

Imagine it's 124 degrees outside and you're standing in a field on Freedom Air Base in Kirkuk, Iraq. All living plants in the field have long-since withered because of the intense heat and is now covered by coat of dust.

Surrounding you are three portable sinks and a stack of dishes that can reach seven to eight feet high. There isn't any running water. Every drop of water has to be hand carried from a water buffalo a hundred meters away.

For 13 hours you're stuck in this field washing dishes.

The soldiers who end up in this field aren't being punished. Every lower enlisted soldier in the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade will find himself on a detail like this, commonly referred to as KP.

KP usually consists of six to eight soldiers who help the cooks prepare breakfast and dinner for the 173<sup>rd</sup> Abn Bde and it's attached units.

There are two dining facilities on Freedom Air Base: 1-508th's dining facility and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (Airborne), 503<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment's dining facility. Each dining facility serves 2,000 personal. Roughly half those personal live off Freedom Air Base in safe houses and urban patrol bases. Besides feeding Army and Air Force personal, the 173<sup>rd</sup> Abn Bde's dining facilities also feed local Iraqis who work on base, and Turkish Special Forces who are working with the 173<sup>rd</sup> Abn Bde.

"Besides washing dishes we also work in the warehouse moving supplies around, taking out the trash, setting up the dining facility and helping insure everything is clean," said Pfc. Kasey Robbins, Alpha Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion (Airborne), 508<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

The cooks have a lot of their own work to do, said Spc. Michael Cewden, a paratrooper in Charlie Company, 1-508th.

"A lot of people don't realize how valuable of an asset KP's are," said Staff Sgt. Carl Jones, a cook in Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-508<sup>th</sup>. "If we didn't have KP's sanitizing dishes everyone would be getting sick. The KP's also handle the trash. I'm pretty sure you wouldn't want the people cooking your food also handling the trash."

Cooks realize how tiring KP can be and try to make the day a little bit easier by giving KP's a extra long lunch break.

"We really appreciate all their hard work," said Spc. Eric Latson, a cook in HHC 1-508th. "That's why we cook them extra meals throughout the day and give them as many breaks as possible."

At the end of the day after everything's done, the cooks have a bonfire and cook a special meal for KP's.

"Last night they cooked steak," said Spc. Steven Hayes, a Mark 19 gunner in Charlie Company 1-508<sup>th</sup>. "I can't remember the last time I had steak."

The KP's realize that the cooks can't do everything, and they know someone has to do the job their doing.

"If the cooks did everything we did as well as the stuff they're doing now nothing would ever get finished," said Robbins. "They would work 24 hours a day, and yet there still be more dishes to wash, trash to take out, and more food to be prepared and cooked."