

Commentary

Troop Talk

This week's Troop talk is a continuation of questions I have received from Soldiers and family members.

Why are the guards at the gate inspecting uniformed personnel's vehicles with a drawn shotgun? Is this necessary?

Searches of vehicles at the gates are conducted in accordance with our Random Access Measures Program. It is random, based on a number given to the team at gates before the daily shifts. The fact that a uniformed Soldier is checked is not the issue, as all personnel in accordance with force protection regulations are subject to the random search. The shotguns are simply another level of force approved by the garrison commander, similar to military working dogs or pepper spray. It is also important to know that other installations employ shotguns as part of their force protection program. Though some may feel uncomfortable, most appreciate it as an added physical security. The officers carrying the weapon are fully trained. They are in an over-watch position, and no one should have the weapon pointed at them at anytime. With the increase in the population of Fort Bliss, we are now averaging more than 1 million vehicles coming through our gates monthly, and this is increasing by about 5,000 more vehicles every month. With this increase, we think the shotguns are a prudent approach to ensure the force protection of Team Bliss.

I would like GMH to furnish some information on the policy they have on transferring expanding families into larger quarters.?



According to GMH, a written policy was developed during the community development and management planning sessions held with numerous military and civilian personnel prior to last July. The document contains operating policy and procedures agreed to by the garrison, Department of the Army, Residential Community Initiatives and GMH. The section dealing with assignments is more than 300 pages, but the section extracted from that policy should answer the question.

Once notified, if the prospective resident, the spouse or the unit fails to contact the Community Management Office within five business days, the prospect will be removed from the waiting list. Refusal to accept the available housing will result in the prospect's name being removed from the waiting list or placed at the bottom of the list, as mentioned above.

Residents expecting the birth of a child or having family members of ages that would change their bedroom requirements during a two-year period will be assigned with the number of bedrooms to take care of their future requirement.

Assignments of fewer bedrooms than eligible will not occur. However, a resident may elect to accept housing with one bedroom less and an addendum to the resident responsibility agreement will document their agreement that they are not eligible to transfer to a larger home.

Moves from one home to another will be authorized when the resident requires an additional bedroom due to an added family member, or within 120 days of the birth of a child. These moves will be at the expense of the resident. There will be an additional \$300 transfer fee that will be

paid by the resident. When the waiting list for a particular category is depleted, the next category in the same priority meeting the bedroom requirement will be offered. If housing is not accepted, the prospect will retain their position on the waiting list. In the event available housing cannot be filled based on the above, housing may be filled from the waiting list maintained for the next lower category. The principal family member or designated agent is authorized to accept assignment when the applicant is on an extended official absence. The applicant must provide a special or general power of attorney authorizing an agent to accept the housing. An applicant's spouse may not accept, change or terminate housing without the special power of attorney.

GMH is a valued partner. A comfortable and well designed home for the military family is their only priority. They have more than met their contract obligations over the past year and they will continue to reevaluate and perhaps make changes as they progress.

Answers to questions I receive may be delayed for a week or two due to the time required to research and give the correct answers. I welcome questions from Soldiers and family members and will respond to all of them either directly, or through this column.

Maj. Gen. Robert P. Lennox
Fort Bliss Commanding General

Soldiers, Marines drive on through adversity

JIM GARAMONE

American Forces Press Service

HIT, Iraq – The Soldiers and Marines here put up with more adversity in their deployment than most Americans will see in a lifetime. And they do it with a great attitude.

These are not some goody-goody type servicemembers. They are profane to the extreme, and expletives make an appearance in most conversations. No one takes offense.

"Busting chops" is a fine art, and people are always ready to tell or listen to a fine story that uses a buddy as the butt of the joke.

But life in Hit, like the troops' language and jokes, is hard. The town's name is spelled "hit," but is pronounced "heat," and the place is hot. The temperature now hovers around 120 degrees. It will climb to 130 by the end of this month. There is always a wind blowing in Hit, but it might as well be a hair dryer. A good way to get a feel for what the Soldiers here go through is to stick your head inside a convection oven for an hour.

Now add to that the gear. The interceptor body armor and Kevlar helmet make you understand why aluminum foil around a potato bakes it faster. Soldiers and Marines carry more than 90 pounds of equipment - weapons, a combat load of ammunition, first-aid pouches, global positioning system equipment, communications gear and the like - every time they go outside the wire.

Try running down a street carrying all that, because that is what servicemembers must do here. The unit has Bradley fighting vehicles, but walking among the town's people is more effective in connecting with the local population, so Soldiers dismount.

Soldiers and Marines come off patrol just drenched with sweat. If they sweat really badly, you can see the

salt stains where it has soaked through the boots.

There are port-a-potties at the main camp outside town, but contractors will not go into the firm bases - or forward operating bases - in the city itself. That means that at the firm bases they use things called "wag bags" for solid waste. The user seals the bag after its intended use and then deposits it in a burn barrel.

You don't want to have an open latrine, because that would attract insects. Urinals at the firm bases are tubes driven into the ground.

There is city water and it sometimes works, sometimes doesn't. You take showers when you can, and when the water is running. Don't count on it to work when you want it to.

And then there is the danger. Some men have been "IEDed" - in a vehicle that got hit by an improvised explosive device - a couple of times. Many in the 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry, are on their second tour in Iraq, and have a history with IEDs going back to 2003.

Added to that is snipers. The unit's only death has been to a sniper. One sniper in Anbar province goes by the name "Scorpion." He has people videotape his kills and you can find DVDs showing these kills in markets in Baghdad and all over the province.

But with all this, the mood is good. Sure, the Soldiers and Marines complain, but that is their right. When it comes to the mission, the troops step out and do what needs to be done.

"I know when we look back on this in five or 10 years, we won't remember the hardships, except to laugh about them," said Army Capt. Eric Stainbrook, Apache Company commander at 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry. "But I will always remember these amazing Soldiers and the way they took on the mission when their country asked them to."

Web sites of interest

- The Monitor**
www.lavenpublishing.com/fortblissmonitor.html
- Fort Bliss** www.bliss.army.mil
- William Beaumont Army Medical Center**
www.wbamc.amedd.army.mil
- Department of the Army** www.army.mil
- Department of Defense** www.defenselink.mil
- DoD news about the war on terrorism**
www.defendamerica.mil
- Defense Finance Accounting Service** www.dod.mil/dfas
- Army Knowledge Online** www.us.army.mil
- Civilian Personnel Online** www.cpol.army.mil
- Thrift Savings Plan** www.tsp.gov
- Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC)**
www.defenselink.mil/brac
- Fort Bliss MWR** www.blissmwr.com
- Armed Forces Vacation Club** www.afvclub.com
- www.amigoairsho.org



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