

Training for disasters, Page 10

Iraqis begin rebuilding healthcare

By Staff Sgt. Brett B. McMillan
Scimitar Editor

INTERNATIONAL ZONE, BAGHDAD, Iraq — On a dusty plot of land beside a bombed-out building here, Iraqi and U.S. officials gathered for a “brick-laying” ceremony March 3, formally beginning construction for what is expected to become Iraq’s premiere healthcare training facility.

The facility, called the Iraqi Academy of Health Sciences, is expected to train personnel to staff approximately 150 healthcare centers being established throughout the country.

Comparable to a traditional ground-breaking ceremony familiar to most Americans, but instead of scooping up a shovel full of dirt and tossing it, in this ceremony Iraq’s Acting Minister of Health and Minister of Communication Mohammad Ali Alhakim and the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, John D. Negroponte, cemented together a couple of bricks with freshly mixed mortar following short speeches by both.

See *HEALTHCARE*, Page 5

Officials give update on rebuilding Iraq

By Sgt. 1st Class Doug Sample
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — Terrorist attacks have hampered the reconstruction process in Iraq, but officials there said March 4 that work to rebuild the country continues.

“My sense is right now we are able to construct and work in many areas of the country,” said Charles Hess, director of the Iraq Project and Contracting Office, during a videoconference from Baghdad with the Pentagon press corps.

“I won’t say everything is improving, but clearly it seems like we have, in fact, the ability to do a lot of work in multiple areas that we didn’t necessarily have that opportunity before,” Hess said. “Not to say that the insurgency is gone, but clearly, by the fact that we have many projects in many areas, we’ve just been able to continue on,” he said.

In their first briefing on reconstruction since January, officials in Baghdad reported that about 2,000 construction projects have been started in Iraq, and that 582 have been finished thus far, including a new health academy that opened March 3 and a new electrical plant.

See *RECONSTRUCTION*, Page 5

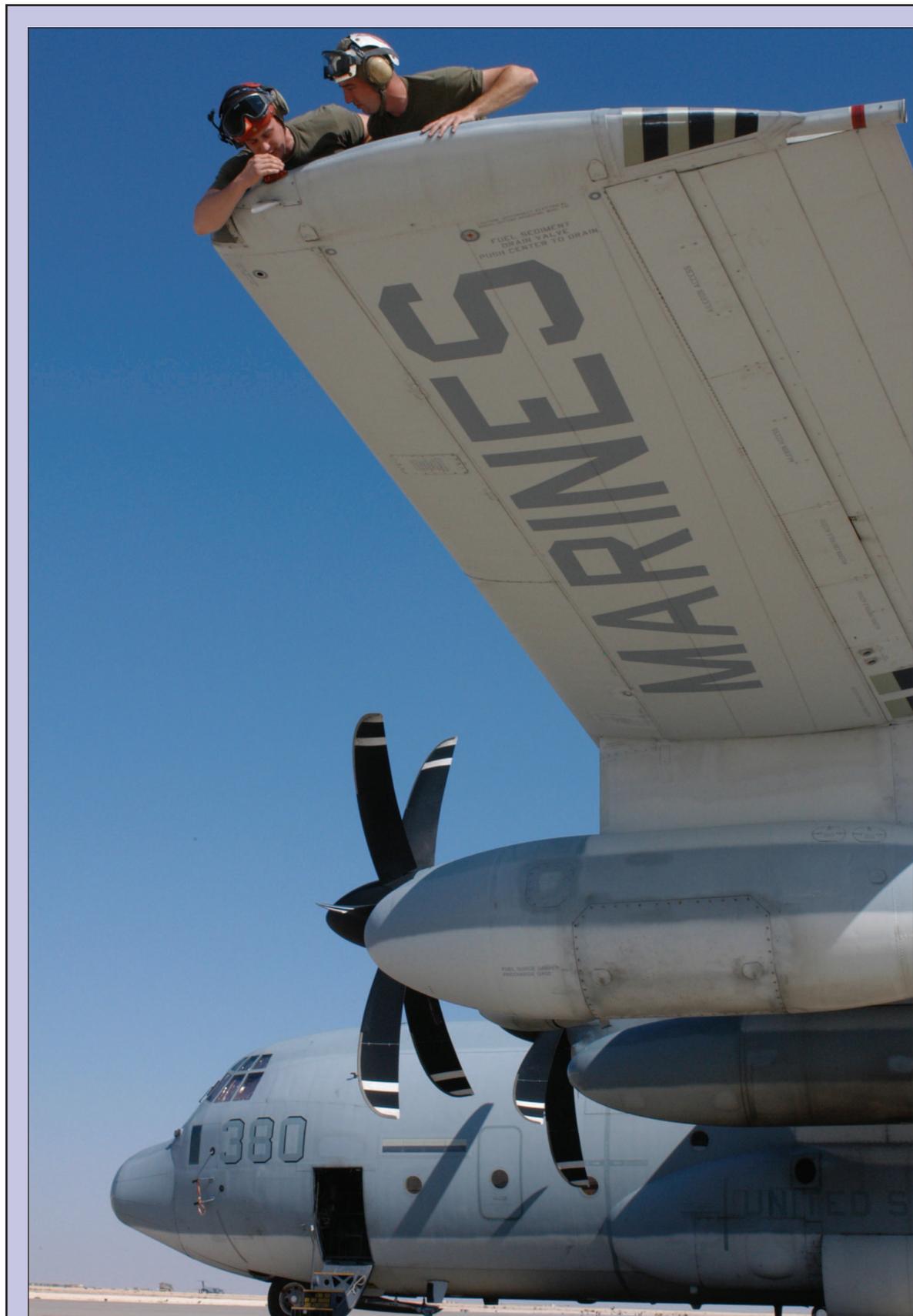


Photo by: Cpl. Rocco DeFilippis

Hang on ...

Cpl. Aaron M. Whyde, VMGR-252 electrician (right,) and Cpl. Adam L. Brunner, VMGR-252 ordnance troubleshoot the lighting on the wing of one of the squadron’s KC-130Js. This deployment marks the first time the “J” has operated in a combat zone. See Page 8.

Inside

MNC-I plans to evaluate, improve vehicle safety record Page 4

Service members, families give shoes to Iraqi children Page 9

AF general commends Airmen at Wingmen Gathering Page 15

Wolfowitz: Iraq, Afghanistan show U.S. determination

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — The results of America's dedication can be seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz told the Senate Budget Committee March 1.

Those who doubted that Muslim countries could embrace democracy have been proven wrong in those countries. Wolfowitz, Marine Gen. Peter Pace, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Tina Jonas, the defense comptroller, testified before the panel.

"In the terror war which [Osama] bin Laden associate Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is waging against democracy in Iraq, al Qaeda is losing badly," Wolfowitz said. "In just the last three years, in regions some people previously judged immune to the democratic spirit, there's been an extraordinary movement

toward representative government, what President Bush has rightly called the ultimate weapon against the terrorists' bleak vision of death and despair."

American service members have helped more than 50 million people realize their dreams of democracy, and that example is being felt around the world, Wolfowitz noted. Elections in Palestine, a revolt against rigged elections in Ukraine and the Lebanese people standing up to Syria are just the latest examples of the spread of freedom and democracy, he said.

Fighting this war, though, is expensive. And the U.S. military role in the battle "is unquestionably the most expensive. It's expensive in terms of the resources that it demands of the American taxpayer, and it's expensive particularly in terms of the sacrifices that it demands of our men and women in uniform, including those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom and security," Wolfowitz said. "This defense budget is first

and foremost about them, about their future, and about ours as Americans."

Wolfowitz said the senators must look at the fiscal 2006 defense budget request in context with what is going on around the world and how far the war on terror has progressed. "Combined with the supplemental [funding request], this request provides sufficient funding to sustain the president's pledges to defeat global terrorism, to restructure America's armed forces and global defense posture, to develop and field advanced warfighting capabilities and most of all to provide for the personnel needs of our forces," he said.

The Bush administration's fiscal 2006 request is pegged at \$419 billion, and it walks a fine line between fighting the war on terror and allowing the U.S. military to continue to transform and face the threats of the future, Wolfowitz told the Senate panel. "It provides for our most valuable asset, our people, by maintaining the president's commitment to take care of our military men and women and

their families," the deputy secretary said. "It includes a 3.1 percent increase in military base pay, it includes an increase in funding to ensure continuing good health care, and it will fund by fiscal 2009 the elimination of all inadequate housing units worldwide."

The deputy said the American "investments" to fight the global war on terror are already beginning to pay off. But that early return should not make Americans complacent, he said, as the war will last many years. "This problem of terrorism grew up over a period of 20 or 30 years, if not longer," he said. "It's not going to go away in two or three [years]."

The United States fought the Cold War for 40 years. "We may recall how long we waged the Cold War and how long it took to rebuild Western Europe, but in both cases we know how the story ended," he said. "We know that seemingly impossible challenges can be achieved when the American people and their allies are resolved to stand firm for freedom."

Gen Abizaid: 2005 'can be a decisive year' against extremism

By Gerry J. Gilmore
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — This year will likely be a momentous one for U.S. and coalition efforts in confronting extremism in the Middle East region, a senior U.S. officer told the House Armed Services Committee March 2.

American forces deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq the past few years "have not only been protecting the United States from attack," Army Gen. John P. Abizaid said to committee members, but "has also done much to help the [Middle East] region move forward in the direction of moderation."

Abizaid said he was "optimistic" about the situation across the Middle East, including future developments in Afghanistan and Iraq. As head of U.S. Central Command, he oversees U.S. troop operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"I think 2005 can be a decisive year," Abizaid said, in the fight against extremism in the Middle East. He pointed to recent events in Lebanon, where its citizens have called for the ouster of Syrian troops and intelligence agents from the country.

There's also renewed momentum in efforts

to make peace between Palestinians and Israelis, Abizaid noted, as well as an opportunity "to establish greater stability in Afghanistan and Iraq."

This year should also provide Iraqi and Afghan forces an opportunity "to take more and more of the responsibility of fighting the insurgencies" within their countries, he said.

And the Pakistani and Saudi governments, Abizaid observed, can benefit from more U.S. and coalition assistance to help them confront extremists operating inside their borders.

However, the general cautioned committee members that extremist elements operating out of Iran and Syria could foment "more violence" across the Middle East.

"The extremist enemy that we face throughout the region will not surrender," Abizaid said, noting the extremists "won't move away, they'll continue their attacks."

By voting in nationwide elections held in their countries, the Afghan and Iraqi people have chosen to reject extremism and participate in a democratic process, Abizaid observed.

"This battle between moderation and extremism in the region is one that the people of the region have chosen to fight, and they can't win it without our help," he concluded.



Photo by 1st Lt. Ron Alombro.

Soul Train

Iraqi schoolgirls patiently wait in line for shoes on Feb. 18. Airmen from 332 ESFS distributed 1,100 pairs of children and adult shoes to three villages near Balad AB, Iraq, during Operation Sole Train.

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PERSPECTIVES

Military life inspires comic strips

By Staff Sgt. Brett B. McMillan
Scimitar Editor

I've never been a huge cartoon, funny papers or comic book fan, but a humorous comic strip I can relate to always makes me smile, and sometimes even chuckle.

Comic books' first steps were taken in the beginning of the 20th century "in search of new ways of graphic and visual communication and expression," according to "Some History (so far...)" a geocities.com Web site.

Often, comic books or comic strip's origin is associated with Egyptian hieroglyphics and prehistoric drawings on cave walls. They were visual narratives of juxtaposed images. Words were not required, but with the adoption of symbols, then letters, they were soon included, providing more information and improving the narrative flow.

The site credits Richard Fenton (R.F.) Outcault with the first comic book, with his creation of "The Yellow Kid" in 1896. He took what had been made before him and introduced the "balloon," a space where he wrote what the characters said.

According to Richard D. Olson, Ph.D., the Yellow Kid "was the first successful comic strip character to achieve a popularity so great that he not only increased the sales of newspapers carrying him, but he was also the first to demonstrate that a comic strip character could be merchandised profitably. In fact, for these two reasons, the Yellow Kid and his creator, R.F. Outcault, are generally credited with permanently establishing the comic strip and making it a part of American society."

In their early years, comic strips were essentially comical, which explains the name they carry in the English language. But comics evolved to feature action heroes, some based on artists' life experiences and others purely from imagination. From 1940 to 1945, some 400 super heroes were created, mostly based on "Superman," but only a few survived, among them Batman and Captain Marvel.

World War II inspired a lot of comic characters; many of them joined the battle and became ideological weapons to increase morale among service members. Captain America even battled Adolf Hitler himself.

Beetle Bailey debuted as a college cutup in 1950 in a mere 50 newspapers. With America's entry into the Korean conflict, cartoonist Mort Walker's star character accidentally enlisted in the Army, and the rest is comic-strip history. "Beetle Bailey" went on to become the third most widely distributed comic strip of all time, running in more than

1,800 newspapers around the world today.

For the past 10 years, "Pvt. Murphy" has been in the ranks of military cartoons familiar to many service members. It's creator, Mark Baker, is a full-time Soldier. "Pvt. Murphy" appears weekly in the Army Times and Sierra Vista Herald newspapers. Baker also supplies the Army Public Affairs Office with cartoons that are distributed to Army publications around the world.

Operation Iraq Freedom has also inspired comic strips created by service members in this theater. Above and beyond that, "Doodles" creator Gary (G.B.) Trudeau has used his strip showing deployed service members talking about the war to make his thought-provoking comments on the war.

Last year his longtime character BD, a college football coach, became a wounded Reserve Soldier in Iraq. The strip depicted BD getting wounded, being medevaced to a military hospital and then on to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, in Washington.

Trudeau spent days at Walter Reed getting to know amputees and their trials and how they dealt with them. He generously permitted the hospital's weekly Stripe newspaper to publish the comic strip and for the most part, the recuperating troops said the strip mirrored their experience.

Indeed comic strips are a way of visually and graphically communicating ideas and expressing opinions, from hard cold news to humorous events. They are so much a part of our culture today most people probably have a few favorites, and it's even common for a person to feel connected to a particular character.

In frustration or adoration many of us may have been called a particular character, or we've called someone else a character. Drill sergeants used cartoon characters at times to poke at recruits in basic training and when I arrived at my first duty station, Fort Bragg, N.C., I fondly recall my roommate and I being called Beavis and Butthead. This was all in good humor, and I'm sure it was because we were such great new Soldiers in the unit. Fortunately the names didn't stick with us for too long.

In Iraq the comic strips we have been printing in the Scimitar are usually based on situations service members deployed here may experience, from the fright of a rocket attack, to the shock and embarrassment of an M-16 negligent discharge in a clearing barrel, the mundane meals served in the dining facility or downright annoying circumstances of mud clinging mercilessly to our boots. They put a humorous spin on these situations and make us laugh about them — and maybe learn from some of them.



Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Shane T. McCoy

'Devil Dog' and his dog

A U.S. Marine rewards his explosive-sniffing dog, assigned to 1st Marine Division, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, for a good job searching vehicles and their occupants at a Ramadi checkpoint. Marines, often referred to as Devil Dogs, and Sailors conducted Operation River Blitz Feb. 20 to March 5 to limit the movement of insurgents by use of checkpoints in vital entry points to the city.

Scimitar Pulse

Which cartoon character are you most like? Why?

"I guess Johnny Quest because I'm always looking for something to do, and I am always on the borderline of getting into trouble."



Army Capt. Stewart Orr
Joint Psychological Operations
Task Force



"Jessica Rabbit because I'm sexy and sophisticated."

Army 1st Lt. Zoraida Wheelock
Joint Area Support Group -
Central

"The project manager in the Scimitar newspaper (a Maj. James Crabtree cartoon character), because I am just like him."



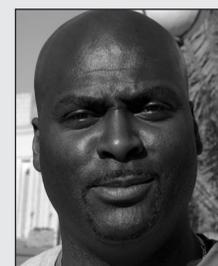
British Army Maj. Colin Code
Multi-National Forces - Iraq



"Wonder Woman because I can make it through any situation."

Airman 1st Class Kayla Simon
Multi-National Forces - Iraq

"The Brown Hornet. He was big, bad and he took care of his people."



Tony Glass
American Science and Engineers



"The coyote because I always have a plan. My plan might not always work, but I always have one."

Kerry Bell
Blackwater

"Mickey Mouse because he represents good."



Air Force Maj. Dona Spaccarotella
Multi-National Forces - Iraq

Coalition gears up to reinforce safety

By Spc. Mary Rose
MNC-I Public Affairs Office

CAMP VICTORY, BAGHDAD, Iraq — Units falling under Multi-National Corps - Iraq has been directed to conduct a safety stand-down within 30 days of their transfer of authority.

This will enable units to evaluate their tactics, techniques and procedures so they can become safer on the roads and be able to reduce or prevent accidents, according to the Multi-National Forces - Iraq safety policy.

The safety policy also states the stand-down campaign will ensure every Soldier assigned or attached to a unit will be trained on how to react during vehicle rollovers and convoy operations. The training will emphasize the need to wear seat belts, pre-mission planning, vehicle readiness, vehicle speed and communication within the vehicle.

In fiscal year 2004, Coalition forces lost 107 troops to military-vehicle related accidents in Iraq. Since the start of the 2005 fiscal year in October 2004, the Coalition has lost 48 troops to vehicle accidents, according to MNC-I safety reports.

The increase in accidents is attributed to the sheer number of Soldiers in the country and increased traffic they create, according to David R. Martin, MNC-I safety manager.

With each rotation coming into the country, there have been increases in vehicle accidents. "With [the current rotation], there is an even greater increase," Martin said. That has contributed to having a greater number of troops and accidents in theater than before.

"The main cause of our accidents is speed and driving too fast for the road conditions. The leading factor in fatalities is

people not using seat belts," Martin said.

The Multi-National Force - Iraq safety policy requires every occupant in a vehicle sitting in a seat to be wearing a seat belt. "We found that they are not wearing them," Martin said.

"I think that when new Soldiers come in and we do the left-seat and right-seat transition, sometimes they may not be as familiar with the terrain," Martin said.

There is anxiety that goes along with being in a combat environment and trying to expect the unexpected, he said. "The tendency is that they drive a little faster. I don't know why we're having so much trouble with the seat belts."

Martin referred to a recent incident when a Soldier was the only one in a vehicle and it collided with another military vehicle. He

was ejected from the vehicle because he wasn't wearing his seat belt. He died of neck and head injuries.

"If a Soldier is wearing a seat belt, he is much more likely to stay conscious and be able to get himself out of the vehicle, versus flying around in a vehicle and having the chance of being knocked unconscious," Martin said.

He also stated that many accidents have been attributed to up-armored vehicles.

"Back home, we're not accustomed to driving a vehicle that

weighs so much. The increased weight of the up-armored vehicle makes it handle differently," Martin said.

"The roads are not designed for the size of our vehicles. While driving down these little narrow canal roads, drivers pull over to the edge to let other vehicles get by. When they pull over, the road breaks away, and the vehicle rolls down into the canal."

"We need the up-armored Humvee. Having the up-armor on the vehicle saves lives; there is no question about that," Martin added.

There is a period of time when Soldiers become more comfortable with the vehicle, Martin said. There is a period of "about 90-120 days" where situational awareness needs to be high at all times. "The risk factor goes

"The main cause of our accidents is speed and driving too fast for the road conditions. The leading factor in fatalities is people not using seat belts."

David R. Martin, MNC-I safety manager

up during this period."

Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis E. Carey, MNC-I sergeant major, said, "Safety and risk assessment are every Soldier's business. We have lost too many Soldiers to preventable accidents. This must cease."

"We're asking units to look at the speed their vehicles are traveling, encourage their Soldiers to slow down and drive based on the road conditions in a combat situation," Martin said.

MPs catch AAFES thieves red-handed

By Spc. Leah R. Burton
28th Public Affairs Detachment

LOGISTICS SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, BALAD, Iraq — Over the past month, the military police here have responded to 54 larcenies, including burglaries, theft of government and private property, postal theft and shoplifting.

"Larceny is probably the majority of our cases," said Spc. Daniel Krupka, 939th Military Police Detachment (Law and Order).

Two of the most recent incidents involved third country nationals who were caught with unauthorized items from alcohol to digital cameras to military-issued equipment.

"We got a tip that the [Army and Air Force Exchange Service] employees had alcohol in their possession, so we went over there and found all kinds of stuff," said Investigator Shane Stephens, 939th MP Det.

The suspects were adamant that Soldiers gave them the items, but much of it had clearly been stolen, Stephens said.

One suspect was in possession of 11 brand new military issue knives worth \$144 each. Others had expensive digital cameras, SAPI plates, rucksacks, load bearing equipment, desert camouflage uniforms and more.

If Soldiers had given the items to the suspects, then troops need to be mindful that there are certain items that TCNs are not authorized to possess.

Furthermore, service members should

never dispose of any uniform articles by throwing them away; they should always be burned for disposal. It's only too easy for these items to fall into the wrong hands and be used against Coalition Forces.

In the second incident, two men were caught by AAFES loss prevention attempting to steal two packages of underwear. When they were questioned, loss prevention personnel found an additional four packages, said Capt. Gary Blagburn, 939th MP Det. operations officer.

"We take an aggressive approach to stopping shoplifting by using in-store exchange detective teams, electronic surveillance systems, electronic article surveillance and other methods. It is a misdemeanor or felony, depending on the value of the stolen merchandise," said Amanda R. Bittle, AAFES area loss prevention manager.

"It involves more than just the physical act of concealing or taking possession of goods or merchandise, altering a price tag or other price marking, or transferring the goods from one container to another. It also involves the intent to convert the goods or merchandise to the shoplifter's own or another's use without paying the full purchase price."

In both cases, the individuals were fired by their companies and flown out of theater.

"Usually, when they're caught, they're back home in one to two days," Blagburn said.

Other incidents include a unit that had some government property stolen. They posted signs that they needed the items returned and provided an amnesty box. The

items were recovered.

Much of the theft of personal and government property is caused by simple Soldier negligence, such as troops failing to secure their belongings. To date, the MPs have recovered items such as M-16s, AT4s, M-9s, grenades and vehicles.

Service members go to public areas like the fitness center, leave their bags unattended and return to find them missing. Or they leave their trailer to go to the latrine, leaving their door unlocked and come back to find their television missing.

"Just keep your stuff secured. Know your roommate, and know who's been in your room," Blagburn said.

While the TCNs are liable to lose their livelihood as a result of a larceny charge, service members have much more at stake.

Several articles of the Uniform Code of Military Justice could be violated including:

- **Article 108, sale, loss, damage destruction or wrongful disposition of military property**
- **Article 121, larceny and wrongful appropriation**
- **Article 122, robbery**
- **Article 129, burglary**
- **Article 134, knowingly receiving, buying or concealing stolen property, with the maximum punishments of dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all pay and allowances and confinement for anywhere from two to 15 years.**

Blagburn said individuals are encouraged to think about the consequences before setting their sights on someone else's property.

Operation River Blitz security measures continue in Al Anbar

CAMP BLUE DIAMOND, Iraq — Enhanced security measures will continue in Al Anbar province to maintain the level of security reached during Operation River Blitz.

"We want to maintain the momentum, and build on the success of Operation River Blitz," said Maj. Gen. Richard F. Natonski, Commanding General of the 1st Marine Division of the I Marine Expeditionary Force. "Our forces, in conjunction with Iraqi Security Forces, will maintain enhanced operations to continue to keep the pressure turned-up on the insurgency."

During the operation, Iraqi Security and Coalition Forces detained more than 400 suspected terrorists and seized numerous weapons caches throughout Al Anbar Province. The number of terrorist attacks dropped significantly during the operation.

Operation River Blitz began Feb. 20 at the request of the Iraqi government to ensure a peaceful transition of power between the interim Iraqi government and the Iraqi transitional government. The combined operation was designed to enhance security in the province by increasing the Iraq Security and Coalition Force presence in the population centers along the Euphrates River. The operation concluded March 5.

A curfew was set, and access control points on routes leading into the provincial capital of Ar Ramadi were established during the operation, which proved to be very effective in preventing weapons and terrorists from entering the city.

Healthcare

from Page 1

Addressing officials and guests at the ceremony, including Iraqi and U.S. military and civilian leaders, and reporters from around the world, Negroponte congratulated Iraqi officials "for their inspired leadership" and commended them on their determination to establish the academy, "an institution that will quickly become a reflection of Iraq's commitment to a brighter future."

"Today we witness another sign of the dawning of a democratic Iraq, a country where people are once again free to pursue their interests to speak their minds and claim their place in the community of civilized nations," he said. "The United States is proud to help as you, Iraqis, dedicate yourselves to reviving your academic institutions."

"The Iraqi doctors, nurses and administrators who will teach here and the students who will learn here will make the provision of health care in Iraq more efficient and more responsive and these actions, Iraqis helping Iraqis, Iraqis building the new Iraq, will define success in this country. The construction of



Photo by Master Sgt. Dave Ahlschwede

Iraq's Acting Minister of Health and Minister of Communication Mohammad Ali Alhakim places mortar on a brick base to cement together another brick to complete the brick-laying ceremony March 3.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Brett B. McMillan

What is left of this building bombed nearly two years ago will be leveled and the Academy of Health Sciences built in its place.

this building the establishment of this academy is further evidence that you are doing precisely that. I wish you and the academy every success," Negroponte concluded.

The need for this academy was apparent to Iraqi officials last August after they assessed the country's healthcare system said Alhakim.

He said training and capacity-building for medical doctors and employees is a priority. "The four areas of training that require special emphasis are management, public health, political skills and continuing education. The first task which will be implemented in the next few months by the academy will be to train a staff of 150 of the new healthcare centers which are also being built as part of the health projects funded by the U.S. subcommittee."

The brick-laying ceremony initiates the start of what will become the future school of public health," Alhakim said. "The Academy of health sciences will be the first step in the process that will lead us back to golden days as a nation with a world-class healthcare system. The academy will be the light House that will lead us to the safe harbor. The harbor I speak of is one that we once knew, was filled with highly skilled and motivated health care teams. They orchestrated great care for



Iraq's Acting Minister of Health and Minister of Communication Mohammad Ali Alhakim



Photo by Staff Sgt. Brett B. McMillan

An architectural rendering of the academy in its completed state is displayed at the brick-laying.



U.S. Ambassador John D. Negroponte

the population."

Project manager for construction of the academy Michael Zumstein, from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said the building consists of a single level, fully functional and self-supporting design of approximately 41,000 square feet. The structure is designed to allow for three additional levels to be built later on. This will allow for training during expansion and construction periods.

"The idea is to get this facility up and running as quickly as possible," Zumstein said, noting that the building should be ready for use in October. However, the academy will stand where a building bombed nearly two years ago in Operation Iraqi Freedom is now being demolished and removed.

He said the contractor is local and all work is to be done by Iraqi workers, about 200 will be employed during construction. Basic amenities of the facility includes six classrooms for 15-20 students, four larger classrooms for 30 students, two conference rooms, an IM area, a library to accommodate 25 people, a cafeteria with seating for 75-100 people.

According to officials the basic makeup of the student body is expected to be a 50-50 mixture of male and females. They expect it will take five to 10 years to build up a reputable "Academy of Health Sciences."

Reconstruction

from Page 1

Officials also reported that construction is underway for military bases for the new Iraqi army and Iraqi National Guard.

"They are essentially the type of facilities that would consist of barracks, dining facilities, training compounds, vehicle maintenance areas and things of that nature that you would find on any kind of typical military cantonment associated with infantry-type activities," Hess said.

Renovations to terminal complexes as well as landing and runway lighting systems for the country's three major airports were also mentioned. And work is also being done at smaller airports in Irbil and Sulimaniyah.

All of this construction has meant a significant increase in dispersing the \$18.4 billion Congress allocated for reconstruction projects, Hess noted. About \$5.8 billion has been paid out to date, he said, at a rate of \$80 million to \$100 million per week.

However, with terrorist attacks on Iraqi workers still a problem, Ambassador Bill Taylor, director of the Iraq Reconstruction Management Office, noted that a substantial part of the money spent has had to go toward security for construction projects. He said the some money was used to pay for personal security details for contractors and supervi-

sors, and for such items as armored cars and concertina wire around bases.

"All of that is included in that cost of doing business," Taylor explained. "It's an expensive place to do business, and the security part is in there."

He said the cost of security, in some cases, clearly has exceeded the 5 percent margin that was budgeted; in other cases, he added, it has been less.

Another area that will require more spending will be getting more of the country's electrical power plants up and running, especially as summer approaches. Hess said construction recently finished on a new electrical power station that will add 280

megawatts of electricity, but he noted that may not be enough.

He said one problem in restoring the country's electricity has been that Iraqi engineers have had to focus on getting parts to make necessary repairs on power stations that not operational and had been neglected during Saddam Hussein's regime.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Brett B. McMillan

An Iraqi construction worker pounds away, working on one of about 2,000 construction projects rebuilding the country. As of last week 582 have been finished.

"What the Ministry of Electricity is doing now is actually doing maintenance on many of the plants that have frankly never received the kind of maintenance that has been necessary to maintain them in an operating capacity," he said. "And, unfortunately, to do that maintenance work, you've got to remove those plants from operation, dismantle some of the equipment, refurbish it, and put it back into what we would describe as fully-capable operating status."

Hess emphasized the Iraqis aren't dealing with the problem alone. "We've gone out to try and identify the parts, get the parts, and help the ministry get those plants back in operation so that we

can achieve some short-term gains here in the electrical infrastructure," he said.

Two new plants are about to come on line in Bayji, Hess said, where insurgents killed one person and kidnapped another. He said workers left the site for a while, but later returned and again are making progress.

"It is still a challenge to get this work done,"

Hess said. Terrorist attacks do not make the task any easier. Taylor pointed out that attacks on transmission lines and oil pipelines have affected the oil flow into electricity-generating plants. "And when those get attacked, that reduces the flow of oil into the electricity, and that reduces the amount available," he said.

Army Brig. Gen. Thomas Bostick, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region Division, said Iraq has seen an increased demand for electricity since the country was liberated. "There's a good-news story here," he told reporters. The general said prewar demand for electricity, about 5,000 megawatts, has increased 60 percent to about 8,000 megawatts. "That's because the Iraqi people are able to buy televisions and computers and air conditioners and heaters — things that they couldn't do until democracy and freedom opened up in this country," he explained.

Hess pointed out that he is encouraged by all the reconstruction work that is being done. But, he added, he worries the insurgents will "regroup and then try and figure out other ways to get at the heart of the infrastructure and get at the heart of the democratic process that the Iraqis are trying to institute."

Even so, he said, the mission of rebuilding Iraq will continue. "There are many challenges that remain out there, but the Iraqi people, working with the coalition forces, the great civilians, are doing a wonderful job moving this mission forward," he said.

NEWS BRIEFS

New program offers subsidized child care to Guard, Reserve

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department has joined forces with national agencies to help Guard and Reserve families in finding and affording child care while Mom or Dad is deployed in support of the Global War on Terrorism.

DoD, in partnership with the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, which administers the program, designed this initiative to benefit those who do not live near military installations.

When a parent is deployed, the remaining parent may discover that child care is something the couple hadn't had to think of before, and the extra expense can be shocking.

OMCC doesn't fully subsidize child care. The fees are based on a sliding scale that takes into consideration total family income and the care provider's actual cost, among other things.

To take part in the program, a family member would apply online at www.naccrra.org/MilitaryPrograms or by a toll-free call to (800) 424-2246. The child care provider also must apply because the subsidy, which comes through the Children and Youth office, is paid to the program, not the family.

NACCRRRA also supports the Guard and Reserve through a program called Operation Child Care. OCC is a voluntary NACCRRRA program that provides up to six hours of free child care to Guard and Reserve families whose deployed service member is returning home for rest and recuperation.

Army Secretary Vows to Resolve Soldier Pay Problems

WASHINGTON — The Army's senior civilian vowed to push efforts to resolve Soldiers' pay issues during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing March 3.

Responding to one senator's concern about a constituent who'd been wrongfully docked for travel and other expenses after he'd lost an arm during military duty in Iraq, Secretary of the Army Francis J. Harvey noted, "it's disturbing that these things happen, and they shouldn't happen."

The goal and intent during distribution of any Soldier's pay, Harvey said, "is perfection," noting he "didn't want to see any wounded Soldier have any problems with pay."

Harvey said the Army has expanded its telephone assistance hotlines to help Soldiers resolve pay problems. He cited recent statistics that say 75 percent of Soldier pay issues are resolved in one day.

"Our objective is 90 percent the first day," Harvey said, noting the end state goal is "zero" pay problems.

Harvey also said he'd support an initiative that would allow wounded Guard and Reserve members to keep their combat pay while they're hospitalized.

Harvey emphasized that the Army was "taking actions" to fix any Soldier pay problems. "We're going to take care of this," the secretary said.

Free sports magazine subscription offer

FirstSwing and The Sporting News have teamed up to provide fully-paid, one-year subscriptions of The Sporting News to the first 50,000 service members who register. To register, you need only send your name and full home address information to firstswing36@hotmail.com. The magazine will begin coming to you in about six to eight weeks. Commanders may submit the name of their organization, in place of an individual's name, so that their unit may receive the magazine.

Army donates ambulances to Iraqi hospital

FORWARD OPERATING BASE DAGGER, Tikrit, Iraq — To help remedy one of the many problems the Iraqis face in rebuilding their nation, Coalition forces donated five ambulances to the Tikrit hospital Feb. 23.

This donation will bring the Iraqis another step forward in their effort to build a stable system of social services, said Capt. Chad Marley, brigade surgeon for 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division. One of the main problems health care and emergency care workers were facing was the lack of transportation for the sick and wounded. This donation will give the Salah Ad Din



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Mike Buytas

Iraqi Army Soldiers conduct Military Operations in Urban Terrain training. The U.S. Army Special Forces are providing an advanced training program to select units of the Iraqi Army.

province a better ambulance-to-person ratio.

"The people here needed ambulances to replace the older ones," Marley said. "We want to get them to a point where they have one ambulance for every 20,000 people."

The province had ambulances before, but they were not up to standard for the amount of work that was required of them, said Thamer Najim Abdulla, an ambulance driver.

"Before, we had ambulances from the old regime," he said. "The ambulances we had were not very fast, making it difficult for us to respond quickly during an emergency. The new ambulances are great. I hope we can get more of them in the future."

Adnan Zidan Khalaf, Chief of the Manager Directorate Office in Tikrit said health care service workers and health ministry officials are very happy to have the new vehicles, as it is the first time they have received any new kind of transportation for emergencies since Saddam Hussein was in power.

Now the emergency services will be more effective due to the acquisition of the ambulances and a Joint Coordination Center for the dispatch of the services, Khalaf said.

"We receive all the calls at one location," Khalaf said. "It is much easier this way, because we can react faster to provide first aid. It was much more difficult to do that with the equipment we had before. If there is an emergency, anyone can call for help at the provincial Joint Coordination Center."

Co-op program breeds success

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The Iraqi Army, Ministry of Defense, and the Multi-National Security Transition Command - Iraq are enjoying the success of a co-op program for supply and logistics.

The program began in early February and is already producing results, including the impending creation of several Iraqi Army facilities that will be used to coordinate equipment, procurement, maintenance, storage and accounting for Iraqi forces.

A large distribution center is set to open in north-central Iraq within the next two months, for example.

"MNSTC-I was initially making all the logistical decisions," says U.S. Army Lt. Col. George Crowell, the Iraqi Ministry of Defense liaison for logistics for MNSTC-I's J-4 supply directorate. "Embedding Iraqi officers allowed us to find out their capabilities and knowledge. We are teaching each other and sharing information. We are learning things that are unique to Iraq that can't be taught without these officers and their skills."

There are currently eight Iraqi officers working in the co-op program — two general officers overseeing the program, and six

experienced logistics, engineering, or maintenance officers embedded at the MNSTC-I Phoenix Base with Coalition Forces.

"Before sovereignty in Iraq, we worked only as advisers [for logistics for the Iraqi Army] — now we work as equals," said an Iraqi logistics colonel who works in the co-op at MNSTC-I. "We share information to make one plan."

Another Iraqi engineering officer said, "It is a pleasure to work with the coalition forces."

The officers said they are pleased to find so many similarities in their methods and processes, which they said contributes to the success of the program.

Coalition and Iraqi officers are working together to solve problems, manage facilities and equipment, execute procurement and purchasing best practices, and coordinate maintenance functions for Iraqi Army equipment. These tasks are accomplished with military and civilian personnel working together, much like the U.S. armed services.

Phone line, e-mail help Iraqi citizens report insurgent activity

MOSUL, Iraq — Iraqi Special Police Commandos are tapping technology to give citizens here an avenue for reporting suspected insurgent activity.

A telephone line set up nearly two months ago and a more recently established e-mail address are generating about 35 tips a week, a commando adviser reported. One recent tip, about a Jihad being issued against commandos and U.S. forces, led to the detainment of the person responsible for the edict.

"The process is working and the people of Mosul are getting tired of the terrorists," said U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Chris Paschel, an adviser who works with the commandos.

While most of the tips are coming in through the telephone line, about a dozen have been delivered through e-mail. The success of the elections helped boost the frequency of calls, but the tips started pouring in after commandos started broadcasting confessions of anti-Iraqi forces on a local television station after the elections, Paschel said.

A Web site is also being developed. Using such technology is a new concept, Paschel said.

"At first, they thought the Internet was a hindrance because it was always going up and down," he said. "But once the tips started pouring in, [one of the interrogators] was very happy to have a way for the public to send them in. It's their job here to rid Mosul of terrorist activity."

NEWS BRIEFS

New ISF troops arrive in northern Iraq

MOSUL, Iraq — The number of troops ready to provide security in northern Iraq increased with the arrival of new Iraqi Security Force troops March 2.

About 330 new Iraqi Army troops arrived in Al Kisik training base following the completion of basic training. The number of ISF troops continues to rise with the growing number of Iraqi citizens ready to help keep their country safe and secure from terrorists.

Iraqi Security Forces continue to take the lead in security and are conducting numerous independent operations. ISF have performed many successful operations due to the increase in information being provided by Iraqi citizens about insurgent activity, the increase in their effectiveness, and the increase in their operations.

Iraqis graduate 72 Emergency Response Unit Police

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The Iraqi Police graduated 72 police officers from the Emergency Response Unit course March 3. The officers completed an intensive four-week basic ERU program of instruction with a strong focus on weapons training and handling, defensive tactics and physical fitness. The course includes instruction on human relations and police organizations.

The ERU provides a national level, high-end, rapid response law enforcement tactical unit responsible for high-risk arrest, hostage rescue and explosive ordnance disposal. With three companies currently operational, ERU has conducted a number of successful missions on national level anti-Iraqi force targets, provided support to other Iraqi Ministry of Interior forces, participated in combat operations in Fallujah and ongoing counterinsurgency operations.

The graduating officers will be integrated into the ERU's operational companies. They will join 344 prior ERU graduates who will attend ERU Advanced training in the coming months.

Iraqi Police graduate 292 from advanced training courses

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The Iraqi Police Service graduated 292 police officers from advanced and specialty courses at the Adnan Training Facility, March 3, as part of the Iraqi government's ongoing effort to train its security forces.

The courses consist of Kidnapping Investigations with 27 graduates, Basic Criminal Investigations with 63 graduates, Interview & Interrogations with 41 graduates, Organized Crime Investigations with 58 graduates, Incident Command System with 32 graduates, Internal Controls with 44 graduates, and Executive Leadership with 27 graduates.

Officers who participated in these courses previously completed either an eight-week basic training course for new recruits or a three-week 'transitional integration program' course designed for prior-service officers.

The police officers report back for continued duty at their respective stations immediately.

Iraqi Police graduate 27 SWAT officers

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The Iraqi Police graduated 27 officers from the Special Weapons and Tactics training course March 3. The officers completed a specialized four-week training curriculum that places a heavy emphasis on weapons training and includes training in dynamic entries, mechanical breaching, diversionary devices, sniper training, intelligence and surveillance, offensive driving skills and human relations and police conduct.

The provincial SWAT teams provide a provincial-level, high end, rapid response, tactical unit responsible for high-risk arrest and hostage rescue. They provide special weapons and tactics capability to the provincial or city police commander. To date, 156 officers have previously completed the course and are operating as SWAT teams in various areas throughout Iraq.

Security Forces find two caches

MOSUL, Iraq — Iraqi Security Forces and Multi-National Forces discovered two weapons and munitions caches during operations in northern Iraq March 1.

Troops from the 107th Iraqi Army discovered a large weapons cache during a cordon and search operation south of Al Had. The cache included 170 mortar rounds, hundreds of rocket propelled grenades, and hundreds of rounds of ammunition. The weapons and ammunition were confiscated for future destruction.

Multi-National Force Soldiers discovered a large cache that consisted of over 2,000 rounds of various ammunition during a cordon and search operation west of Mosul. The ammunition was confiscated for future destruction.

ISF and MNF continue operations to protect the rights of Iraqi citizens to live free of fear and intimidation from terrorists. The success of those operations has increased due to the information provided by Iraqi citizens helping Security Forces capture insurgents and seize weapons.

Task Force Baghdad Soldiers detain possible insurgents

BAGHDAD, Iraq — U.S. Soldiers were able to detain four possible insurgents March 4. Around 10:30 a.m., a patrol in western Baghdad was questioning two local nationals after finding one with an AK-47, when an improvised explosive device detonated. One Soldier was wounded. After detaining the two individuals, local nationals living in the area confirmed they were anti-Iraqi forces. Soldiers later detained two more individuals that have been named in the insurgency.

Task Force Baghdad Soldiers were able to net a large weapons cache earlier in the day. The original find was only one rocket-propelled grenade, two rockets and one 82 mm mortar system. After the unit searched the area with a metal detector, they also found a 120 mm mortar system, two more 82 mm mortar systems, tank rounds, rockets, fuses and other weapons.

Upcoming MWR Events

Laugh Factory (LFOR) (Stand-up comedy act)

March 11: 42nd ID (Tikrit)
 March 12: 1St COSCOM, LSA Anaconda (Balad).
 March 13-15: MND-W (Al Asad, TQ, Fallujah, Ramadi)

Comedian Colin Quinn

March 11: MND-W (Fallujah, Ramadi, Al Taqaddum)
 March 12-13: Camp Victory Complex (Baghdad)
 March 14-15: 1St COSCOM, LSA Adder (Tallil)

Purfect Angelz (Live Dance/Variety Shows with Female Performers)

11 MAR: 1St COSCOM, LSA Anaconda (Balad).
 12-13 MAR: 42nd ID (Tikrit)
 14-15 MAR: TF Freedom (Mosul)

Check with your MWR office for exact times and locations.



AFN Iraq

Al Asad	93.3 FM
Ar Ramadi	107.3 FM
Baghdad	92.3 FM
	and 107.7 FM
Balad	107.3 FM
Camp Taji	102.5 FM
Fallujah	105.1 FM
Kirkuk	107.3 FM
Mosul	105.1 FM
Q-West	93.3 FM
Ridgeway	107.1 FM
Sinjar	107.9 FM
Talil AB	107.3 FM
Tikrit	93.3 FM
Taji	107.7 FM



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

VMGR-252 soars high in Iraqi skies

Story and photos by
Cpl. Rocco DeFilippis
2nd Marine Aircraft Wing

AL ASAD, Iraq — America's military has the reputation of being the most technologically advanced fighting force in the world. The Marine Corps' ability to stay at the forefront of innovations in aircraft, weaponry and fighting vehicles has allowed it to dominate the field of battle.

Keeping with that tradition are the Marines and Sailors of Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 252, who are employing one of the Corps' newest aircraft, the KC-130J, in support of combat operations during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Since the arrival of the main body of VMGR-252 here Feb. 10, the squadron has been conducting air-to-air refueling and assault support missions in support of coalition objectives in the area of operations.

"We have only been operating here for a brief amount of time, but we are meeting our mission requirements," said 1st Lt. Ben Grant, KC-130J co-pilot and Cincinnati native. "The Marines, even though they have little experience with the 'J,' are adapting to this technology and applying it extremely well."

Although this squadron received the first KC-130J in



Cpl. Matthew Conant, VMGR-252 corrosion control specialist and native of Cocoa, Fla., tapes up vents on a KC-130J Hercules to prepare the aircraft for washing.

2002, this is the first time the "J" has operated forward deployed, in a combat zone.

"Other Marine Corps aircraft have been operating for years and deployed multiple times, so there is an immense amount of collective knowledge in those communities on every aspect of their operations. However, the 'J' is relatively new, so the squadron is learning as we go, and doing a great job."

Having to adapt the most to the vast technological differences between the older aircraft and the new "J Model" are the VMGR-252 maintainers and avionics technicians, who are working day and night to keep the high-tech birds flying.

According to the squadron maintenance officer the work is less physical, but very technical. With less time spent turning wrenches, and more time spent tweaking computer-systems, maintenance is down from up to 40 hours per flight hour with the "F" and "R" models, to 10 hours with the "J."

"The biggest issue we are facing is a lot more computer based technology, which is susceptible to the affects of weather and dust," said Cpl. David W. Booth, KC-130J, communications navigation technician, and native of D'Lo, Miss. "This is a new aircraft to a lot of the Marines, and it's all advanced technology. Instead of getting your hands around a bolt, you have to get your hands around a data bit."

To overcome the challenge of working with a new, high-tech aircraft, the Marines of VMGR-252 are relying on reading many publications and manuals, talking with tech representatives, and good old-fashioned hard work.

"If it weren't for the civilian 'tech-reps' we work with and the systems they provide, our job would be a lot harder than it is," Booth said. "Some of our Marines have only been with the squadron a few months, and are already doing great things. They are well-trained and picking up knowledge very quickly."

Serving as the only VMGR squadron in country, the VMGR-252 Marines and Sailors have taken the mission and are off to a flying start, logging in more than 200 flight hours in just two weeks.

"The last time we had this many aircraft forward deployed was Operation Desert Storm," said Maj. Jeff Moses, VMGR-252 operations officer, and native of



Lance Cpl. Sandra P. Duque, VMGR-252 communications navigations technician and native of North Bergen, N.J., programs communications information into the computers in the cockpit of one of the squadron's KC-130Js.

Birmingham, Ala. "With a brand new aircraft that has seen zero deployment time, the crew and maintainers are doing awesome."

"Real world operations have allowed our junior Marines to stand out and shine among their peers," Booth said. "As a noncommissioned officer, I am extremely proud to have these Marines working with me."

Mississippi native lends shoulder to the push

Story and photo by
Cpl. Rocco DeFilippis
2nd Marine Aircraft Wing

AL ASAD, Iraq — On a daily basis, Cpl. David E. Booth, a D'Lo, Miss., native, protects the lives of the pilots and aircrews of Marine Aerial Transport Refueler Squadron 252 as they transport troops and cargo throughout Iraq and the area of operations.

The KC-130J Hercules communications and navigations technician has been working on defensive electronic countermeasures equipment since his arrival here at Al Asad air base Feb. 10.

"We get out there and work as hard as we can to make sure our gear is up and running," he said. "We work hard because we know that this gear can and will save someone's life."

Booth joined the active duty Marine Corps Feb. 25, 2002, and went to Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, S.C. for basic training. After boot camp and

Marine Combat Training, he attended a course in basic avionics technology at Naval Air Station Pensacola, Fla., where he learned the basics of communications and navigations technology.

Taking what he learned in Florida, Booth went onto more specialized training with the KC-130 at Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, N.C., where he was assigned to Marine Aerial Transport Refueler Training Squadron 253.

Booth joined VMGR-252 during a time of transition, when the Marine Corps started to introduce its newest generation of the KC-130 Hercules, the "J" model. Booth quickly tackled the task of learning the new aircraft and training the Marines under



Cpl. David E. Booth stands in front of one of Marine Aerial Transport Refueler Squadron 252's KC-130J Hercules.

him to work on the new, high-tech systems.

"We really busted our butts to learn the 'J' as best we could back home," he said. "You can sleep easy at night knowing that your hard work has kept someone safe. It motivates me to keep working so hard every day."

Before his days of "data bits" and "crypto," Booth attended Copiah-Lincoln Community College. However, even before that, he had dreams of wearing the Eagle, Globe and Anchor.

During his senior year of high school, Booth had enlisted into the Marine Corps' delayed entry program, but instead of going in right after high school, he chose to attend college when he was offered a

scholarship to play baseball.

"College wasn't going well, and I wanted to learn a good job skill," Booth recalled. "I had always wanted to be a Marine, and I saw what the Corps had done for my uncle."

During his three years of service, Booth has established a reputation for excellence in both his job performance and military duties. In February 2004, he was named Marine of the quarter for his squadron and Marine Aircraft Group 14, and also earned a meritorious promotion to the rank of corporal in March 2004.

His wife, Staci, and their 19-month-old son, Kyle, await his return as he serves his country in Iraq. Booth said their support, and that from family and loved ones, help him carry on.

"If it weren't for the support they give me I wouldn't be where I am today," he said. "I miss them a lot, but I am proud to be out here making a difference. Being out here, participating in real-world operations, makes being in the Marines and calling myself a Marine a lot more rewarding."

'Can Do' infantrymen deliver shoes to Sadr kids

Story and photos by Spc. Ben Brody
2nd Brigade Combat Team

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Operation Happy Feet brought smiles to children of Sadr City as Soldiers of Company B, 3rd Battalion, 15th Infantry distributed sneakers at Marakah al-Taf Elementary School Feb. 28.

Working in conjunction with Civil Affairs, Soldiers purchased 500 pairs of shoes from a local vendor to give out at the northeastern Baghdad school, according to Capt. Timothy Terese, B Co. commander.

"We go around to lots of schools in the area, basically every day, to make sure they have the proper equipment to function," said 1st Lt. Jason Rocks, B Co. fire support officer and effects coordinator. "Blackboards, pencils, paper — we check that they are able to function on a day-to-day basis."

Rocks, of Puyallup, Wash., said the missions help foster support for coalition forces in an area once considered firmly under insurgent control.

"Right now, [Operation Happy Feet is] immediate gratifica-

tion," Rocks said. "But everything we do for them helps them and their families realize that the Iraqi government and coalition forces care about the Iraqi people."

In addition to the company of 'Can Do' infantrymen present, a squad of Iraqi Army Soldiers helped provide security and translations during the visit.

The school is coeducational, meaning girls have class in the morning and boys in the afternoon.

"We're trying to get the kids of Sadr City some new shoes, and hand out copies of 'Baghdad Kids,'" said Spc. Brandon Wise, 307th Psychological Operations Company, Team 1033, a Missouri Reserve unit. "It's a fun magazine for kids — it's got stuff about dinosaurs, outer space, the Olympics — things kids like. It's got some important safety and hygiene messages too, like 'remember to brush your teeth' and 'don't point toy guns at Soldiers.'"

Wise, of Greenville, Ill., and Staff Sgt. Travis C. Butler, also of the 307th, handed out bags of school supplies, coloring books and issues of "Baghdad Kids".

"It's really important for us to make a good impression on these kids before they grow up," Butler, of St. Clair, Mo., said. "The kids are the future of Iraq, and fostering a better relationship now will make for better relationships later."

The morning's classes of girls lined up to get their feet measured and receive the white tennis shoes. The girls quietly giggled as Soldiers passed the shoes forward to Chaplain (Capt.) Steven Hommel, 3/15 chaplain, who handed them out. Several Soldiers remarked at how well-behaved the girls were.

"The American school kids back in the states don't realize how lucky they are when you look at someplace like Iraq," B Co. 1st Sgt. Donald Rangel said. "We passed out these shoes just so the kids here can get from home to school without hurting themselves."

"It makes me feel good to do this for the kids here," the San Antonio native continued. "I've got six kids of my own, three of them in elementary school."

The Soldiers distributed about half of the 500 pairs



Chaplain (Capt.) Steven Hommel, 3/15 Inf. chaplain, hands a pair of sneakers and a coloring book to a student at Marakah al-Taf elementary school in Sadr City, Iraq. Soldiers distributed about 250 pairs of shoes at the school in northeastern Baghdad.

of shoes to the girls, and will give the rest to the school's boys later in the week.

"This is one of many missions we have, providing aid to Sadr City residents," Terese said. "We come out here every day. We're also working right now to get a functional sewage system installed in the neighborhood, which will make for a much safer neighborhood for these kids to grow up in."



Soldiers from B Co., 3/15 Inf., hand out hard candy to kids in Sadr City, Iraq, Feb 28. Sadr City is in northeast Baghdad.

Operation Hands and Feet brings relief to Iraqi children

By Staff Sgt. Duane M. Brown
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE COBRA, Iraq — Members of a Tennessee National Guard Family Readiness Group and local churches have been working closely with Coalition Soldiers to bring relief to Iraqi children through Operation Hands and Feet (OHF).

Operation Hands and Feet is a program created by Carolyn McKenzie, of Gallatin, Tenn., mother of Spc. Matthew McKenzie, 3rd Squadron, 278th Regimental Combat Team.

"I became involved with OHF back in Kuwait when I first arrived in country," said Sgt. Jeffery L. Litton, squadron chaplain's assistant. "Ms. McKenzie and I began corresponding through e-mail. She wanted to know if there was something she could do from home that could make a difference."

McKenzie and Litton got together and called the project Operation Hands and Feet. The operation is designed to put school and medical supplies, shoes and clothing into the hands of

Iraqi children in the 278th area of operations in eastern Iraq.

The name Operation Hands and Feet came about from religious influence. The hands and feet symbolize Christian missionaries helping the people, Litton said.

Now, the operation has evolved into a positive way that Tennessee churches and FRGs can assist Soldiers to be the hands and feet of Christ in this war-torn country, he added. The "hands" part is getting school supplies into the hands of school children and the "feet" refers to getting shoes to put on their feet.

The project began to take shape as soon as the 278th arrived at Forward Operating Base Cobra. "We came here in winter time, during the rainy season and saw many of the children running around barefoot in the mud," Litton said. "We discovered many of the Iraqi children either don't have shoes, or had shoes that were too small for their feet. It really got to us."

As the brigade's military operations got underway, Soldiers began going into local villages and taking tours of many of the schools. They found that many of the schools had no

electricity or running water and were short on supplies necessary for learning, Litton said. Seeing this, they began doing anything they could with the resources they had available.

"We inherited some school supplies from the Soldiers that were here before us," Litton said. "It wasn't long before we realized it wasn't enough."

During missions where Soldiers had the chance to interact with local kids, they would bring along school supplies and other items.

"Anything we can provide them is a big help," said Litton. "They are very appreciative of what we can give them."

This benefit of the goodwill by Coalition Soldiers shows in some of the relationships that have been formed with the schools and children.

"Several times we have been able to play soccer with some of the children. This is something to see," said Litton. "Soldiers running around in full body armor kicking a ball with a bunch of kids. That is good P.T. for the soul."

Everyone in Gallatin soon got into the groove, Litton said.

"Wal-Mart immediately jumped onboard as a drop-off site, and the Gallatin Fire Department volunteered to pick up items dropped off and deliver them to local armories," he said.

The local juvenile courts also got involved, he said.

A county judge in Tennessee deemed it a worthy cause and set up a community service program to have offenders serve out their community service hours helping local armories pack donations, Litton said.

Litton said everyone can help out and that money is needed to get the donated items sent to Iraq.

"People can very easily go through their house and come up with items to be sent over here," Litton said. "The problem is the cost of shipping. It averages about \$1 per pound."

For more information on the program, log on to www.operationhandsandfeet.org, the OHF Web site

"You can basically be in any town in the U.S. and go to the Web site and obtain information on how to replicate the project in your area," Litton said.

LSA first-responders train for disasters

Stories and photos by Pfc. Abel Trevino
28th Public Affairs Detachment

LOGISTICS SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, BALAD, Iraq — When first responders, including fireman, paramedics and rescue personnel, arrived on the scene, they discovered more than a dozen casualties and a smoking building were only a training exercise.

In the training scenario, which tested response time and consequence management, a building had been hit by a mortar and collapsed, trapping victims inside.

“We had a report of a heavy smoke condition at building 5001. I don’t know what caused it, I just arrived on scene, set up a fire control area and then started assisting with patient extraction,” said Tech. Sgt. James Harvey, a fireman with the 332nd Expeditionary Civil Engineering Squadron.



Staff Sgt. Jack Carrasco and Senior Airman Daniell Hernandez, 332nd ECES, race up the side of the building with rescue equipment to perform a technical extraction, which involves immobilizing the casualties and rigging a rope system to haul the two victims down the side of the building.

Nineteen volunteers portrayed casualties to keep the training exercise as realistic as possible.

“We’ve simulated a bomb hitting a building and the building partially collapsing with approximately 19 people trapped inside, and the fire department crews have to go in and rescue those [who] are trapped,” said Master Sgt. Thomas Miter, 332nd ECES firefighter and facilitator of the exercise.

The training is necessary to streamline reactions from responding units and point out mistakes that can be prevented.

“[This exercise] is very important because this is simulated as if it got hit by a mortar and it was a building collapse. That could happen at any time in this part of [Iraq],” said Master Sgt. Tom Schipper, 332nd ECES. “The structure is very realistic; we have a lot of confined spaces in there, we’re able to put the simulated victims in places that, if an explosion happened, they could actually be trapped in something like that.”

The realism is important to point out errors that could have occurred if this had been an actual emergency.

“Just like any kind of drill, there will be some things that need to be addressed. So far, everything I’ve seen has been very minor and we will take care of that so the next time there will be improvement,” Miter said. “I don’t think any operation will ever go perfectly; things happen, that’s just the nature of the business we’re in.”

Training exercises of this nature should occur about once a month to keep the skills of responders sharp and prepare them for other types of emergencies that could occur, Miter said.



A generator lights up the darkened entryway as two firefighters enter the collapsed building prepared for fire, smoke, victims and any other mayhem the exercise could throw at them.

At the end of the exercise, all went well.

“I’m very happy with what I’ve seen. All the agencies are working well together,” Miter said. “Since we’ve been here, we have a combined fire department – we have contractors, Air Force firefighters and Army firefighters. We’ve become one big family and we’re responding together to handle all these types of emergencies. I’m very happy with the way it is going.”

Preparation for the event took three weeks, with a tabletop exercise held during the second week to go over the schematics and for planners to put forth what was expected from the event. Only the planners knew what was going on, keeping an element of surprise from the responders as a method of increasing the realistic response to the situation.

Army, Air Force work together to keep Anaconda safe

Story and photo by
Spc. Kathryn Spurrell
81st Brigade Combat Team
Public Affairs Office

LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, BALAD, Iraq — Logistics Support Area Anaconda stays safe thanks to the Soldiers and Airmen who work together in the Joint Defense Operations Center, the LSA’s nerve hub.

The JDOC functions as an emergency response center as well as the central communications coordination for all internal force protection issues.

Force protection components include guard towers, quick reaction forces and security elements at the entry control points. Security forces also stand ready to respond to indirect attacks against the LSA.

The Air Force supplies various technological resources, including an unmanned aerial vehicle capable of providing information about areas outside the LSA.

A camera system also allows the JDOC to survey the area outside the LSA, scanning for anything that looks suspicious or out of the ordinary. Air Force operations employ a similar surveillance system.

In the event of an indirect mortar attack against the LSA, Soldiers and Airmen in the JDOC respond immediately.

After an attack or potential threat has been

verified, JDOC Soldiers activate the “Big Voice” — LSA Anaconda’s base-wide alert system — to warn people across the base to take cover in bunkers or hardened buildings.

While the siren continues to scream out its warning, Soldiers and Airmen are already hard at work compiling data and grid coordinates of the attack’s origin and impact.

The JDOC also coordinates emergency response immediately after an attack.

“It’s like the 911 center for the base, so if there’s an emergency, we are called and are able to dispatch the people who will respond — the provost marshal office, the ambulance, the hospital, the fire department, or [Explosive Ordnance Disposal],” said Lt. Col. Joseph Maassen, a resident of Dupont, Wash., and the officer in charge of the JDOC.

When appropriate, counter-attacks against the threat are organized and executed. “If we’re being attacked, we are able to quickly get in touch with the right forces to defend the base,” Maassen said.

In addition to maintaining security on the LSA, JDOC operations also ensure LSA Anaconda’s flow of supplies remain sufficient for supporting the theater of operations in Iraq.

According to Maassen, the JDOC is on the cutting edge of security technology in the Middle East. “Elements from other bases come here to look at our operations so they can emulate them throughout Iraq,” he said.

The JDOC replaced four different head-



Staff Sgt. McLain and Spc. Sado work together through a mortar attack battle drill in the HHC, 81st BCT JDOC.

quarter elements that used to handle defense on the LSA, said Maassen. “When we got here and took over from the 82nd Airborne [Division], we brought all those headquarters together to manage base defense out of the Joint Defense Operations Center. It’s really streamlined things and helped us to go after the bad guys.”

Thanks to its state-of-the-art technology,

the JDOC provides a sensor-to-shooter environment in which Army and Air Force coordinate and augment one another’s efforts, and working together has been a positive experience for Army and Air Force personnel alike.

“The JDOC has been good for everyone involved,” said Capt. Marcos Tassone, an Air Force battle captain at the JDOC. “The Army and Air Force have a lot to offer each other.”

Capt. Kristin Zornes, an 81st BCT battle captain from Tacoma, Wash., agreed. “Pooling our resources has allowed us to make the LSA a much safer place,” she said. “Combining the Army and Air Force has greatly increased our force protection ability.”

“Working with the Air Force has been great – that’s what makes it a joint operation,” said Maassen. “The combination of the Air Force, their security forces, their technology along with resources from the Army has all strengthened our abilities. We work together to make a good team.”

The 81st Brigade Combat Team, a National Guard unit comprised of Soldiers from all over Washington state, worked in conjunction with Air Force Security Forces in the conception, construction and development of the JDOC.

When 81st BCT Soldiers redeploy to the States, they will leave behind a base that is safer and better prepared to respond to any kind of emergency.

IP force still grows, unites in fighting terrorism

1,700 more Iraqi Police join thousands of others, bringing total to almost 20,000

Story and photo by Pfc. Laura M. Bigenho
42nd Military Police Brigade Public Affairs

BAGHDAD, Iraq — In a country where everyday chaos and mayhem has become the norm, its citizens are progressively working toward restoring law and order, a concept that was once completely foreign to many here.

Despite being primary targets of violent attacks triggered by insurgents, hundreds of newly-trained Iraqi police continue to graduate each month from the Dean of Police College in Baghdad. In the most recent graduation ceremony, more than 1,700 proud, fresh faces accepted certificates of completion from the college.

The first step to get into the Dean of Police College is rather simple, and makes it all the more surprising that so many have taken that first step. Potential Iraqi police men and women volunteer by walking into a recruiting center and seeking to sign up for the course.

“What’s amazing about the Iraqi police is that they are primary targets for threats and violent actions just because they’re Iraqi police and they’re working with coalition forces, yet they continue to volunteer in large numbers,” said Col. Richard Swengros, 42nd Military Police Brigade Commander.

Another surprising factor in the new Iraqi police force is that women are stepping forward and joining. Swengros said this is largely in part to the Iraqi people recognizing a need for women to join. “[Women] played an important role in the [Iraqi] elections by serving as security, searching the female voters — some-

thing that men are not permitted to do. There was a lot of pride in what they accomplished.”

“We’re building a better Iraq by teaching and having both Iraqi men and women volunteer to learn. They want to learn. It’s definitely progress towards a better Iraq,” said the course’s officer in charge, 1st Lt. Olakunle Daramola, of Battery B, 1-258th Field Artillery, an Army National Guard unit from New York.

Using classroom and hands-on training methods, a team made up of civilian instructors, language assistants, Iraqi police instructors and Soldiers from the 42nd Military Police Brigade are assigned to the mission of training and teaching these men and women, Swengros said.

Cadets go through an intense eight-week training course, covering everything from the basics of law, democracy and terrorism to preparing them with hands-on training in firearms, defensive tactics and physical training. By the end of the course, graduates are ready to leave the academy and venture to their next destination: one of hundreds of police stations throughout Iraq.

“These graduates are fresh out of [training] and are confident enough to be able to learn and get better. They’ll get even better once they get more experience outside. It’s definitely a confidence step to where they can pick up and learn the way the police officers work and act to build a better Iraq,” said Daramola.

Although they are straight out of training and much more skilled than they were prior to the course, their learning doesn’t



A female Iraqi police graduate walks up to accept her certificate as the rest of her fellow policemen and women look on.

stop in the classroom. Many of the Iraqi police will continue to work alongside other security forces, continuing to learn and sharpen their skills with experience, while leading their country to a safer, more promising future.

“By being involved in police academy operations, we have a chance to shape how they look at police operations, in addition to some of the values [Americans] live every day and sometimes take for granted,” said Swengros.

“They’ll go out and see other military and civilian police, take what they’ve learned in the academy and be able to transfer it into actual street police operations capabilities,” Swengros said.

“The police structure is growing stronger,” he added. “To have this many Iraqi [people] step forward every couple months and say ‘I want to be part of this. I want to be part of change,’ that’s sending a strong message.”

Redeployment: readjusting to life back home

Story and photo by Pfc. Mike Pryor
82nd Airborne Division Public Affairs

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The plane that brought the Soldiers home sits empty on the runway, its long journey complete. Inside a nearby hangar, the Soldiers stand at attention, the smiles on their faces growing wider by the second. The families they haven’t seen in months are now only a few feet away from them.

“Dismissed!” shouts their commander, and the happy anticipation in the room gives way to joyful anarchy. Family members swarm around the Soldiers. Wives and husbands embrace with tears in their eyes. A father in desert camouflage holds his infant son in his

arms for the first time.

These images of homecoming have become familiar sights on the nightly news as units continue to redeploy from missions in support of the Global War on Terrorism. But they don’t tell the full story because the process of redeploying doesn’t end when a Soldier steps foot on American soil, and it begins long before he or she leaves theater.

Redeployment refers not just to a Soldier’s movement from a combat zone to garrison, but to the entire process of adjusting to life back in the rear. In its entirety, the process is known as reintegration. To make the adjustment period easier, the Army requires every Soldier to undergo reintegration training while still in theater.

“Reintegration training is the means by which we ease the transition between combat and garrison life for our Soldiers and their families,” said Staff Sgt. Joseph Osinski, a human resources manager and reintegration training instructor with 3rd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division.

Osinski’s battalion, which was deployed to Iraq in December 2004, began conducting reintegration training in early March in preparation for its upcoming redeployment to Fort Bragg, N.C.

The training was conducted by the battalion’s Reintegration Training Team, which included representatives from the human resources, staff judge advocate,

chaplain, intelligence, and medical departments. The team spent a week traveling between the different company areas, holding several classes a day at each location.

Every paratrooper in the battalion was required to attend the training, which included briefings on financial and legal issues for redeploying Soldiers, suicide and risk awareness, family and relationship conflicts arising from deployments and operational security. Another major component of the training was the Post-Deployment Health Assessment, an in-depth survey of the paratroopers’ physical and mental health.

Reintegration training is designed to anticipate the whole spectrum of issues Soldiers face during redeployment, said Maj. John Bride, battalion surgeon, who gave the briefing on suicide awareness.

“It encompasses everything from guidance on how to fill out a travel voucher worth \$3.50 a day to tips on how to prevent suicide. There are very few briefs that everyone can relate to on an equal level. Reintegration training is one of them. There’s something in there for everyone,” Bride said.

Bride received the training during his last deployment. He didn’t take it very seriously, he said, until he got home and realized how much of it applied.

When Bride returned home, he found that his wife had been doing the taxes, paying the bills, and running the household — and she liked it! She resented the fact that he expected to just come in and take over. Other things were different, too. When Bride had to watch

the kids alone for a few hours while his wife went shopping, he was overwhelmed.

“I was ready to go back to Iraq,” Bride said. “That’s when I realized there are stresses and there are issues, and these reintegration classes are important.”

Because of that experience, Bride volunteered to teach more classes during this deployment’s reintegration training. He ended up teaching the class on suicide prevention as well as overseeing the PDHA.

Spc. Aaron Sutliff, battalion legal specialist, gave the paratroopers their legal brief. He said reintegration training is important because it gives Soldiers the tools they need to overcome the hidden obstacles that redeploying presents.

“When you deploy, you expect the stress and you prepare yourself to handle it. But nobody expects redeployment to be stressful. Everyone thinks they’re going to go home and everything will be perfect. But of course it’s not. Our number one goal is to get people back to their normal way of life,” Sutliff said.

It was a beautiful spring-like day on the first day of training, and with thoughts of being home in a few weeks dancing in their heads, some of the paratroopers had a hard time treating the classes as anything but a pure formality. But veterans of the last deployment — and redeployment — like Sgt. Richard Mouser of Headquarters Company, knew how valuable the training was.

“There wasn’t a Soldier in there who didn’t relate to at least something that was said. Believe me, they’re getting a lot out of it,” Mouser said.



Sgt. Ronald Young (left) answers questions about his health from Maj. John Bride, Battalion Surgeon, during the Post Deployment Health Assessment portion of the battalion’s reintegration training.

Camp Lejeune unit nears end of tour in Iraq

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Jim Goodwin
1st Force Service Support Group

CAMP TAQADDUM, Iraq — After more than seven months of running supply convoys, collecting and burying enemy killed in action, and providing humanitarian aid to Fallujans, several hundred Camp Lejeune Marines are leaving Iraq. More than 200 Marines from Company B, 2nd Transportation Support Battalion — a unit of military truck drivers, mechanics and heavy equipment operators — are returning to North Carolina this month.

The unit arrived in Iraq last summer for duty with the Camp Pendleton-based 1st Force Service Support Group.

The first of B Co.'s seven platoons — Maintenance Platoon — left Feb. 26 for Kuwait, where it would spend several days before flying back to the States.

These Marines have spent more than half a year serving in war-torn Iraq. Their arrival in Kuwait will be the first time in a long time many of them have been outside a combat zone. Soon, they will return to their family and friends — and regular lives — in the U.S.

"It went by fast," admits Lance Cpl. Jeremy B. Carr, a Chauncey, Ga., native who says the first person he wants to see when he gets home is his "mama."

"I knew it was going to come, but not this soon," said Cpl. Robert P. Warf, a 21-year-old Lewisburg, Tenn., native and vehicle mechanic. Warf said he'll be home just in time to celebrate his second anniversary with his wife, Lindsey.

Although he's looking forward to going home and seeing his family, Carr said the deployment has brought him closer to his fellow Marines.

"You get close to the people you live with in a tent for seven months," said Carr.

After loading green sea bags, backpacks and other military and personal gear into the back of a seven-ton truck, Warf and the 20-some other Marines of maintenance platoon — all wearing their body armor and Kevlar helmets — boarded a bus, which took them to the base air terminal, where they waited for their flight to Kuwait.

As B Co.'s Marines were leaving, thousands more from Camp Lejeune were just arriving. The 1st FSSG is being replaced by Marines and Sailors from the 2nd Force Service Support Group as part of a regularly scheduled changeover of Marine forces.

"We're out! We're out of here!" screamed one Marine while he waited in line before boarding the bus.

The other Marines hooted and hollered in response.

"I hope [the Iraqis] realize what we did. We were here to help



Lance Cpl. Dustin S. Curran carries rations for an Iraqi man at a humanitarian assistance site in Fallujah, Iraq.

them, not to hurt them," said Warf, reflecting on his unit's achievements before boarding the bus.

In the past seven months, the Marines of B Co. were charged with conveying supplies across Iraq's roadways to military bases, repair vehicles and man a U.S. military air terminal at Camp Taqaddum, Iraq. They made more than 100 supply convoys and traveled more than 464,000 miles on Iraq's dangerous roadways to deliver everything from fuel, water and food to amenities to U.S. military bases and outposts in Iraq's Al Anbar Province. Cities like Ramadi and Fallujah are located in this area that has been a hotbed of insurgent activity throughout the Marines' deployment.

Following an awards ceremony for nine 2nd TSB Marines, Col. John E. Wissler, commander for the incoming thousands of 2nd FSSG Marines and Sailors who are replacing 1st FSSG, told B Co. Marines they had "set the standard for the people in the battle supply distribution field."

"How's the motivation out here?" asked Wissler, surrounded by B Co.'s 200-plus Marines.

"Ooh-rah!" the Marines yelled in response.

"You probably don't realize the impact you've made here and won't until you get home, said Wissler. "You leave Iraq a much better place by your contribution."

In addition to delivering thousands of tons of supplies to U.S. military forces throughout western Iraq, B Co. was also tasked with a variety of other jobs during their deployment.

During combat operations in Fallujah, B Co. Marines augmented a full-time military mortuary affairs detachment to assist with the collection and burial of more than 460 enemy killed in action.

"We'd convoy out into the city and [Iraqi] guides would take us to the location of the bodies," said Sgt. Saleem A. Byrd, who

drove military vehicles on convoys into Fallujah to collect enemy corpses.

After locating and loading the bodies on trucks, the Marines transported them back to the temporary mortuary east of Fallujah for proper processing, Byrd said.

With combat operations still ongoing inside Fallujah, B Co. Marines provided their own security while collecting remains, as infantry Marines fought insurgents often only a block away. They also had to be wary of the last-ditch efforts insurgents displayed by rigging the dead with IEDs.

Along with learning about the health concerns involved with handling the cadavers, using body bags, processing and registering remains and grave sites, the Marines also had to deal with the mental fatigue of viewing and handling decomposed, charred or otherwise mutilated bodies.

Although B Co. was not involved in direct combat in Fallujah, they did receive occasional enemy small arms fire while driving in and out of the city, said Maj. James R.

Hensien, B Co.'s commander.

"It was not uncommon for the Marines to receive two- to three-round bursts of [enemy] fire," Hensien said.

Immediately after completing their mortuary duties in December, B Co. manned two humanitarian assistance sites in the city through January, assisting more than 39,000 returning civilians as the local government began allowing civilians back into the combat-devastated city.

Byrd, a 27-year-old native of Philadelphia, was part of the detachment of Marines who spent 12 hours a day, seven days a week handing out bottled water, boxed rations, hygiene kits and blankets to returning Fallujans.

"It felt weird going from dealing with the deceased to giving out help to the living," said Byrd, who leaves Iraq in several weeks. "Between the mortuary part and the humanitarian assistance projects, it makes me feel lucky as an American. Other people have it hard."

During Iraq's national elections in January, Marines from B Co. coordinated the movement and transportation of more than 800 Iraqi elections officials from Camp Taqaddum to polling sites throughout Iraq.

Driving at night, the Marines manned machine guns and other crew-served weapons mounted on Humvees to provide security for the election workers during the convoys to the polling sites.

With the elections over, B Co. is back to conveying supplies, coordinating passengers and cargo on military flights, repairing vehicles, and providing heavy equipment support for construction projects — at least for a few more weeks, until the last of the company's Marines set foot in Kuwait and eventually fly home.



Lance Cpl. Lucas Rusch checks some hoses in the front engine of Black Knight CH-46E during a 100-hour inspection.

'Black Knights' strut their stuff in Iraq

Story and photo by
By Cpl. C. Alex Herron
2nd Marine Aircraft Wing

ALASAD, Iraq — On a cool, crisp evening in late January, two pilots, a crew chief and an aerial observer boarded a gray, tandem rotor aircraft for a mission they and the rest of the world had been looking forward to for months.

The mission, one of historic significance, was to pick up election workers in their CH-46E Sea Knight and transport them to the polling stations in time for the Iraqi election. For the first time in 50 years Iraqis would vote.

"I was able to fly more than 40 hours with HMM-265 (Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron) and help fly election officials all over the country," said Capt. Cory Shackelton, pilot, HMM-264 and Annapolis, Md. native. "That has been one of my favorite missions thus far in the deployment."

The Black Knights have logged more than 40 flight hours per day for their first three weeks of flying.

Missions range from general support to quick reaction force missions, delivering infantry units to their objective within two hours.

"We usually do general support missions that include the transport of cargo and passengers all over our area of operations," Shackelton said. "We also do tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel missions. Those missions return personnel and aircraft to their home base."

While the Black Knights log long hours in the air, the mechanics of the helicopter have been working equally as hard maintaining a demanding flight schedule.

"We have flown more than 276 hours since we took over for HMM-265, Feb. 19. At this rate we will fly over 1,000 hours a month," said Sgt. Kenneth L. Benson Jr., data analyst, HMM-264 and Columbia, Mo., native. "Our maintainers have put in more than 1,000 hours working on the aircraft and keeping them functional."

"To help keep up with demand, the maintainers have to work together in every way possible to help the

MUSIC REVIEW

“Love. Angel. Music” ... Maybe

By Sgt. Derek F. Meyer
214th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

“Naturally, I’m worried if I do it alone / Who really cares, cause it’s your life / You never know, it could be great / Take a chance cause you might grow,” opens “Love. Angel. Music. Baby.” Unfortunately, it’s not great. Gwen Stefani, 35, takes a break from No Doubt with this album. Die hard No Doubt fans will not find any traces of the pop-ska format the band is known for. Instead, this can only be described as bubble-gum pop with a hip-hop hangnail.

Perhaps lyrics found later in the same song, What You Waiting For, better encapsulate the album. “You’re still a super hot female / You got your million dollar contract / And they’re all waiting for your hot track.”

And we’re still waiting.

Following recent trends, Stefani collaborates with many well-known names, including Outkast’s Andre 3000, Dr. Dre, The Neptunes and Eve. In fact, it almost seems an effort to



throw so many different things out, that listeners will have to like one of them. Somehow, it works. Combine these faces with constant self-adoration, frequent references to Japanese

Harajuku girls, and quirky electric beats, and you’ve got a success. Single, Rich Girl, has climbed to 7 on the Billboard chart.

How can this be? Because the album is fun. Despite an array of horrible lyrics, cheesy music, and an overall “sell-out” theme, I am still nodding my head to the beat. In a recent Rolling Stone interview, Stefani claimed that her album would be “your guilty pleasure.” She nailed it.

“Love. Angel. Music. Baby.” is available at AAFES locations.

Knights

from Page 12

stress of the busy flight schedule,” said Lance Cpl. Lucas Rusch, flightline mechanic and Green Bay, Wisc., native. “We help out in any way we can. It is all for the good of the unit, so that we can accomplish our mission as a whole.”

Rusch and the other mechanics understand they are the ones who keep their fellow Marines safe in the air.

“We are the last people to see that aircraft before it takes off,” said Rusch. “It is our job to send out the safest birds possible.”

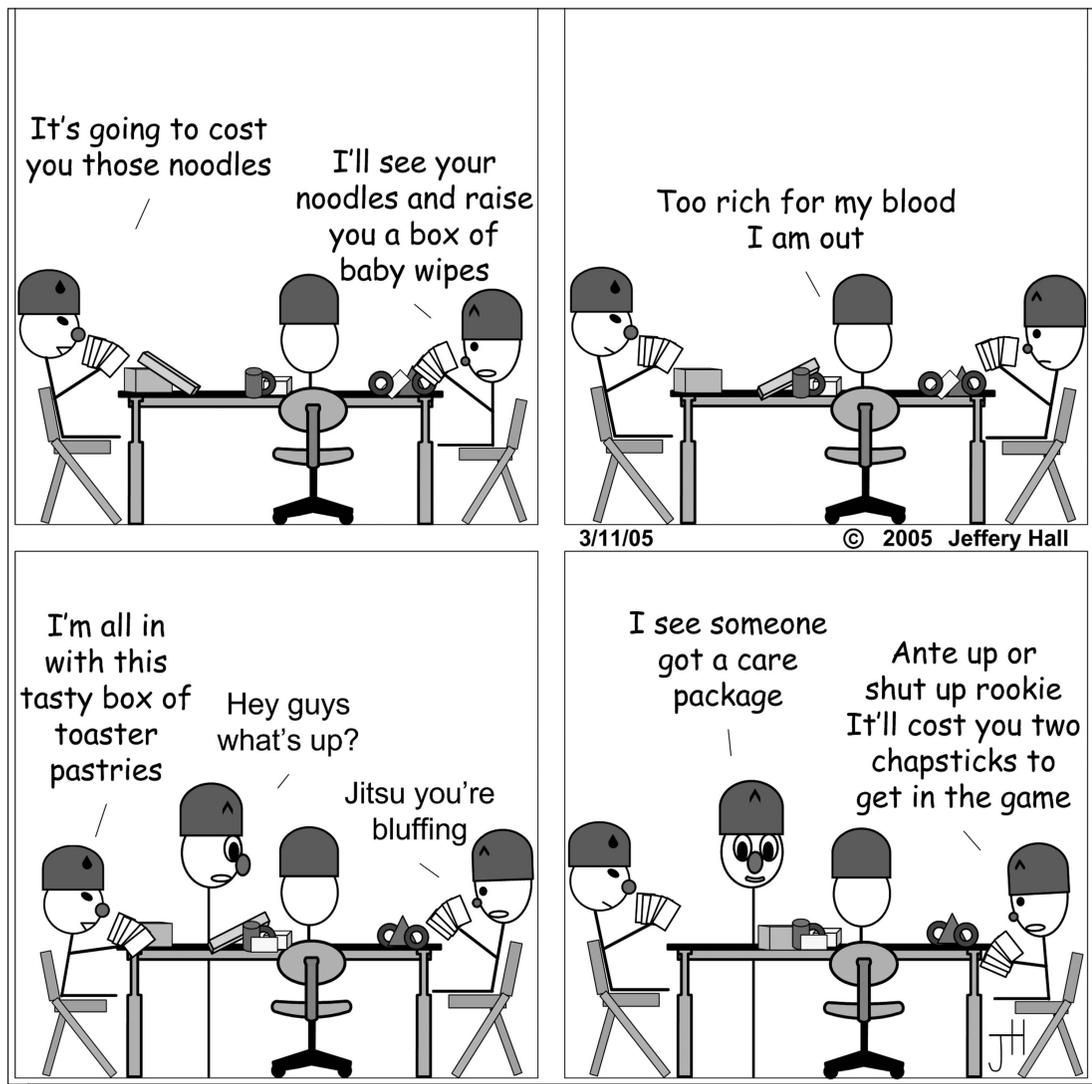
With the start of their deployment showing off the versatility of their aircraft, the Black Knights are primed and ready for success.

“We’re prepared for this operation,” Rusch said. “We have all been training and preparing for this for months. Now it is time to show our readiness.”



Master Sgt. Leonard Caires, quality assurance chief, HMM-264 and Salem, Mass. native, tightens down a panel during a pre-flight check on one of the squadron’s CH-46E.

Scimitar Slapstick



Art by Jeffery Hall



Art by Maj. James D. Crabtree

The place to access the latest MNF-I/MNC-I news and information is online. Check out www.mnf-iraq.com to stay informed.

Shhhh!

Operational Security...

OPSEC

Keep cell phone and email comms free of sensitive information.

You don't know who's listening.



Father pins Silver Star on son in Baghdad

Story and photos by Sgt. John Queen
3rd BCT Public Affairs

INTERNATIONAL ZONE, BAGHDAD, Iraq — Staff Sgt. William Thomas Payne of the 1st Cavalry Division received the United States' third-highest award for heroism in combat Feb. 27 during a ceremony at the crossed scimitars monument in central Baghdad.

Although Maj. Gen. Pete Chiarelli, the division's commander, was on hand to present the award, Payne took the unique opportunity to have the medal pinned on him by his father, Carl Payne, a Department of the Army employee working in Iraq.

"I could never be more proud," said the elder Payne, a retired Army tanker.

"As a parent it's like a double-edged sword though," he said, speaking of his son's actions. "I'm glad he was recognized for the duty that he did, but it is tough to know that

your son risked his life in a situation like that."

Payne, from Benford, Okla., and an infantryman assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment, is credited with rescuing a group of Soldiers from a disabled Bradley fighting vehicle while under fire last September.

"Staff Sgt. Payne displayed gallantry and valor that was truly amazing," Chiarelli said. "He did it in one of the toughest neighborhoods in Baghdad — Sheik Maroof."

The neighborhood has many areas that have been dubbed with nicknames like "Grenade Alley" and "Purple Heart Lane" by the Soldiers who regularly patrol it. The infamous Haifa Street runs along the northern border.

"I've read a lot of citations since I've been here," Chiarelli added, "but I have read none that talks of any greater act of heroism than what Staff Sgt. Payne did that day."

During the late morning hours of Sept. 12, 2004, Payne's battalion was wrapping up an

operation on Haifa Street. As Bradley fighting vehicles patrolled the streets, Soldiers on the ground set up defensive positions in order to pick up other Soldiers that had been manning observation posts in high-rise buildings throughout the night.

Payne and his dismounted squad were in position along the side of the street when a car laden with explosives sped onto the street and detonated into the rear of a Bradley.

"I looked back," Payne explained, "it was like, 'There is no way that this was happening.'"

A split second later the blast's powerful concussion hit his squad, knocking one Soldier to the ground.

"When I heard the concussion I knew it was real and it was time to go," he said.

The force of the blast disabled the 33-ton Bradley, bringing it to a halt. Its rear ramp was engulfed in flames and the upper cargo hatch was blown off.

Small arms fire began to rain onto the street, so Payne had Sgt. Richard Frisbie shift the squad into a new position so they could provide cover fire while he and Spc. Chase Ash went to help the Soldiers in the Bradley.

"Luckily I had someone there to help out," Payne said. "I had a Soldier to keep control of the squad and another to help me with the wounded."

Payne and Ash ran 50 meters to the burning vehicle while terrorists fired on them. At the Bradley, Payne climbed up on top and helped



While Maj. Gen. Pete Chiarelli watches, Carl Payne pins the Silver Star medal on his son, Staff Sgt. William Thomas Payne.

two of the crewman out of the turret. He then turned his attention to the infantrymen still inside the crew compartment. One by one he pulled them up through the damaged cargo hatch.

"I lowered them down the side of the Bradley to Spc. Ash so he could get them to safety," Payne said. "There was a lot of gunfire going on."

Within seconds of retrieving the wounded Soldiers from the Bradley, the vehicle's load of ammunition began to cook off from the heat and fire.

According to Payne the whole series of events lasted nearly five minutes.

"All the training just kicked in," Payne said about his actions "It's hard to explain; I didn't really have time to think about it."

Once back in a safe position on the south side of the street, Payne's squad teamed together again to further protect the rescued Soldiers as the medic treated them.

"Some of the wounded were unable to get their equipment out of the Bradley," Payne explained. "We had one Soldier who didn't have his helmet and another was missing his weapon."

Payne's men began giving them whatever piece of protective gear they could spare.

"They were giving up goggles and things like that," Payne added. "They were giving them anything they could to provide them better protection than what they had when they got out of the vehicle."

When it was safe enough, Payne and his Soldiers put the wounded into another Bradley for evacuation to the combat support hospital in the International Zone.

"I owe everything to my squad," Payne said. "If my squad wasn't there I couldn't have completed that mission. My squad was there for me — that's what it comes down to."



Although Staff Sgt. William Thomas Payne was the recipient of the Silver Star medal, he credits his squad for their teamwork in the successful rescue of wounded Soldiers from a burning armored vehicle last September.

Platoon sergeant takes a licking, keeps on ticking

By Spc. Erin Robicheaux
256th Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Thirteen improvised explosive devices, five mortar attacks, and one vehicle-borne improvised explosive device; this may sound like an insurgent Christmas carol, but it is actually the scorecard of Sgt. 1st Class Patrick Sandel.

A Soldier with 3rd Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment, attached to 1st Battalion, 156th Armor Regiment, this DeRidder, La. native has faced encounters more times than any other Soldier in the 256th Brigade Combat Team. He counts his blessings every day that he is still here.

"That first IED scared the [you know what] out of me," he said with a reflective grin.

Sandel said his inaugural mission outside the wire was a prophetic vision into what lay ahead for him and his Soldiers. The very first time he ventured into his area of operation he was met with a mortar attack. A few days later, he hit the first IED, and only now has it begun to slow down.

"November and December were busy for us," he said. "Right now it's been three weeks since I've been hit, and that's the longest I've gone without in a while."

According to Sandel, his platoon's reaction to an attack has



Photo by Sgt. Maj. Steven Stuckey

Sgt. 1st Class Patrick Sandel scans the area in front of him while on patrol in his Bradley Fighting Vehicle.

improved with each incident, and is, in fact, now second nature to them. Whether they are conducting mounted or dismounted patrols, if something happens, they shut it down immediately and begin sweeping the area for threats. He said along with incorporating the training that they received at Fort Hood, Texas, they have a strategy that works best for

them, and within two seconds of getting hit, they are out and scanning their sector.

"It's just like brushing your teeth now," he said. "We have this process down to an art."

Recently, the platoon lost Sgt. Seth Trahan, from Crowley, La., to an IED attack. Sandel said that until this happened getting hit seemed normal and like it was just a part of the job. The Soldiers were clearing an intersection, and as Trahan rounded the corner, the device went off, instantly killing him and wounding two others.

"We weren't complacent on the patrols, by any means," said Sandel, "but until it killed somebody, getting hit was a routine thing."

Command Sgt. Maj. Steven Stuckey from Shreveport, La. is the sergeant major for 1/156th AR. He feels that Sandel's spirit and enthusiasm for his job have not diminished over time, even in the face of such adversity.

"A lot of the guys who get hit by IEDs get scared and start to wear down, but Sandel has not," said Stuckey.

Stuckey said the leadership that Sandel has shown is exemplary and shines through in his own attitude for his job, and also in the attitude of his Soldiers toward him.

"He never stops, and he's always high-spirited," Stuckey said. "His Soldiers like to go out with Sandel, and I think they'd do anything for him."

Mongrels square off for training, stress relief

Story and photos by Sgt. David Foley
MNC-I Public Affairs Office

CAMP VICTORY, BAGHDAD, Iraq — Camp Victory, Iraq, may be a long way from Vegas, but that hasn't stopped the Mongrels from enjoying Friday-night fights.

Every Friday at 4 p.m., walls vibrate with the sounds of Survivor's "Eye of the Tiger," and a crowd of cheering spectators from 20th Engineer Brigade, XVIII Airborne Corps, Fort Bragg, N.C., converge on the "Alamo" to take part in a boxing extravaganza specifically designed for the unit.

When Capt. Richard Ojeda, Headquarters Headquarters Company, 20th Engineer Brigade commander, ordered boxing equipment for combatives training, he had no idea it would lead to the fast-paced high-energy, morale-boosting stress reliever that his troops created.

"We got the equipment to build on the convoy security team's training," Ojeda said. "It wasn't intended to be used for boxing ... but the Soldiers wanted to box."

Ojeda said the boxing matches started with about seven Soldiers who wanted to test their skills, and it quickly grew into a weekly affair.

Seeing an opportunity to boost Soldiers' morale, Ojeda filled out a risk assessment and put safety precautions in place so the Soldiers could enjoy the fights without any major injuries.

The event started drawing more and more

people and now has a following of about 50 Soldiers. The unit is working to build a regulation-size boxing ring with turnbuckles and ropes.

Ojeda said the event shows him a lot about his Soldiers and teaches them valuable lessons.

"Just for them to be willing to step in the ring shows they have heart," he said. "I have more respect for a Soldier who is not a very good fighter but is willing to step up than one who is in the ring just to show off his skills."

"I'll take heart over skill any day of the week," Ojeda said. "Heart doesn't stop but skills can deteriorate."

"It doesn't matter if they win or lose, it's about being willing to step up," he said. "When we go out the gate, I like knowing I have Soldiers who are willing to step up and get things done."

Despite the violent nature of boxing, there have been no serious injuries and the Soldiers insist it is all fun and games.

"It teaches you a lot, but mostly, it's just fun," said Pfc. Bethany Howell, HHC 20th Engineer Bde., who was one of four females to fight Feb. 25. "There are never any grudges. If you get beat, you just lose bragging rights."

Spc. Christopher Mauro, HHC, 20th



Pfc. Michael Carr, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 20th Engineer Brigade, XVIII Airborne Corps, Fort Bragg, N.C., follows through with a right hook on Pvt. Jamal Joseph, 175th Engineer Company, 20th Engineer Brigade, during Friday Fight Fights at the 20th Engineer Brigade's motorpool at Camp Victory, Iraq.

Engineer Bde., has fought several times and said he has other reasons for participating in the matches.

Mauro said most of his comrades are combat engineers who are working in jobs out of their field, and the boxing matches are a way for them to relieve the stress that causes.

"I can see this going for the whole time we are here," he said. "We keep getting more and more people, and it's a good way to relieve stress with no hard feelings."

As with everything his unit does, Ojeda said safety is his primary concern, and the boxing bouts are no exception.

"We always have at least one [emergency medical technician] with dispatched vehicle, numerous combat lifesavers and an EMT bag on hand," he said. "We also have a [special forces medic] and a referee at each event."

"Nobody is trying to kill anybody here," said 1st Sgt. Anthony Archer, HHC, 20th Engineer Bde. first sergeant. "Any time we see that someone is overmatched, we pull them apart. We do not put Soldiers with boxing experience in with a novice. If someone goes down, the other boxer will step away."

Ojeda said boxing could also give the Soldiers confidence to resolve situations that may arise during their convoys without using deadly force.

"If someone comes at you without a weapon, you don't want to kill him if you don't have to," he said. "So you always want to use other ways of getting them off of you without using your weapon. If you can settle the situation without having to squeeze the trigger, that's good."



Capt. Richard Ojeda, commander, 20th Engineer Bde, lands a low body blow on Spc. Donald Mack of the same company.



Sgt. Wayne Meyers, HHC, 20th Engineer Bde, lands a high jab on fellow HHC Soldier Spc. Donald Mack, who almost lands a jab right back.