



Tent peg turns into folk art

By John Connor
Gulf Region South district

FOB ECHO, Iraq – It started out as a tent peg but became something else entirely—a story etched in wood.

Call it war zone folk art, Iraq vintage.

Neil Myers, a construction representative with the Qadisiyah office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, plucked a tent peg from a pile of debris months ago. He does some carving from time to time and the tent peg looked like a good piece of wood to work on.

Myers said he began carving as "therapy for the mind, allowing the hands to work with little thought required," using only one blade of his Leatherman™ tool initially.

When he finished the bulk work, Myers decided to make the onetime tent peg into a memento piece to represent his mission. But this required carving tools, so he sent for his tools back home in North Carolina where he works for the Wilmington District of the Corps of Engineers.

What Meyers has produced is nicknamed the "Echo Specter." It displays a variety of carved features and inlays that tell a story about his tour in Iraq. These features include inlays of the flags of the 12 nations that have had troops on Echo since he has been there: Poland, Romania, Latvia, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mongolia, El Salvador, Denmark, Slovakia, Ukraine, and, of course, the U.S.

Other features include a piece of imbedded shrapnel from a mortar that ripped a vehicle-size hole through the ceiling of his office building one night; and miniature T-walls and HESCO Bastion™ barriers (T-walls are free-standing concrete wall units and HESCOs are fabric-lined wire baskets filled with soil, both providing protection on the base from incoming mortars and rockets).

One feature is a ring of prison-style bars made from DFAC (dining facility) toothpicks placed around a groove. The bars represent the confined nature of activity at a small forward operating base and the groove represents how one deals with confinement, by developing a comfortable routine, "a familiar groove," Myers explained.



Col. Stephen Hill admires Neil Myer's handiwork during a visit to Forward Operating Base Echo. (USACE photo by John Connor)

Lastly, the Echo Specter includes a variety of embedded Agency coins and emblems, including his GRS Pin for Civilian Service in a Combat Zone.

Myers said it took him about 80 hours over four months, with three superficial cuts, to craft his one-of-a-kind memento representing six months of service in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Note: *John Connor is a Public Affairs Officer with the Gulf Region South district, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Iraq. For more information, contact Grant Sattler, public affairs specialist at 540-665-1233 or email requests to CEGRD.PAO@tac01.usace.army.mil. For more information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, visit www.grd.usace.army.mil.*