

Photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy B. Lawn

Children from an Iran and Iraq Kurdish border village named Homerble playfully rush a Humvee from the 278th Regimental Combat Team, Tennessee Army National Guard. The village had suffered many assaults throughout Saddam Hussein's dictatorship; most of the parents had either been murdered or deported.

Sgt. Matt Maupin is not forgotten

By Maj. Patricia C. Anderson
Command Information Officer

INTERNATIONAL ZONE, BAGHDAD, Iraq — Just more than one year ago, on April 9, 2004, a convoy of fuel tankers driven by Halliburton employees and Soldiers from the 724th Transportation Company was ambushed by insurgents west of Baghdad. Over half of the 40-plus men in the convoy were wounded or killed. Then-Pfc. Kenneth Matthew "Matt" Maupin was among the three men captured. If he is still alive, he is a year older and is now a sergeant, but he is still missing.

A week later, on April 16, Al-Jazeera aired a video of

Maupin, not visibly wounded but surrounded by five masked men armed with automatic weapons. It was the last time he was positively identified. A couple of weeks later, Maupin was promoted to specialist, and he was promoted again to the rank of sergeant earlier this month. A video on Al-Jazeera on June 28, 2004, showed a figure, purportedly Maupin, who was shot and knocked into a grave. The image quality was so poor that military investigators, as well as Maupin's parents, who could only view still photos taken from the video, were not convinced that it was indeed Maupin.

Batavia, Ohio, a small village east of Cincinnati, fervently prays for the return of its native son. His parents, Keith and Carolyn, refuse to believe he is dead. The town is draped with yellow ribbons and signs so that Maupin will

not be forgotten. His younger brother, Micah, a Marine stationed in San Diego, wants to volunteer for duty in Iraq, but his mother has asked him to wait until her older son's fate is determined.

To raise awareness for their son and to improve the life of other service members in Iraq and Afghanistan, Keith and Carolyn founded the Yellow Ribbon Support Center, a non-profit organization, which has shipped an estimated 2,000 care packages to deployed service members. Keith has given up his full-time job to work at the center.

"We don't want him to be forgotten," Carolyn Maupin told The (Louisville) Courier-Journal. "I am just afraid that

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New medals recognize Iraq, Afghanistan service



By American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — Two new campaign medals announced April 7 recognize service members for their contributions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Defense Department announced the Afghanistan Campaign Medal and Iraq Campaign Medal for military members who directly support Operation Enduring Freedom between Oct. 24, 2001, and a date to be determined in the future or Operation Iraqi Freedom between March 19, 2003, and some future date.

The new campaign medals were established by presidential order for service members who have been assigned, attached or mobilized to units operating in these areas, officials said.

Until now, service members deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq during the designated timeframes were awarded the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal.

“By awarding separate medals, we will recognize the specific contribution that our servicemen and women have made in Afghanistan and Iraq,” said Bill Carr, DoD’s principal director of military personnel policy. “It’s appropriate that we present them with an award that truly honors their heroic service in these operations.”

Service members with the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal remain qualified for it, but officials said they may apply for the appropriate new campaign medal as well.

Military personnel may receive both of the new campaign medals if they meet the requirement for both awards. However, officials said the qualifying period of service for one award can’t be used to justify eligi-

bility for the other. Just one award of each of the new medals is authorized, as no service stars are prescribed.

No service member is entitled to wear all three medals for the same act, achievement or period of service.

The area of eligibility for the Afghanistan Campaign Medal includes all the country’s land and air spaces. The Iraq Campaign Medal applies for service in Iraq, its waters out to 12 nautical miles, and the airspace over Iraq and its 12-mile water area.

To qualify for the awards, service members must have served in the appropriate region for 30 consecutive days or 60 non-consecutive days, officials said.

Service members also qualify for the medals if they have been engaged in combat during an armed engagement, regardless of the time spent in the area of eligibility, or were wounded or injured and required medical evacuation from the area of eligibility while participating in an operation or on official duties.

Regularly assigned aircrew members flying sorties into, out of, within, or over the area of eligibility in direct support of military operations also qualify, with each day of operations counting as one day of eligibility.

On the uniform, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal will be positioned below the Kosovo Campaign Medal and above the Iraq Campaign Medal. The Iraq Campaign Medal will be positioned below the Afghanistan Campaign Medal and above the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal.

Each military department will serve as the awarding authority for the new campaign medals and issue regulations for processing, awarding and wearing them, officials said.

Each military department will serve as the awarding authority for the new Afghanistan Campaign Medal, left, and Iraq Campaign Medal, and will issue regulations for processing, awarding and wearing them.

Maupin

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if they move on, then what will we say when he shows up alive and we aren’t there waiting for him?”

The Soldiers of the 724th Trans Co., minus Maupin, returned from their deployment in late February.

“I am an old Ranger, and we don’t leave a Soldier behind,” Sgt. Mike Bailey, a fellow Soldier of the 724th, told The Courier-Journal. “I don’t think the Army will, either.”

The former student at University of Cincinnati, who enlisted in the Army Reserve to earn money for college, is officially listed as “missing-captured,” because there has been no definite proof of his existence, or death, since the April 16, 2004 videotape. A review board met on April 6 to review the status of his case, and while its decision is not expected for another week, his status could remain the same or be changed to “deceased-body not recovered.” The U.S. is still searching for him and Timothy Bell, a Halliburton employee and native of Mobile, Ala. who is also missing from the convoy.

Maupin is the only member of the U.S. military classified as missing in both Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. In January, the military recovered the remains of another Halliburton employee killed in the Good Friday ambush near the site. Maj. Gen. William Brandenburg, the commander of U.S.-run prisons in Iraq, credited the intelligence that led to the grave from interrogations conducted at Abu Ghraib prison. The same intelligence also led to a raid on a local village and capture of a number of insurgents.

Another Halliburton employee who was captured in the ambush, Thomas Hamill, escaped from his captors after 24 days. He recently co-wrote a book, “Escape in Iraq: The Thomas Hamill Story,” about his captivity. Hamill met Maupin’s parents at the homecoming ceremonies for the 724th.

“I told them we have to keep Matt’s name out there and to never stop believing,” Hamill told the Cincinnati Enquirer. “Some people thought I would never come home alive either.”

The U.S. military has not forgotten Maupin and intends to find him.

“I want to make sure everyone is clear about this – we do not abandon our com-

rades,” said Brig Gen. Vincent K. Brooks, chief of Army Public Affairs, about the recent board review of Maupin’s case. “We will not abandon Matt Maupin, or his family.

“While Matt is in a captured status the operational commands keep looking for anything that would lead them to him. We cannot, and must not, detail those efforts, but we are certain at the Department of the Army that the operational commanders are active. Remember that Soldiers live by an ethos that includes an all-important tenet — ‘I will never leave a fallen comrade.’”

Related links:

Message board of support for Maupin’s family:
<http://frontier.cincinnati.com/comments/threadView.asp?threadid=37>

Yellow Ribbon Support Center:
<http://www.yellowribbonsupportcenter.com/>

724th Transportation Company:
<http://www.724transco.citymax.com/>

WCPO coverage:
<http://wcpo.cincinnati.com/specials/2004/maupin/>



U.S. Army poster

A yellow ribbon poster distributed by the U.S. Army Reserve last year remembering then-Spc. Matt Maupin, who was captured by insurgents on April 9, 2004, and is the only U.S. service member missing in OIF.

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PERSPECTIVES

Medals recognize service, more or less

By Staff Sgt. Brett B. McMillan
Scimitar Editor

In my experiences working with service members of all U.S. services, I've noticed vast and subtle differences in various aspects of our "military lives." Some seem cushier than the others ... no big deal.

One thing that stands out in my mind, though, is members of one branch claiming their branch doesn't "give out" awards to troops like another branch.

At one time or another we've probably all heard someone say that a person, civilian or military, didn't deserve an award they received. A few mumbles and grumbles and it's over — no more said.

But on one occasion, I recall a troop who was so emphatic and completely bent out of shape over a Soldier receiving a fairly prestigious award that I thought he may need to see a mental health professional.

OK, so the award was the Bronze Star, and yeah, it was awarded to a Soldier who was a former prisoner of war, who, although she went through hell and endured more than I would want to go through, perhaps she didn't do anything truly heroic. At worst, she really didn't deserve the medal, but you know, her receiving it didn't keep him from receiving it. He didn't deserve the medal either, nor did I, so why be so bothered by it?

I'm pretty sure this Soldier didn't go asking for the medal. She graciously accepted it, whether she wanted the attention of receiving it or not. In the end though, she knows what she went through better than anyone else. She alone knows just what it means to her to have been awarded one of the nation's highest medals. And quite likely what it means to her is far different than what it means to other recipients of the same award from other wars in our history.

If a person does what he does for some sort of an award or recognition, I think he's doing it for the wrong reason. I seriously doubt that Sgt. 1st Class Paul Smith, whose family President George W. Bush presented with the Medal of Honor earlier this month for his heroic actions prior to his death during the early days of Operation Iraqi Freedom, did what he did so he could

posthumously receive the nation's highest war medal. (See <http://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/> for more information.) No, he performed as a courageous well-trained Soldier to save his fellow troops.

A military award, medal or ribbon is a symbolic representation of one's actions and service, heroism or simply adequacy for some duration of time. It's something you place on your uniform or in a frame or scrapbook. And that's all it is. Awards can be inflated or they can be completely nonexistent.

I don't want an inflated award, and if I don't receive an award at all for my years of service at a duty station — as happened with my first — at least I know how well I served and what I did for my unit and my service (I was actually deployed or away on temporary duty assignments more than I was home during my years there at Fort Bragg, N.C.). Sure, I felt I probably deserved at least an Army Achievement Medal for those years, but I got over it. I know I served well even if it wasn't formally recognized; besides, I rarely wear the medals.

A funny thing happened though. Just a few months into my next duty assignment, I was awarded an Army Achievement Medal for my work in our newspaper winning a competition. Things seem to even out over time. In my mind the newspaper's award was enough, but I wasn't about to tell my colonel that. To me, that medal represents the one I didn't get, but should have.

Now, with the Department of Defense's new Afghanistan Campaign Medal and Iraq Campaign Medal, as announced April 7, the contributions of all Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines who meet certain requirements of serving here will be justly recognized for their service in this war zone.

To some the ICM (as it will probably be known) on their dress uniform will represent an unforgiving day in combat in Iraq, to others 30 days of simply being in the combat zone. Years from now, for some it will remind them of a four-month tour, for others six, 12 or more months struggling to survive, establishing peace and freedom and rebuilding a nation.

Often what we put into something determines what we will get out of it. When I pin the ICM on my uniform eight or so months from now, I'll think back and remember the good and bad times for sure, and although the award is a "gimme" automatic sure-to-come one, not comparable to a Silver Star, it will mean a lot to me. I'll wear it with pride.

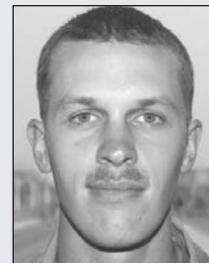
Scimitar Pulse

How do you feel about the DoD authorizing the Campaign medal for combat zone deployed troops only?

"I feel the medal should be for anyone deployed to the Middle East."

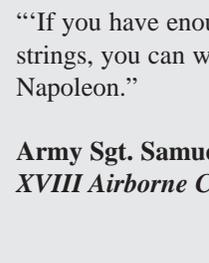


Air Force Staff Sgt. Travis Eldridge
Joint Area Support Group – Central



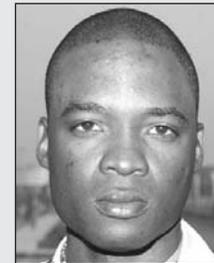
"It is kind of messed up, troops in Kuwait and Iran can not get it."

Air Force Staff Sgt. Michael Bookhardt
Multi-National Corps – Iraq



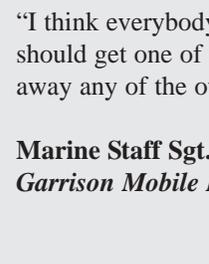
"If you have enough ribbons and strings, you can win any war." - Napoleon."

Army Sgt. Samuel Robinson
XVIII Airborne Corps



"I think a medal that signifies duty in Iraq is significant and of special note."

Army Lt. Col. Kirk Johnson
Multi-National Force – Iraq



"I think everybody on both sides should get one of them, but not take away any of the other medals."

Marine Staff Sgt. Daniel Ortiz
Garrison Mobile Equipment



"If you spend your time here, you should get it."

Army 1st Lt. Rich Wood
44th Medical Command

"It's more of a combat zone here than in other countries in the Middle East. I agree with it."

Army Pfc. Sheena Inabinet
1st Corps Support Command



The winner is...



Photo by Master Sgt. Dave Ahlschwede

Iraq's Transitional National Assembly met April 6 in a session in Baghdad. Nominations were taken and a vote was cast. The votes were then read aloud as a tally was kept. Iraq's parliament chose Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani as the country's new president and his deputies are former President Ghazi Yawer, a Sunni Arab, and Finance Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, who is Shia. The three candidates received 227 votes, while 30 ballots were left blank.

Troops repel insurgent attack at Abu Ghraib

Story and photos by Sgt. Michael J. Carden
Multi-National Corps – Iraq Public Affairs Office

FORWARD OPERATING BASE ABU GHRAIB, Iraq — The Marine on guard duty in the tower the evening of April 2 was cleaning his .50-caliber machine gun. It was just after 7 p.m. when he heard the first enemy shots fired. An enemy-fired rocket-propelled grenade followed. The impact caused a cloud of smoke and debris to form around him, impairing his ability to see his aggressors. Another RPG connected for a direct hit from behind the Marine, damaging his communications radio and wounding him. The terrorists continued to engage the tower with small arms, hand grenades and RPG fire.

“With the amount of firepower they had on us, it seemed like there were 300 insurgents shooting at us,” said Marine Lance Cpl. Joseph Arale, Battery E, 2nd Battalion, 10th Marine Regiment, Camp Lejeune, N.C., of the insurgent attack on Forward Operating Base Abu Ghraib, a detention facility for more than 3,400 terrorists.

The only operable weapon Arale and his fellow Marine on duty had was Arale’s M-16 rifle. Arale, 33, fired several rounds at the insurgents before they decided to jettison themselves from the tower.

“We had no radio and only one weapon,” said Arale, a native of Wilkes-Barre, Penn. “We had no choice except to get out of the tower.”

Arale and his battle-buddy rappelled 25 feet down the side of the tower. They used a rope that was normally used to haul equipment into and out of the tower. Both Marines sustained rope burns to their hands to go along with their shrapnel wounds. Arale also sprained his ankle when he hit the ground.

Once the Marines were on the ground, they took cover in a fortified bunker just inside of the perimeter wall. They maintained their position, keeping their sights on the doorway at the base of the tower. Other than scaling the wall, that was the only place the terrorists could enter the compound, Arale explained.

“The Marines applied heavy machine gun fire and established a perimeter on the inside of the wall,” said Capt. Drew Bone, commander, Batt. E. “If the insurgents had made it into the tower and breached the wall, they wouldn’t have gotten very far.”

Meanwhile, terrorists hidden in a nearby residential area began a ground assault, targeting several access points and var-



Marine Lance Cpl. Joseph Arale, Battery E, 2nd Battalion, 10th Marine Regiment, Camp Lejeune, N.C., sustained shrapnel wounds to his lower back during an April 2 insurgent attack at the Abu Ghraib prison compound. He holds the shrapnel-lacerated body armor that he wore during the attack.

ious areas of the compound, including another Marine guard tower. The insurgents continued to throw grenades, small arms and RPG fire, as well as indirect mortar fire.

“A grenade actually hit a recovery team who came to the aid of the wounded Marines in the towers,” Bone said. “It was one of the most well put together assaults that I had ever seen. It was enough for the insurgents to move up close to the towers.”

The insurgents used small and medium arms fire as cover fire for a suicide car-bomber as he drove his way towards the perimeter wall near the southeast tower. Marines returned fire, causing the vehicle to explode before it reached the wall.

A quick reaction force, made up of Marines and Soldiers, as well as Apache helicopters and artillery counter fire, prevented the insurgency from breaching the perimeter walls.

The terrorist force was estimated to be more than 60 members strong. Their attempt to infiltrate the operating base lasted for two hours before they were forced to retreat, but not without suffering at least 50 casualties.

“They came at us hard, but we came back at them even harder,” Bone said. “We had Marines fighting while wounded, and wounded Marines fighting who refused to be evacuated. Every single Marine fought without fear and with the sole purpose of protecting everyone inside this FOB.”

The battle resulted with minor damages to the compound. Thirty-six were injured, including Marines, Soldiers, Sailors, civilians and detainees. Seven U.S. troops were evacuated to combat support hospitals; 16 were treated for minor shrapnel wounds and have since returned to duty. All of the base’s detainees have been accounted for.

“It really was the most humbling experience I’ve ever been near,” Bone said. “It’s the type of stuff you read about in books and see in movies — 18-, 19- and 20-year-old men sticking to their guns, never leaving their fellow comrades behind.”



This guard tower near a main road at the Abu Ghraib prison compound sustained heavy enemy fire during an insurgent attack April 2 on the compound. Both Marines manning the tower were injured during the gun battle.

Robots help save countless troops’ lives in Iraq

By Sgt. Andrew A. Miller
Task Force Baghdad

CAMP VICTORY, BAGHDAD, Iraq — Since being welcomed into the ordnance community, robots have helped save countless lives by making their human counterparts’ roles a little more remote.

But at the Joint Robotics Repair Facility here, it is people who are working hard to extend the lives of robots. In their two repair shops, specialists are on call around the clock, ready to get damaged or decimated machines back on the streets.

“We’re like the emergency room for robots,” said Navy Petty Officer 1st Class James L. Overton, a robotics maintenance chief from Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center, San Diego, Calif.

As such, the technicians at the facility can do everything from the replacement of inoperative parts to rebuilding robots that have been blown up by improvised explosive devices. They maintain complex robotics systems from three different manufacturers,

and they can work fast.

Operating out of what look like garages, crowded with parts, they have made it their policy to turn whatever they’re given into a functional robot within four hours. In some cases, if the damage is too extensive, an injured robot can be swapped for a working one.

With only four technicians supporting explosive ordnance disposal units all over Iraq, they stay pretty busy.

“We have responsibility for all robotic repairs for the entire theater,” Overton said.

On average, the facility receives for service four or five robots daily. They

have seen, he said, as many as 22 in a single day. And as often as once weekly, a machine comes in that has been all but ruined by an IED.

According to Overton, the robots have some of the latest and greatest technology onboard. Resting on tank-like tracks, robots can cost anywhere from \$60,000 to much more than \$100,000 in different gadgets, depending on the model and the included accessories. Robots are built and rebuilt according to the needs of the unit that will use it, he said.

Each is unique, and at least at the repair facility, they get their own names. Partly because playing with robots is an element of the work, the techni-

cians say they like their robots and their jobs.

“The [exploded ordnance detachment] community is really tight,” Overton said. “That’s what I like more than anything else. It’s like a family”

Accordingly, technicians like Overton appreciate the importance of the job, he said.

Robots that became casualties could have been one of their comrades, so they work hard to ensure that EOD teams have what they need as soon as possible.

“We have units that come in at 10, 11, or 12 o’clock at night,” Overton said. “They come knocking on our door and we’re there for them.”

Petty Officer 2nd class Jennifer S. Smith, a robotics repair technician also from SPAWAR SSC San Diego, finds it disheartening to see one of her robots fall to a terrorist’s bomb, she said.

“You kind of forget the human aspect as you spend most of your time working on a piece of equipment,” she said. “And then you look up at that tech, and you know that’s a person you get to send home, back to their family.”



Photo by Spc. Jonathan Montgomery

An EOD robotic "Talon" gainfully employed by the 184th EOD Robotics Team in Baghdad, Iraq.

Vehicle safety, awareness improve in Iraq

Story and photo by
Sgt. Michael J. Carden
Multi-National Corps - Iraq
Public Affairs Office

CAMP VICTORY, BAGHDAD, Iraq — From October 2004 to January 2005, Coalition forces in Iraq suffered 48 troop fatalities due to military-vehicle related accidents. This is nearly half the number of troops who were lost during the entire 2004 fiscal year, according to Multi-National Corps - Iraq safety reports.

After analysis and investigation, the MNC-I safety office determined that more than half of the total accident fatalities that have occurred in Iraq are vehicle-related. Sixty-six percent of those accidents were vehicle rollovers.

Since February, the MNC-I safety office has noticed a considerable decrease in rollover accidents and a decrease in total vehicle accidents and fatalities, said David Martin, safety manager, MNC-I safety office.

The safety office has attributed this decrease to the institution of the safety stand-down program, which requires newly deployed units to hold a safety stand-down day within 30 days of assuming authority of an area.

"The safety stand-down reinforces the basics of vehicle safety and awareness by practicing rehearsals such as convoy briefs and rollover drills," Martin said. "I think the safety stand-downs, better risk management and previous accident [statistics] have opened Soldiers' eyes. They're paying more attention to detail now."

Extra attention was evident in two separate rollover accidents that occurred in March. The troops involved sustained only minor injuries that could have easily been fatal, Martin said.

In the first incident, five Soldiers were in an up-armored Humvee. The second incident involved three troops. After interviewing the troops and investigating the incidents, the MNC-I safety office learned that both convoys rehearsed and received rollover drill procedures

and precautions. They were familiar with their vehicles and aware of the terrain they were traveling, Martin continued.

"Units are doing the right thing," Martin said. "They're making sure they go over rollover drills, safety and threat awareness. They're making sure that every Soldier in their vehicles knows what to do during any situation. They've even been practicing egress of the vehicle after a rollover, and it is showing."

"If the Soldiers rehearse the rollover drills, in the event of a rollover, they're much more likely to survive," Martin said. "Getting the gunner back inside the vehicle, bracing yourself during a rollover and wearing your seat belt may all be deciding factors in the severity of any injuries."

There are many contributing factors in sustaining vehicle safety that troops should be aware of when participating in convoy movements. Negligent discharges shouldn't even be an issue, according to Martin.

"There's nothing accidental about a negligent discharge," Martin said. "It's simply a lack of situational awareness."

Another factor is that troops may not be aware of the significant increase in the weight an up-armored Humvee gains with the addition of protective armor. Up-armored Humvees become top-heavy.

"When the armor is added, the Humvee's balance and characteristics are changed dramatically," Martin explained. "Soldiers have to take the added weight into consideration."

Because of the added weight, up-armored vehicle drivers are more likely to lose control and roll the vehicle. Speed also plays a major role in maintaining control.

"In a convoy, if a vehicle falls behind the vehicle in front of it, the driver tends to increase his speed to catch up," Martin said. "He may find himself too close to the vehicle and possibly jerk the wheel too hard. This may cause him to swerve off of the road."

"Do you want to drive 50 miles per hour



Marine Cpl. Chris Pearo conducts a safety check of the gunner's safety harness in his Humvee at Camp Victory, Iraq April 2.

down a two-lane road with heavy traffic and have the vehicles in the convoy constantly trying to catch up, or do you want to slow down to 40 or 45 miles per hour so the convoy can stay together?" Martin asked. "If you keep the speed to a minimum, you can safely negotiate the situation."

On roads with many potholes, Humvee drivers may have to maneuver around them. They must be cautious of their speed. They may also encounter narrow roads or be attacked, which could cause them to lose control of their vehicle, said Marine Cpl. Chris Pearo.

Pearo is an up-armored Humvee driver for the Multi-National Corps - Iraq resource and sustainment operations security team. He participates in several convoys each week.

Every morning Pearo conducts a standard safety check of his Humvee, making sure his fire extinguishers, safety belts and doors are all working properly. Prior to each mission, his convoy commander gives a thorough convoy brief, explaining the terrain, route and what the troops should do in unsafe situations, he said.

"Safety is paramount," Pearo said. "Before every convoy, we discuss safety procedures, making us more aware and prepared. Every time we go out, we're alert to the possibilities of a rollover and what may cause an accident."

"You've always got to be cautious when driving a Humvee," Pearo said. "It's not like driving your car. It's top-heavy. It's worse than a [sport utility vehicle]. If you jerk the wheel too hard, all you have to be going is 35 or 40 miles per hour to flip the vehicle."

Pearo explained that his main concern while driving is the safety of his passengers. They are his motivation to always maintain a safety-conscious attitude.

"As a driver, you have to remember that you're not the only person in the vehicle," Pearo said. "If something happens, you'll have to live with that mistake for the rest of your life."

"Every time we lose a Soldier to an accident, it depletes our combat readiness," Martin said. "We need every Soldier to successfully complete our mission here. It's our responsibility to protect our force and maintain our combat power."

Although units and troops practice vehicle safety and rehearse situational drills, that may not be enough. Martin expressed his concern for troops to use their own common sense and know-how to maintain vehicle safety and awareness.

"Safety is all about using common sense. We have the guidelines, rules, policies and procedures in place," Martin said. "We understand those things, but you still have to apply common sense. That can be the difference in having an accident or safely completing the mission."

Commandant of the Marine Corps visits warriors during Iraq visit

Story and photo by Lance Cpl. Aaron P. Mankin
II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward)

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq — Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Michael W. Hagee, and Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, John L. Estrada, spent four days visiting Marines and Sailors deployed to Iraq early this week.

During their tour of bases throughout Corps' area of operations, Hagee and Estrada focused on making sure Marines knew they were appreciated.

"I want to thank you for what you are doing here," said the commandant. "You are making a difference. In years to come you will be able to tell your children and grandchildren that you participated in a significant time in history. A time when you helped change the direction of where this area of the world was headed."

The recent history of Iraq has been marred with anti-coalition terrorists and former regime loyalists. Estrada spoke of the difference his Marines are making in Iraq.

"Your efforts here are changing the shape of this region," Estrada explained. "The Iraqi people have not been able to dream. Now, you are giving them the chance to realize their dreams. Now they are in the infancy of democracy. You and your fellow Marines make that all possible. The bottom line is you are a large part of everything taking place right now."

The commandant ate breakfast with Marines stationed at

Camp Blue Diamond one morning during his tour of the area of operation.

"It was truly an honor to eat breakfast with the commandant of the Marine Corps," said Cpl. Amy A. Butiko, administration clerk, Headquarters Battalion, 2nd Marine Division. "It is not every day that a chance like this one comes along."

As the highest ranking Marine, Hagee took time to hold a town hall style meeting with Marines stationed at Camp Fallujah. He spoke of how important it was for Marines to lead the way and set the example.

"We want to build the trust between the Iraqi Security Forces and the Iraqi people. We have to teach the Iraqi forces how the armed forces in a democratic society work," he said. "Teach them how to respect the people and how to help the people. You can set that example. Even if you are not working



Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Michael W. Hagee, and Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, John L. Estrada, entertain questions at a Camp Fallujah town hall meeting April 5.

directly with the Iraqi forces your actions here day-to-day will set that example for them. How you interact and treat the Iraqi people will also show them what to expect from their armed forces in the future.

"We need to build a secure environment here so companies and businesses, even people that live here in Fallujah, will return and get the economy going. Providing a secure environment is critical in winning the war here. Part of that is training up the Iraqi Security Forces. We need to be able to turn the security mission over to them."

During the town hall meeting, Estrada added, "The majority of Iraqi citizens are very thankful for what you're doing. The enemy is still present but they are very much the minority. They are trying to stop this locomotive called democracy. But you are staying on course and you are making a difference."

"I appreciate your sacrifices. I ask you to stick in here with us until our mission is completed. Granted there is still work to be done. It is important that you complete that work so that your sons and daughters don't have to come back years down the road."

"As you know, our president is committed to complete this mission ... I know you are committed."

The leaders visit also included Camp Taqaddum, Camp Hurricane Point and Al Asad.

"I have been in this area several times," said Hagee. "I am really quite amazed at how the atmosphere has changed here. And it has changed for the better."

NEWS BRIEFS

Sec. Rice: 'Proven record' led to choice of new Iraq ambassador

WASHINGTON – Citing his “proven record of building consensus and achieving results in very tough situations,” Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced April 5 that Zalmay Khalilzad is President Bush’s choice as the next U.S. ambassador to Iraq.

If confirmed by the Senate, Khalilzad would succeed Ambassador John D. Negroponte, who is awaiting Senate confirmation as director of national intelligence.

Khalilzad is both U.S. ambassador and special presidential envoy to Afghanistan.

“Zal helped lead America’s efforts to help millions of Afghan refugees return to their country and rebuild their lives in freedom,” Rice said. “He worked tirelessly to secure the rights of Afghan women who were brutalized and oppressed under the Taliban. And Zal helped lead our government’s efforts to support the Afghan government as they managed their first free and open elections in their entire history. Zal has certainly been effective, and now he will turn to the unique situation in Iraq.”

Rice noted that Khalilzad has also served as special assistant to the president and senior director at the National Security Council. In the latter capacity, she said, “he worked to define America’s forward strategy for freedom in the broader Middle East and North Africa.” Before the liberation of Iraq, she added, he also served as special envoy and ambassador-at-large for free Iraqis.

With Iraq’s Transitional National Assembly beginning the work of drafting the country’s new constitution, Rice said, Khalilzad will be a “valuable representative for the United States and a wise counselor to the new Iraqi government.” But the political process is only a small part of the U.S.-Iraq relationship, she noted.

“Zal will also work with all institutions of our government and those of other nations to continue our efforts to help Iraq build the institutions of freedom,” she said, “from training Iraqi security forces to training Iraqi teachers, from improving power plants to improving schools, from increasing access to health care to increasing the efficiency of Iraq’s food delivery systems.”

Khalilzad said he understands the way ahead in Iraq and what it will take to get there.

“If confirmed by the Senate as ambassador, I will work with all Iraqis, all sects, all ethnic groups, men and women, to accelerate success in Iraq,” he said. “By success, we mean an Iraq that can stand on its own feet in terms of providing security for its people, controlling its borders, delivering basic services such as education and health care, and creating the framework for a prosperous private sector.”

He emphasized that Iraqis will determine whether the effort succeeds.

“It is for the Iraqis to seize this historic moment by building an Iraq in which all Iraqis are vital and active participants and everyone’s rights are respected,” he said. “It will take time. It will not be easy. However, when the Iraqis succeed, they will become an example of a thriving democratic state and a prosperous society for the wider region. If confirmed, I’ll make every effort to support and assist the Iraqi people in this historic project.”

Rice reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to helping Iraq on its road to democracy.

“In all that lies ahead in Iraq, the Iraqi people can know that they will have a strong and committed partner in the United States of America,” the secretary said. “We have been inspired by their courage, and we will stand with the people of Iraq because a free Iraq serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration to the world.” (By John D. Banusiewicz American Forces Press Service.)

Troops awarded for Egyptian hostage rescue

CAMP LIBERTY, BAGHDAD, Iraq — One Soldier received a Bronze Star and eight Soldiers received the Army Commendation Medal April 5 for rescuing two Egyptian hostages from terrorists in Baghdad Feb. 7.

Maj. Gen. Lloyd Austin III, 10th Mountain Division com-



Photo by Spc. Matthew McLaughlin

Command Sgt. Maj. Ralph Borja, 10th Mountain Division command sergeant major, congratulates Sgt. 1st Class Michael Carlan and other Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, at their April 5 award ceremony for rescuing two Egyptian hostages from terrorists Feb. 7.

mander, presided over the ceremony and congratulated the Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, for a job well done.

“They are rewarded for doing what they are supposed to do,” Austin said. “In doing so, they saved lives. I’m grateful for the way you helped this division and the Army.”

Four Egyptians working for the mobile cell phone company Iraqna were kidnapped Feb. 6. Less than 24 hours later, Soldiers from Battery B, 2-15 FA saved two of the hostages and detained two terrorists after they pulled over a suspicious vehicle while on a routine patrol in their area of operations. First Lt. David Lucas, a platoon leader from B Btry., 2-15 FA, noticed a vehicle sagging low to the ground. Believing this to be a possible vehicle-borne improvised explosive device, Lucas ordered his convoy to stop the vehicle.

“I told my driver to cut them off so we can search them,” said the Knoxville, Tenn., native. “Before we even stopped, they stopped. Two guys jumped out and bolted in opposite directions.”

The convoy gave chase to the terrorists. One managed to escape while the other was detained with assistance from an Iraqi civilian.

“An Iraqi ran out and yelled at me in the turret and showed us where the road was,” said Spc. Jeremy Arneman, a gunner from Erie, Penn.

The terrorist ran around the corner and the Soldiers dismounted and chased after him. Spc. Stephen A. Rivera, a convoy driver from Miami, Fla. was close enough to him and raised his rifle.

“He was in the middle of the road and I yelled ‘Stop!’” Rivera said. “He turned around and saw how close I was to him and stopped. I went up to him and he got on his knees.”

While his Soldiers pursued the terrorists, Lucas and the Soldiers in his Humvee detained a terrorist who remained in the vehicle. Sgt. 1st Class Michael Carlan, a platoon leader from Dahlonaga, Ga., had the detainee open all the doors and finally the trunk. Carlan approached the trunk expecting a VBIED, but instead found two people blindfolded and handcuffed.

The hostages, later revealed to be two of the four kidnapped Egyptian workers, were elated to be freed from their captors, said Staff Sgt. Joey Washington, a squad leader from Raleigh, N.C.

“One guy was so happy we found him, he came up and kissed my hands,” he said.

“It’s the best feeling in the world knowing we saved two guys’ lives,” Arneman said. “It makes the job worth doing.”

The hostages were eventually released to the Egyptian Embassy. The other two Egyptian workers were rescued later in the day, Lucas said.

Lucas received the Bronze Star for his part in the rescue. Carlan, Washington, Arneman and Rivera received the Army Commendation Medal for their contributions. Other ARCOM recipients include: Staff Sgt. Miguel Guzman, El Paso, Texas; Pfc. Jose Atilano, Prosser, Wash.; Pfc. Billy Bailey, Brookland, Texas; and Pfc. Jose Santos, Cidra, Puerto Rico. (By Spc. Matthew McLaughlin 10th Mountain Division Public Affairs Office.)

Operation Purple Summer Camp to begin

WASHINGTON — Registration for “Operation Purple” summer camps for children of deployed service members begins today on the National Military Family Association’s Web site, program officials announced.

The 22 Operation Purple camps provide summer camp experiences for more than 2,000 children whose parents are deployed in the U.S. armed forces. The camps are funded through the Sears American Dream Campaign, a \$100 million commitment to strengthen families, homes and communities, officials said. The funding by Sears, Roebuck and Co. allows children to attend the camps free of charge.

NMFA officials said Operation Purple is the only summer camp program that focuses on helping children deal with deployment-related issues, and is open to children of personnel from all branches of the U.S. armed forces.

Applications will be available April 15 through May 15 on the NMFA Web site.

NMFA developed Operation Purple camps last year in response to the need for increased support services benefiting children of men and women serving in the armed forces, especially those whose parents are or will be deployed, officials said.

With funding from Sears, Roebuck in 2004, NMFA conducted 12 camps, reaching nearly 1,000 young people. This year, the program has expanded to host more than 2,000 children. NMFA officials estimate that more than 135,000 children are experiencing the absence of a parent due to a deployment to

Continued on next page

NEWS BRIEFS

Iraq or Afghanistan, and still others have a parent deployed elsewhere.

“Operation Purple Summer Camps fulfill a critical need in the military community,” said Candace Wheeler, NMFA’s chief executive officer. “We have been overwhelmed by the messages of support and gratitude we’ve received from children, parents, the Department of Defense, the National Guard Bureau and members of Congress. We are thrilled to be able to expand the program this year.”

A senior Sears official explained why the company is involved. “Sears prides itself on serving the needs of homes and families, and our affiliation with the NMFA provides advocacy programs for the families of men and women actively serving in our armed forces,” said Alan J. Lacy, vice chairman and chief executive officer of Sears Holdings Corp. “Our support of the summer camps enables a fabulous developmental experience for thousands of children and enriches the lives of their families.”

The camps, which last from five to seven days, give children ages 8 to 18 an exciting and memorable camp experience, providing tools to help them deal with the stress resulting from a parent’s deployment, NMFA officials said. (American Forces Press Service.)

Officer testifies in Iraqi case to begin his second OIF tour

TAJI, Iraq — Capt. Brian D. Vogt, the commander of Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, received an e-mail summons to appear in court. He was not being asked to appear for parking violations.

Vogt was summoned to testify against a terrorist in an Iraqi court. The accused had allegedly engaged in attacks against U.S. forces Oct. 15, 2003 during Operation Iraqi Freedom I. Vogt, then the commander of Company C, 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, was on a night patrol in the village of Ultifiya when a resounding boom filled the night air.

“We were the closest asset in the area, and I was asked to take

my six-man patrol to investigate,” said Vogt. The explosion occurred near a granary in an area that Vogt patrolled regularly and knew very well.

“Near the river bridge, I found a large hole in a barrier wall, and a rocket fin section,” he said. As he and his patrol began to analyze the area, he noticed a scuffle taking place in a nearby alley. “I saw several local guys pushing another Iraqi man around ... then I noticed the rocket launcher lying on the ground.”

At this point, he knew who was responsible for the rocket attack. The men from Ultifiya were beating the terrorist. They were unhappy that the man used their neighborhood to stage an attack on the Americans. Vogt said, “He was pretty bloodied and beat up, I thought the Iraqis did it ... but I later found out that his wounds were from inadequate protection from the rocket’s back-blast.”

The terrorist was detained and put in jail to await his trial in the Iraqi legal system.

In February, Vogt received his summons to testify via video teleconference. “When I told them I was returning to Iraq they said ‘Great ... you can address the court in person ...’ I told them I’d love to testify in person,” he said.

Vogt left his forward operating base and traveled to Camp

Liberty to link up with staff from the Judge Advocate General’s Office. With legal counsel in tow, he proceeded to the Iraqi courthouse March 16. “The court was held in the old Baghdad Museum building,” Vogt said. “The walls were lined with hard wood, and a lot of Iraqi security forces. I was there for a long time and got to see several other cases and really view the workings of the Iraqi courts.

“I answered many different questions while there,” Vogt continued.

“The judge asked, ‘Do you think he did it?’ and I said, ‘I think he was trying to kill Americans,’” Vogt said.

“He asked, ‘Do you think he was trying to kill you?’ I said, ‘No, I don’t think he was trying to kill me specifically,’” Vogt said.

The line of questioning continued until the judge was satisfied that all of the evidence was presented.

In the end, the terrorist was sentenced to 15 years of hard labor in an Iraqi prison facility.

“It was very fascinating to see and participate in this process,” Vogt said.

“It was great to see an Iraqi government entity working well. ... It felt good to help put someone who was trying to kill Americans behind bars for a very long time.”

Motomail service not just for Marines

By Cpl. C.J. Yard
2nd Force Service Support Group

CAMP TAQADDUM, Iraq — The Marine Corps’ newest way of staying in touch with loved ones, Motomail, has been extended to the Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 112th Armor, 36th Infantry Division.

“We’re doing them a favor because they are doing us an even larger favor by putting their lives at risk guarding this base,” said Master Sgt. Robert Simpson, the postal chief for Headquarters and Service Battalion, 2nd Force Service Support Group (Forward).

Motomail is a service to send letters to Marines via the Internet and have the Marine receive the letter within 24 hours. A family member or friend is able to logon to www.Motomail.us and type letters to their Marine serving overseas. The letter is then downloaded and printed in a secure envelope and delivered to the Marine during mail call.

“No one ever sees what is in the letters,” Simpson said. “The really cool thing is the person who sent the letter can go back to the site and see when it was downloaded and printed. It’s communication for free; and it’s nice to have that letter in your hand instead of always reading e-mail.”

According to Simpson, the only glitch in the system is the Marines who are not always inside the wire do not always get their mail within 24 hours.

The concept of Motomail came from the British Royal Marines, said Simpson, a Tonawanda, N.Y., native. “Since the base is 70 percent Army, we thought we could give the family members of the 2/112th another way to keep in touch with their loved ones. We proposed the idea to the [the battalion commanding officer], and he said that it was good to go.

“When a family member logs on, they choose from a list of addresses, and there is only one address for the Army, that’s here,” Simpson continued.

Camp Taqaddum averages about 400 pieces of Motomail in a day, and the Army gets anywhere from 30 to 50 letters, Simpson said.

“The 2/112th has been set up to use Motomail for the past two weeks,” said Army Maj. Lloyd Waugh, executive officer the 2/112th and native of Cypress, Texas. “Motomail will have an impact on the morale of our troops moving forward; however, we have not been able to measure its success yet. This media should help our Soldiers and their families that do not have e-mail readily available in order to improve communications while deployed.”



Photo by Sgt. Kirstin S. Jochums

Lance Cpl. Kelly A. Martinez, a 2nd Force Service Support Group (Forward) postal clerk, looks through a list of all the units throughout Iraq to route mail and packages to deployed service.



Upcoming MWR Events

Comics On Duty World Tour

Today and tomorrow: Tallil Air Base

Sunday: Camp Echo

Monday: Abu Gharib

Tuesday: Balad

Wednesday and Thursday: MND-NC AOR

Friday: Mosul

***Check with your MWR office for exact times and locations.

Worship and Prayer Schedule for the International Zone

Sunday

9:30 a.m. — Choir Rehearsal
10 a.m. — Catholic Mass (3rd BTC)
10:30 a.m. — General Christian
Noon — Episcopal/Lutheran/Anglican
2 p.m. — Latter Day Saints
4 p.m. — Catholic Confession
4:30 p.m. — Catholic Mass
6 p.m. — Contemporary Protestant

Monday-Friday

Noon — Catholic Mass (Mon.-Thurs.)
Noon — Catholic Communion Service (Tues.)
5:30 p.m. — Catholic Mass (Fri. at Camp Steel Dragon)
6 p.m. — Jewish Shabbat Services (Fri.)
7:30 p.m. — Prayer Service (Tue.)
8 p.m. — Bible Study (Thurs. at Senior Advisors Conf. Rm.)
8:30 p.m. — Bible Study (Wed. at Ambassadors Conf. Rm.)

Saturday

11:30 a.m. — Catholic Mass (Camp Headhunter)
12:30 p.m. — Buddhist Worship
4 p.m. — Catholic Confession
4:30 p.m. — Catholic Mass

Daily Islamic Prayer

For more information, call DSN 318-239-8659.



STRYKERS Patrol Mean Streets of Mosul



By Staff Sgt. Timothy B. Lawn
Scimitar Staff

MOSUL, Iraq — On a busy Iraqi highway crowded with early morning traffic, two heavily armored Strykers each spun inward and lurched to a halt. Their iron ramps hissed and banged the ground as determined Soldiers leapt from their armored interiors. The steely-nerved Soldiers of Company B (Bobcats), 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment out of Fort Lewis, Wash. quickly halted the stunned Iraqi drivers and passenger as two more Strykers sped by to a pre-determined blocking position several hundred meters up the road.

Like a tightened noose, in a matter of moments the alert Stryker Soldiers had effectively sealed a stretch of highway establishing a traffic control point (TCP). They cut off all traffic in and out and blocked the road that their newly trained Iraqi Army counterparts could systematically search the vehicles and occupants for suspected terrorists, explosives, weaponry or intelligence.

TCPs, combat patrols and “snatch and grabs,” are the Strykers’ day-to-day life. They patrol the mean streets and surrounding areas of Mosul, and every day they face the possibility and the reality of improvised explosive devices, vehicle-borne IEDs, ambushes, snipers and other threats.

Capt. Steven Szilvassy from West Patterson, N.J., B Co. commander, pointed to his map of Mosul in the company’s tactical operations center. He proudly described how the brigade adopted his idea of renaming patrol sectors to make them easier to understand for tactical communications within the command and for his



Illustration by Staff Sgt. Timothy Lawn

Stryker Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, conducting joint patrols with Iraqi Army troops on Market Street in downtown Mosul.

Soldiers. The patrol sectors of Mosul were divided up and renamed after New York City boroughs, including Yankee Stadium, Lower Manhattan, the Bronx, and even Coney Island Playground.

The Stryker Soldiers and their Iraqi Army counterparts patrol Palestine, an area of Mosul that has seen its share of terrorist activity. By Iraqi standards it is well-to-do neighborhoods, to the Stryker Soldiers it is a sinister area populated by Saddam’s old guard, cronies and former high-ranking officers.

Many of the regiment’s Strykers bear scars of their past patrols. They have struck IEDs, been hit with rocket propelled grenades and bullets. Though tough as nails, even the Strykers weren’t enough protection to prevent the loss of life. Some men have been wounded and the regiment has lost a few Soldiers.

Bobcat Soldiers are veterans of Fallujah and more than a hundred combat patrols. At least 160 patrols since October, estimated Sgt. Norman Betts, Vancouver, Wash.

“The guys are getting smoked ... wearing out hard,” Szilvassy said. He added, “keeping busy makes the time fly by.”

Though he described IED’s as horrific, Szilvassy added that snipers were his greatest threat. Szilvassy described how his young sniper was credited with several assassinations and was on their wanted list.

To counter the insurgent threats the Stryker Soldiers spend at least 12 hours every day in and out of their armored beasts patrolling the streets. For the most part they are buttoned-up as the vehicles travel from one area of the city to the next.

Inside the cramped vehicles they share precious space with combat gear, equipment, ammo, medic bags and supplies. They engage in friendly horseplay, share a priceless cigarette, ferociously challenge one another to digital games such as Yahtzee or listen to their favorite songs on MP3s or portable DVD players.

The Stryker Soldiers welcome the foot patrol. It allows them the opportunity to get out, stretch their legs, get some air and interact with the locals. When the ramp goes down they switch game faces. From laughing good-natured young men, they now become steely combat veterans primed for action.

When on foot patrol duty the Soldiers intersperse with their

Iraqi counterparts. Striding alongside their assigned Strykers they scan the rooftops and walls, always alert for the potential ambush. Occasionally, they may search a house or business if they feel suspicious.

In one part of town smiling children flock around the American and Iraqi Soldiers begging for a chance photo, money or food. Men and women fill shops and walk the streets. Fresh vegetables are carefully cleaned and stacked in bins, and a cobbler sits on a corner, repairing a shoe.

“The Soldiers actually feel like they are making a difference here,” said Lt. Col. Todd McCaffrey, 1st Battalion commander. “This would not have happened two months ago.”

At the end of each day the Strykers with their cargos of weary Soldiers return to base camp. This particular haven on a hilltop the troops call home. The base camp landscape is either hazy and gray from spring rains — the mud and gravel is slick like ice and ankle deep at some points — or is a choking mixture of fine talcum powder dust that stings the eyes, grits teeth, and seems to cover everything.

The base camp is made up of rows upon rows of whitewashed quad-con containers and wood buildings and is surrounded by concrete walls and Hesco protective barriers.

For the Stryker Soldiers, their goal is to bring back security to the Iraqis and hand over the job to their Iraqi Army compatriots. They have the hardest part of the tour out of the way — almost

the six month mark or “crest of the hill,” said McCaffrey. As he leaned back in his chair, he added, “My goal is to, do the mission and bring everybody home.”



Photo by 1st Sgt. Kelly C. Luster

An Iraqi Soldier conducts a security pause while on foot patrol near one of the strykers.



Photo by 1st Sgt. Kelly C. Luster

Strykers vehicle commander checks the road ahead using his navigation system.

Photo by 1st Sgt. Kelly C. Luster
Squad leader Staff Sgt. Troy Jensen keeps an eye on the area as the Stryker rolls on a mission.



Photo by 1st Sgt. Kelly C. Luster

A Stryker Soldier stands vigilant as an Iraqi Soldier inspects an Iraqi citizens identification and vehicle at a traffic control point.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy B. Lawn

Strykers set out to patrol downtown Mosul.

Keeping it Cool in Baghdad

176th Field Artillery technicians keep busy keeping troops from overheating in Iraq

Story and photos by Sgt. W. Watson Martin
214th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP HONOR, INTERNATIONAL ZONE, BAGHDAD, Iraq — To keep the enemies of survival from harming you or your buddy, you need to keep it cool. Terrorists are not the only threat here — prepare for extreme heat.

“Extreme weather hasn’t gotten here yet. What are we to do when it hits 130 to 140 degrees?” said Sgt. 1st Class Hassan Stewart of Forward Support Company (FSC), 176th Field Artillery of the 3rd Infantry Division. The battalion motor sergeant said that is where his Soldiers come into play.

During a quality check of his work, a 52C — air conditioning technician Pfc.

Earnest Bogard III counted down, “It’s in the 60s — it’s dropping — it’s in the 50s — 52, 51 — uh oh — 49, 48!”

Bogard helps maintain and repair air conditioning systems on all types of military vehicles here. As the only air conditioning technician at Camp Honor he is a hot commodity, said Stewart.

In the two months he’s been here, Bogard said he has settled in and learned a lot more about his job from fellow technicians in different specialties. “I couldn’t be doing this job without those jokers,” he said, referring to Spc. James Bellamy and another guy Sgt. 1st Class Tony Robertstone.

As far as diagnosing electrical problems Bogard has relied on late-night brainstorming with Bellamy, who is a generator mechanic.

“Our [military occupational specialties] go hand-in-hand,” said Bellamy. “I’ve taught him the electrical aspect and he has taught me the AC aspect.”

The add-on armor (AOA) kits come with a Red Dot AC system. “I think the factory-installed AC systems found in the M114 Humvees are superior to the Red Dots,” said Bogard. “There have been a few KBR-installed systems that did not work from the beginning, and we find it necessary to run a new wire here or there,” he said.

Working on three to four military vehicles a day, Bogard checks refrigerant pressure as well as potential electrical problems. He’s found in the engine compartments the Red Dot AC hoses can chafe against metal if not secured properly. If a hose leaks he replaces it and recharges the system. He’s also replaced burned out air



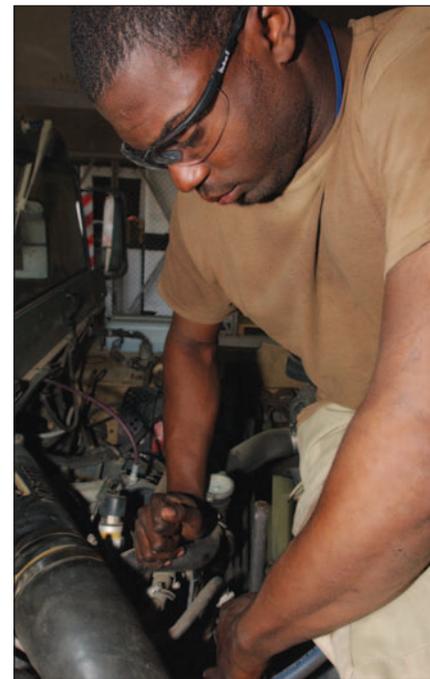
With a simple set of hoses, gauges and a tank of refrigerant Pfc. Earnest Bogard can perform a field pressure check and charge an air conditioner.



Pfc. Earnest Bogard strips the end of a wire that he will run from the air conditioner compressor to the control switch inside the Humvee because of a faulty wire in an aftermarket system.



A technician strips a new hot wire on an aftermarket air conditioning system bypassing the wiring harness that never worked.



Spc. James Bellamy, of the 176th, tightens the air conditioning belt on a Humvee.

conditioning compressors.

Some problems can be prevented at the operator level by simply keeping the air filter clean, explained Stewart. Warm air blowing from the vents is a past-due reminder to the operator to check and clean the air filter, he said.

Operators need to check and clean the air filter at least once a week, Stewart said. A clogged air filter can cause an expensive compressor to prematurely fail.

Bogard recommends cleaning the filter with pressurized air, running your fingers up and down the filter and clapping it against the other hand or hosing it out. If you hose it out then let it dry completely before turning the AC on. A wet filter clogs worse than a dusty filter, he said.

To solve air conditioning problems other than a dirty filter

Bogard is glad to help and has been able to drop the aftermarket systems down to a cool 45 to 50 degrees and the factory-installed systems down to a chilly 32 degrees, he said.

“Keeping troops cool is what it is all about.”



Staff Sgt. Percy Eley of Co. A, 703rd Distribution Bn., 3rd ID gives an AC vent a high five after technicians recharged his system.

Iraqis learn valuable EMT skills

Story and photo by Sgt. Matthew Acosta
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE WARRIOR, KIRKUK, Iraq — A new program has been developed to train Iraqi civilians in the life-saving emergency medical technician skills necessary to help the Iraqi people take charge of their nation.

In a combined effort with the U.S. State Department, Ministry of Health, the Red Crescent and the U.S. Army and Air Force, the first civilian Emergency Medical Technician program in Iraq will consist of four individual classes on basic EMT skills.

At Kirkuk Regional Airbase [FOB Warrior] medical staff assigned to the Air Force's 506th Expeditionary Medical Support Squadron and the Army's 145th Support Battalion and 126th Forward Surgical Team spearheaded the training of 23 handpicked Iraqi civilians in their second EMT class at the airbase.

"This course has two main goals," said Army Capt. Jeremy Ostermiller, physician assistant and program coordinator, Company C, 145th Support Battalion, Idaho National Guard, Task Force Liberty. "One [goal] is to teach the basic EMT skills to civilians so they can treat casualties."

Ostermiller said the second goal is to have the three highest graduates from each class return as assistant instructors with the next class. Eventually the entire program will be turned over to them, with the Army and Air Force observing the program for quality control. This would establish the start of an Iraqi-led EMT training system.

Most of the students do not have medical backgrounds and many of those selected work as security for oil fields and some are firefighters, he added.

During the two-week course, students are taught the same basic life-saving skills as taught in the nationally-registered EMT course in the United States, including cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, first aid, trauma management, intravenous injections, injury dressings, splinting, joint immobilization and childbirth procedures.

"Normally in the Arab culture, women nurses deliver babies," Ostermiller said. "But these guys showed interest in learning everything they can, including the procedures for child delivery."

Besides the cultural difference, the medical staff has had to overcome a few obstacles, he said.

"Because this is the first EMT program taught in Iraq, there are no textbooks written in Arabic available to the students," Ostermiller said. "We have some slides with both Arabic and English translations on them now describing some procedures, which help out a great deal with the language barrier."

After the training period, the students were given a 100-



Air Force Tech. Sgt. Troy Moore, Mental Health Technician and EMT instructor, 506th Expeditionary Medical Support Squadron, Task Force Liberty, watches an Iraqi EMT student splint a simulated leg fracture on a medical instruction mannequin during the final practical exercise of the class.

question written exam and a practical exam consisting of several injury stations.

"The Iraqi students were eager to take the written exam, but were more enthusiastic with taking the hands-on practical exam," said Senior Airman Melissa Wass, medical technician and instructor, 506th EMEDSS, Task Force Liberty.

"They're incredible," she added. "They learned the curriculum in two weeks, versus the normal six-week time frame we teach back in the states."

"The reason they picked it up so fast is because those with the aptitude for it were specifically identified and chosen to attend the course," said Tech. Sgt. Ronald Stacy, medical technician and instructor, 506th EMEDSS, TF Liberty. "They want to learn about the medical field. They want to be here and it shows."

The entire class of Iraqi EMT students graduated April 2 at Kirkuk Regional Airbase, and the three honor graduates were presented with U.S. military combat life saver medical kits as a reward. They were also invited back to become assistant instructors in the next EMT class.

Wass said she enjoyed working with the Iraqis and looks forward to teaching the next class.

"I feel good knowing we're making a difference with people we normally wouldn't have been able to help," Wass said.

"This course can be likened to the saying 'Give a man a fish and you'll feed him for a day. Teach him to fish and he'll feed himself for a lifetime,'" Stacy said. "I think this is the start of something really good for the people. If they grab hold of this EMT program, it's a step closer to them taking charge of the new medical field that's growing here in Iraq."

Preventable Leishmaniasis can lead to disfigurement, death

By Sgt. 1st Class Helen Gillespie
Task Force 44th Medical Command

INTERNATIONAL ZONE, BAGHDAD, Iraq — It's nothing to worry about — right? It's just a strange-looking little bump resembling a volcano. With all the bumps and scrapes service members receive in performance of their duties, this is just another battle scar to wear proudly. However, if that little bump doesn't heal or becomes larger, it's not a battle scar to ignore. It could be a sign of sand fly bites that could be serious.

Sand fly bites can deposit a parasite called leishmania into the skin. According to the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine's Web site, <http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/news/Leishmaniasis.asp>, female phlebotomine sand flies pick up leishmania from dogs, rodents (including rats, hyraxes and gerbils), and even other humans. Only in rare cases can victims infect each other. Sand flies are the carriers.

"The only way to get the disease is from bites by infected sand flies," said Ron Ross Ph.D. M.D., 261st ASMB in Balad. In regards to animals he said, "It is not possible to tell whether an animal has leishmania without medical testing."

Officially, an occurrence of leishmania is called leishmaniasis, but has been called by other names such as kala-azar, Oriental sore, espundia, Jericho boil, Bagdad button and Delhi sore. The specific medical name for leishmaniasis of the skin is Cutaneous Leishmaniasis, or CL.

Ross stressed the necessity for troops to seek medical treatment if they have bumps or sores that are growing or not healing.

"The disease will usually not go away unless treated," he said.

As for sand fly bites, skin bumps are the good news. The bad news is that some strains of CL can spread into the nose and soldier's mouth to become Mucocutaneous Leishmaniasis, or MCL. This can become disfiguring and can happen long after the CL bumps have healed. An Internet search yields many pictures of people grossly disfigured by MCL.

The third, and deadly, form is Visceral Leishmaniasis which causes damage to the liver and spleen. Although VL is characterized by an irregular fever, it can only be diagnosed by an organ biopsy or by checking for the parasite in aspirated fluid by inserting a long needle into internal organs.

"It is not possible to predict whether an individual with or without cutaneous disease will get the visceral type of disease," said Ross.

Ross offered a solution that will prevent all types of Leishmaniasis.

"Getting early treatment is not the answer," he said, "Not getting bitten is the answer. So, if someone is bitten they need to find ways to stop getting bitten."

At the USACHPPM Web site, several pages explain how Soldiers can protect themselves from this disease. There are documents, pocket cards and flyers that can be reprinted for command use. The information presented stresses treating soldier's uniforms with Permethrin and spraying mosquito netting with insect repellent that is at least 33 percent DEET.

Sand flies tend to bite at dusk and during the evening hours. Even during the day, sand flies will bite if they have been disturbed. At night, sand flies can sneak through loose-meshed mosquito netting.

"The rate of disease in US troops is low although in some areas the rate is many times the average rate," Ross said. "The rate in the Iraq population is high, very high in rural areas."

Nice to meet you

Maj. Andrew Johnson of the 18th Military Police Brigade Civil Affairs department shakes hands with a young Iraqi girl March 30 while visiting a site that is to become the new Iraqi Highway Patrol Headquarters in Baghdad. Approximately 150 Iraqi families are living on the government-owned property which is a former special police training compound. "Squatting" on government property is punishable by up to three years in prison. Each family was paid \$500, equivalent to a police officer's two-month salary, to assist them with relocating.



Photo by Spc. Lynne Steely

DPW develops garbage control system in IZ

Story and photo by
Pfc. Ferdinand Thomas
Scimitar Staff

INTERNATIONAL ZONE, BAGHDAD, Iraq – Although the “big red one” has departed the International Zone, red monsters have made the IZ its temporary home. Since early March, the monsters have been devouring all the garbage in local neighborhoods thanks to a few Soldiers from the Department of Public Works.

For the last six months, DPW has been developing a system that would stop people from disposing of their trash in any place but a landfill. This system consists of teams that clean the main streets of the IZ six days a week. It also recently brought 60 red dumpsters into IZ neighborhoods.

“What we have in the IZ right now is a series of garbage piles in vacant lots and on sidewalks here and there,” said Capt. Charlie Jaworski, construction manager for DPW with the Joint Area Support Group – Central. “I am trying to eliminate those one by one, and the dumpster program was the first step in cleaning the entire IZ. The ultimate goal is to get rid of all the garbage in the IZ.”

Every Sunday and Wednesday, DPW has scheduled a series of dump trucks to enter the IZ and empty the dumpsters it has in place. The trash is then taken and disposed of in a local landfill. It also has water trucks, which go behind the trucks and spray out the dumpsters.

After placing the dumpsters in the neighborhoods, Jaworski and his team made frequent visits to ensure the locals realize those

garbage bins were there for them, he said. “Anytime a Soldier comes through the [IZ apartments], they are very visible. Children and adults come up to us and ask questions. I take that opportunity to say, ‘See that big red dumpster right there? Please put all of your garbage in there. Don’t throw it on the ground. Don’t put it anywhere else. Bring your garbage to the dumpster.’ I had an interpreter with me at all times while I was doing this. I told them, ‘Spread the word. Tell your family. Tell anyone else you see. Put garbage in this dumpster.’”

Before the dumpsters were put in place, local residents in the IZ were throwing garbage out of their windows, leaving it on the sidewalk and stacking it in any large open space they could find, Jaworski said. Children were even playing outside near the trash and in it.

Since the start of the dumpster disposal program, the locals have started disposing of their garbage correctly and cleaning up their neighborhoods, he said. “The adults of the neighborhoods started paying the children a couple of bucks here and there. They also gave them a few shovels and brooms and they started cleaning up the curbs. Instead of just putting their household garbage into the dumpster, they are cleaning up the garbage that is on the streets. They are taking pride in their neighborhood and making it a better place for them to live. That is what I hoped would happen, and it did.”

Residents could not be happier for the help from DPW, said Natiq Al-Bayati, a local IZ resident. “The dumpsters from the government helped us greatly. The garbage



An Iraqi garbage truck driver empties one of the dumpsters in the International Zone. The Iraqis in the IZ are not equipped with a truck that empties the garbage automatically, therefore every dumpster has to be emptied by hand.

control has definitely helped with disease control.”

Jaworski and one of his Soldiers, Sgt. Luis A. Colon, who is helping him make this project a success, are glad to be a part of this mission. A native of Aibonito, Puerto Rico, Colon said he knows what it’s like to live in an unsanitary area.

“I used to live in a place like this when I was young back in Puerto Rico, so I like to see the improvement,” Colon said. “I know how they feel when they can not send their children out to play because it’s unsanitary. Now things are cleaner here. You see children outside playing with balls and having fun. I see people coming outside saying, ‘Thank you!’ Before we came, there was garbage everywhere. We haven’t had 100

percent improvement, but it is definitely getting better.”

The project DPW has put into effect has had a positive impact on every person it has come in contact with, Jaworski said. It has created jobs and boosted morale.

“I have had people come out, smile and shake my hand. They say, ‘Thank you for doing this. You are helping the neighborhood. No more smell! No more smell!’ And they always ask me for another dumpster. I have noticed happy and smiling faces. I have been here for almost six months. If you ask me, ‘Do I see a difference here?’ The answer is absolutely yes. I have noticed the illegal dumping in the IZ has almost ceased since the dumpsters have been here. We are making a huge difference.”

Anaconda lab keeps troops’ eyes on battlefield

Story and photo by Spc. Abel Trevino
28th Public Affairs Detachment

LOGISTICS SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, BALAD, Iraq — It’s a sight to behold, an unexpected spectacle in a combat environment: a fully functional optometry lab that offers quality eye care to all stationed here.

“We provide eye care for all the Soldiers here at Anaconda as well as anywhere in the task force or anyone that requests it through the 44th [Medical Command],” said Capt. Kate Wagner, 261st Area Support Medical Battalion. “We treat whoever shows up to our door.”

While treatment does include removing foreign debris from eyes and treating eye problems, such as pinkeye, most of the lab work involves the expedient fabrication of glasses, said Pfc. Dartanian Howard, an eye technician.

The first part of creating glasses for patients is discovering if the patients need glasses or an updated prescription. For this, patients are checked out by the technicians, who give them a visual acuity examination and check the refraction of their current prescription, if necessary, Howard said.

After being examined and verified by an optometrist, the prescription and frames are sent out to the optical fabrication lab, where the glasses are made and ready for pickup the next day.

“Bifocals are a different process, so those can take a day or two extra,” Howard said.

The glasses Howard is talking about are the “frames-of-choice” glasses, which resemble civilian spectacles, as



Optometrist Capt. Kate Wagner, 261st Area Support Medical Battalion, checks for damage to Lt. Col. Patrick Lyons’ eye as part of a routine eye examination. The optometry lab offers full-service eye treatment and can usually have eye protection ready the day after an examination.

opposed to the brown-framed, military issued glasses.

“I’d say, for most people, they are really happy to get the frame-of-choice glasses, which we have here. Most of them will deploy with just the brown glasses, and they are really happy to know that we have a bigger choice to offer,” Wagner said.

Eye protection is one of the most important services the lab offers troops.

“The recent challenges [include] fielding combat eye protection. A lot of times Soldiers will arrive here without the combat eye protection they need, so getting proper eyewear to them has been quite a bit of a challenge,” Wagner said. “In our typical week, we fabricate about 250 pairs of glasses, and last week it was 850.”

When the demand for eye care goes up, so do the challenges that the optometrists face.

“For us here in the clinic, the hardest thing has been getting the equipment that we need. We’ve been tasked to go out on certain missions, but we see a large number of patients here at Anaconda, usually between 20 and 30 a day, and so, getting equipment in order to do missions out there and be able to do what we do here has been the biggest challenge,” Wagner said.

When they took over from the previous Troop Medical Clinic optometry lab, equipment was in short supply. The 118th Medical Battalion left behind some necessary pieces of equipment, so the lab could be fully functional, Wagner said.

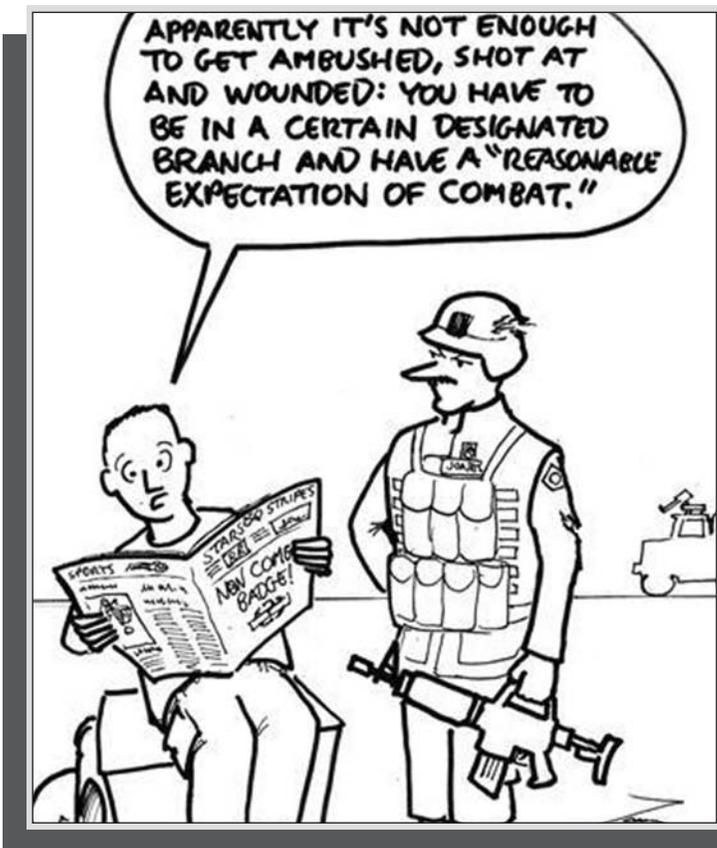
Despite shortcomings the lab faced when its staff arrived Dec. 23, they came fully staffed to handle the optical needs of those stationed here.

“When we first got here, there was only one optometrist, and he had two technicians. They were all working out of one room. We came with two optometrists and have three technicians, so we needed two rooms, [and that has] worked a lot better,” Wagner said. “Seeing 30 patients and screening them in the same room as us treating them in was much too much. So, a big change has been in our space and the efficiency with which we can see patients.”

Scimitar Slapstick



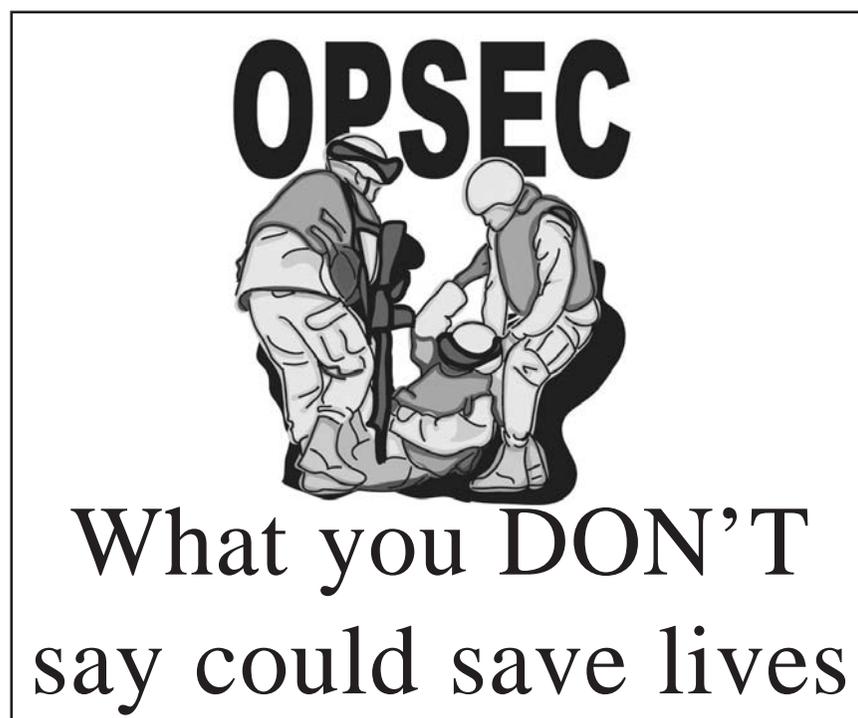
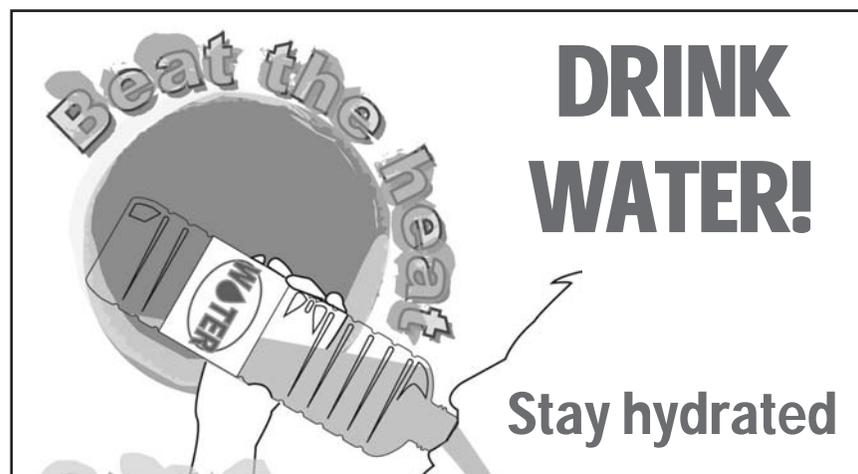
Art by Staff Sgt. Timothy B. Lawn



Art by Maj. James D. Crabtree



Art by Jeffery Hall



Albanian Komandos support coalition efforts

Story and photo by Spc. Jeremy D. Crisp
Multi-National Corps - Iraq Public Affairs

LOGISTICS SUPPORT AREA DIAMONDBACK, Iraq — A small, elite unit of troops from Southeastern Europe are playing an integral role in providing area security for the Mosul Airfield and coalition forces in northern Iraq.

Working alongside U.S. Special Forces and infantry units, 77 Albanian special forces troops from Albania's Regiment Komando 1200 unit conduct routine day and night patrols outside the LSA, providing security and presence in the area.

The Komandos' mission is to work alongside coalition forces, search within the area of operations to find unexploded ordnance, maintain a quick reaction force to face unplanned tasks inside the base and provide rapid reaction and patrolling inside the base whenever it is attacked.

The value the Albanians bring to the LSA is monumental, explained Chief Warrant Officer Kenneth R. Baggett, battle operations chief, 10th Special Forces Group, Fort Carson, Colo. Baggett participates in patrols alongside the Komandos, and due to the language barrier, he acts as a communication and coordination liaison between the Albanian troops and all the other units in Mosul.

"The Komandos are most definitely a valuable asset to the LSA," Baggett said. "With all the logistical support and the LSA having a major airfield, our area is a prime target for insurgents. By virtue of the Albanians going out night and day on patrols, they help keep attacks down. Having them is a big advantage. They probably do more for the security of the installation and airfield than any other unit here."

Baggett said working alongside other countries is nothing new for the Special Forces, and he just fell right in with the Komandos. "They are always a motivated unit and come ready to do whatever mission they are tasked with," Baggett said. "It has been a pleasure working with them."

Since the Albanian unit arrived in October, it has conducted more than 150 combat patrols, and confiscated over 410 rounds of various ammunition, including mortar rounds, improvised explosive devices. Nine pieces of unexploded ordnances have also been found and destroyed in the Komandos' area of operation.

On several raids with U.S. Special Forces units, the Komandos played key roles in the capture of prime target and weapons caches, explained Lt. Col. Kenneth J. Hurst, commander, 2nd Battalion, 10th SFG. Hurst said the Komandos worked alongside the SF in numerous raids, and the LSA "has a direct correlation with the reduction in attacks due in part to the work of the Albanians." Hurst added "the Komandos have made a significant difference here. It has made a real impact having them working with us."

Maj. Ardian Bali, Albanian Regiment Komando 1200 unit commander, said they train extensively before coming into theatre to support coalition operations. Much like the Army



Albanian Soldiers from Regiment Komando 1200 Unit stand at parade rest during a recent inspection at Logistics Support Area Diamondback, Iraq, March 28.

Rangers, the Komandos go through two weeks of special forces training, a two-week mountain training course, and two weeks of summer training. This on top of a nine-week basic training, followed by advanced individual training.

The current group of Albanian Soldiers is on the last month of their six-month tour of duty in Iraq and will be replaced by 120 fellow Komandos from their battalion back home.

Bali said he is very proud of his Soldiers and the work they have done. "We have been very professional in our mission. I am very happy for this. This is our first time outside [Albania,]" he said. "This mission has been a very good thing, and a good experience for our Komandos."

Former political prisoner recalls incarceration

Story and photo by
Staff Sgt. Craig Zentkovich
Task Force Baghdad

CAMP LOYALTY, BAGHDAD, Iraq — The Directorate of General Security and Special Security office — the compound that is now Camp Loyalty means different things to different people. To some Soldiers of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, it is their home. To some Iraqis, it is still a symbol of fear, torture and death at the hands of the former regime.

Most Iraqis, like Anmar Abdel Ali, knew, or at least believed, if you were sent to the compound and its prison, you weren't leaving there alive.

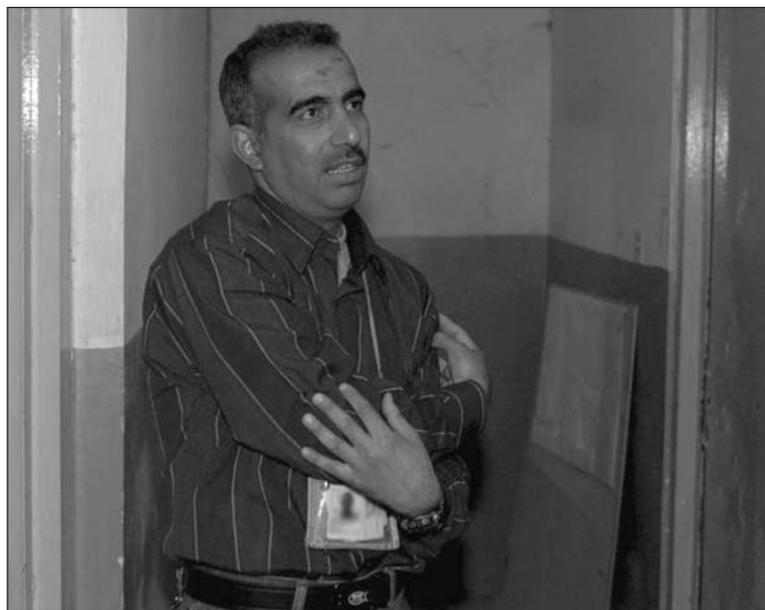
The prison held anyone who was considered a "threat to the regime." Ali was one of those threats.

On March 11, he visited Camp Loyalty and the prison where he was held for three months.

At 22, Ali was arrested in Baghdad at his place of work by Baath Party security. He was forced into a vehicle, had his eyes covered and was transported to a military police camp. Hours later, he arrived at the DGS prison.

"The security stopped me on the street, asked if I was Anmar ... then asked me for my ID card," he said, adding that the former regime's Iraqi police, military police and special security all dressed in civilian clothes. "When I asked why they wanted to see my ID card, seven men surrounded me, took my ID, and forced me into a vehicle."

Ali said, "I thought this was the end, that I was going to die."



Anmar Abdel Ali describes how guards would press salt into open wounds during interrogations.

He was suspected of doing business with Kurdistan, and in possession of a fake ID — he had deserted the Iraqi army in 1992.

When he first arrived at the prison, the interrogations began. He was questioned on his dealings with the Kurds, being hit repeatedly in the process.

"I don't want to remember some of the other things they did," Ali said, and referred to incidents of prisoners being hung from the ceiling by their feet, being hit with a reed and having salt rubbed in their wounds.

"On my first [rough interrogation], they put me in a cell by myself ... took my clothes ... and [guards] would pour buckets of water on me," he said. It was February.

Incidents of torture during interrogations

were the rule, not the exception.

According to 1st Lt. Gregory Holmes, 2nd BCT, brigade human intelligence analysis chief, a variety of barbaric methods were used to interrogate prisoners throughout Iraq.

"You name it, they did it," he said. In addition to what Ali experienced, "[the guards] practiced [strategically placed] electroshock and slicing, sensory deprivation, various

methods of [suspending prisoners] with hooks and eyelets, starvation ... and severe beatings."

Some of the prisoners' sensory deprivation was ongoing. Window openings, which now offer refreshing beams of sunlight into the prison, were blackened — inmates did not know if it was night or day.

The living conditions at the prison were equally horrific. According to Ali, his 6'x9' cell held as many as 18 prisoners at a time.

"We had no bathroom," he said. "After they fed us ... a piece of bread and maybe some soup for the day ... we had to use the food tray for a toilet."

When the United States first made the compound into a military camp, many locals seek-

ing work would not enter the compound, according to Hayder Abdul-Nabi.

Abdul-Nabi, a contracted interpreter, had two brothers incarcerated at the DGS prison. His older brother, whom he would not name, was a prisoner there for seven years.

"My brother was an [armor] for the [old Iraqi army]," he said. "The [regime] found out he [sold] a pistol, and he was arrested."

Abdul-Nabi added that his family had no idea where his brother was for those seven years — they suspected he was dead. It wasn't until the brother was transferred to Abu Ghraib, where he spent another 10 years incarcerated, that the family discovered he was still alive.

"My brother won't speak a word of what happened in [the DGS prison]," Abdul-Nabi said. "But when we sleep in the same place, I always awake to hear him talking in his sleep, having nightmares of the things they did to him."

Abdul-Nabi himself would not step foot in the prison during his visit.

For Ali, his incarceration was all for naught. Ali spent three months at the DGS prison in Baghdad before he was transferred to Kirkuk for four more months. There was no evidence against him for dealings with the Kurds. Someone else who shared the same name was the suspected threat to the regime.

Ali spent the next three months in a military prison for his desertion from the army before his father sold his house and bought his son's freedom.

Ali, now 34, and Abdul-Nabi both left the former DGS compound March 11 on their own free will, alive, and no longer living in fear.

Engineers go from building tree houses to rebuilding Iraq

Story and photos by
Cpl. C.J. Yard
Force Service Support
Group

CAMP TAQADDUM, Iraq

— Teams of combat engineers aboard the base are making a difference, and the changes are quite noticeable.

One of those teams, Cpl. Chase Frye, Lance Cpls. Gary Stout, Anouphong Chanthamany, Jason Cook, Brad Feola, Casey Crotty and Pfc. Kyle Lefever, has been reshaping and remodeling the “dark tower” of Camp Taqaddum. Whether it is adding offices within the building, constructing Southwest Asia Huts, known as SWA Huts, or adding an entry control point to the front of the headquarters building, they are making an impact.

Frye, a 21-year-old native of Columbia, S.C., is the team leader and the “glue” that binds the team together, as Cook described him.

Frye and Cook have been friends for about a year, according to the two. They have bonded so much the two have aspirations of moving to South Carolina to take over Frye’s uncle’s construction business.

According to Lefever, Chanthamany is the quiet guy in the group, but is the go-to-guy if they need anything.

“If we ever have downtime, you catch him taking naps or cooling off in the shade,” said Lefever, who hails from Buffalo, N.Y. “If you ever need anything, he’s right there. You can always count on Chan. We’re a pretty tight team, though. I can count on any of these guys to be there for me.”

Though Lefever has been working with the team for only four months, he said they welcomed him into the group with open arms.

“I was really nervous being the new guy, but they took me in and started teaching me,” Lefever said. “While we’re out here it’s easy to be inseparable, but even back at Lejeune, [N.C.], the group was tight. Frye and Cook; those guys are inseparable. If you needed to find one you’d find the other one too. Working with these guys is great though. I’ve learned so many things from them. Frye is so focused; he helps you get through the day. He’s always singing or something to make the day go by.”

“All the time and experience I’m gaining while I’m in the Marine Corps counts towards hours for my apprenticeship and contractor’s license,” Frye said. “My uncle wants me to take over the business and Cook is going to come with me.”

Cook, who hails from St. Louis, said when he joined the Marine Corps he wanted to be a heavy equipment



Lance Cpl. Jason Cook cuts a two-by-six to the correct length as Pfc. Kyle Lefever helps hold the board.

members, they are also responsible for teaching other combat engineers how to use the Marine Corps’ newest minesweeper.

“Feola isn’t here because he had to give a class on how to use the new minesweeper,” Cook said. “Normally, with the full team, we can put up one whole SWA hut in a day-and-a-half. You can look back and see the progress; that’s the best part of the job.”

Frye said his start in construction began when he was old enough to swing a hammer. “I started building tree houses in backyards and now look — I’m in Iraq building SWA huts.”

The engineers hope to achieve goals that will broaden their Marine Corps career experiences and eventually help them when they return to the civilian sector.

“I’m using the time out here to learn as much about construction as I can to take with me back to South Carolina,” said Frye. “I want to build as much as I can, learn about leading Marines and taking care of the guys who work under me and teach them about leading and the responsibilities of being a [noncommissioned officer].”



Pfc. Kyle Lefever carries two-by-sixes from where they were dropped off to stack them closer to the job site.

operator, but is glad he became a “jack-of-all-trades.”

Combat engineers are demolition experts, as well as the primary builders of the Marine Corps. When attached to infantry units, combat engineers are used for breaching concrete walls, buildings, minefields and wire obstacles, using things such as C-4 explosives for metal, bangalore torpedoes for wire obstacles and line charges for breaching mine fields, which blow enough clearing for an M1A1 Abrams tank.

“These guys know their [Military Occupational Specialty],” Lefever said. “They can tell you anything you want to know about the MOS, and if they didn’t know, they will find the answer.”

Though the team has been busy building SWA huts and office spaces for service



Lance Cpl. Brad Feola marks the correct measurement on a stud.

Coalition Corner

... highlighting countries serving with MNF-Iraq



Australia

local name: Australia

The Commonwealth of Australia is located in Oceania between the Indian and South Pacific Oceans. Size-wise, Australia, which consists of a large island and several smaller islands, is slightly smaller than the U.S. contiguous 48 states.

Australia is the world’s smallest continent and geologically, one of the oldest. Yet, it is the sixth largest country with only about 20 million people living on this continent. Known as the “outback,” a vast central portion of the continent is desert, therefore the majority of the population lives along the eastern and southeastern coasts where the climate is either temperate or tropical. English is Australia’s official language, but there are native languages spoken throughout the country. The country’s currency is the Australian Dollar.

In its vastness, Australia features many beautiful beaches and majestic mountains encasing exotic wildlife in historic rainforests. Sidney, one of the country’s many gorgeous cities, is home to Bondi Beach, one of Australia’s best beaches, and Sydney Harbour, which is considered one of the world’s most beautiful. This city is also home to its signature landmark, the Sydney Opera House, which opened in 1973 and has become the most frequented performing arts center in the world. Australia also has the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves, which include the most extensive areas of subtropical rainforest in the world that represent major stages of the earth’s evolutionary history.

In addition to spectacular sites, Australia is home to several famous people. Mel Gibson, who wrote, produced and directed “The Passion of the Christ,” was born to an Australian mother and spent most of his early life in Australia. Bombshell actress Nicole Kidman, who starred in Moulin Rouge and was once married to Tom Cruise, also grew up in Australia.

Although not a person, the Tasmanian Devil, the marsupial made famous by Looney Tunes cartoons, is also an Australian and is found only on the island of Tasmania.

When asked what he misses most about his country, Australian Navy Lt. Campbell Spencer said,

“[Australian] football season just started, and I’m going to miss it! It’s a really big deal there ... like football or baseball is in the U.S. I’ll miss all the football parties and barbeques, too!”

Australia — yet another piece of the Multi-National Force - Iraq puzzle, dedicated to rebuilding Iraq.

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Coalition Corner is compiled by Sgt. Misha King, assistant editor, scimitar@iraq.centcom.mil.



Iraqi children get a 'kick' out of Operation Soccer Drop

Story and photos by
Capt. Sonise Lumbaca
 1st Corps Support Command
 Public Affairs

LOGISTICS SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, BALAD, Iraq — What is routinely conducted by civil military operation detachments and ground troops has expanded to the airways, courtesy of the 18th Aviation Brigade here.

Members of the brigade now participate in "Operation Soccer Drop," a program where pilots drop soccer balls from their helicopters onto Iraqi soccer fields and areas populated by Iraqi children.

Started by units in the first year of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Iraqi children continue to "get a kick out of it" thanks to the generosity and support from Americans back in the states.

"Ground units, such as the Civil Affairs, began a distribution program which coincided with Operation Iraqi Children," said Col. Mason Thornal, commander of the 18th Aviation Bde.

Operation Iraqi Children, founded by actor Gary Sinise and author Laura Hillenbrand, primarily involves distributing school supplies to children and schools of Iraq, said Joseph Naqvi, engineer and civilian representative for OIC, U.S. Air Force Center for

Environment Excellence.

"In addition to school supplies, OIC helps distribute blankets, tents, and tarps in other humanitarian missions. We also distribute children's clothing to help assist the children during winter times," Naqvi said.

When the 18th Avn. Bde. receives OIC items, Naqvi advises the unit where to send them. Units have since expanded on this distribution by adding their own twist, like adding soccer balls to the distribution list and dropping them out of helicopters.

"OIF I and II units before us either delivered soccer balls via ground or dropped them from helicopters. We are just continuing to maintain the good relationship the units before us began," Thornal said.

Two of Thornal's family members heard about the operation and thought it was a great idea. As a result, family members purchased 1,000 new soccer balls and mailed them to the aviation brigade.

The donations didn't stop there. Other family members were told about the good things the unit was doing here, told others about it and soon Thornal's classmates were involved in supporting the operation.

"My classmates actually put ads in the newspaper about the drop and the next thing you know, I was receiving e-mails from classmates I hadn't heard from since high school," Thornal said. Since then, the soccer balls have been "rolling in."

"We have been dropping soccer balls every day since February, which is when we got here," said Maj. Brian Pierce, aviator and commander of



Capt. Michelle Iopa, secretary general staff, and Sgt. Adriana Santiago, personnel services noncommissioned officer in charge, Headquarters and Headquarters' Company, 18th Aviation Brigade, prep boxes full of soccer balls in the brigade headquarters foyer to distribute to Iraqi children in Operation Soccer Drop.

Company B, 1st Battalion, 126th Aviation Regiment. "We also drop candy bombs, which are sandwich-size plastic bags full of candy that are sometimes attached to [little dolls]."

For the pilots and crew chiefs, mission always comes first, and they never sacrifice the safety of the aircraft and personnel during the drops. They always look at the threat and only make drops on their way to and from missions.

"If on our way one of our crew chiefs spots a group of kids while we are scanning for other things, he cues us with 'targets on the left,' or 'targets on the right,' we will drop the goodies where the kids are," Pierce said.

The candy bombs are big enough so there is enough to share among the kids, but small enough so when they are dropped they don't hurt anyone, Pierce said. "It is our way of reaching out and touching the children since we aren't on the ground like the ground com-

manders."

Pierce's company and others like it in the brigade not only receive candy and toys from OIC, but also from schools and churches back in the states. When they arrive, members of his unit assemble the candy bombs and distribute them along with the soccer balls.

In the past, when the children heard [the helicopters] coming, they would run and hide because they were afraid, Thornal said. "Now, when they hear us coming, they'll come running from every direction to wave at us."

Throughout a brigade, on shelves, piled in corners and on desks, are soccer balls, boxes of candies and Beanie babies; evidence of just how dedicated the unit is in supporting this operation and winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people.

"It is an outstanding program," Pierce said. "It fosters good relations — at a minimum — with Americans and the Iraqi children."



Courtesy Photo

Spc. Dennis L. Virts, crew chief, Company B, 1st Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment, 18th Aviation Brigade, prepares to drop a soccer ball out of a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter over a field full of Iraqi children. Right, Iraqi children on an open field chase after the soccer balls and "candy bombs" dropped from a Black Hawk.

