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I was a rock band roadie in Iraq

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The road crews (or roadies) are the technicians who travel with a band on tour, usually in sleeper buses, and handle every part of the concert except for actually performing the music with the musician. Sgt. Nollette recounts his experience as a roadie during a performance of the rock band Quietdrive at Q-West Feb. 23.

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE Q-WEST, Iraq — As part of the events and communications team here, I am called upon to be part of base Morale, Welfare and Recreation events. Sometimes these missions are a chore, sometimes they are exciting, but they are always a learning experience.

I have escorted Indy racecar drivers to the PX (post exchange), watched over Comedy Central comedians as they slept, set up garbage cans and fire extinguishers at a flea market, and provided warming beverages at an early morning fun run. None of these prepared me for my latest mission as a roadie for the rock band “Quietdrive.”

Quietdrive is a pop rock and punk band based out of Minneapolis, Minn. They have been together since 2002 and have toured in the U.S., Europe, Japan and now Iraq. They have had their music in the “American Top 40,” and their song “Time After Time,” a cover of a Cyndi Lauper song, is featured on the soundtrack of the 2006 feature film, “John Tucker Must Die.”

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ROADIE/2-2-2

My night as a roadie started with picking the band up at the airport. They came with 900 pounds of drums, guitars, speakers and other equipment.

I and four other Soldiers, Sgt. 1st Class Shawna Snodgrass, Morale, Welfare and Recreation non-commissioned officer in charge, Staff Sgt. Martin Chen, helpdesk non-commissioned officer in charge, Department of Public Works, Sgt. Christian Gabriel, projects non-commissioned officer in charge, DPW, and Spc. Phillip Stosser, cable technician, were assigned to move their equipment from the airport to the MWR indoor theater where they would be performing.

The entire band and everyone else involved pitched in and helped load equipment. In very short order the gear was stowed safely on the truck and the band members were on the VIP bus. When we arrived at the theater, again everyone pitched in to help unload the equipment.

Then the real activity started. Speaker covers were pulled off and then the speakers were mounted on their stands. Microphone stands were telescoped into position at various points around the stage.

“Do you think I can get a rug for my drums?” asked the drummer, Brandon Lanier.

At the time I was wondering why he needed a rug. As the flurry of activity continued, I went in search of a rug. The staff at the MWR quickly found a rug and it was brought to the stage. Brandon directed where it should be placed. I finally had to ask what the rug was for. He told me that it keeps the drums from scooting across the floor and out of reach as he plays. Like I said, you learn something new with every mission.

Another learning point was the hundreds of feet of cable that a band needs for all their

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ROADIE/3-3-3

equipment. The cable was housed in several large black duffle bags. We opened the bags and Robert Conner, the band's sound engineer, directed us in stringing cables from every microphone, drum — there were five just for the drums! — guitar, speaker, mixer, and power outlet.

They had obviously done this before, because each cord had a place and a path to follow and the band walked amongst these trip hazards as if they were not there.

After all the equipment was set up, our job as roadies was done until after the concert. They started their sound check and for about 20 minutes we were serenaded by guitar riffs, drum solos, and the words “check, check, one, two, check,” sung in a variety of notes.

At one point, Droo Hastings, Quietdrive's bass guitarist, was trying to fix some “tinny” sound he was hearing when he played. I, of course, couldn't hear anything tinny. The sound crew must have been able to hear it, because in short order they had a smiling Droo bumping his way through the rest of his sound checks. And then the music began.

They played well. Some songs I recognized and others were new to me. I enjoyed it all. As I looked around the theater, I could see heads bobbing and knees pumping in time to the music.

Quietdrive played for just under an hour. Once they were done, they signed pictures and greeted Soldiers. We call this part the “meet and greet.”

After everyone left, we assisted the band in tearing down the equipment. This time all the cables needed to be coiled and stowed into the duffle bags, guitars nestled into their cases and microphones put back into their boxes.

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ROADIE/4-4-4

Everyone again lent a hand and all the chores were done quickly. We drove the band and their equipment back to the airport. We only had to wait about 20 minutes before the helicopters showed up. Loading the equipment onto the helicopters was done in the same manner as everything else to this point, as a team effort. Then at 10 p.m. we waved goodbye to the band members of Quietdrive and my night as a rock band roadie came to an end.

The total time the band was here at Q-West was 3.5 hours, but the memory of meeting a rock band and being part of their roadie crew will last a lifetime.

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Quietdrive band members (from left to right) Droo Hastings, bass guitarist; Kevin Truckenmiller, lead singer; Brandon Lanier, drummer; Seth Davin, guitarist; and Justin Bonhiver, lead guitarist, pose for a picture after a concert at the Morale, Welfare and Recreation base complex at Contingency Operating Base Q-West Feb. 23. (Courtesy photos)



Sgt. Christian Gabriel, 181st Brigade Support Battalion, 16th Sustainment Brigade, runs wire for a rock concert at the Morale, Welfare and Recreation base complex at Contingency Operating Base Q-West Feb. The rock band Quietdrive performed a free concert for Soldiers at the small logistics base in northern Iraq Feb. 23.



Justin Bonhiver, lead guitarist for the rock band Quietdrive, tears down the bands equipment after a performance at the Morale, Welfare and Recreation base complex at Contingency Operating Base Q-West Feb. 23.