

Dark Horse Welder Takes On Any Mission

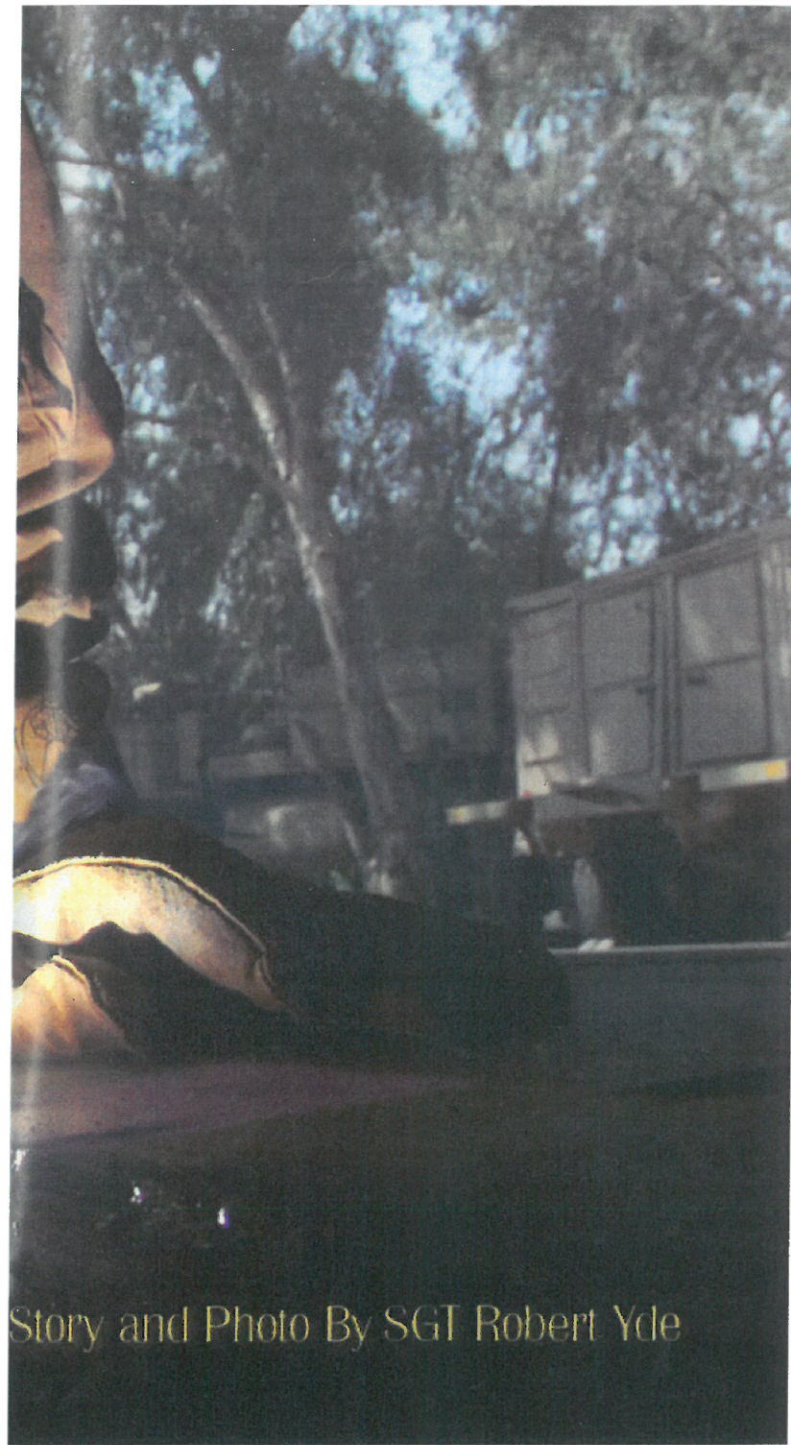
FOB PROSPERITY, Iraq – Behind a huge black mask that is reminiscent of something out of “Star Wars,” SPC Sara Baggett’s eyes watch as her hand’s deftly move a welding torch over two pieces of metal, fusing them together.

“It’s very important to get the right temperature when you’re about to weld because you have to get the puddle to form and once the puddle forms you’ve got to move it,” she said, explaining her trade. “As soon as the puddle forms perfectly in a circle you move it little by little, and then you have to keep pushing the rod in to keep the puddle forming so that the metals fuse together, and then you get the beads to form.”

As the only school-trained welder in Co. D, FSC, 4-9 Cav., 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div., Baggett has had plenty of opportunities over the past 12 months to master her trade in an environment, that in many cases, calls for things to be rigged together on short notice.

While there are other Soldiers who she works with in the company’s recovery section who have welding experience, the Chicago native is the primary welder for the sections numerous projects.

“Basically we weld anything that people see that would help them out on their missions,” the NCOIC of the recovery section, SSG Cody Britton, said. “It’s not even brigade...it’s everybody that’s on



Story and Photo By SGT Robert Yde

this FOB. We've helped out civilians; We've helped out the Air Force; We've helped out the Navy, the Marines...pretty much anybody that comes to us asking for something. We don't turn them down."

Britton, a native of Sheridan, Wyo., said that since arriving in Baghdad last November his shop has filled requests for grills, bed frames, doors, cages, guideon stands and numerous additions to all types of vehicles. Throughout all these missions, whether they are on the FOB or out in sector, Britton said that Baggett has played a central role.

"Specialist Baggett is an awesome Soldier and probably one of the best welders I've ever seen," he said. "She never says no. She always says yes

when it comes to a mission or a welding job. She'll go out in sector and weld. She's an awesome troop."

Baggett said that when she selected metal worker as her military occupation four-and-a-half years ago, she didn't really know what the job was going to entail, but that she has grown to really enjoy it.

"It's amazing what you can do when something breaks down, and how you can fix it, and how you can fabricate anything – make anything that you want to make," she said. "It's just amazing."

She said that so far, her most memorable project was a 10-foot door made out of half-inch steel, which she constructed to fill an empty spot in a wall separating one of the International Zone's entry control points from downtown Baghdad.

"That one took like three or four days to actually complete," she said. "It was huge; it was really heavy."

During her time as a welder in the Army, Baggett said she has learned various types of welding styles to include Tungsten Inert Gas, Metal Inert Gas and oxycetylene, but that her favorite is arc welding. She said that no matter what type of welding one is doing the most difficult part of becoming a proficient welder is maintaining a steady hand and developing an eye for the right angle.

"You have to have a steady hand," she explained. "If you don't have a steady hand, you'll lose your bead or your angle. If your angle's wrong, it won't really stick together like it's supposed to."

Baggett also stressed the dangers that can occur during welding and the safety precautions that must be taken to prevent these from happening.

"You have to have eye protection because you can really hurt yourself," she explained. "You have to have gloves on. Depending on what type of welding you're doing, you put an apron on so you don't burn through your clothes because you can really hurt yourself. I have a few scars from accidentally touching metal right after I'm done welding it."

While she said she has grown to love welding, Baggett said she plans on pursuing a career in social work after her enlistment is finished, but that she will probably still weld for the rest of her life.

"I'll just do it for fun," she said. "I like welding, but I think it will just be a hobby for me."

Until that day though, Baggett said she will happily spend her days in the Army, hidden behind her welding mask building anything that will help Soldiers complete their missions.