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## *Taking PT to new heights*

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**BASRAH**, Iraq – Sir Edmund Hillary climbed Mt. Everest because it was there.

Stalwarts with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers run up and down the stairs of the Basrah Air Control Tower for much the same reason.

The tower stands about 14 stories high, according to Maj. Rick Smith. And if you negotiate the stairs up and down 233 times, you have done the equivalent of climbing Mt. Everest and you receive a plaque attesting to the fact that you have met the Mt. Everest Challenge.

And a few people from the Corps recently seized the opportunity to rappel down the face of the tower to raise money for a charitable cause.

The Basrah Air Control Tower is a fully operational facility, controlling flights in and from the Basrah International Airport. It is located in close proximity to the Basrah Area Office of the Corps of Engineers.

Coalition Operating Base Basrah is the site of other challenges as well, not the least of which are periodic IDF (indirect fire) attacks. Lt. Col. Kenneth McDonald, officer in charge of the Basrah Area Office and a deputy commander of the Corps' Gulf Region South district, said PT (physical training) has proven to be a major stress reliever in a sometimes hostile environment.

McDonald said he runs the tower a couple times a week but that other people in the command take different approaches. These include running on treadmills, pounding on the two punching bags avail-



The Basrah Air Control Tower serves as a control center for flights in and out of Basrah International Airport and as a challenge to runners on the installation. (USACE photo by James Hodges)

able for those pugilistically inclined, lifting weights and walking.

Regular exercise was cited as a leading tool for dealing with stress in stress management instruction presented recently to a group of USACE personnel in southern Iraq.

Navy Lt. Cmdr Chad Lorenzana, resi-

dent engineer with the Corps' Basrah Area Office, prefers running the tower to running on a treadmill. He said the top of the tower affords a nice view and is a great place to take pictures, which is an added plus if you are an avid photographer like him. He started running the tower last June and runs up and down five times once every two weeks or so. Hazards include sore backside muscles.

"It's something different," added Lorenzana in a remark that may resonate with people who like to break up routines.

"It's quite exhausting," said Tia Chandler, the Basrah Office's administrative officer. She runs up and down the tower six times per outing, now every day. The people who work in the tower don't mind the runners, she said, reporting that a log book is kept for Mt. Everest Challengers to record their numbers. She also said the Basrah power system occasionally leaves tower runners in the dark, but that chem lights are available in that eventuality.

"The competitive streak in me wants to take back the 'exhausting' comment, but I suppose it is," said Chandler, who also commented that running the tower is good for building team spirit.

Maj. Rick Smith, S-3 and LNO (liaison officer) to MND-SE, is another tower runner. He has been at it for about four months and does 10 pull ups every time he reaches the top, working on a double challenge. He's now up to six times a run, once a day, like Chandler. He said the tower is filled with people who have great stories to tell.

In terms of stories and the tower, it's hard to beat the one about the British soldier who did his 233 round trips in a single day.

Running the tower might seem quite



Tia Chandler, administrative officer at USACE's Basrah Area Office, rappels down Basrah Air Control Tower. (USACE photo by James Hodges)

tame compared to rappelling down its face. But James Hodges, chief construction representative at the Basrah Office, said rappelling was easy to do. He and the other USACE tower runners were offered the opportunity as part of a fund raising event put on by the British contingent to support injured UK troops. He also said it provided a good opportunity to relieve a little stress.

Chandler found the rappelling experience "a little scary," but added that she wasn't about to pass on a chance to rappel off a tower, "in Iraq no less." She also works out on the punching bags, having acquired boxing and jujitsu skills in Iraq, and plans to keep up her workouts when she returns home.

Chandler, Maj. Smith declared, "is a trooper."

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