

IBEW Local 48 instructor tells of duty in Iraq

A U.S. flag that once flew over a Marine base in Iraq's Al Anbar province now hangs framed on an auditorium wall at NECA-IBEW Local 48 Electrical Training Center in Portland.

The flag was sent by Naval reservist Ron Umali, 44, who spent six months in Iraq earlier this year as a member of the U.S. Navy Seabees just months after he was hired by the training center as an instructor.

"It's a really bad place," Umali told the NW Labor Press. "You learn to appreciate what you have because there are people there who don't have anything."

Umali grew up an American "expat" in places like Pakistan and Iran, where his father worked in the oil construction industry. But in Iraq, he said, he had almost no interaction with the locals. Security was always on the mind, and he and the fellow members of his battalion kept to their own.

While Umali was in Iraq, five members of his battalion of about 500 were injured, and one, a friend and fellow squad-member, was killed by an IED (Improvised Explosive De-



vice) while on a convoy.

Though Umali's unit came under mortar attack when he was in Fallujah, Seabees mostly don't work directly in harm's way. Umali said he carried an M-16 but never had to fire it. And Umali said he's never been on a ship.

The Seabees are the Navy's best-kept secret, Umali said. Known formally as the U.S. Naval Construction Force (and informally as the "dirt navy"), the Seabees do construction support for the U.S. Marine Corps. The name Seabee comes from "CB," the abbreviation for Construction Battalion.

Umali spent several tours of duty in the U.S. Air Force, and a stint in the Army, but joined the Navy in 1999 and found a home in the Seabees.

Umali said he can't talk in detail

about where he was or what he did in Iraq. But mostly he served as a construction planning and estimating specialist, upgrading military outposts to improve security and quality of life. That included installing blast barriers and replacing tents with hard structures. After seven days a week of 12- to 16-hour days, teaching apprentice electricians in Portland is light duty.

Umali declined to share opinions about the politics of the war, but said he wouldn't hesitate to go back if called.

When his enlistment expired last month, however, he decided not to reenlist; he and his wife Melissa are expecting a daughter in February.

Her weekly care packages kept him going in Iraq. Now, Umali concluded, he's needed on the home front.

Local Motion

September 2007

Union activity in Oregon and Southwest Washington, according to the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board

Election results

Company	Date	Union	Location	Results:		
				Union	No Union	
Linn County Juvenile Detention Center						
9/14	Linn County Juv. Det. Assn.	Albany	11	1		
Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the NW						
9/19	OR Fed. Nurses, AFT, #5017	Portland	3	0		
City of Newport Fire Department						
8/29	Newport PFFA, Fire Fighters	Newport	card-check			

Representation petitions

Company	Location
Union	# of employees
Vanguard Car Rental (decertification)	Portland
Teamsters Local 305	67
Apria Healthcare Group	Portland
Teamsters Local 81	22
American Medical Response	Portland
Teamsters Joint Council 37	556
Albertsons (decertification)	Corvallis
United Food & Commercial Workers Local 555	36
Petrochem Insulation	Vancouver
Asbestos Workers Local 36 vs. Petroleum & Industrial Workers	65
Harry's Fresh Foods	Portland
Bakers, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers, Grain Millers Local 364	200

U.S. House panel oks bill to overturn NLRB's 'workers are supervisors' ruling

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — By a 26-20 party-line vote, the Democratic-run House Education and Labor Committee last month passed the RESPECT Act — legislation to clarify the definition of "supervisor" under the National Labor Relations Act.

The bill — the Re-Empowerment of Skilled and Professional Employees and Construction and Tradesworkers Act (H.R. 1644) — is in response to recent decisions by the Bush-appointed National Labor Relations Board that significantly broadened the definition of supervisor. In October 2006, the National Labor Relations Board handed down a trio of decisions — known collectively as the "Kentucky River" decisions — that could enable employers to reclassify many employees as "supervisors," thereby denying them the right under the law to organize and bargain collectively.

According to the Kentucky River rulings, skilled and professional workers who regularly direct a co-worker on a single, discrete task just 10 percent of

the workday could be considered supervisors, even if they have no authority to discipline, reward, promote, hire or fire employees.

The Economic Policy Institute estimates that 8 million workers could be at risk of losing their collective bargaining rights because of the Kentucky River rulings. In the NLRB's final decision, the dissenting Democrats on the board said the rulings could strip 34 million workers of their rights by 2012.

As a result of the Kentucky River decisions, in a recent case from Salt Lake City, a regional director of the NLRB ruled that 64 out of 88 registered nurses attempting to organize were supervisors.

The RESPECT Act clarifies the definition of "supervisor" to say a supervisor must perform supervisory duties for at least 50 percent of his/her work time to be considered a supervisor.

The bill was introduced by Rep. Robert Andrews (D-NJ). It is co-sponsored by Oregon Democrat David Wu, who sits on the Labor Committee.

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