

# AMERICA SHOULD BE PROUD

Their mission: "Clear the Corps Main Supply Routes of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED-s)." This mission was a 24 hour, seven day a week tasking. It was vital for these engineers to keep the supply routes clear so the logistical supply convoys could deliver all classes of supply to other Soldiers throughout the Theater.

A Route Clearing Team (RCT) is configured differently to match the mission. This team used five vehicles and 14 Soldiers. Many of those Soldiers were less than 30-years-old; some less than 20 years of age. Sergeants and staff sergeants of these teams often made critical, life and death decisions during combat, a tall feat for a Soldier in their early twenties.

It is 8 p.m. and the Soldiers on the team are listening to the back brief of the team that just returned from clearing the sector they are about to cover. Insurgents often relay mines and IEDs after an area is cleared, thus the task of clearing is never ending. These Soldiers have been up for hours in the hot Iraqi sun preparing themselves, their equipment and their vehicles for the task. Some of the vehicles are in short supply so they will "hot seat," a term which means they will use the same vehicle that just returned from a mission.

They don their protective gear and equipment. The body armor with all accoutrements can weight up to 40 pounds; an additional weight they carry as they climb into the vehicles, often into very cramped spaces. Spotting an IED is tough duty. It is long as scheduled missions are for eight hours but can take 10-12 hours if complications arise. During the day, it can be extremely hot while at night heat reduces to be uncomfortably hot. Lots of water is consumed to replace that lost in sweat. Energy drinks provide a boost to alertness on missions. Bag lunches and snacks are a part of the combat load.

The RCT leaves its start point on time, 9 p.m. The lead vehicle is an RG 31, commanded by a sergeant. He is 28-years-old, a bit older than many of his active duty peers who may be 21 years, as promotions in the Army Reserve and National Guard are often slower than for those serving on active duty. This sergeant and his driver, a private first class fresh from initial military training, will be the first vehicle in the convoy searching for IED-s. Depending upon the type of IED emplaced, this can be the most dangerous or least dangerous position. You never know for sure.

It's 3:30 a.m.: "All Stop!" The words come from the sergeant in the lead RG. Suddenly, sleep deprived eyes – all totally alert – scan the horizon exactly the way they are trained. The lead vehicle backs up slowly. It was just inches from rolling over the wires; "Christmas Tree Lights" as known by the Soldiers. It is a form of pressure plate to initiate the bomb by insurgents. The engineers go to work; identifying, assessing danger, studying, and finally safely rendering the explosive harmless. It's the third one this mission. Some missions have no IEDs, others a few. Alert job performance is required; always given by these brave young men and women every day. Once again, the engineers have saved lives of those logisticians driving vehicles less capable of withstanding the blast of an IED. The logisticians: another group of brave often-young Soldiers performing their duty.

**America should be proud of these heroes.**

**About the Author:** Michael J. Silva, a West Point graduate, is a brigadier general currently in the United States Army Reserve serving as Commander of the 411th Engineer Brigade, who served in Iraq 2006-2007. He is a member of numerous non-profit organizations including Veterans of Foreign Wars, Reserve Officers Association, Military Officers of America, Army Engineer Association, Senior Army Reserve Commanders Association, and the Association of United States Army. An accomplished businessman with an extensive background in finance, engineering and marketing, Mike Silva is currently advising the National Remember Our Troops Campaign. He has previously served on the Board of Directors of the Reserve Officers Association.



*We never forget who we're working for*



**Pentagon Federal Credit Union serves over 780,000 members in the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Defense, defense-related companies, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.**

**We were federally chartered in 1935 and serve our members worldwide.**

**Pentagon Federal Credit Union is one of the strongest and safest financial institutions with more than \$12 billion in assets. We offer mortgages, credit cards, automobile loans, personal loans, checking, money market savings, and other accounts.**

**The majority of our members enjoy worldwide service by Internet and phone, seven days a week, 24 hours a day.**

**CLICK OR CALL:**

**[www.penfed.org](http://www.penfed.org)**

**800-247-5626**