

*'Livin' on Tunis time . . .'*

## Survey Group member likes his duty, but finds there's no place like home

"Tunisia? Where is that?!" "Tunisia! Oh, man, do I feel sorry for you! Whatever you do, buy bottled water!" "You're going to Tunisia? Are you aware the PLO is headquartered there?"

by SSgt. M.P. Warner  
*Geodetic Survey Group*

These were some of the reactions I encountered from the public when the subject of my next TDY assignment entered the conversation. And, I must say, their reactions didn't surprise me. When the idea of an overseas assignment comes to mind I normally think of a country like Germany or possibly England. Deploying to areas such as the Azores, Greenland or Korea is certainly not that uncommon either.

But I was a military member and headed to a Third World Moslem country on the African continent, situated between Libya and Algeria. Well, that idea was a little unsettling to say the least. Since we don't have an active military installation in Tunisia, I really didn't know what to expect. All my fears of the unknown were unfounded.

My job would be to participate in a geodetic survey. The survey originated with a request from the Tunisian army to the Defense Mapping Agency. They wanted DMA (me!) to assist their survey teams in establishing a Doppler survey network throughout the country. Because the Geodetic Survey Group is the data acquisition branch of DMA, we got the nod.

The survey itself was to consist of two Tunisian military teams with five men on each. The two Tunisian teams would be supplemented with two DMA teams respectively, with an Ameri-

can civilian and military member on each team. The survey was to last about 45 days. Each combined survey team was responsible for the Doppler positioning of about five stations apiece, and the 10 stations were located all over the Tunisian countryside.

The survey odyssey our team embarked on began in the capital of Tunis. We spent the first week getting the equipment out of customs and meeting our Tunisian counterparts. I began to notice the diversity of culture in the capital. I was amazed at the influx of European influence in Tunis. This was due to a number of reasons. Tunisia was once a French colony, so their presence is permanent. Especially in the language.

Also, Tunis is separated from Italy and the southern European community by only the Mediterranean Sea, so Mediterranean influence is everywhere. When you combine these influences with the Moslem background, you get a very complex and extremely intelligent community. The city of Tunis was as civilized as any of the major hubs in the United States. An excellent road system, major hotels, superb shopping and dining and, most importantly, cable TV!

But the aspect that impressed me most during my 45 days over there was the tremendous hospitality of the Tunisian people. Time and time again,

their overwhelming friendliness was a tremendous comfort when our teams were so far away from American soil. And I don't mean just an obligatory friendliness, ei-

ther. The entire populace, or at least what I saw of it, throughout the country, was genuinely concerned with making our stay as comfortable as possible no matter where in the country we went. We headed south into the heartland of the country to begin our survey. If there was one thing that each team had an abundance of, it was transportation. Each team traveled with two deuce-and-a-half trucks for equipment and two jeep-type vehicles. All I could think of was a line from the old 1970s song—"We got ourselves a C-O-N-V-O-Y!" The further south we went the more primitive life became. But the underlying friendliness of the people was still prevalent.

At one point during our sojourn, I spent Thanksgiving eating Spam® in my tent in the middle of the Sahara. Two weeks later, I found myself on the resort island of Djerba surveying the Mediterranean until the other team arrived. We also spent a week at an oil drilling camp in the Sahara near the Algerian border.

When the final survey point was completed, I remember riding in the deuce-and-a-half back to Tunis and thinking how many great friends we had all made in the past month and a half. Like any "run of the mill" Survey Group TDY, we had managed to pack a lifetime's worth of experience into 45 days.

But I was also thinking of home. All that had been so terribly wrong for me in Cheyenne, Wyo., now seemed so fabulously right. As I boarded the Yankee Clipper, I closed my eyes, clicked my sneaks together and said, "There's no place like home."

