

SEARCH

[Advanced Search](#)Thursday, January 11, 2007 [RSS](#)

Sections

- [News](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Stripes Travel](#)
- [Military Life](#)
- [Letters](#)

Information

- [Contact us](#)
- [Photo of the Day](#)
- [Web features](#)
- [Comics](#)
- [NewsPuzzle](#)
- [Links](#)

Services

- [Electronic Paper](#)
- [Library research](#)
- [Buy Stripes photos](#)
- [Stripes Lite](#)

[print article](#)**Reporter's Notebook:**

Gerty may be battered, but she beats walking

By [Megan McCloskey](#), Stars and Stripes

Mideast edition, Thursday, January 11, 2007

CAMP TAQADDUM, Iraq — Her name is Gertrude and she's a Denver Broncos fan.

Around Engineer Village, the Marines and sailors affectionately call her Gerty.

Her metallic blue paint is a little battered, the front-side passenger door can only be opened from the outside and the heating system blows dust instead of warmth, but folks will tell you she's the best wheels on Camp Taqaddum.

She leaves promptly — don't be late, because she won't wait — at 7 a.m. for breakfast, 11:45 a.m. for lunch and 5:45 p.m. for dinner. The Marines and sailors who ride her to chow are known as the "Gerty Crew."

She's "a place where we bond," said Petty Officer 1st Class Dane



Christopher Baldwin / Courtesy US Marine Corps

Staff Sgt. Oscar Camarena gets into the driver's seat of "Gertrude," while Sgt. Remsey Eisha sits in the passenger seat.



Ways to support our servicemembers

NFL CHALLENGE
Test your football knowledge against players around the world. Sponsored by Exchange New Car Sales

A year in Iraq
Photos by Monte Morin

Stripes revisits the trials at **THESE Nuremberg**

View your Holiday Messages online now

[Map of Iraq](#)

In PDF format

[Map of Afghanistan](#)

In PDF format

[World War II](#)

Anniversary special editions and archive material

[Unsung Heroes](#)

Nominate someone you think deserves recognition!

[Show us your Stripes](#)

Learn how readers

Beichter.

Gerty, an eight- or nine- or however-many-need-to-squeeze-in passenger van, was acquired by the first of the 9th Engineer Support Battalion Marines from Okinawa to deploy to Iraq. They put an old-school Denver Broncos sticker on the front windshield and christened her Gertrude.

Her prized keys were bestowed to the second group of Okinawa Marines when they showed up in August.

"She's old, broken-down and dirty, but that's why we love her," said Beichter, who was with the unit for a portion of the first deployment as well. "Gerty is a part of this place."

Prayers too effective

Before a road clearance mission, 9th Engineer Support Battalion's chaplain, Navy Lt. Alan Snyder, would pray the Marines didn't encounter any roadside bombs.

And they didn't.

Uhh ... Chaplain? Finding the roadside bombs and defusing or destroying them is kind of the point of going out there, they told him after a few weeks of unfruitful missions.

"Yeah, they weren't finding squat," Snyder said, laughing.

So now Snyder's prayers for the clearance missions go a little something like this: "Lord, we pray they have a successful mission. One where they're able to meet and defeat the [bombs] that are out there ..."

Since the change, Company B Marines have more than 40 roadside bomb finds.

Snyder jokingly takes some credit for that, laughing with the Marines after a prayer last week.

"I didn't pray against you finding them tonight, so now you'll have a shot," he said.

Adopting Bronco fans



become winners

[Shopping Guide](#)

A variety of options for fast and easy shopping.

[2006 CFC Guide](#)

Download the annual Combined Federal Campaign guide in PDF format

[CFC Charity Directory](#)

Choose the right recipient for your CFC donation

[Retirement Planning Guide](#)

Tips for when it's time to separate

[Gamer's guide](#)

Your link to a galaxy of cool electronic stuff

[Insurance guide](#)

For servicemembers and dependents overseas

[Financial Planning Guide](#)

Take charge of your financial future

Being a football fan in Iraq often means sacrificing sleep to catch a game.

But even for those who stay up all hours of the night to watch their favorite team, there's still that disconnect of being thousands of miles away from the action — the defensive-end-forcing-the-quarterback-to-eat-turf kind, at least.

To bring a little of the Denver Broncos to Camp Taqaddum, one fan in Colorado has basically adopted her fellow orange-and-blue diehards.

Carol Drotar, whose son is a Marine serving in Anbar province, keeps them flush in Bronco gear. She sends Marines autographed photos of the players, which she scores at the filming of Broncos safety John Lynch's TV show each week; pompoms from the cheerleaders; and other Broncos paraphernalia, such as a blue and orange version of the lid worn by the Cat in the Hat. She even sent a giant banner to be hung in the chow hall.

"I knew I could give them part of the world outside of Iraq," Drotar, 30, said in an e-mail.

She originally hooked up with a Broncos-loving Marine through Anysoldier.com. Her e-mail has since been passed along to new Denver fans coming into Camp TQ.

"I e-mailed her, saying, 'I'm the new Bronco fan,' " said Staff Sgt. Oscar Camarena, 33, who is from California but roots for Denver. "She wrote me back right away."

[Home](#) | [Archives](#) | [Stripes Lite](#) | [Ombudsman](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Contest rules](#)
[About Us](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Job Openings](#) | [Press Releases](#)

© 2006 Stars and Stripes. All Rights Reserved. [Disclaimer](#) | [Web Notice](#)