

Navy divers join their army comrades in Afghanistan

By Jeri Grychowski
Navy Public Affairs

Seven divers from Halifax and Esquimalt are supporting the troops from 1 Combat Engineer Regiment (ICER) in Afghanistan, according to Master Seaman (MS) Paul Weber, a clearance diver from Fleet Diving Unit Atlantic (FDU(A)). MS Weber is the first diver to be part of the operations in Afghanistan.

After receiving his tasking, MS Weber joined 1 Combat Engineer Regiment (CER) in Edmonton for integrated training. Training for the deployment included two months in Edmonton, explosive ordnance device (EOD) training for six weeks in Borden for basic demolition, six months at the Eglin Air Force Base in Florida for international EOD and six more weeks in Borden for improvised explosion demolition (IED).

According to Weber, "no school or training can give you the insight that comes with actually being on the ground."

MS Weber described the whole process as very interesting. "I had no real problems with integration with the Army folks, it was an excellent team," Weber said.

"The training that I received prior to my deployment, along with nine years experience as a clearance diver, certainly prepared me for what I was to do. I have, in the past, partic-



More than 5,000 pieces of munitions were turned in.

ipated in major joint explosive ordnance disposal exercises, Swiss Air as well as a MARCOT exercise, so I felt pretty confident in myself."

In describing his job in Afghanistan, MS Weber spoke passionately about what he did, not so much about the dangers involved, although he says, every time they left the camp the adrenaline would flow, but more about how they worked as a team.

MS Weber said he knew he had the right training and the proper equipment to do the job, so he was in the let's get on with it frame of mind.

The day would start with a call into the Operation Centre. The team would be assembled and briefed and it would then be on its way.

Once the team reached its destination, the team would be briefed by the onsite cordon commander. The team would then perform an

initial assessment of the device, and using specific equipment, would determine the most effective way to ensure a positive disruption of the weapon.

Following the disruption of the device, MS Weber, dressed in his bomb suit, would verify that it was indeed disabled. He would then collect all the parts and return them to the base for forensic analysis.

The bombs the team defused

ranged from very basic to very complex, but no matter their design, all bombs are all dangerous and extreme care must be taken.

The improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are the greatest threat to the troops, but for those detailed to disarm them, it is just another part of their job, one they willingly do even knowing the dangers. Not a job for the faint hearted, but for MS Weber, it is all in a day's work.

Dangerous yes, but with the right training, and the confidence that comes from working with a top-notch team, it is a job that is very rewarding.

The Navy has four divers from Halifax and Esquimalt who are currently undergoing training for the next deployment scheduled for late summer/early fall 2006.

Like MS Weber, they will undergo intense training to prepare themselves for deployment and will be working alongside soldiers from 2 CER from Petawawa. Once on site, the divers will be on call and must be ready to respond.

While glad to be back home, MS Weber said he found his experience in Afghanistan very rewarding.

"I would definitely go back over there. It's an important job, and while it may be somewhat out of the norm for clearance divers, it is something that we can do and we do it very well."