

## Marine bomb expert shaken but not deterred by IED... *Continued from Page 1*

"It's one hell of a picture," said Col. John L. Gronski, commander of U.S. troops in and around Ramadi.

The 2-28 Brigade Combat Team commander keeps an enlarged, autographed copy on his office wall.

Whether Burghardt is using a Mars rover-type robot or a knife blade to probe for bombs, or searching for them in a heavily armored Buffalo mine-clearing vehicle, his goal is to outmaneuver the fertile yet deadly imagination of the unseen bomb-maker and, he hopes, save the lives of fellow soldiers and Marines.

Now, with roughly two months remaining in his third Iraq tour, Burghardt shakes his head in wonder at the variety and evolution of the roadside bombs he has encountered and the relentlessness with which they're planted.

Washing machine timers, cordless telephone docking stations, battery acid, shaped charges and artillery rounds seemingly scrounged from all corners of the globe are the insurgents' currently preferred tools. Yet Burghardt said it's only a matter of time before they move on to newer and deadlier devices.

"It's a big game of chess," Burghardt said. "They're thinking their steps through on how to beat us, and we're doing the same thing."

In the hierarchy of roadside bombers, Burghardt said insurgents are divided into three groups: those who plant bombs; those who design them; and those who finance the process.

The lowest rungs, those who plant the improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, are most likely doing it for financial reasons as opposed to any ideology, he said.

"It's almost like a drug habit," Burghardt said. "There are the guys on the top who have the money and do the planning, and then there are the crack addicts down below. They make their living planting IED after IED until somebody puts a bullet in them."

While roadside bombs remain the No. 1 killer of U.S. troops in Iraq, aggressive efforts at finding improvised explosive devices in and around Ramadi have reduced the number of attacks here from a September high of 45 a week to fewer than 15 currently, the U.S. military reports.

Burghardt earned the Bronze Star for disabling 64 roadside bombs and destroying more than 1,500 pieces of ordnance during his second Iraq tour.

But he and his fellow explosive ordnance disposal technicians do not always beat the bomb-makers and planters.

Already, five EOD technicians Burghardt has worked with have been killed, the most recent death occurring three weeks ago when the technician sunk his knife into a dirt berm and activated the pressure switch on a buried bomb.

"Pink mist," Burghardt said gravely, using the term familiar to Marines to describe the aftermath of a person being blow up.

The day Burghardt found himself checkmated by a roadside bomber was Sept. 19. He was in Ramadi's wild Tammim neighborhood as part of a team of bomb technicians responding to the scene of a chaotic ambush in which four U.S. personnel were killed.

Burghardt, who was looking to clear an evacuation route for the vehicles, hopped into what he thought was a recent bomb crater. He said he saw an interesting piece of shrapnel in the 4½-foot- deep hole and wanted to investigate. As he took a closer look, the shattered gravel beneath his foot suddenly shifted, revealing a package wrapped in orange plastic and a cordless telephone base station.

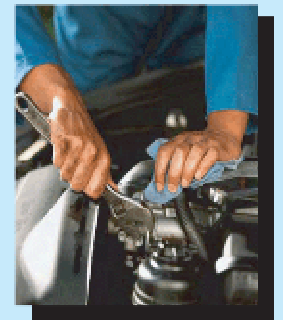
Realizing that he had just stumbled onto a primed explosive, Burghardt stuck his knife in the dirt and dredged up a red detonating cord that led to a pair of 122 mm artillery shells. He cut the cord with scissors and told the rest of his team to stay back.

"I thought I had done good," Burghardt said.

But what he didn't realize was that a second detonating cord ran from the base station to a third artillery shell buried behind him. The triggerman, figuring perhaps that he wouldn't lure anyone else into the trap that day, placed a telephone call to the base station.

"That's when I heard the distinct crack of that artillery shell," Burghardt said. ***Continued on Page 10***

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