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Metro Gold Line Transportation Manager Duane Martin presents Operator Rosendo Reyes the commemorative medallion he missed receiving during the 2005 "Night of Stars" while he was on active duty in Iraq last September. Joining in the celebration to welcome Reyes home is a group of Metro Gold Line co-workers, back row from left, RTOS Gerald Harper, Operators Lorne Currie and Thomas Cowan, RTOS Josie Robles and Mario Cancio. Front row from left, Clerk Brenda Aguilar, Reyes, and Transportation Manager Duane Martin.



Photo Credit: Bill Heard

Ex-Marine was Top Sergeant in Army Company Deployed to Iraq

- Gold Line Operator Rosendo Reyes is back on the job after 16-month deployment

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(March 30, 2006) Dressed in his dark blue working uniform, Metro Gold Line Operator Rosendo Reyes is compact and muscular. His movements are deliberate, his voice calm but authoritative. He has what the military calls "command presence."

It's a look, an attitude that has served Reyes well since April 2004 when he took over as first sergeant – top enlisted soldier –

of Charlie Company, a National Guard unit based in San Pedro.

It also may have been a critical factor in helping preserve the lives of Charlie Company's 119 men during the 13 months they served in Iraq following activation as an Army mechanized infantry unit in November 2004.

Reyes, previously served almost 20 years as an active duty Marine and Marine Corps reservist and was no stranger to the Middle East. During Desert Storm in 1991, he deployed for six months as a member of an artillery and air support control team attached to the Saudi Army in Kuwait.

Reyes switched from the Marine Corps Reserve to the National Guard because, he says, "The Marine Corps wasn't deploying the reserves. I had to do something, so I went over to the National Guard." Within months, his unit was called up.

Most senior enlisted man

Reyes left the Marine Corps as a first sergeant and, although it raised some Army eyebrows, he joined Charlie Company at the same rank. That made him the most senior enlisted man in the company and instantly conferred tremendous responsibility.

As top sergeant, his role is to advise the company commander on training, personnel administration, company combat readiness, troop and family morale, and many other everyday company activities.

To the troops, First Sgt. Reyes also is chief organizer, disciplinarian, inspirational leader, physical fitness and weapons trainer, and sometimes father confessor. These are big shoes to fill, but Reyes had years of Marine Corp leadership training to call on.

With the possibility of deployment looming for Charlie Company, Reyes



Meet Rosendo Reyes

Metro Gold Line Operator Rosendo Reyes joined Metro in April 1984 and worked out of Central City Division 1 as a part-time operator during the Olympic Games. He was one of the original operators assigned to the Metro Gold Line when it opened in July 2003.



A former Marine who served on active duty and in the reserves for almost 20 years, he rose to the rank of first sergeant. He joined the California National Guard in 2004 and hopes to be promoted to sergeant major before his enlistment expires in 2009.

He and his wife, Sandra, daughter Isabella, 10, and son Jonathan, 9, live in Pomona.

set to work bolstering enlisted leadership, instilling discipline and fostering camaraderie among the troops. He worked on overcoming the "me attitude" among the younger soldiers and began welding them into a team.

"We formed some pretty good bonds," he recalls. "It was good, but it took a lot of work. I was brand new and no one knew me."

'Mental fortitude'

Once the company was activated, Reyes continued setting an example for his men, emphasizing physical fitness and "mental fortitude" as they went through more than two months of combat readiness training at Ft. Lewis, Wash., and then two more months of desert training in Egypt.

"I went out on every single run," says the 46-year-old soldier, recalling 12-mile runs he and his men made in less than four hours. "I tried to physically do everything either equal or better. I didn't show any weakness. We had a mission and that's all we concentrated on, the mission."

As Reyes taught Marine-style discipline and training techniques to his troopers, he also learned different weapons systems and ways of controlling the movement of the Army's larger squads during battle. "I learned a lot from them."

Eventually, Charlie Company was posted to Mosul, Iraq, a city on the Tigris River with a Sunni-Kurdish population. Located some 225 miles north of Baghdad, Mosul was a dangerous city in 2005 and remains so today. (A bomb blast, March 27, killed 40 people and wounded 30 in an insurgent attack on Iraqi Army recruits.)

During their deployment, Charlie Company operated with the 3rd Battalion, 160th Infantry and was assigned to protect convoys moving food and equipment to observation outposts. "That was a little tricky," says Reyes.

Quick reaction force

The company also acted as a quick reaction force covering the guard towers around the perimeter of the base.

Thanks in large part to Charlie Company's rigorous physical fitness, constant weapons training and tight discipline – not to mention a good bit of luck – the troops made it through their 13 months in country with no losses, not even a serious injury.

For that, Reyes gives great credit not only to his men, but also to his three platoon sergeants. "These guys took care of a lot for me. They were good, good soldiers."

Reyes and Charlie Company were released from active duty and returned home Feb. 23. He came back to work driving Metro Gold Line trains earlier this month, and he had a good welcome back.

"Everybody's good here; this is a good place to be," he says. "This is my second family."