



36th Engineer Group Conducts Somber Mission

By Captain Brian Chapuran

The soldiers of the design management section of the 36th Engineer Group from Fort Benning, Georgia, are often tasked to survey sites. It is a mission they have done hundreds of times in preparation for various construction missions. The mission they executed on 19 May 2003, however, was anything but normal. Two surveyors and a civil engineer had the somber mission of siting and marking a gravesite. It was the location where Iraqi captors had buried nine U.S. soldiers, members of the 507th Maintenance Company who were captured when their convoy was ambushed. Almost every American has heard the story of Private First Class Jessica Lynch and her dramatic rescue from the hospital in An Nasariyah. The nine soldiers were with Private First Class Lynch when they were captured, but they were not as fortunate as she. The soldiers were killed and their bodies buried in a shallow grave just outside the hospital.

After the bodies were discovered, detailed information about the site needed to be recorded. At this point, the 36th Engineer Group was asked to provide its technical expertise. There were two main reasons to locate and mark the site. The first was to begin the process of designing and possibly building a memorial to the soldiers. The second reason for the mission was to assist in the investigation of war crimes. The information gathered by the 36th Engineer Group will be used by the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command as part of its investigation into potential war crimes committed by the former Iraqi regime.

The 36th Engineer Group commander saw the mission as a necessary and unforgettable task in the aftermath of war, yet one more reminder of the ultimate price some have paid to ensure that the principles of freedom are made available to all people. The soldiers from the 36th Engineer Group were proud to put their skills and expertise to use for a mission they probably never envisioned and will never forget. 

Captain Chapuran is currently the trial counsel for the 36th Engineer Group and the 11th Infantry Regiment at Fort Benning, Georgia. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, he served as judge advocate, public affairs, and civil affairs officer for the 36th Engineer Group.