

## **An AMC Attorney Meets the Real Army!**

“Your hair is touching your collar!” “A button is undone!” “Your boot laces are hanging down!” I heard these comments, and more, while participating in the “greening” program at Ft. Polk, Louisiana. The “greening” piqued my interest because it looked like an extraordinary opportunity to bridge the gap between my role as a civilian Attorney working for a military, research and development installation and the end users of our products, the soldiers. It is coined a “greening” because participants experience total immersion in the soldiers’ environment.

The first morning, SSG. Haddad, our team advisor, reviewed procedures on proper assembly of the rucksack and harness. The equipment weighed approximately fifty (50) pounds after assembly and insertion of three days worth of supplies including canteens with water and Meals, Ready-to-Eat (MREs). Initially, I insisted on bringing a sleeping bag in addition to the fifty-pounds of equipment. I was skeptical about SSG. Haddad’s comments that I did not need it. His exact words were “pack light, freeze at night.” I refused to concede to his assertion. “After all, it is only an extra eight pounds.” However, after lifting the rucksack with the eight-pound sleeping bag inside, I acquiesced and adopted SSG. Haddad’s philosophy. His assurances that he “knew the warning signs of hypothermia” were cold comfort to me.

We marched three miles with the equipment to experience the weight on our bodies and the wear and tear of the Battle Dress Uniforms (B.D.U.s) and boots. The boots were the subject of copious advice, mainly, “Break them in before you go!” I wore my boots for several days before the “greening.” In addition, I wore sock liners upon hearing John Stone, Chief Counsel at SBCCOM, Natick, comment that liners decrease the likelihood of blisters. I did not get blisters while marching although another participant had several of them. I believe the Medical Team qualified his feet as a “disaster area” by the end of the greening. My appreciation of soldiers increased every step that I took walking those three miles. There is no better method of learning than walking in someone else’s shoes, literally in this case.

The soldiers at Ft. Polk inquired about our motivation. I explained my role as an Acquisition Attorney and Natick SBCCOM’s part in researching and developing products that they use on a daily basis including MREs, clothing, and other equipment. The soldiers appreciated our willingness to experience their lifestyle and shared their thoughts candidly with us. They talked about heating MREs by placing them inside their t-shirts and eating when they have an opportunity. Time is crucial for soldiers. Others boycotted MREs because of a price increase. Apparently, inflation affects everyone. Others noted that Kevlar helmets are “heavy” and wondered if we can modify that feature. There were numerous mutually enlightening conversations.

We had many opportunities to eat Meals, Ready to Eat. I was anxious to prepare and taste these well-known Natick products. SSG. Haddad demonstrated proper procedures on heating the MREs. I tried a variety of the vegetarian MREs including the pasta with vegetables and tortellini, and found them tasty. Upon hearing that I enjoyed these meals, several soldiers requested that I seek immediate medical attention.

We drove to neutral areas for both nights in the woods since Ft. Polk is a combat training area. As we set up for the night, SSG. Haddad said to look for a “flat area” on the ground. That essentially equated to, “drop your gear wherever you are standing and prepare to sleep.” It was difficult to accomplish any tasks after the sun went down since there were no streetlights and our eyes had to adjust to the darkness. Anything routine became difficult, including walking. I had to accept that my “bed” for the next two nights would be bumpy, hard, and cold.

I put on several layers of additional clothing and increasingly appreciated the warmth of the sun. I treasured all the warm weather gear including the neck gator. SSG. Haddad said to wrap the neck gator around our heads to conserve body heat. I laid down to sleep, or so I thought. Unfortunately, earlier in the day, I noticed a display featuring a variety of snakes and the corresponding bite treatments while in the medical van. Those thoughts remained in my head until I fell asleep. I fared better the second night because I was fatigued from all the activities.

We engaged in many exhilarating activities during the days. We had a thrilling ride on a MI-17 Hip, Russian Helicopter where the entire rear section was open to the environment. We wore helmets and/or earplugs to protect our ears from the noise. I also entered a Sheridan tank and spoke with its operators. I drove a humvee through rugged terrain, which reminded me somewhat of driving through the potholes of Boston. We trudged through a claustrophobic, underground sewer system at a simulated urban site.

When the greening was over, we went to our lodging facility and, I ran to the shower. I had to scrub my face vigorously to rub off the camouflage that we had applied and reapplied throughout the greening. Despite the vigorous scrubbing, a tinge of green hue remained on my face. That was acceptable since St. Patrick’s Day was around the corner and I could pass myself off as a holiday reveler. Or, maybe I could go to a Celtics game. The possibilities were endless.

We drove back to the airport and while heading home, I felt I had an insightful experience. The “greening” was an indispensable learning tool that allowed me to glance into the soldiers’ world. I not only learned about assembling the gear, carrying equipment, and “living” in the woods, but learned first hand about the soldiers’ way of life and their thoughts. The “greening” was an extraordinary opportunity that surpassed my expectations.