



photo by Tina Miles

Don Shiles says good-bye to his wife, Gay, prior to deploying from Fort Meade, Md. last December.

# On his own terms

By Tina Miles  
902nd MI Group

Shortly after the Great Depression, the Shiles family moved from the East Coast to Nevada, pulling an old trailer over the rough mountain passes. During the trip, Don Shiles, the tenacious 10-year-old son, was given a pair of boots from people they met along the way. At that time, it was common for strangers to hand down clothing to others.

Shiles was very proud of those boots, but quickly outgrew them. In an effort to hold on to them, he would walk to a nearby pond, pry the boots on and stand in the water until they stretched enough to fit him again. That's all anyone needs to know about Shiles - he lives life on his own terms.

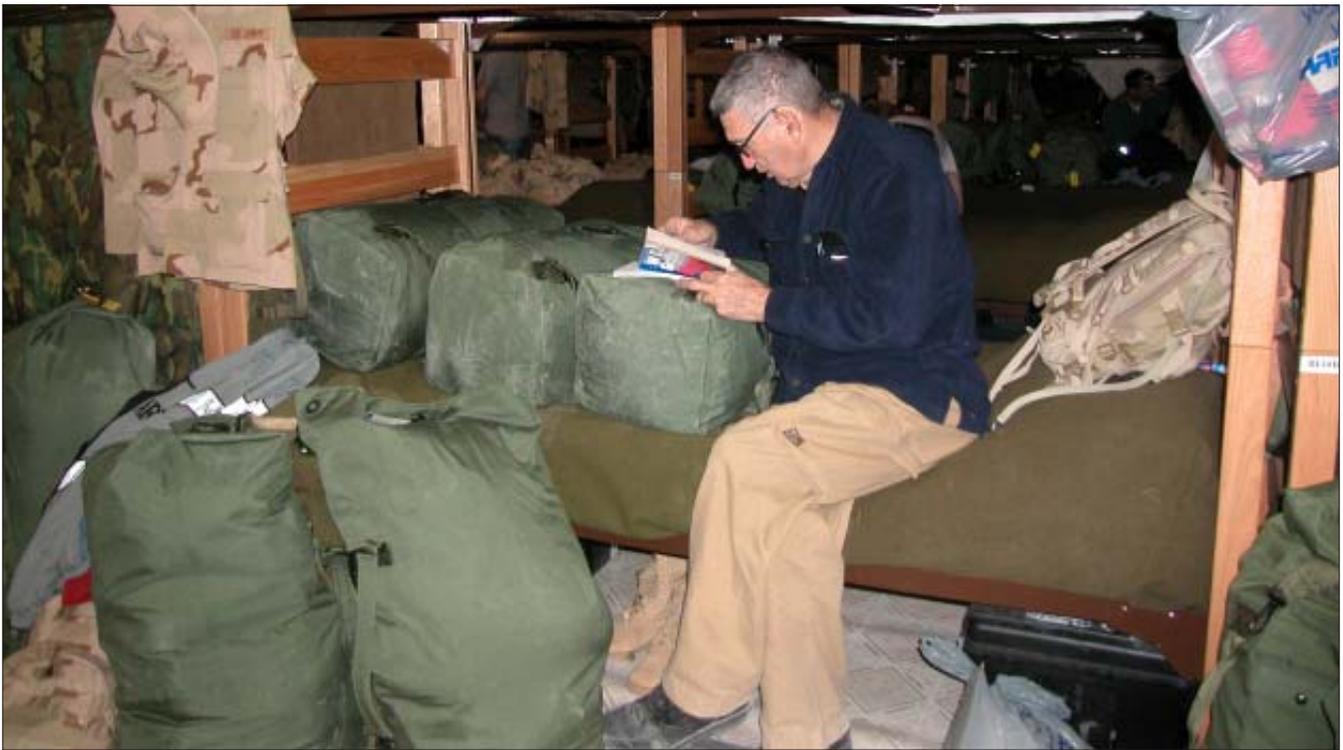
But in a stark contrast, Shiles, chief instructor, Technical Counterintelligence Directorate, 310th Military Intelligence Battalion, 902nd MI Group, is also the ultimate team player.

When the 902nd MI Group was given the mission to deploy a task force in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the 67-year old Shiles was among the first to volunteer. It didn't matter that he was scheduled to retire, when Shiles heard about the mission he pulled his retirement paperwork and volunteered his services.

"Don is a very gracious person. When he volunteered for the mission, it was because he was thinking of the younger members who would be deploying and that he could somehow benefit them," said Kathy McKinney, training technician, TCID. "With Shiles, it is always mission first."

Everyone seems to agree that the 902nd MI Group is a better place because of dedicated workers like Shiles.

"He works much harder than he should," said Barry Wray, Shiles' supervisor. "We're lucky to have



*courtesy photo*

**Shiles unwinds by reading a book before bed during his deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.**

him. He is extremely dedicated and will help in any way. Any of his co-workers will tell you he'd give you the shirt off of his back."

Many of those in the 902nd MI Group consider themselves lucky to work with someone with as much experience as Shiles.

"He has a strong sense of duty, opportunity and dedication," said Dave Hunsaker, an intern at the 902nd MI Group. "The man is a wealth of knowledge, especially in our career field."

When preparing for the mission, Shiles compared it to the only other deployment he'd been involved in - Vietnam.

"With Vietnam, I didn't know what to expect. This time I had a pretty good idea of what I was getting into. Last time I left six small children at home. This time, my children are grown. Last time I was afraid, this time I have nothing to fear," he said. "In both cases I felt that I was doing what I should do, and that the Lord would watch over me. Religion is a big part of my life and has a lot to do with what I do, think and feel."

The last, and most vital, part of preparation was to ensure his wife of 44 years, Gaylie Ann, approved of the deployment. He discussed his decision with Gay, who supported him entirely as she always has.

"When he went to Vietnam, it wasn't as a

volunteer," she said. "I was concerned then. Having six kids and knowing he would be in direct combat. This time was different. This was something he wanted. I knew he would go if he could, so I encouraged him - not that I had to.

"Facing retirement, that was the big step," Gay said. "He was facing the end of a life-long career, doing something he loved. When he was told he could join the task force, his whole outlook changed - he had a new beginning to look forward to."

It seemed Shiles welcomed any challenge that would delay retirement.

"To be honest," Shiles said, "I wasn't too excited about retiring. I felt that I owed the Army my help."

About one-third of the task force is made of up former students, and many of the other individuals are people Shiles knows personally. In fact, one of the members, Al Mathis, was a classmate of his in 1972 at a counterintelligence agent's course. Knowing so many of those involved gave Shiles a sense of responsibility.

"I felt that if I didn't go and anything happened, I would feel guilty the rest of my life," he said.

While Shiles volunteered out of patriotism and dedication to others, he benefited too.

"He has a connection with each of his protégés," Gay said. "He always does everything for everyone else. This time he did something for himself."