



Postal improvement conference held at Victory



Sgt. Michael J. Carden
MNC-I PAO

For many troops serving in Iraq, mail may be their most sincere reminder of home. Whether it's a love letter from a high school sweetheart or a package filled with video games and movies, something as small as a letter or as simple as a package may have a positive, long-lasting affect on the morale of a Soldier.

That's why the Army postal officers in the Operation Iraqi Freedom theater are striving to better the mail system and procedures to be more expedient and efficient.

The most recent step the APOs have made toward improving postal operations in Iraq is through an OIF Theater Mail Conference at Al-Faw Palace Wednesday on Camp Victory.

More than 60 Soldiers representing APOs from base camps and forward operating bases all across Iraq participated in the conference, discussing postal guidelines and procedures. They also shared ideas and information about how to get mail to Soldiers faster.

"The objective of this conference is to open the lines of communication among all of the

APOs and to identify any problems," said Lt. Col. Marybel Johnson. "We want to know what the good things are too, so we can share that information among everyone."

Johnson is the commander of the 217th Personnel Services Battalion, North Carolina Army National Guard. Her unit is responsible for two joint military mail terminals in Iraq. Much of the mail that passes in and out of Iraq comes through her terminals in Baghdad and Balad.

One reason for delays is because there is too much information in the address on the letter or package. In many cases, it may take a Soldier as long as 45 days to receive a letter or package because of extra information, Johnson said.

She said that the most important thing Soldiers can do to speed up the process is to have their families address their mail properly. All that needs to be on the package is the Soldier's rank, name, unit and APO AE number.

"The problem that we're having is that if Baghdad or Iraq is written on the address, the piece of mail will go into the international mail system and will go to Baghdad," Johnson explained. "The good thing is that we have an agreement with the Iraqi postal system, and we go down and get our mail every month."

Although Johnson's troops make a monthly trip to the Iraqi post offices, the added time means a Soldier has to wait longer to receive mail. Mail that is addressed properly is flown from U.S. post offices to one of the several military terminals in Iraq. From there, the mail goes to the APOs at the base camps and FOBs. The APOs are then responsible for getting the mail to Soldiers, Johnson said.

Maj. Matthew Bailey, theater APO, joint theater personnel office, Multi-National Corps - Iraq, said that a lack of APOs redirecting mail is an issue as well. If a Soldier is no longer with a unit or has been moved to a different base camp, some APOs send the mail back to the U.S. rather than redirecting the mail to the Soldier. In some cases, letters and packages have gone back-and-forth on planes three or four times.

"No one was redirecting mail," Bailey said. "Whether the Soldier was still in theater or had already redeployed home, mail was just getting kicked back to the states ... only to get sent back to the APO who just kicked it back again. We've probably wasted a substantial amount of money because of situations such as that."

Postal service Soldiers watch a slide presentation of military postal operations in Iraq during an Operation Iraqi Freedom theater mail conference April 26, 2005, at Al-Faw Palace.



photos by Sgt. Michael J. Carden/MNC-I PAO

Sgt. Rita Parker, postal supply noncommissioned officer, 217th Personnel Services Battalion, North Carolina National Guard, sorts through and organizes mail to be delivered to camps all across Iraq Wednesday at the Joint Military Mail Terminal at Baghdad International Airport.

Preventive Points:

Tips from Multi-National Corps - Iraq Force Health Protection

Heat Exhaustion

- Heat exhaustion is a type of heat injury and results from peripheral vascular collapse due to excessive water and salt depletion. Symptoms include profuse sweating, headaches, difficulty breathing, dizziness, light-headedness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, increased heart rate and pale, clammy skin.
- If you or someone you are with experiences these symptoms, you need to act immediately. The casualty needs to be moved to a cool shaded area to rest, and his clothes need to be loosened. If the casualty appears to be dizzy or light headed, lay him on his back and elevate his feet 6 to 8 inches.
- If the casualty is experiencing nausea or vomiting, lay the casualty on his side. If possible, the casualty needs to slowly drink cool water and someone needs to cool the casualty's body by fanning and spraying him with a cool mist of water or applying a wet cloth to his skin. If the casualty doesn't respond to these first-aid measures, seek medical attention.
- In order to prevent heat exhaustion, it's important to know and understand the signs and symptoms of heat injuries. Make sure that vigorous outdoor activities are conducted during cooler parts of the day. Use the buddy system, drink plenty of water -- no more than 12 quarts per day -- and avoid eating large meals before working in hot environments.

MAIL

Bailey and Johnson explained that the APOs should "think outside the box" to find Soldiers. During the two years Coalition forces have been conducting operations in Iraq, many of the FOBs and base camps have changed names or even ceased to exist. Numerous units have been in and out of the country.

At Johnson's terminals, if they can't find a Soldier, they'll search for the Soldier's name on one of several Army Web sites to find his unit. Once they find the Soldier's unit, they know whether to send his mail to an APO or, if the Soldier has redeployed, send it back to the U.S.

"We go to the extreme to locate a Soldier," Johnson said. "Every day we send out a blast e-mail to about 30 to 35 Soldiers, letting them know they have mail and we don't know where they are."

Johnson and her troops don't receive a 100-percent response to the E-mails, but they do receive replies from the majority of the Soldiers with their correct information, she said.

Johnson said the standard time frame to receive mail is 12 to 15 days, but if a troop is stationed at a FOB, it may take a little longer to get mail because of transportation issues and enemy threats.

Along with her Soldiers, Johnson has about 200 civilian contractors who work at her terminals. Many of their jobs involve driving mail delivery trucks to the FOBs.

Johnson recently lost a Soldier due to an insurgent attack on a mail convoy. Since her unit's arrival to Iraq in January, she's lost four Soldiers and two civilian employees to such attacks. "It's not the same fight as it was 20 years ago, where only the infantry was the front line," Johnson said. "Today, everyone is on the front lines taking equal risks."

"Everyone has their role in Iraq," Bailey said.

"The APOs are not out there kicking down doors or detaining insurgents, but they're out there risking their lives to improve the communication between those Soldiers who are kicking down doors and their loved ones back home."

Bailey said that the overall goal for the conference was to reduce the amount of time it takes to receive mail, because mail plays such a major role in raising the morale of deployed troops. He said low morale among the troops may result in a lack of motivation to complete the mission.

"Mail is one of those things that if it doesn't work, it could be a big morale issue," Bailey said. "Morale is the backbone of our Soldiers' ability to fight."

"Receiving mail is definitely a morale booster," said Staff Sgt. Matthew Malinowski, Al-Faw Palace security team, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 299th Infantry Regiment, Hawaii ANG. "My guys and I love to get mail from our families. I know it means a lot to them when they get letters and packages from their kids."

"At the end of the day, all we want is to get the Soldiers their mail," Johnson said. "Mail is something you have from your family that you keep in your hands and that goes with you and stays with you. Nothing of any value can take the place of the physical contact of something sent by your loved ones from home."

Bailey said that the APOs plan to have a similar conference in November and foresee this conference becoming a semi-annual event in the OIF theater.

"The Soldiers' needs are never going to be met without an efficient mail system," Johnson said. "Soldiers don't expect mail every day, but the system has to be as efficient and effective as we can make it. There's no debating the importance of mail."

Hawaii Guardsmen win Victory softball championship

Spc. Jeremy Crisp
MNC-I PAO

A three-day softball tournament ended April 25 at Camp Victory's 'The Beach' softball field, culminating in a dramatic extra-inning final game where the Hawaiian National Guard's Alpha Dogs eked out a 7 - 6 win against the civilian/military KICC -- Kuwait, Iraq, C4 Logistics and Commercial -- Camels to take the championship.

The Camels came into the final game having dropped only one of the four games played in the preliminary rounds, while the Hawaiians

had rolled through all other opponents.

Alpha Dogs pitcher William Castillo Jr., from Kalaheo, Kauai, led off the bottom of the first inning by whacking a shot into left field that the Camels' outfielders couldn't corral. Castillo sprinted around every bag to come in with an in-the-park home run. Shortstop Richard M. Largo, from Honolulu, added another run behind Castillo to put the Dogs up 2 - 0 at the end of the first inning.

The consistent defense and solid



photo by Spc. Jeremy Crisp/MNC-I PAO

Hawaiian National Guardsman and Alpha Dogs shortstop Richard M. Largo, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 299th Infantry Regiment, swings away during the Dogs' win against the Camels April 25 at Camp Victory.

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Voices of Victory: *What are you doing for your mom on Mother's Day?*



"I'm sending my mother flowers and a card."

Sgt. 1st Class Melissa James, equal opportunity advisor, 44th Medical Command, Fort Bragg, N.C.



"My father works in Taji, Iraq, so I would like to get a photo taken with the two of us together and send it to her."

Richard Nichols, construction technician, water operations, Kellogg Brown & Root



"I'll be home on mid-tour leave, so I'll take her out to dinner."

Sgt. Maj. Kevin Lamer, sergeant major, clinical operations, 44th Medical Command, Fort Bragg, N.C.

Operating Hours

Coalition Cafe

Breakfast 5:30 - 8:30 a.m.
Lunch 11:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Dinner 5:30 - 8 p.m.
Midnight Dining 11:30 p.m. - 1 a.m.

Sports Oasis

Breakfast 5:30 - 8:30 a.m.
Lunch 11:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Dinner 5:30 - 9 p.m.

Shopette

Everyday 8 a.m. - 10 p.m.

Camp Liberty Post Exchange

Everyday 8 a.m. - 10 p.m.

Fitness Center

Open 24 Hours

Chapel

Sunday:
Protestant Worship 7 a.m. and 9 a.m.
Catholic Mass 10:30 a.m.
Gospel Service Noon
Mormon (LDS) 2 p.m.
Episcopal 4 p.m.
Full Life Service 6 p.m.

Saturday:

7th Day Adventist 11 a.m.
Catholic Mass 8 p.m.

Mini-Chapel (Bldg. 2)

Friday:
Jewish Service 6:30 p.m.

SOFTBALL

fielding of the Hawaiians allowed them to keep the Camels scoreless through the first three innings, while they tacked on three more runs to go up 5 - 0.

After leading off the fourth with two runs, the Camels kept the win in reach and left the Hawaiians scoreless, closing the gap 5 - 2.

The hitting and fielding of Camels Tim E. Sartori and Steffen "Tuffy" Morris -- both Soldiers with the Oklahoma National Guard stationed at Camp Victory --



Photo by Spc. Jeremy Crisp/MNC-I PAO

Left-centerfielder Fred Casticimo with the Hawaii National Guard's Company A, 2nd Battalion, 299th Infantry Regiment, takes a cut at the ball during the April 25 softball tournament at Camp Victory.

allowed the Camels to sneak up on the Dogs in the 5th with a three-run rally. After a one-run sixth, the Camels squared off with the Hawaiians in the 7th tied 6 - 6, taking the game into extra innings.

The Dogs put down the Camels in textbook style in the top of the 8th: three up, three down.

The Soldiers from the Alpha Dogs came up to bat in the 8th with a chance to slam the door shut and take the win, but the Camels put the first two batters down with ease. Then it was time for Castillo to bat again.

In deja-vu fashion, Castillo drove a shot into left field and scurried around the bases for another in-the-park home run, ending the game the way it started and giving the Dogs the championship, 7 - 6.

"I was just trying to hit it up the middle," Castillo said. "It just happened to travel farther than I thought. You go up to the plate planning for a base hit, not something like that."

Bernard Creque, Camp Victory's MWR sports coordinator, said it was an excellent game, and it was good to see so many teams come out to play. Creque said that this was just a spring training tournament and the actual softball league will start in a month.

"We put this tournament together to get the troops out to play and get them up to speed before the league starts."

For more information about sporting events at Camp Victory, contact Creque at b_creque@yahoo.com.

Hometown Greetings

There will be no hometown greetings this week due to other Multi-National Corps - Iraq public affairs missions. However, they will reconvene for the following week. Currently, the time and location has not been determined.

Victory MWR Events May 03 - May 09

Today: Halo at 8 p.m. at Bldg. 124; Crimson Sky at 8 p.m. at Bldg. 51; Basketball coaches meeting at 12:30 p.m. at Bldg. 51; Classes at the Gym: Tae-Kwon-Do from 6 - 7 p.m.; Fencing from 7:30 - 9 p.m.

Wednesday: Chess at 8 p.m. at Bldg. 124; Island Night at 7 p.m. at Bldg. 51; Classes at the Gym: Aerobics from 5 - 6:30 a.m. and from 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.; Boxing from 8 - 9 p.m.

Thursday: Country Night at 7 p.m. at Bldg. 124; Ping Pong at 8 p.m. at Bldg. 51; Classes at the Gym: Tae-Kwon-Do from 6 - 7 p.m.

Friday: Latin night at 7 p.m. and Salsa lessons at 8 p.m.

at Bldg. 51; Classes at the Gym: Aerobics from 5 - 6:30 a.m. and from 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.; Fencing from 7:30 - 9 p.m.

Saturday: Hip-hop night at 7 p.m. at Bldg. 124; Dominos at 8 p.m. at Bldg. 51; Classes at the Gym: Aerobics from 6 - 7 a.m.; Tae-Kwon-Do from 6 - 7 p.m.; Boxing from 8 - 9 p.m.

Sunday: Ping Pong at 8 p.m. at Bldg. 124; Eight-Ball at 3 p.m. and Spades at 8 p.m. at Bldg. 51; Classes at the Gym: Fencing practice from 9 - 11 a.m.; Fencing from 7:30 - 9 p.m.

Monday: Dominos at 8 p.m. at Bldg. 124; Halo at 8 p.m. at Bldg. 51; Aerobics 5 - 6:30 a.m. and from 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.; Boxing from 8 - 9 p.m.

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