

Merchant Marine service. He was in the New York office looking at a wall covered with listings of ships sailing to various part of the world. He considered passage on a tanker down to Buenos Aires, but one would-be passenger, a Jewish man (although Brettschneider did not know that at the time) said, "Oh, we've got something better for you. We're going across the Atlantic in a yacht." Brettschneider said his ears perked up. He gave Brettschneider the address of where to inquire. When he visited the suggested office, the Zionist movement recruited him.

"As a youngster from Brooklyn, I was not much of a yachtsman, but that sounded very attractive. The very idea of crossing the Atlantic on a yacht, number one, and to be involved also with the Israelis – both considerations told me, yes – do it," he said.

He was an engineer on the *Ben Hecht*, a yacht named for a famous Hollywood producer and playwright who helped finance the mission. The boat sailed under the Honduran flag to deceive British naval vessels patrolling the Mediterranean.

In January 1947 at Port du Bouc, France, the crew picked up its cargo – 600 displaced Jews. For weeks the yacht sailed along the coast of France and Italy and toward Palestine. Three British destroyers trailed the *Ben Hecht* as it approached Palestine, but approximately 10 miles out from a potential docking, British marines forcibly boarded the ship, took control, and towed it into Haifa.

Brettschneider and other crew members could have faced prison sentences had the British discovered they were Americans. Brettschneider, who speaks three languages, used anything but English to avoid capture. With no documents and the appearance of a refugee, Brettschneider, the crew, and the refugees were taken to a British operated relocation camp in Cyprus.

Once released, he joined on a former icebreaker renamed the *Geula* which picked up Jews in Bulgaria and Romania. They were caught in the Mediterranean once again and were back into British custody. Again, crew members had disguised themselves as refugees, and Brettschneider even dressed as a Rabbi. They ended up back in the Cypriot refugee camp.

These "cat and mouse" chases throughout the Mediterranean were common for members of the Aliyah Bet fleet, but even when captured, sometimes with an occasional brawl, Brettschneider maintained respect for the British.

"I have the utmost admiration for the British. ... We used to feel sorry for them. The average [British] soldier at the camp on guard duty used to come to our dining facility to obtain something to eat from crew members who were getting food from Israel. They had a tough time of it," he said.

Reminiscing about his accomplishments through peace and through war, Brettschneider expressed gratitude for the opportunity to derive satisfaction from his work. As a mechanical engineer, Chief of the Mechanical Section of Technical Engineering, and Chief of Project Management here in Europe, he met the needs of the Corps family and served thousands of customers.

"I could have earned a living elsewhere but it would not have been the same. I would not have the satisfaction of knowing that I've contributed in part to something very important. I wish I could have continued with the Corps," Brettschneider said.

If one talks of humility, gratitude, effective mentorship, and a sense of accomplishment for a job well done, Brettschneider indeed comes to mind in Europe District circles.

"Lou is a unique personality. There was never anyone like him in the Corps, and I feel exceptionally

privileged to have known and worked with him for so long. His intellect, wit, sense of humor, honesty, kindness and enthusiasm never failed to cheer me up," Biliter said.

**Pat Biliter at Brettschneider's retirement ceremony.**

\* Tanya Williams, a data manager in the Regulatory Division with the New England District, contributed to this report.

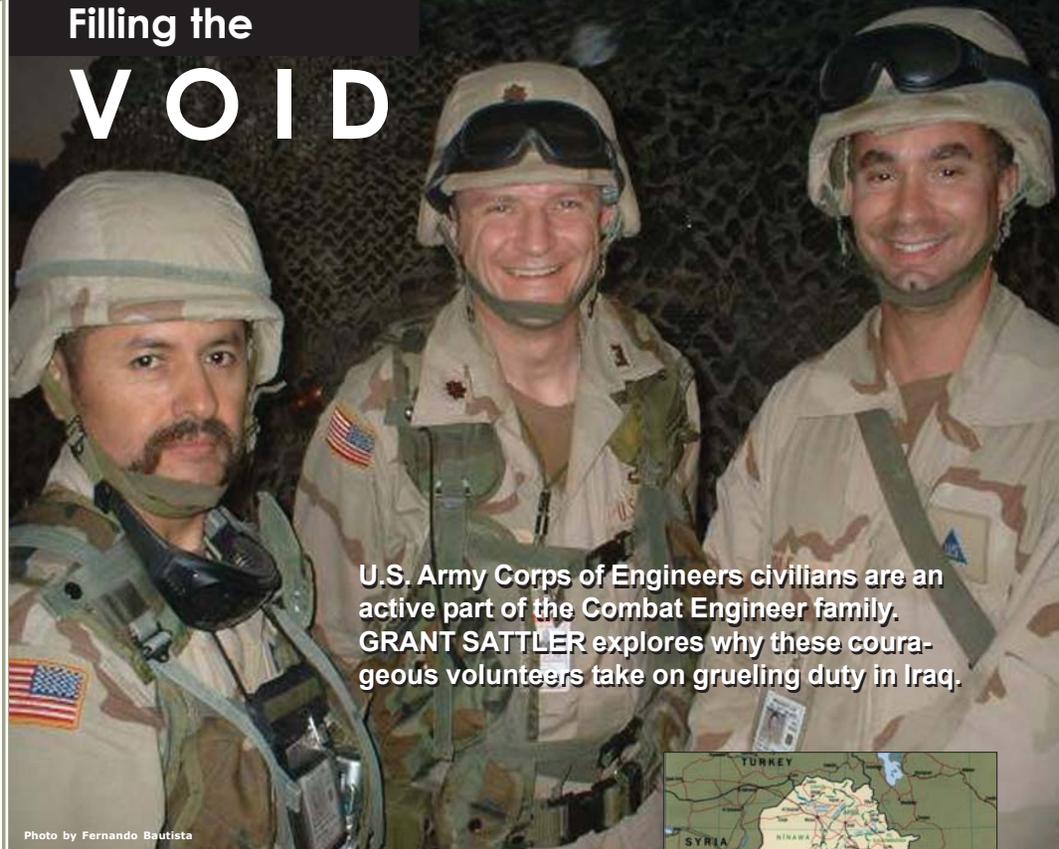


**Lou Brettschneider in his home library.**



**Pat Biliter at Brettschneider's retirement ceremony.**

## Filling the VOID



**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers civilians are an active part of the Combat Engineer family. GRANT SATTLER explores why these courageous volunteers take on grueling duty in Iraq.**

Photo by Fernando Bautista

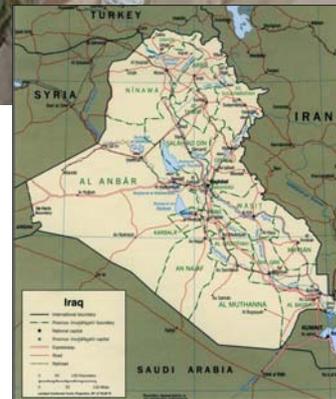
Europe District's Forward Engineer Support Team – A, attached to V Corps for Operation Iraqi Freedom, battle tested the Field Force Engineering concept and the team members' mettle.

The District's five-member FEST-A deployed to Kuwait at the onset of hostilities, then moved north into Iraq to support soldiers with engineering expertise.

Maj. Kristopher Hurst, an activated Army Reservist serving as an Individual Mobilization Augmentee in the District's operations center, switched out of his role as the Heidelberg Regional Program Manager to the 26<sup>th</sup> Area Support Group to take on the job of FEST-A leader.

Deploying with him were four Department of the Army Civilian volunteers from Europe District: civil engineers John Hasselman and Stephen Martinez, architect Fernando Bautista, and master planner Jon Cole.

Activated on Feb. 14, Hurst and Maj. Michael Fitzgerald, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Liaison Officer attached to V Corps, began the process of selecting the team. "We had to solicit volunteers from the District at large and coordinate with their managers, supervisors, and senior District leadership in order



Courtesy of The University of Texas at Austin

to bring the right skill set together for the team," Hurst said.

The team's composition in terms of skills was based on customer needs. However, selecting individuals was very difficult

because of personal circumstances, work load situations, and timing, Hurst said. "It was a good team. We had a diverse group of folks ... who brought something different to the team." Various perspectives resulted in better engineering solutions, Hurst said.

After just a two-week train up, "... we were standing tall and ready to get on an airplane to Kuwait," he said. The team arrived March 20, just as Operation Iraqi Freedom began.

"The first thing the Air Mobility Command terminal reception person said as we came off the plane was, 'We just had a SCUD 30 minutes ago.

There's the bunker, grab your stuff, and start getting out there. Oh, welcome to Kuwait,'" Hurst said. "Coming into theater in that environment was really an eye opener for the team."

The deployment experience also gave some team members a new perspective on their work in Germany as they experienced the tough conditions and the extremes soldiers work in. "What we focus on [in Germany] is the quality of life for soldiers and their families," Martinez said. "When it's their time to punch the card like in Operation Iraqi Freedom, they go off for a long time away from their families, so the quality of their life outside of doing the actual thing they are trained to do is very important."

After arrival, the team transitioned through Kuwait City's Camp Doha, and moved forward to Camp Virginia on the Iraq - Kuwait border, Hurst said. "We were brought into the V Corps Rear Tactical Operations Center and linked

**Jon Cole (left) and Fernando Bautista identify buildings near Balad, Iraq, for assessment.**

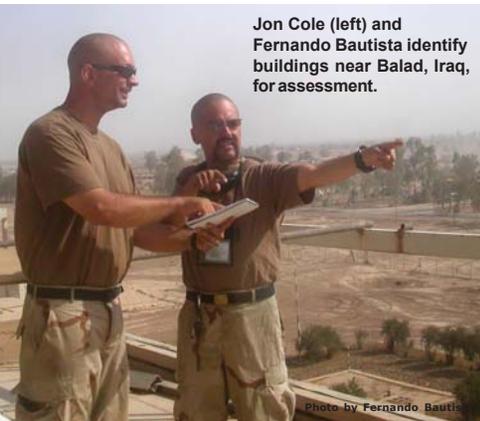


Photo by Fernando Bautista

**"The first thing the ... reception person said as we came off the plane was, 'We just had a SCUD 30 minutes ago. There's the bunker, grab your stuff, and start getting out there. Oh, welcome to Kuwait.'"**

up with the Staff Engineer Section." There they started on the planning process for eventual base camps within Iraq and working on missions supporting combat engineers, specifically the 130<sup>th</sup> Engineer Brigade.

Team members felt their work was appreciated. Cole said, "A lot of the soldiers were very grateful that we came. They had to be there because they are soldiers, but they knew as civilians we were there because we had volunteered to come."

As the mission developed, Hurst divided the FEST-A into a utilities team, pairing civil engineers

Hasselman and Martinez, who both had construction experience with electrical and mechanical systems, and a planning team, pairing architect Bautista and master planner Cole.

Cole, who works in the District's Installation Support Branch, said the planning team's first mission was to address possible contingency basing on more than a dozen Iraqi airfields.

"Fernando [Bautista] and I worked on 17 lay downs, essentially putting scale polygons on aerial maps and in AutoCadd 2000 representing a stake of land that units would require to satisfy their needs," Cole said. "We [had to] determine if there was enough real estate on the post for about 12,000 personnel, assuming that none of the facilities would be usable." He described the 16-hour days as an exercise in personnel vs. square footage



**Stephen Martinez ▲**

**▲ John Hasselman**

number crunching. "The biggest focus was on Balad Airfield. As it turned out, there were tents set up for soldiers, but there were a lot of facilities available as well."

The utilities team was the first to move into Iraq in mid-April. Fitzgerald led the way on the ground while Hasselman and Martinez moved forward by air to Baghdad International Airport to work with the 94<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion. Fitzgerald, along with members of the 308<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Brigade and the 249<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion (Prime Power), assessed electrical substations and water and sewage treatment plants in the cities of As Samawah, An Najaf, and others as they traveled north to Baghdad. While at Baghdad, Hasselman and Martinez also assessed the water distribution and sewage collection systems at the airport.

"This particular mission focused on infrastructure, particularly water treatment and sewage treatment, and that for me was excellent experience," Martinez said. "We were armed with a very good reference book. ... We went in and performed assessments and provided short-term and long-term recommendations and a 35 percent scope of work so that they would have a road map."

Martinez volunteered to deploy because he wanted to get involved and support the Army, and having previously found participation in hurricane relief to be very rewarding from an engineering standpoint, he was also looking to the Field Force Engineering experience. "I gained much more than both of those things," he said.

At the end of April, Fitzgerald and the utilities team linked up and moved to Balad Southeast Airfield and began assessments there. They also supported the 308<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Brigade in assessing Iraqi communities' water treatment and sewage treatment northwest of Baghdad.

Hurst said, "As the war progressed and we moved farther into Iraq, we took on more mitigating-



Photo by John Hasselman

**▲ Assessment teams check a water treatment plant built in the 50's near Al Dujayl, Iraq. It has the capacity for around 3,000 in a city of almost 30,000. The yellow tanks contain chlorine gas and the team discussed proper storage options.**

**▲ Maj. Kris Hurst with Iraqi helmet.**

**▼ An airman with the "Red Horse" engineers discovers a broken drinking water supply near the Baghdad International Airport. The assessment team shut the water down and made the repairs.**



Photo by John Hasselman

humanitarian-crisis-type missions.

For the utilities team, convoying through Iraq was eye opening. "I felt sorry for the people. Because of the poverty, but mainly because of the hopelessness," Martinez said.

"It's very positive ... to know that you were there and you did support the Army and were able to see these things. And the belief that our presence there will improve the quality of life for the people,"

Martinez said of the humanitarian mission that developed. "But that was not an initial impression during deployment."

The FEST-A's primary mission is to support the warfighter, deploying with skills and equipment to bring engineering expertise to the combat engineer. One of the tools they bring is the TCED

**"There were times I would sit there and the alarms would be going off, I'd run through the faces of my family and I'd think 'What am I doing here?!'"**

Telecommunication Engineering Deployable kit that enables engineers to reach back through data, video, and voice transmission to engineering expertise in theater, and to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Europe District and USACE Centers of Expertise in the States. "If any piece of equipment could be labeled as a success, it's the TCED," Hurst said. "It was an invaluable tool."

Fitzgerald deployed with one of the FEST-A's two TCED kits as he moved northward. The second TCED remained at Camp Virginia until that body jumped to Logistical Support Area Anaconda, at Balad Southeast Airfield, in late May.

Once there, the planning team worked with the Facilities Engineering Team 21, essentially an interim Directorate of Public Works, and got to work immediately conducting assessments of 557 facilities on the air base that were damaged by bombing, years of neglect, and vandalism.

"We each took a team of three: a carpenter, electrician, and plumber from the 168th Engineer Group," Cole said. "Fernando took half the post and I took the other and we went through every building. What we walked out of the building with was a bill of materials that would repair all concrete slab roofs and replace broken windows, light fixtures, toilets, sinks, and make any other repairs necessary."

As part of the survey, the planning team generated 'as-built'

drawings of buildings including fire stations, emergency operations facility, gymnasium, hangars, and concrete buildings of type E, EE, H, and HH. All drawings were created on laptop computers running AutoCAD software.

The team's contribution was the basis for a prioritized project list completed even as some units

with discretionary funds began to hire out repairs to local laborers. While most of the masonry buildings could be repaired, some were condemned due to bomb damage and demolished, Cole said.

For Cole, the work was not particularly demanding, though the hours were grueling. The wartime environment, however, was a real teacher.

"Like most everyone who goes through such an experience, I have a greater appreciation for my family. I also learned a lot about myself," he said. Although he served in the Navy and experienced boot camp, he found he had to reach down deep.

"I went into it thinking it shouldn't be a problem," he said. "There were times I would sit there and the alarms would be going off, I'd run through the faces of my family and I'd think 'What am I doing here?!'"

But adjusting to the tense situation allowed Cole to draw new boundaries for himself. "In that environment, I found I had a tendency to allow people greater latitude than I would otherwise. You're a fish out of water. Every few

hours the first couple of weeks I was fumbling around with my mask. ... It was a brand new experience. It took a while to become proficient and react quickly and appropriately. I felt incompetent for a time, so I kind of let people push me around more.

"I know anybody who would hear me say that would say, 'That's not the same Jon Cole I know.' I was out of my element. So this was good professionally. If I'm out of my element again, say if I find a job in Civil Works, then this experience in Iraq will benefit me. It may be new, but that's not to say I'm incompetent."

Martinez agrees that there are real personal benefits from serving, but cautions that it may not be for everyone.

"The thing about FFE and the mission in Iraq is that it is a whole different animal. It's not the hurricane relief field engineering type experience. There is a level of risk," Martinez said. "I can only speak for myself and tell folks what happened and all of the great benefits you gain from it by learning about yourself, learning about playing on a team, about engineering work, the amount of learning that's going to happen

**Jon Cole ensures that supplies are compacted before his team departs Camp Virginia on a convoy.**



through that field engineering experience.

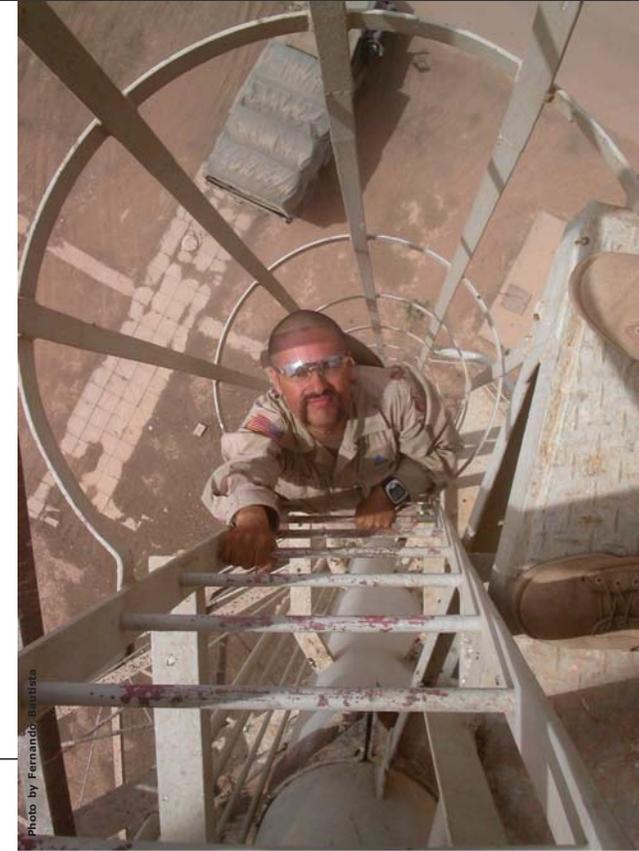
"You have all these benefits that start stacking up, and then you have the difficulties, the fact that you're going to be away from family for a very long period of time, the fact that there are big security issues, and the living conditions. ... You have to personally weigh all of those. ..."

Martinez said the value from successful accomplishment of an FFE mission can be great. The mid-July FEST-A transition came at a good time, Hurst said, taking place as the warfighters in Iraq transitioned from V Corps and 1st Marine Expeditionary Force into Combined Joint Task Force 7 (CJTF7).

"We were basically finishing up missions we had started in support of V Corps and the new team would be coming in and starting new projects in support of the CJTF-7 that would affect the whole country," he said.

In addition to the six member FEST-A now in Iraq, 17 Europe District people are also supporting operations in Afghanistan, the Gulf Region in engineering capacities at bases, and with FEST-Restore Iraqi Oil.

► **Fernando Bautista climbs a water tank at the Balad Air Field in Iraq to survey the condition of the water tower.**



## This FIGHT is PERSONAL Story by Grant Sattler

Recently returned from four months duty in Operation Iraqi Freedom, one Wiesbaden-based Army civilian relishes the opportunity to have been able to support America's Army.

Working as an architect deployed with a Forward Engineer Support Team from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Europe District, Fernando Bautista was involved in master planning for 17 airfields,

including Balad airfield where V Corps Rear is now located, assessing all of the Balad airfield buildings for safety and usefulness, and generating floor plans of existing buildings.

But it is not just the contribution of his team to the war effort that gives Bautista a reason to feel pride. It is the sense that he has in his way helped strike back for the

terrible attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, particularly the attack on the World Trade Center.

"I'm a New Yorker, and I feel

**"I am an American. I am a New Yorker. I had to do something."**

great about it," the 20-year resident of the Big Apple said.

And like all New Yorkers, Bautista had his personal experience