

## Operation Bosslift: Field report

By Melissa Regennitter of the Muscatine Journal (July 16, 2007)

Editor's note: The following is a first-hand perspective of Muscatine Journal reporter Melissa Regennitter's Bosslift experience.

MUSCATINE, Iowa — I have always been curious about what it takes to be an American soldier. Though I have never been strong enough to take that path myself, I have the utmost respect for those who do.

My experience on the Bosslift, hosted by Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I will never forget.

I was along with five Muscatine employers, two ESGR volunteers and Muscatine Journal photographer Beth Van Zandt on a two-day trip to Camp Ripley in Minnesota.

I was excited from the first moment I heard that I would be riding on a CH-47 Chinook helicopter. Watching out the rear of the helicopter, wind blowing and a panoramic view of the patchwork land of Iowa and then the lakes of Minnesota below, kept me in a trance.

I'll admit that on the way home I was a little nauseous. I'm not sure if it was the military lunch of a minestrone MRE (meal ready to eat) or the jiggling motion of the helicopter, but the kind pilots of the Hawkeye II should be thanked for their hospitality, and for moving me to the front when they questioned my ability to hold down lunch.

In military fashion, the event was planned out precisely. We landed, were debriefed, and right on schedule headed out to participate in a convoy drill.

I was impressed by the kindness of our military hosts but also the discipline, teamwork and trust in one another and dedication to their duties.

I heard someone call out "is that Melissa?" and sure enough, there stood my friend, Spc. Belinda "Bamba" Perez, of Muscatine's 2133rd Transportation Company. I was happy to see her. I've always known her as a strong and dedicated person since we met and instantly became friends a few years ago, so I was proud to have her providing cover for us during the mock convoy attack.

This trip led to many firsts for me, from sleeping in military housing to eating at the mess hall.

I was thrilled to ride in a military Humvee and check out the turret atop the vehicle where the gunner rides. There was little resemblance to the Humvee's luxury civilian counterpart — no air conditioning, seat covers or cup holders — just the necessities needed for combat.

I felt like I was traveling in a lunch box with wheels — but it was awesome!

I was most excited to shoot the machine guns and participate in mock firing drills. I think that desire to shoot heavy artillery stems back to the first "Rambo" movie I saw in the 1980s.

We were offered the chance to shoot an M16, M4 and a 249 SAW machine gun in a close-quarters combat scenario. Of course we used mock ammunition, but the sound effects were still there.

Fortunately I hit two out of three targets on my first try.

Unfortunately, if it were a real combat situation, I would have been shot in the head because I didn't follow precise procedure (which is very important in a battle zone) and stepped past my boundaries.

The guns were so heavy I couldn't help but think of the soldiers trekking through a war zone with a weapon slung over one shoulder and 40-70 pounds of other equipment and ammunition strapped to their bodies. I felt like a wimp so I kept it on, but wearing the Kevlar military helmet alone gave me a head-ache and made my neck hurt.

My experience with the ESGR was positive, informative and exciting. The volunteers were helpful and accommodating. I have gained an appreciation for both the mission of the ESGR and the soldiers who are training for possible deployment.

The soldiers and employers who were participating in the event also seemed to appreciate the ESGR's attempt to share with us the vital role a civilian soldier plays in the military.

I feel fortunate to have had this opportunity and would suggest it to anyone with an adventurous side or who might be seeking an understanding of what civilian soldiers are capable of.

I give the Bosslift experience one big "Hoo-ah"!