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As war enters fourth year, morale holds

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our generation's war. And it's the place where the money is as an infantryman," said Beck, who is assigned to the 6th Civil Affairs Group.

Unlike in Vietnam, most of the troops live on bases with easy links to home, via telephone and Internet, and there are bonus comforts such as video-conferencing on Valentine's Day and dining halls.

Many of the troops say, however, that more important are the personalities of those in their platoons and the leadership style of commanding officers.

"Having a good platoon is key — just having your friends around," said Lance Cpl. Michael Surber, a native of Kenosha, Wis., who also is in the 1st Light Armored.

"The biggest thing is the guys you're with, and not having to see your buddies get hurt," Surber added as his squad trudged through a field in Rommana, one of a string of cities along the Euphrates River where hundreds of Marines are based near the volatile Syrian border.

Surber's squad lived this winter in a cluttered room with dirt barriers for walls and a wooden roof topped with sand bags. Hot showers were available only every one or two weeks and heat came from a black diesel stove that gurgled through the night.

"You're going to go through the same hardships. If it rains, you and your buddy are both going to get wet," said Ward, who quietly sips coffee at his base chow hall to observe his Marines and gauge their morale. "These guys are fighting and jumping on hand grenades for their buddies."

Despite the better morale, psychological stress on U.S. troops is evident even after tours are over.

A Pentagon report released last month said 12 percent of the more than 222,000 returning Army soldiers and Marines in the study were diagnosed with a mental problem. In all, 35 percent got psychological counseling soon after returning from Iraq, the report said.

Harsh conditions and lingering effects aside, many U.S. troops point to last year's Iraqi elections and the growing ranks of the Iraqi army as validation of their mission. Many Marines see progress in the fact that fewer battles are being fought with insurgents in western Iraq compared to previous tours.

"I've been here four times and I think we need to stay out here," said Capt. Russell Becker of Houston, a communications officer based near Rutbah in western Iraq. "Change is coming about, but I don't know how many more years it's going to take."

Others say they can speak only about their assigned areas and know little about the insurgency in the rest of Iraq.

Even for those whose confidence in the war remains, however, consecutive deployments have taken a personal toll. One Marine inside a wood shack that serves as his home quietly showed a sheet of paper with pink footprints of an infant daughter he has never seen.

Others say they try to make the days go by faster.

"I'm just doing my time. You know, they say you don't have to be in prison to do time," Lance Cpl. Kevin Bourbon of Redondo Beach, Calif., said as he watched Iraqi police recruits do sit-ups and run sprints during physical fitness tests in Rommana.

Some find relief in efforts to rebuild a corrupt Iraqi police force that collapsed last year.

"Now that brought my morale up, that they're trying to help themselves without us," said Surber, surprised to see a turnout of 300 police recruits, who commanders hope can eventually take over responsibility for security in Rommana.

Faith also helps many.

At a base in Qaim near the Syrian border, Marines file into a makeshift chapel, complete with a chaplain, set up inside an abandoned railway passenger car on rusty tracks. They call it the "Soul Train."

Inside dining halls across Iraq, it is common to see soldiers and Marines bow their heads and pause to pray before they eat.



ALAN HAWES/STAFF

The Gay Dolphin gift shop is among many icons representing the Myrtle Beach of old. Current owner Buz Plyler (in photo at left) has spent most of his life in the shadow of the Pavilion, where he is seen in the photo at right (tall boy in center) in the 1950s.



JACK THOMPSON

Final days for Myrtle Beach's Pavilion

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steamroller. The town has sought to bury its kitschy, mom and pop roots and recast itself as a high-rise-laden, year-round destination — equal parts Vegas, Miami and Branson, Mo.

A great deal of this change came after a relatively quiet, 100-year-old family company known as Myrtle Beach Farms reinvented itself as Burroughs & Chapin in the early 1990s. In 1993 the company came under the directorship of hard-charging local businessman Doug Wendel. With holdings of thousands of acres of prime Myrtle Beach forest, a company that had previously been content to operate its profitable Pavilion, mall and golf course suddenly decided to remake the face of the Grand Strand.

The company built the 1-million-square-foot Coastal Grande Mall and turned a vast woodland into the 700-acre Broadway at the Beach complex.

Where rickety deer stands recently overlooked a forest filled with fox squirrels, red-cockaded woodpeckers and bears, the company is hard at work on multi-million-dollar homes for its 2,500-acre Grande Dunes golf resort.

Yet the few square blocks around the Pavilion stand much as they did in the 1950s. Tourists still flock to Peaches Corner or Marvin's for a corn dog and wander slack-jawed through Ripley's Believe it or Not and the bewildering aisles of the 60-year-old Gay Dolphin Gift Cove. Around the corner, the Bowery Bar still fills with bikers and country music fans. Along Ocean Boulevard, teens still check each other out from cruising cars or scream as they soar into the night sky aboard the Pavilion's Rainbow.

Some of the sheen, though, has clearly worn off. At the Pavilion's northern edge, empty stores line 9th Avenue, while along Ocean Boulevard, tattooed and pierced teenagers browse the music-blasting aisles of lowbrow airbrush painting and gift stores. The iconic Mother Fletcher's Bar now stands empty at the corner of 8th Avenue.

According to Burroughs & Chapin spokesman Pat Dowling, time and traffic have passed the Pavilion by. And while he has been moved by emotional pleas he has seen online, he said it's time for a long-planned upscale redevelopment of the Pavilion and the surrounding 300 city acres to move forward.

"No one feels more emotion about this than the people at Bur-

roughs & Chapin," he said. "The Pavilion is what is Myrtle Beach is best known for as an icon. The Pavilion is our identifier and part of our culture and psychology. But it's no longer true that people come to Myrtle Beach to see the Pavilion. If they did, I guarantee we would not be closing."

Dowling points to the more than 12 million visitors drawn to Broadway at the Beach last year. Despite



BLAKELY FAMILY PHOTO

Cecilia Blakely on one of the rides at the Myrtle Beach Pavilion in July 1967.

being one of the few oceanfront amusement parks left on the East Coast, Dowling said the Pavilion only drew around half a million paying customers last year.

Visitation is now siphoned off by attractions from the Carolina Opry to Barefoot Landing to Burroughs & Chapin's other ventures, such as Myrtle Waves. Dowling said the company had been heavily subsidizing Pavilion operations, and it is difficult and expensive to maintain rides for several years.

But to Meredith Cox and thousands of other online signers of the Save the Myrtle Beach Pavilion, these arguments hold little water. Originally from Myrtle Beach, Cox now lives in Charleston and is a nurse at Roper Hospital.

Like her parents before her, Cox spent entire summers at the Pavilion.

"My friends and I still get together today and ride the rides," she said. "I think this is absolutely crazy. So many families continue to share memories with their children at the Pavilion. I don't understand how they could do this. It's all about the money for Burroughs & Chapin, and it probably always will be."

Cox and her husband, Ashley, visited the Pavilion on their first date. A Charlestonian by birth, Ashley said that even his great-grandmother visited the original 1920s-era Pavilion, when the only way to get there from her home in Conway was by train. He said his father Tommy, today a Pentecostal minister in Georgetown, recently recalled dancing the shag on visits to the Magic Attic, a teen nightclub still open today.

"Everybody in South Carolina has gone to the Pavilion," he said. "Even the 'hoity-toities' in Charleston who want you to believe they only go to Hilton Head — whether they like to admit it or not, they all went to the Pavilion."

The Coxes and several others, including Myrtle Beach historian Jack Thompson and Gay Dolphin owner Buz Plyler, said they doubted the Pavilion was losing money. They and several misty-eyed families interviewed along Ocean Boulevard also said Burroughs & Chapin could generate incalculable good will and return family visits to Myrtle Beach by keeping the Pavilion open.

Comparing his venerable store to the Pavilion, Plyler said, "Mine is a very antiquated business. I have far too much American labor and far too much cost, but it's important to me that people here have a good place to work. It's been a great thing to be a positive part of people's vacations for so many years."



ALAN HAWES/STAFF

Jack Thompson was the "Myrtle Beach Jail" photographer during the 1950s.

Jack Thompson has spent more than 50 years of his life within 1,000 yards of the Pavilion. Working as the Pavilion's "Myrtle Beach Jail" photographer during the 1950s, he was also a well-known local crooner, jitterbugger and shagger. He recently published the book "Memories of Myrtle Beach," a photographic record of most of

his 69 years.

Thompson said he plans to work with other area business owners and politicians to consolidate petition work and appeal to Burroughs & Chapin to consider at least saving and renovating the old Pavilion building.

"I'm one who believes that if they really paid attention to putting the Pavilion and amusement park back into tip-top shape, they could be busying people there from all over the Southeast," he said. "The Pavilion is falling into disrepair, and it needs a little grease, so the numbers are falling. But they're not falling because people don't want to go there."

Burroughs & Chapin has contracted Charleston architecture and planning firm LS3P for the long-stalled redevelopment of the Pavilion and surrounding area. According to Vice President Tom Hund, no firm plans have been drawn yet, and LS3P is conducting intensive research into a myriad of possibilities and issues.

"I think this redevelopment is being done for all the right reasons, but it's hitting a historic nerve," Hund said. "I don't think it's about the money. It's really time to think about what could go there if you can't maintain what you have."

But the Blakelys and Coxes are not convinced. Should the Pavilion disappear, Cecilia Blakely said she would never patronize another Burroughs & Chapin-owned business.

On Friday, Dexter Blakely learned that Tripp Carter, who started the original online petition, had inspired a Murrells Inlet resident, Boz Martin, to found a new Web site, www.savehembpavilion.com.

"We are going to keep on with this petition going until our voice is heard," Blakely said.

"We are the people who made Burroughs & Chapin into the business that they are," added his mother. "And the Pavilion is what made Burroughs & Chapin. They are ripping the heart and soul out of Myrtle Beach. There are so few places left today where you can say, 'Look, this was my favorite place when I was your age.' It's so wonderful to look at the your child on a ride laughing, and think back on the time you had the same expression on your face at the same place."

"It disgusts me," said Ashley Cox. If they tear the Pavilion down, "my wife will cry every time she drives by."

Pavilion's legacy: The Shag

Original building dates to the 1920s

BY CHRIS DIXON
The Post and Courier

There has been a Pavilion around the vicinity of 8th and 9th avenues in Myrtle Beach since the 1920s. The current beachfront building was constructed in 1948 after the previous structure burned.

Though Burroughs & Chapin points out that this is not the original Pavilion, to many millions it might as well be. The building has served as a game arcade, dance hall, vaudeville stage, concert venue and focal point for the town since its construction. The 1989 Phoebe Cates comedy "Shag" was set here.

The Pavilion's outdoor patio was the site where South Carolina teens first danced the Jitterbug and later the Shag. Photographer and longtime Chamber of Commerce member Jack Thompson grew up dancing here as a starch-shirted teen. "I watched the Jitterbug change to the Shag because the Carolina boys were too egotistical to jump up and down," he said. "They wanted to move side to side and be a little more sophisticated. So the purpose of the Shag was to dance like you weren't paying attention."

Though it has been through many updates and iterations, there has been an amusement park across the street from the Pavilion since 1950. While the park today has 49 rides, including the modern Hurricane roller coaster and popular Hydrosurge, it also holds antique gems such as a 1912 Herschell-Spillman carousel and Baden Band pipe organ that was first exhibited at the World Exposition in Paris in 1900. Both have been targeted for listing by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The Pavilion is also one of the few places in the country where you can have your stomach churned aboard a vintage Scrambler or Tilt-A-Whirl within a block of the ocean.

Burroughs & Chapin and the town of Myrtle Beach have sought to substantially redevelop some 300 acres of properties adjacent to the Pavilion for over five years. In 2004, Burroughs & Chapin and Myrtle Beach's redevelopment agency contracted with a California developer to come up with a redevelopment plan, but it never materialized.

After that developer stepped down, Burroughs & Chapin decided to move forward on a mixed-use redevelopment with LS3P, a Charleston architectural firm.

Though Burroughs & Chapin has been tight-lipped about plans and revenue for Pavilion redevelopment, Thompson said the fully redeveloped Pavilion property would likely be worth well over \$500 million.

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