

Spirit of adventure colors tour of duty

GIVEN THE same choice my friend Benjamin Franklin Creech had as to where to spend the last two weeks of August, I would have gone north, maybe to Frankfort, Leland, Elk Rapids or Harbor Springs. Or perhaps I'd simply have stayed home. Most certainly I would not have gone south, at least not with Ben.

Sgt. 1st Class Creech of the Army Reserve's 424th Personnel Service Company, which is part of the 300th Military Police Command, chose Honduras.

It was strictly voluntary duty as part of an American unit surveying for a road-building project up in the mountains of the Yoro province in north central Honduras. But three days after Ben's Wednesday flight left for Central America, his friends were scared spilt by a story in the Detroit Free Press.

It was headlined, "52 Reported Dead in Honduran Crash."

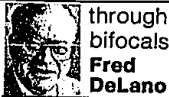
The first paragraph read: "Rescue crews and military planes, searching the jungles of eastern Honduras Friday, discovered the wreckage of a U.S.-supplied Hercules C130 missing for a day with 52 troops and civilians aboard. There were no survivors."

IT TURNED OUT that no Americans were on the plane, but what with all that we've been hearing lately about activities in sectors of Honduras and neighboring Nicaragua, you can understand our anxiety. When the 6-foot, 200-pound Creech did return, it was a welcome sight.

Now the son-of-a-gun wants to go back, probably in mid-October. In civilian life Ben, 43, is a forensic security aide at the state's Center for Forensic Psychiatry near Ypsilanti. Originally he was trained as an engineer at the University of Michigan and Michigan Tech, and then while working for the late Herald Hamill surveyed much of western Wayne County.

His military life dates back to 1968 when he served with the 33rd Engineers and honed skills which were dusted off for practical application in Honduras.

There were seven volunteers in the unit and they supplemented a permanent contingent of about 20 men of the Honduran army, said Creech this week as we discussed the experience. He doesn't view this particular road as being pivotal to national security, either theirs or ours.



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ALTHOUGH CONDITIONS were described as "primitive in the extreme," a fond memory remains of the only decent bathing facility available. This was a tiny fresh-water pool gouged out of the rocks by a small stream trickling down the mountainside.

The only other water was brought to the camp in 250-gallon, bladder-like rubber containers which then sat out in the 90-degree sun and for some colleagues became the source of what we jestingly refer to as "Montezuma's revenge."

Aside from the "resident rats," unsatisfactory rations and nights which turned much colder than expected after unwisely having left his sleeping bag at home, Creech had little ill to say of this tour of duty. In fact, he concedes it even carried with it a sense of adventure.

On the plus side was a setting reminiscent of pine-forested foothills of the Smokies and Appalachian Mountains back home, augmented by the friendliness of the Spanish-speaking natives.

TWICE IT WAS even possible to get to the town of Yoro, which has about 3,000 residents and where there are three small hotels. "We had dinner in the two that boasted the only two flush toilets in town," said Creech.

A sense of pride crept into Ben's recollections when he talked of the long hours or preparing a two-track, winding, deeply rutted road for the laying of six kilometers of an aggregate hard gravel surface.

This is only one leg of the eventual roadway, but in its first two days, this unit accomplished as much as a prior crew in its full stay. Ben thinks this is a major reason he has been invited back.

We all know that our nation's presence in Honduras in one form or another is becoming more and more frequent. When Ben was asked if he saw evidence of this becoming a stepping stone to further involvement, he properly ended our discussion with this statement:

"I think it would be highly inappropriate for me to make such comments but I knew you would try to bait me anyway."

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. None can be returned. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. Letters should be limited to 300 words in most cases. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

Viewpoint is off the mark

To the editor:

"Party laws miss the mark!" (Farmington Observer, 9-4-86) Hardly! A more apt title to the Crackerbarrel Debate would have been "Steve Barnaby Shoots Self in Foot!"

From my perspective here in Farmington Hills, Mr. Barnaby errs on the intent of the ordinance here, the attitude of the police, the reason city council passed it, and the seriousness of the situation it addresses, just for starters. I wonder if the man bothered to check any of his points at all beyond the ordinance itself.

The facts are that the party ordinance was brought to the Farmington Hills City Council in May of 1985 by Farmington Families in Action (FFIA) — a middle of the road group of area citizens whose thrust is substance abuse education/awareness in the Farmington schools — public and parochial.

Our support is broad-based including area schools, churches, service clubs, social groups, PTAs, bowling leagues, businesses, etc., and members include parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, and, yes, city council members, too.

What the ordinance was meant to do was to crack down on the large keg parties involving several hundred high school kids that used to be so prevalent in our community in the summer months. I say "used to" because the ordinance hit its mark. The incidence of these parties is much less today (ask Police Chief Dwyer; Mr. Barnaby apparently didn't), and we like to think that lives have been saved as a result.

The intent was not "to nail" anybody. The intent was to make parents responsible for their kids and kids responsible for their actions. No kid has to have a criminal record. All he has to do is obey the law. The ordinance has been well publicized; in fact, its greatest value is as a deterrent.

Serving liquor to an underage person, especially one with a car, is a serious offense ending in the loss of life and should be treated as such whether the bartender is 17 or 45. Mr. Barnaby's permissive attitude is out-of-tune with the times and irresponsible.

Mr. Barnaby lays the blame on liquor store owners. Wake up, Steve! Some parents are buying the beer. It's time to put the emphasis where it belongs — on the family.

Responsible parents can make a difference, and a good ordinance can help! They can know what their kids are doing, with whom, and where.

They can tell their kids that alcohol has no place in the social life of high school students and do their best to see that it doesn't.

And they can be proud that the Farmington Hills City Council cared enough about kids to be the first in Michigan to pass an ordinance that works so well that it is being copied by communities all over the state.

Martha Ehlers
FFIA

History article receives praise

To the editor:

I should like to commend you and thank you and Mr. Litogot for the ongoing series, "Footprints in History." They are very interesting and informative.

As further details, two more significant families who have lived in the Lawrence Simmons House: the Lorions — Vayle transcribed the famous "Powder Diary" from the original script to an easily read type and made it available for all. She was also the sparkplug and guiding spirit behind the formation of the Farmington Historical Society and its first president. Annual Christmas parties of the group were held in this home for many years until the house was sold to Patrick Nowaks.

Kathryn Briggs
Farmington Hills

City council is receptive

To the editor:

I want to commend Mayor Alkateeb and the Farmington Hills City Council on the professional, prompt and courteous manner in which they handled my request for repeal of the zoning ordinance banning political signs in the city of Farmington Hills.

Considering the fact that my initial contact with the city in this matter was an encounter on a Saturday afternoon with the zoning inspector threatening to confiscate my property, the reception I received from the mayor and the council was remarkable and most gratifying.

Most citizens feel powerless to affect the actions of their government. My experience proves otherwise.

From the moment I presented my concerns, during the public comment portion of a July meeting, through the next two months, they were courteous and receptive to criticisms, suggestions and alternatives. Although some on the council may have differed with my approach to what I see as an absolute right of free speech in the citizenry, each and every one of them viewed the problem objectively and recognized their responsibilities under the law and the Constitution.

Although the process of appeal is not complete and will require both planning commission and council sessions, I am confident that, in the end, the council will continue to recognize that the right of free speech is inalienable and is not a privilege bestowed upon citizens by a benevolent government. It is a right of free men and women everywhere.

My experience should clearly demonstrate to all citizens of Farmington Hills that we do have representative government at work and that, with a little effort and time, each citizen may be heard and affect his environment, surroundings and life.

David L. Haron
Farmington Hills

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