. So much of my day is spent trying to take people out of doing something stupid. We spend more time reworking plans than we do with coming up with them in the first place. I tell people that we need to have all of our ducks in a row before we start something. But instead, we just go off half cocked and it always ends up costing us in the end.

The stress is starting to build up. I am at the point where I am just going to follow what ever they want me to do. I am not going to think about anything regarding a job except what they tell me. Maybe this way I can conserve enough energy to make it through the rest of the deployment. I need a break to get away from Al Asad. I'll even go to Ramadi and work on project to get me out of here.

We had a command climate assessment survey do this past week. Our command sucks. We have a CO who worries about the littlest thing. Nobody can stand the guys. I would not be surprised if he got relieved. Example: We designed a coin for our department. Someone was looking at it in the hallway. He came walking by and took it out of the person's hand. Looked at it and said it contained references to NMCB 25 and he did not authorize this. He does not realize that this is not his battalion, it is ours. He will be going in one year and we will all still be here.