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## **First sergeant, father-in-law work together**

INLAW

By Sgt. Keith M. Anderson

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FORWARD OPERATING BASE MAREZ, Iraq — For one first sergeant, whose father-in-law is a sergeant in his company, this deployment to Iraq is a family affair.

1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Rene Berlingeri, first sergeant, 268<sup>th</sup> Cargo Transfer Company, 18<sup>th</sup> Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, said working with his father-in-law, Sgt. Carlos Velazquez, CRSP yard manager, 268<sup>th</sup> CTC, doesn't cause any problems.

“Sgt. Velazquez and I have been in this unit since November 2007, and we have a great relationship,” said Berlingeri. “He is very respectful — he’s an ‘old school’ non-commissioned officer — and understands his role. He knows I am the first sergeant regardless of my age or even that I am married to his daughter. For us there is no issue, and we continue to execute the mission as always.”

The 37-year-old first sergeant from Caguas, P.R., said there have been some funny moments, though, between himself, his 27-year-old wife, Jessika Velazquez, and her father, Carlos.

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“He transferred from the National Guard in Puerto Rico to the Army Reserve, and afterwards for some reason during the contract procedures his leave and earnings statement showed that he had only one year in the service,” Berlingeri said.

“He was talking to Jessy when she found out that he wasn’t getting paid correctly, and then she called to my cell, and said to me, ‘Honey, you know that Daddy isn’t getting paid correctly, and I know you can fix this, there is nothing that you cannot fix, you are the first sergeant,’ so just minutes later I called Jessy back and said, ‘Hey, Mami, it’s been fixed, anything else?’” Berlingeri said.

The first sergeant said the three of them had a clear chain-of-command.

“We know who the O-6 (colonel) is back home — Jessy,” he said.

Velazquez, a 46-year-old father of five, said it was strange, at first, working under his son-in-law.

“Working with my son-in-law as my first sergeant was at the beginning kind of confusing,” Velazquez said. “I did not know how to approach him, so I did the best thing, stayed out of his sight. My fellow Soldiers did not know me personally, but they knew I was the first sergeant’s father-in-law, so making friends was very hard at the beginning.”

Velazquez said that’s not the case, anymore.

“Nowadays I am known as Sgt. Velazquez, instead of the first sergeant’s father-in-law,” he said. “So far I have always talked to him as a first sergeant, though we sometimes call each other by our first names.”

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Berlingeri, who works in a biotech company when he's not on Reserve duty, said the first time he met his wife's father he was surprised to find out his rank.

"When I met Jessy's dad she didn't tell me what rank he was she just told he that he was in the Army," Berlingeri said. "So we spoke at their house for maybe 45 minutes then the question came from him, 'So, Rene, you are in the Army, what's your rank?'"

Berlingeri explained his job in the Army Reserve, and then his rank.

"I told him that I was a sergeant first class and a chief instructor of the '88-Series' (transportation) at the 8th Brigade, 108th Division (Institutional Training), and then he told me that he was a specialist in the Army National Guard, and Jessy started laughing, saying 'Ha Ha, Rene outranks you,'" Berlingeri said. "I thought it wasn't funny, but we both smiled, and since that day we've had a great relationship."



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1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Rene Berlinger, first sergeant, 268<sup>th</sup> Cargo Transfer Company, 18<sup>th</sup> Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, and his father-in-law, Sgt. Carlos Velazquez, CRSP yard manager, 268<sup>th</sup> CTC, work together in the same company at FOB Marez, Iraq. "Sgt. Velazquez and I have been in this unit since November 2007, and we have a great relationship," said Berlinger. "He is very respectful – he's an 'old school' non-commissioned officer – and understands his role. He knows I am the first sergeant regardless of my age or even that I am married to his daughter. For us there is no issue, and we continue to execute the mission as always." (Courtesy photo)