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FREE MAIL

Designed by: Spc. Chris Foster

256th Brigade Combat Team
Public Affairs Office

To:

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This Edition

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TO THE FAMILIES AND TROOPS



BG John Basilica, Jr.
256 BCT Commander

The BCT continues to excel in the performance of combat operations. Since the last edition of Tiger Tracks, we have successfully completed Operations Warrior's Rage and Thunder Cat I. Together they resulted in over 230 suspected insurgents captured. Both of these major offensives were conducted with our partners in the 1st and 3rd Brigades

of the new Iraqi Army. They continue to progress at an impressive rate and have assumed additional battle space ahead of schedule.

I want to address the recent media interest in the Brigade's military justice results. First, it should be understood that the number of reports of misconduct of all types has been approximately 450. This includes all of the Article 15s and the courts martial. The total includes all of the incidents since May of 2004 when the Brigade was mobilized (14 months). While any violation is a

disappointment, these numbers are about average for a unit as large as the Brigade. We have a slightly higher number of courts martial (55), because we use the summary court martial more often than the active component. The vast majority of Soldiers in the 256 comply with all of the policies and regulations every day. Good units enforce the rules. We have done so and those Soldiers that have been found guilty have been dealt with in a manner commensurate with the crime.

As you read this, we are beginning in earnest our preparations for redeployment. We must remain vigilant and on the offensive right up to the last day. We have the responsibility to conduct a thorough relief in place operation with the unit replacing us. And then, we must redeploy the entire Brigade back to the US through Kuwait. Your chain of command will begin releasing many of the details of the redeployment soon. As soon as the transportation (aircraft) schedules are published, we will be able to advise the families of the dates for our arrival back in America. Until then, remain alert and focused on force protection. Now is not the time for short cuts or complacency. Look after one another and remember to keep safety first and foremost in everything you do.

TIGER BRIGADE!

CSM James Mays
256 BCT Sergeant Major



Soldiers and families of the Tiger Brigade, this is the last part of the deployment and we really need to think about safety. We are beginning our movement home and preparing for demobilization.

You should think about safety every hour on the hour. We still

have a mission and part of that is getting Tigerland ready for our replacements to move in.

The upcoming days will require long hours, and leaders need to keep an eye on their Soldiers for the next few weeks.

When we finally do go home, you will face many challenges. You will go out with your friends and go back to work. Be careful, and take time to adapt to your surroundings. We have been away from home for a year, and have a lot to catch up on—take your time!

From here on out safety is our first mission. If you do not feel right about what you are about to do, think about it again. We all need to get home safely, and adjust to being back home and at work.

--Tiger 7

Editor's Note:

Dear Soldiers and Families,
I would like to thank all of the families and Soldiers of the Tiger Brigade. We appreciate all who have contributed stories, photos, and words from their hearts throughout this deployment. Your submissions have made this newsletter exactly what it is...yours.

We have one remaining newsletter before we redeploy; however, this one will be quite different. The last edition will be a recap of our deployment and its highlights. Thanks again for all of the dedicated contributions, and we look forward to publishing our online newsletter once we arrive home.

1Lt. Taysha Deaton
256th BCT PAO

Chaplain's Corner

Lt. Col. (CH) Robert Baker Jr.

Well, here it is down to the last days. This has been a long deployment. We have shared many joys together, cried many tears together but through it all we have enjoyed each other's company. Our dedication to our jobs and our soldiers has cemented us together. We are a family.

At times, while here in Iraq, I felt like George Jefferson before he "moved on up to the east side." He finally got a piece of the rock. What the 256th BCT has here is a piece of "IRAQ."

No matter who we are this place has made impressions on us. We are different people now than when we left our homes in Louisiana, New York, Minnesota or small town U.S.A. I hope you took time for some introspection and soul searching while here.

I believe most of us have done exactly that. I know that he who seeks finds, to him who knocks it shall be opened to him and to him who asks receives. Jesus is always knocking at our heart's door. We must make room for Him if we ever find true PEACE in our lives.

The Prince of Peace is the only One who can truly give peace and He gives it to us in abundance. In John, Chapter 17, Jesus prays one of His last prayers while here on earth. His prayer to the Father was "make them one with you, Father, just as You and I are one" and "MY peace I leave with them."

I think we all will find we need His peace at home as much as we need it here in Iraq. I hope you will find true peace in your lives. He will be all to you that you let Him be. May the Lord bless you and your families as we prepare to go home.

Gospel Explosion!

On Saturday, July 30 Soldiers from all around Camp Liberty rocked a little chapel in Tigerland and brought the devil to his knees, at Gospel Explosion 2005. With more than 10 gospel choirs and 400 Soldiers praising' the Lord, the revival at the Tiger Chapel was a huge hit.

Staff Sgt. Devin Jones, from Marerro, La., minister of music, said the purpose of the service to introduce God to Soldiers who did not know Him. "We also wanted to promote fellowship among all chapels in the camp, and it was a send off for the 256th." At the end of the night, there was an altar call for anyone who wanted to accept God into their hearts.

"That was the main focus, of course," he added.



More than 400 Tiger Brigade Troops Raise their right hand

"...to support and defend..."

By Spc. Erin Robicheaux

On July 20 in a chapel in Baghdad, Iraq, voices rang out together, not in a song of praise, but in commitment. More than 400 National Guard Soldiers of the 256th Brigade Combat Team raised their right hands and swore to "support and defend the constitution of the United States of America." More significant than the number of Soldiers who extended their service to the military is these National Guard Soldiers did so in a combat zone.

Maj. Gen. Bennett Landreneau, adjutant general of the Louisiana National Guard, had the honor of administering the oath of extension to the 256th Soldiers. The most recent media releases say re-enlistment for the Army and its National Guard units is down, but Landreneau said the number of Soldiers who extended their services to the Louisiana-based Brigade Combat Team tells a different story than the media.

"It speaks volumes about the commitment, dedication and morale of these Soldiers, and affirms the fact that they want to be a part of this great team," he said.

Staff Sgt. Brandon Andrews, from Sulphur, La., a civilian police officer and infantryman with B Company, 3rd Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment, extended his service for three years and said he's anxious to see what lies ahead for his unit.

"The structure of the National Guard is changing and it's going to be interesting to see how that affects us," he said.

Andrews said he had no other choice than to sign his name one more time, because this is who he is.

"This is what I do. I'm a civil servant, a police officer at home as well as a Soldier, and re-enlisting is just a part of me doing what I do," he said.

Since the beginning of the deployment, 925 Soldiers promised service to their states and nation, with 761 hailing from Louisiana, 120 from New York and 43 from various states and territories attached to the 256th BCT, such as Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Puerto Rico and Washington.

Sgt. 1st Class Terrence Delcambre, from New Iberia, La., retention and recruiting representative for the 256th,



More than 400 Soldiers crowded into the Tiger Chapel on July 20 to once again, promise their service to the Army National Guard.

the majority of Soldiers extended for six years as opposed to the shorter three-year commitment.

Delcambre also said while recruiting numbers remained low, the retention numbers climbed. According to him, this shows the fear of deployment tends to be worse than the actuality.

"The perception of the people back home comes from what they see on television, which is usually not very good, so they're afraid," Delcambre said. "However, the retention rates are up, and that's based on reality. The Soldiers out here have been on the ground and if they're extending their service that should tell you something about what's really happening in Iraq."

Soldiers had a variety of reasons for continuing their service to the 256th, Delcambre said. Many just wanted to continue to serve, and others love what they do. Some wanted to be Soldiers until they retire, as well as take advantage of the educational benefits.

Delcambre said the deployment may have actually pushed people to want to remain in the National Guard.

Spc. Steven Heil from Baton Rouge, La., of HHC 1088th Eng. Bn., took the oath of extension on July 20 with more than 400 of his fellow Soldiers.



Continued on page 10...

SOLDIER FIGHTS . . .

By Spc. Erin Robicheaux

"Being out here is like living through the Soldiers who came before me—our lives are not free, freedom is not free."

This is the mentality of Spc. Casey Carroll.

Doctors sent the 22 year-old, father of two, home in March, after he lost a finger from a vehicle borne improvised explosive device. However, his intentions were not to stay there.

"They sent me home for good, but I went home to build myself back up so I could get back to my unit," he said.

The Raceland, La., native with C Co. 2/156th Inf. Bn., "Blacksheep," attached to 1/69th Inf. Bn., said his patrol investigated suspicious activity at a gas station along Route Irish, where they routinely conducted route clearance missions. They had problems with people selling gas on the side of the road so their commander wanted to check vehicles to make sure no one had containers which could potentially be used for black market fuel.

A few hours later, the Soldiers went back to the station and noticed some strange activity, and a few people also waved them down. The patrol exited their vehicle and began investigating the scene.

A black BMW sat off to the left, so they cordoned off the area to keep the civilians out of possible harm's

way. The commander saw a man walking down the road, and before the Soldiers could close in on him, a vehicle drove into the intersection behind the BMW and exploded.

"This war is crazy," he said. "It's like going into a battle blindfolded, and you never know what's coming around the corner," said Carroll.

One Soldier was killed and four wounded, including Carroll, who lost his right pinky finger and took shrapnel in his hip and foot. Within 30 days he returned home to recuperate, and after only one month, was on his way back to Baghdad.

"I always planned on coming back, but I didn't tell anyone my intentions at first," said Carroll.

He said he could not bring himself to tell his wife that he wanted to be with his fellow Soldiers, so he told her that the Army would probably call for him after he healed.

"I eventually told her the truth and she understood," he said.

Carroll used his time at home to get back into shape so the Army would have no reason to turn him away.

He ran and exercised everyday, and once he passed his physical fitness test, the doctors did not refuse to keep him out of the fight. He said his friends were surprised.

"Nobody knew I was coming back until I was here,"



Spc. Casey Carroll from Raceland, La., recovers in a military hospital after sustaining injuries from a VBIED, including the loss of his right pinky finger and shrapnel wounds to his hip and foot, on Route Irish in late March.

he said. "I think the morale of our unit was raised when I came back. We've lost so many guys out here over this craziness." Blacksheep lost eight Soldiers since arriving into Baghdad.

Carroll claimed coming back to Iraq and fighting this war with his unit was not optional. He said he had a duty to do for his country and he had a responsibility to this unit. He also owed it to his children. He came back to Iraq so they would never have to.

"If we don't fix these problems now, my kids, and your kids, will have to come back here and do it for us. I don't want to have to worry about that or people coming into their world and messing it up," he said. Carroll has a three year-old daughter, and a son who was born in November of last year, while he was fighting in Iraq.

He said though he was more than ready and jumped back into the routine of patrols and missions, it was a little difficult to adjust mentally. He wanted revenge, and was even a little scared, however, he knew he had a job to do and

put all of those feelings in the back of his mind and focused on his tasks. It even helped that his first time back outside the wire was an eventful one.

"One of our patrols was hit with a VBIED and we responded," he said. "Everyone came out okay, but we took small arms fire and I felt like they (the insurgents) were saying, 'Welcome back.'"

The injury did not affect Carroll's abilities as a Soldier, and his missions did not suffer as a result of them.

He has a history of Soldiers in his family, and said he is honored to be a part of the American tradition.

"These heroes and Soldiers are willing to spare their lives and sacrifice their time and I think they are something great," he said. "There is no greater honor than to do what we do, and I'm grateful to be affiliated with such a group of people."

Carroll said if given the choice, and knowing what he knows now, he would not change a thing.

Female Soldiers tackle basic training



By Sgt. Thomas Benoit

Breathing, squeezing the trigger and keeping the enemy in sight are just a few of the technical shooting techniques taught by 1st. Sgt. Amir Jabbar Taleb of the 1st Iraqi Army Brigade, 6th Division, to some of the first female Soldiers inducted into the Iraqi Army.

For the first time in Iraq's history, Iraqi leadership at an Iraqi base conducted an all-female IA basic training course. Over the past two weeks, 27 female recruits have had intensive training to learn the necessary skills to become a Soldier.

"They learned how to use weapons, map reading and battle tactics to engage the enemy during combat," said Brig. Gen. Jaleel Khalaf Shawail, commanding general of the 1st Iraqi Army Bde., 6th Div.

"And with the help of my American friends, this course has become successful. The Americans did not participate physically in the training, but observed," he added.

Amir instructed the Soldiers on riot control and how to calm an angry crowd without losing control of the situation. Amir said the cadets performed almost flawlessly. He was honored to be one of the first instructors to teach such an important class.

"An obstacle like inducting female Soldiers into their security force is a very difficult task. Jaleel is trying to

1st. Sgt. Amir Jabbar Taleb with the 1st IA Brigade, 6th Div., works with female Soldiers on a range July 7. Amir is passing on knowledge he gained from Soldiers from 2/156th and 3/156th Inf. Bn.

accommodate both the cultural sensibilities and the practicality of training these females," said Lt. Col. Mark Kerry, commander of Task Force Bengal of the 256th Combat Team.

The basic training academy is located on Camp Taji, where Iraqi males are also indoctrinated into the security forces. Though the facilities are not structured to accommodate females, Camp Justice provided the necessary flexibility that Camp Taji could not.

"The cadre at Camp Justice did not minimize or down play the academic or physical training mandated by the curriculum," said Command Sgt. Maj. Hassan Abid Khadim, the senior enlisted non-commissioned officer of the 1st IA Bde. The women received the equivalent training as the males from the academy.

Instructors Amir and Sgt. 1st Class Mohamad Mohsen Shheib both described the female Soldiers as some of the bravest women in Iraq, because there are men in this country who are afraid to wear the military uniform.

"Every time I look at the Iraqis, I say to myself, 'Let them do it, let them figure it out.' We should not put an American template on top of them," Kerry said.

The brigade's success will be the template for the rest of the Iraqi Army and inevitably it will help out the entire country. The Iraqi women are fighting and defying cultural trends that are stacked up against them Kerry added.

Many of the female Soldiers have lost their husbands in previous wars, Jaleel noted. "Even under these circumstances with such a strain on raising a family, they are still brave and worry about their country. They still perform almost the same duties as men."

History in the making

“ I joined because all I have left are my brother and sister, and I wanted to defend them and my homeland. ”

MORE ON THIS ARTICLE ON PAGE 11





CAMP TIGERLAND Fire Dept. is *SMOKIN'*!

By Spc. Erin Robicheaux

Sometimes even heroes need to be rescued, and the firemen of Victory Complex Fire Department, Station One, will be there if that time comes.

The firefighters are based in Camp Tigerland, and the 21 personnel come from a variety of backgrounds. Some were full time firefighters in the states, while others volunteered or were paid for singular responses.

Chief Stan Cole from Henry County, Ga., senior site leader, said in order to come to Iraq, firefighters must meet national professional standards. Additionally, the individual's experience is taken into consideration.

"You could have a firefighter with three years of experience who works for a department that runs 25,000 calls a year, or you could have someone with 20 years under them, but only answers 5,000 calls," he said. "It's all looked at when deciding who's best for the job."

Cole feels he does have the best people working for him. They proved this recently when they responded to a call on Camp Tigerland.

Soldiers of B Co., 2/156th Inf. Reg. were outside burning documents, when the fire got out of control and spread to their operations center. Before long the building was in flames. Within moments the firefighters from Station One took control of the situation.

The department does much more in addition to responding to calls, said Ben Bendiburg from Marietta, Ga. They conduct daily training, sometimes physically, where they are given scenarios and are required to respond accordingly, and sometimes in written exams.

"We do inspections throughout Camp Liberty on smoke detectors and fire extinguishers, for example, and we also conduct fire prevention training for civilians and Soldiers on the base," said Bendiburg. According to Cole, they respond to rescue calls as well, such as overturned vehicles, incidents involving hazardous materials, and in some cases, downed aircraft.

"We have the capabilities to do the same things as back in the states. The whole idea is to be a full service fire department," said Cole.

It has not always been this way, however, according to John McMillan, from Fairmont, W. Va., a 13 year fireman who came to Iraq over a year ago. He said the provisions have come a long way.

"Last year we had no equipment, not even fire trucks," he said. "We spent a lot of time helping set up the

base, putting out concertina wire, filling sandbags, whatever the Army needed us to do."

McMillan said after a year, the logistics finally caught up. When he first arrived, he and the other 70 firefighters lived in tents. However, now there are over 500, and they live in trailers and even fire stations, in some areas.

Recently, Station One, located in Camp Tigerland, held an official ribbon cutting ceremony, and the honor belonged to Brig. Gen. John Basilica, Jr., commander of the 256th Brigade Combat Team.

Spc. John Fike, from Shreveport, La., a mechanic with Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 156th Armor Regiment, is a volunteer fireman with Caddo Parish Fire District One, and became friends with the employees of Station One.

"When you have something in common like the history of the fire department, you feel comfortable talking to people in the same situation," he said.

Fike said the friendship evolved into a brotherhood, and sometimes they get together at the end of a long day to unwind. "We barbeque, play pool, watch movies, and just hang out," he said.

According to Cole, his firefighters have a very strong internal bond, an element that is almost required in their line of work.

"I think the biggest challenge for us all is that we come from different backgrounds and regions, and we all have different ways of doing things," said Cole. "There's more than one right way to do a lot of things in this business and if you're not working together as a team, in spite of the fact that you're doing the right thing, you'll be pulling against each other."

Cole said his team came together in a big way. "These guys train hard and put everything into it, and when the real deal happens you want them to step up—and they do," he said. "I'm very proud of them."



Iraqi Army takes charge during Warrior's Rage



Soldiers from 3/156th Inf., secure the area where a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device targeted their patrol in the attempt to take their lives.

By Spc. Erin Robicheaux

Beginning July 14, units from the 6th IA Div. and the 256th BCT worked together on Operation Warrior's Rage, a series of cordon-and-search missions and combat patrols to capture known anti-Iraqi forces.

The joint effort brought in more than 60 terrorists through targeted raids, seeking out specific individuals suspected to have participated in actions against Iraqi and Coalition Forces.

The operation's main players came from 4/1 IA and 3/156th Inf. Bn. On the first day of the operation, the two units captured three detainees, positively identified as brigade targets.

Capt. David Bauer from Webster, N.Y., commander of E Troop, 101st Cavalry, attached to 3/156th Inf. Bn., said

his Soldiers provided the security, while the Iraqi Forces conducted operations against the targets.

"We concentrated on supplying a quick reaction force and elements to secure the route, and ensured that it was safe for the 4/1 to maneuver,"

he said. "This allowed the IA to work independently."

Bauer said the teamwork in this mission made the relationship between the two forces stronger, and also allowed the IA to prove what they can do.

"This only worked to solidify our relationship with the IA and it further validated their professionalism," he said.

First Lt. Jeremy Falanga from Baton Rouge, La.,

searched separate areas simultaneously.

"As 2nd Platoon searched neighborhoods in the Ameriyah District of Baghdad, not far away, 3rd Platoon conducted a joint cordon-and-search with the 4/1 IA," he said.

The joint operation led to the detainment and capture of a target. Falanga said the family lied about the identity of the target, but his Soldiers knew better.

"They continued to search the home until they found the proof of identification they were looking for," he said. "And now, he's in our custody."

Col. Ronnie Johnson from New Orleans, La., deputy commander of the 256th BCT, said the collaboration of this mission was different, in that the IA not only conducted the searches, they gathered the intelligence and developed the targets as well.

"They brought much of the intelligence in and U.S. and

Iraqi officers decided together what targets to go after," he said.

This was the first time the two forces worked together on the analysis side of an operation. Johnson said it is a major step to total independent operations for the Iraqi military, and it is following a progressive plan set forth and put into motion by the 256th BCT.

"When we first started,

U.S. Forces were right beside the IA when they went into a cordon-and-search, then we progressed to where our Soldiers would set the outer cordon, while the Iraqis entered the homes and searched," he said.

"This time, our forces were on the very outskirts on the main roads, and the Iraqis executed their own plan."



OPERATION THUNDER CAT I NETS 171

1Lt. Taysha Deaton

From July 26 through July 30, Soldiers of the 1st and 3rd Iraqi Army Brigades, 6th Division, and the 256th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, conducted combined offensive operations called Operation Thunder Cat I, a series of cordon and attack missions resulting in the capture of 171 suspected insurgents.

This operation was a part of a much larger Task Force Baghdad operation called Operation Thunder. The focus of this operation and future operations is to disrupt and destroy the insurgency, according to the Commander of the 256th Brigade Combat Team, Brig. Gen. John Basili-ca, Jr.

"This operation was primarily an Iraqi Army mission, beginning with intelligence gathering, all the way through to the capture and detainment of the Anti-Iraqi forces," he said. "My brigade provided staff assistance to the Iraqi Security Forces and added combat power if needed."

Of the 171 suspected terrorists, 33 were specific brigade level targets of the 1st Iraq Army Brigade, captured by Soldiers from 2nd, 4th and 5th Battalions.

"Operation Thunder Cat I was an outstanding opportunity for the Iraqis to demonstrate their continued development into a fully operational combat unit," said Maj. Stuart Burruss, from New Orleans, executive officer for 2nd Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment, who worked with the 5-1 IA during this operation.

"The 5th Bn. leaders did an outstanding job preparing for and executing the mission," he said. This was proven by their performance, both technically and tactically sound. It was also shown by the high morale of the junior leaders and Soldiers, Burruss added.



Iraqi Soldiers with 5/1 IA, cordon off the area of a targeted house, where they captured one of the suspected terrorists during Operation Thunder Cat July 28.

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Troops Raise their Right hand



Sgt. 1st Class Huey Touchet from Crowley, La., with HHC 2/156th raises his right hand on July 20 and promises to serve his country and state for another term.

"Just today someone told me the deployment has changed their perception of the Guard," Delcambre said. "They're doing a job that counts out here, and the realignment of the National Guard as a whole will be beneficial because it will allow people to move up faster in their military career."

He said the largest concern among the Soldiers was whether or not the unit would deploy again. According to the plan set forth by the National Guard Bureau, the units should not come back to Iraq any sooner than six years. In addition, Delcambre said the idea of "at a moment's notice" is being surpassed by the need for preparation.

"They're coming up with a plan that will inform the Soldier years ahead of time so they can have time to get their situations set and ready for the deployment," he said.

Capt. Jeff Musumeche from Lafayette, La., strength manager for the 256th BCT, said the number of Soldiers who extended is a true testament of their dedication, as well as to the commitment of the leaders in the brigade.

"Soldiers extend for a majority of reasons, however, they all have one common attribute—dedication to the Guard," he said. "Our Soldiers are constantly engaged in full spectrum operations while serving in Iraq, and their leaders never forget the age old saying of 'taking care of Soldiers.'"

Musumeche said with this kind of commitment, the 256th BCT will continue to excel in retaining combat experienced Soldiers.

Landreneau thanked the Soldiers of the 256th on behalf of Louisiana Governor, Kathleen Blanco, and said he was proud of the statement they were making on this day.

"We look forward to having you back home and giving you the hero's welcome you each deserve," he said.

Continued on page 12

Master Sgt. Linda Litchfield from Carencro, La., chief legal non-commissioned officer for the Staff Judge Advocate, embraces a female Soldier from the 1st Iraqi Army Brigade.

By Spc. Erin Robicheaux

They were the first, but if they have their way, they won't be the last.

On July 16, a group of determined and proud female Iraqis took a step in creating a new world for Iraq, and gave little girls across their country positive role models to look up to. They became the first all-female class to graduate from the Iraqi Army basic training, coming from separate battalions of the 1st Iraqi Army Brigade.

The training, taught entirely by Iraqi instructors, consisted of weapons qualifications and physical fitness development. This was also a first, said Command Sgt. Maj. Hassan Abid Khadim, senior non-commissioned officer for the 1st Iraqi Army Brigade.

"In addition to being the first all-Iraqi staff, it is also the first time we (Iraqi leadership) trained Soldiers on our base," he said.

The courses are usually held at a U.S. Army camp with Coalition Forces helping to some degree.

Hassan said the females learned various skills of the Army, regardless of their specified job. They most often serve in an administrative capacity, but are called upon at times to accompany the infantry on missions, in case they are needed to search females.

A 19 year-old military intelligence sergeant said this was one of the proudest days of her life.

"I joined because all I have left are my brother and sister, and I wanted to defend them and my homeland," she said.

The group of women said they were happy they made it through the course, and can now start focusing on their future.

"It feels good that we can almost touch the spirit of Iraq," said one graduate. "We're Soldiers who will defend our country."

Brig. Gen. Jaleel Khalaf Shawail, commander of the 1st IA Bde., said the mothers, daughters, and sisters in Iraq played dual roles; taking care of the kids,



Female Intuition

Historic Event for Iraqi Army

family, and home, and fighting terrorism in the streets with their brothers-in-arms.

"These men (terrorists) don't dare wear this uniform, but the women do," he said. "We should salute these brave women for their contribution to democracy and freedom."

Jaleel said women make up 60-65 percent of the Iraqi population, and have the right to be part of it in all facets of life.

"We cannot exclude such a huge percentage," he said.

Master Sgt. Linda Litchfield from Carencro, La., chief legal non-commissioned officer for the 256th Brigade Combat Team Staff Judge Advocate, and several females from the 256th BCT attended the graduation. They supported their sisters-in-arms and following the ceremony, displayed their pride as they walked through the ranks of the formation to congratulate each Soldier individually.

"I was very proud to be there, because women have always played such an important role in society," Litchfield said. "I thought it was great that they were making such a huge step in their country, and I was very proud of them."

Litchfield said she heard several stories of the Soldiers' lives, and how they came to be members of the Iraqi Army. She said one woman, in particular, stood out to her—the Soldier's husband had been killed and she now had eight children to support.

"The majority of these women have kids and families to take care of, and I just think it's awesome that their families are so supportive," said Litchfield.

The women said their families were proud of them, and some even have husbands, brothers, sons, and fathers in

the Iraqi Army as well. However, one female said her family's prior service in the military did not influence her decision to enlist one way or the other.

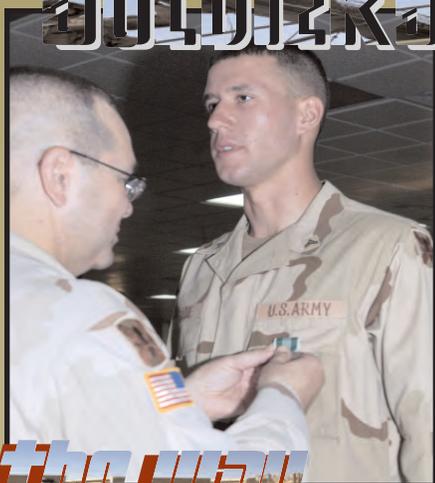
"This is something I wanted to do for my country, and I would be here no matter what," she said.



Sgt. Hallie Godchaux, from Arnaudville, La., congratulates a female Iraqi Soldier after the completion of her basic training.

256TH SOLDIERS

Cpl. Jeffrey Abadie from Mandeville, La., receives an ARCOM from Brig. Gen. John Basilica, Jr. on August 1.



Lead the Way!

By Spc. Erin Robicheaux

Two Soldiers from the 256th Brigade Combat Team stood before a panel of senior non-commissioned officers and proved why they should be chosen as the Soldier and NCO of the Quarter, respectively.

Cpl. Jeffrey Abadie from Mandeville, La., of C Company, 3rd Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment, attached to 1st Battalion, 156th Armor Regiment, 256th Brigade Combat Team, competed against fellow Soldiers of the 256th for the coveted title of Soldier of the Quarter. His leadership helped him prepare and in the end, it paid off.

"I'd never gone before a board before, so my NCOs set up a mock scenario to help me get ready for it," said Abadie. Though his questioning at the brigade level lasted only a few moments, Abadie's leaders grilled him for a twenty minute question and answer session, so he would have as few surprises as possible. He also prepared by reading through a study guide provided by his leaders, though he said the mock board helped him more than anything.

"My NCOs purposely asked me the harder questions to better prepare me," he claimed. There was no way of knowing what level of difficulty the questions would be for the actual board, but Abadie's tutoring from his leaders helped him stay calm under pressure. He said this was also something the panel looked at when deciding a winner.

"I was pretty confident in most of my answers, and when I wasn't, my composure was never shaken," he said.

"One thing that helped me a lot was that if I didn't know the answer, I always know where to find it, so I stated the appropriate field manual to reference."

Ultimately, Abadie said this quality is what makes a good Soldier. You may not always know the answer, but knowing where to find it is a step in solving a problem.

Staff Sgt. Daniel Slone from New Iberia, La., with B Company, 2nd Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment,

THUNDER CAT I



An Iraqi Soldier with 5/1 IA, pulls security while the rest of his team searches a surrounding house for a targeted terrorist during Operation Thunder Cat July 28.

Continued from Page 10

One of the most successful operations belonged to 3rd Battalion, 3rd Iraqi Army Brigade, who captured 45 detainees in the west Abu Ghraib district of Baghdad. Soldiers of 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, 256th BCT, supported the mission by providing outer security.

Capt. Kurt Merseal from Steepleville, Mo., commander of C Company, 2/130th Inf. Bn., said the IA showed significant improvement throughout Thunder Cat. "The Iraqi Army has progressed so much as a team and unit, and it is satisfying for me to assist them in accomplishing our collective goal," he said.

"I noticed that the IA has improved their situational awareness, as well as working together as a team," said Staff Sgt. Ronald Floyd, a squad leader for C Co., 2/130th Inf. Bn., from Villa Grove, Ill. "As they improve, it helps Coalition forces and Iraqi citizens move forward."

Joint missions involving forces from different commands creates challenges in planning, execution and reporting. This adds significant complexity to the operations, explained Basilica.

He added Operation Thunder Cat I was also the first time these challenges were managed using state of the art computer networks to coordinate the efforts of the three brigades.

"The Iraqi Army has done a superb job and I am very proud of what they accomplished," said Basilica. "The measure of success for this operation is not only the number of insurgents captured, but it is proof of the Iraqi Army's growth as a military force," he said. "It is also a clear indication that they are becoming stronger and more capable as a team."

attached to C Company, 1/156th AR, earned the role of NCO of the Quarter. As a chief operating officer for single share holder companies on the civilian side, he has quite a bit of experience dealing with numerous employees, in a leadership role. As a Bradley commander and patrol leader, he deals with fewer subordinates, but said due to the conditions around them and the nature of the job, it is much more challenging.



Cpl. Enrique Olivencia, native of Puerto Rico, and Cpl. Renelta Hollins, from Natchez, Miss., with C Co. 1088th Eng. Bn., explain to Maj. Gen. Bennett Landreneau, adjutant general of the Louisiana National Guard, some key projects they accomplished since being deployed.

On July 19 through 22, senior leadership of the Louisiana National Guard spent the time with their Soldiers and witnessed what life in Iraq.

Maj. Gen. Bennett Landreneau, and Command Sergeant Major John Morrow, senior leadership for the Louisiana National Guard, visited Soldiers including those in units attached to the Louisiana Brigade from various states.

Their first morning began with breakfast with Soldiers from 1/156th AR. Sgt. 1st Class Philip White from Texarkana, Tex., non-commissioned officer in charge of personnel operations for HHC 1/156th AR, said Morrow had good things to say.

"He alleviated a lot of our concerns and put fears to rest," said White. "He really stressed the importance of getting back to our families and caught us up on the news of the rest of the Louisiana National Guard," he added.

Throughout that day Landreneau and Morrow traveled in Tigerland and met with Soldiers of different battalions. The 1/141st FA hosted the Louisiana chain of command and escorted them throughout selected base defense posts, the paladins, and the 256th Brigade Interrogation Facility.

Shortly following their time with 141st FA, the 199th Forward Support Battalion showed Landreneau and Morrow the maintenance areas, support and sustainment facilities, and the troop medical clinic. Soldiers from 2/156th Inf. Reg., and HHC 256th, and the 256th Military Intelligence Co. shared lunch and dinner, respectively, with the commanders and command sergeants major.

The close and highlight of the day was administering the oath of extension to over 400 Soldiers of the 256th BCT. Troops from all units and battalions pledged their allegiance and service, once again. Only this time, the National Guard Soldiers did so in a combat zone.

LA LEADERSHIP VISITS THE TIGER BRIGADE



Staff Sgt. Michael James Booker from Bossier City, La., with 1/156 AR, talks with Maj. Gen. Bennett Landreneau.

Command Sgt. Maj. John Morrow, of the Louisiana National Guard, has breakfast with Cpl. Jason Webb, from Baton Rouge, La., of HHC 256th.



Day two began with breakfast with troops and leadership from 3/156th Inf. Bn. The Task Force Bandit Soldiers voiced concerns about the future of the National Guard and various issues regarding the military as a whole.

Following the breakfast, 1088th Engineer Bn. hosted Landreneau and Morrow, and demonstrated the Buffalo and Warlock. They also received a brief from the Essential Services Team on the current projects in the Baghdad area. Their tour concluded with an awards ceremony at the Tiger Den DFAC, and breakfast the following morning with Enlisted and NCOs of the Quarter, as well as all finalists.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE 256TH

LAANG Office of Family Programs Reunion Workshops

Prepare yourself to meet the challenges of redeployment (homecoming). Separation and the changes it brings about can create strong and what may seem like conflicting emotions in you and those you care about. Reunion Briefings will address the stress that comes from the changes that have taken place and concern about what life will be like following a long period of separation. This workshop has recently been expanded to include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to be facilitated by a subject matter expert. LA National Guard Chaplains will be providing a Marriage Assessment Survey for spouses as well as ASIST training. We encourage families to attend.

Not only does reunion impact the Soldier, but it also has a significant impact on the children. Children ages 4 and above should also attend. Breakouts will be according to appropriate age group. The sessions are designed to help children better understand issues related to reunion and to improve skills needed for successful reintegration, according to their developmental level. In anticipation of the upcoming return of the 256th BCT, the Office of Family Programs and Family Assistance Centers have scheduled a series of reunion and reintegration briefings.

These briefings will help families and friends prepare to meet the challenges of redeployment and homecoming. Separate breakouts will be held for adults and for children, ages 4 and up. This workshop has recently been expanded to include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to be facilitated by a subject matter expert.

These briefings are open to all family members and friends of LA National Guardsmen. For more information contact your nearest FAC.



**Items for Sale at the
TIGER'S
MARKET**

**Electronics, Sporting Goods,
Furniture, and Misc. Items.**

Accessible on NIPR
www.256bet.id3.army.mil

Citizen Cen

*Contributed by Spc. Chi Cen
HHC 1/69th Inf.*

What could be more American than coming from another country to join the United States military in support of the war against terrorism? And what more ideal place to



be sworn in as a United States citizen, than the Al-Faw Palace, one of Saddam Hussein's previous residences? I previously gained by citizenship, along with 143 fellow Soldiers, with more than a dozen supporters from my own unit, 1/69th Inf. Bn., in attendance for the ceremony. I was so happy they were cheering for me because they supported me through my naturalization process. It was an event and experience I'll never forget.

To me, being a U.S. citizen is a symbol of hope and freedom, two things that many of us take for granted. Being in Iraq, I witnessed what it is like to be denied these gifts. Now liberated, the Iraqi people received no rights under Saddam Hussein. In January I was able to witness citizens of this country march to polling sites to vote, despite threats to their lives. This event gave a whole new meaning to the term, "the right to vote," as these people were willing to put their lives on the line for it.

Becoming a U.S. citizen did not make me feel more "American," since this was something I have always felt in my heart. I joined the Army in 2002 because I felt I had an obligation to defend my country, even knowing the chances of going to war in the near future were inevitable. I learned the best kind of people you will ever meet in your life are those who served in the military. Each one of them are volunteers, and risk their lives to keep their families, friends, and loved ones out of harm's way. I am proud to be a United States citizen and a Soldier in the United States Army.

She said Yes, again!

On 2 July 2005 Shelley and I celebrated our 17th wedding anniversary. Feeling more love than words could ever explain I asked her to marry me again, and she said YES, again. Shelley, I will take this as a second chance to do what I got to do and not did the first time. day forth I reaffirm my love for you, my Queen of family, and my King rival any and all ever told. I promise



second time will be twice the fun, twice the love, and maybe twice the children. Thank you for loving me! When I pray, I give thanks to God for You!

~Sgt. 1st Class Jabian Sellers
HHC 256th

Fallen Soldier, commander's angel

By Spc. Erin Robicheaux

On July 16 Soldiers from 1st Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, encountered an improvised explosive device in the area of Abu Ghraib, and Staff Sgt. Jorge Pena-Romero, or Pena, fell victim to the effects. On July 20 Soldiers and leaders of 1/11th ACR and the 256th Brigade Combat Team paid tribute to an outstanding role model, warrior, and friend.

"I now believe in God," said Capt. Ryan Keys, from Lisbon, Maine, commander of B Troop, 1/11th ACR.

Keys shared his personal spiritual beliefs and how he felt like his Soldier, Staff



A fellow Soldier with 1/11th ACR says good-bye to his fallen brother in arms

Sgt. Pena, saved him.

"Up to now, I did not believe in the existence of a god or an afterlife," he said. "I never rejected the existence of one, but I had not

yet accepted it."

Keys said he is a logical person who relies on facts and concrete evidence. He said through the inspiration and influence of Pena, he has something tangible to backup his new belief, something he can hold. He spoke of his last moments with his Soldier.

"I had his head in one of my hands and my other was trying to apply pressure. Through all of the smoke, the screaming, and the radio traffic, my head went clear and two words started to flood my thoughts: "Thank you," said Keys.

Keys said he was grateful to Pena for saving him and his family, and for allowing his own life to be Keys' tangible evidence. He said his time with Pena led him to believe in God and to accept and embrace Him into his life. Staff Sgt. Richard Sayrat from West Covina, Calif. supply sergeant from B Troop, 1/11th ACR, said Pena was a leader in the truest sense of the word. The day he met him, Pena exemplified mentorship and motivated his troop for greatness.

"The first time I met him is when he took me to the promotion (E-6, Staff Sgt.) board. I remember telling him that I was nervous and scared and didn't think I could do it," said Sayrat.

Pena told him he could, because he did.

"He told me 'you don't follow what your mind says,



On July 20 Soldiers and leaders of 1/11th ACR and the 256th Brigade Combat Team paid tribute to an outstanding role model, warrior, and friend.

you follow what your heart wants you to do, and that's to become a staff sergeant, a leader of Soldiers," said Sayrat.

He said Pena was a leader a Soldier could not be afraid to go to combat with.

Capt. David Snyder from Washington D.C., chaplain for the 1/11th ACR explained the significance of the display set up in memory of Pena.

The B Troop flag was surrounded by all flags of the 1/11th, symbolizing the support offered by fellow Soldiers in the time of need. The 1st Squadron's colors were displayed, and denoted that Pena was a part of the family and would be missed and mourned. Out in front sat his body armor with a lollipop carefully attached, to signify the dozens he passed out to children, and the necklace

draped over his boots was a gift from his daughter, Alexis.

Lt. Col. James Blackburn from Washington, Pa., commander of the 1/11th ACR, said Pena did not give his life for an idea, or a symbol, he gave it for his friends.

"He did his best, and made the ultimate sacrifice for his battle buddies, the troopers who grew to know and love him," he said.

Blackburn said Pena lived a life to be celebrated, and his death, as a result was not in vain.

"He left it out there on the battlefield for all to know and for all to see," he said. "As General Patton told us more than 60 years ago, 'It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died, rather, we should thank God that such men ever lived.'"



TAKING CHARGE

Iraqi Soldiers pull security for their team during a cordon and search.

Continued from Page 9

Johnson said the IA decided what targets they were going to hit, when they were going to hit them, and how many forces they were going to use.

"That was a huge step forward," he said.

Capt. Stuart West from Pineville, La., commander of B Company, 3-156th Inf. Bn., said his Soldiers were thoroughly impressed with the 4-1 Soldiers' execution of this particular operation.

"Soldiers in my command expressed they were pleased by the efficiency at which the Soldiers of the IA conducted their cordon-and-search missions," he said.

As a result of the IA's intelligence gathering, they successfully captured a target on the brigade's list.

"On July 17, the forces apprehended a Syrian national suspected of AIF activities in the vicinity of Ameriyah," said West.

The IA conducted several traffic control checkpoints and searched more than 40 vehicles for vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, West added.

The Soldiers captured more than 60 terrorists, as well as a number of contraband and weapons.

Three AK-47 rifles, two pistols, a list of documents, and a general officer's uniform of the former Iraqi regime were among the items recovered by the IA and U.S. Soldiers. In some cases, it was the Iraqi people who steered forces in the right direction, which further exemplifies the growing faith the Iraqi people have for their own military.

Maj. William Rachal from New Iberia, La., plans officer for 1st Battalion, 156th Armor Regiment, 256th BCT, said in the Khadra area of Baghdad, he and his troops witnessed the growing bond between the citizens and Iraqi Security Forces.

"Many homeowners were outside observing their Army in action and you could see a sense of pride as the citizens waved, laughed, and talked with their Soldiers," he said.

West agreed, and said the promise of a new attitude was also evident in his area.

"The overall climate of the people in our sector is now one of inspiration and encouragement," he said. "They often expressed this to my Soldiers, in reference to seeing Iraqi Soldiers patrol their neighborhoods."

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Soldiers lead the way

"Being shot at and seeing what we've seen as a section changed my outlook and actually put things into perspective," he claimed. "When I go back to my civilian job and have to work with a difficult person, I'm going to think, 'You're not that big of a problem, are you?'"

Slone and the other NCOs were questioned by the board on the same topics as the lower enlisted Soldiers, in addition to leadership procedures.

"When we walked in we had to do a series of facing movements so the panel could see how we moved and inspect our uniforms," he said.

Each senior NCO on the panel asked two questions about a topic, which included maintenance, current events and first aid, for example. Slone claimed one of the most difficult topics dealt with weapons systems, since there are so many different lengths, weights, and ranges. Even under the pressure of difficult questions, he said he never faltered in his confidence, and attributed his calm head to his civilian career.

"I felt like I had an advantage because I speak before a lot of large groups and often run meetings and conferences," he stated.

As well as Slone felt he performed, he never knew how he fared in the overall spectrum of the competition, because each NCO separately faced the judges. In that respect, he said winning was a total surprise and very gratifying.

Both Abadie and Slone showed unwavering self-assurance in their answers and learned quite a bit, in addition to winning a competition.

"I realized that I could maintain my composure under pressure, and I think that's something that I can take home with me, and know that I can have confidence in difficult situations," reflected Abadie.

Slone said it helped that most questions seemed to be directed towards their lives in Iraq, and that each topic may have already pertained to any number of experiences since arriving in Baghdad.

"Well, they certainly didn't ask me any questions about cold weather injuries," he smirked.



Staff Sgt. Daniel Slone, from New Iberia, La receives an ARCOM presented by Brig. Gen. John Basilica, Jr.



One BIG Happy Family

Staff Sgt. Everett Ozenne, with B Co. 1088th, and his first cousin Lawrence Ozenne Jr., with HHC 2/156th, both are from Lafayette, La., are enjoying evening chow at Tigerland DFAC.

Almost Home

MAIL RODEO !

Soldiers of the 256th BCT gather at the MWR tent to mail personal items back home.



Joint Raid

Joint forces continue to fight for Iraq's Freedom by ridding the area of insurgent activities by conducting raids such as the one shown below.



Spc. James Castille from Iowa, La. and Spc. James Wheat from Lake Charles, La., both with A Co, 3/156th Inf., outside the prison entrance controlling the crowd.

Justice Reigns in Tigerland

Court Martials

1. Pfc. Benjamin King HHC 1/156th AR
-One specification of violation of a lawful general order (General Order Number One) under Article 92, UCMJ.
-Sentenced to reduction from E4 to E3, forfeiture of 2/3 of one months pay and 30 days confinement in a military detention facility.
2. Pfc. Dredatis Cook, HHC 1/156th AR
-One specification of wrongful use of a controlled substance (marijuana), a violation of Article 112a, UCMJ.
-Sentenced to reduction from E4 to E3 and forfeiture of 1/3 of one months pay.
3. Pvt. Christopher Pearson HHC 1/156th AR
-3 specifications of failure to go to appointed place of duty, a violation of Article 86; one specification of wrongful use of a controlled substance (marijuana), a violation of Article 112a; and one specification of wrongfully communicating a threat, a violation of Article 134.
-Sentenced to reduction from E4 to E2, forfeiture of 1/3 of one months pay and 30 days confinement in a military detention facility.
4. Pvt. Ian Graham, HHC 1/156th AR
-3 specifications of violation of Article 112a (Controlled substances, valium and marijuana).
-Sentenced to reduction from E3 to E2, forfeiture of 1/3 of one months pay and 10 days confinement in a military detention facility.

5. Pvt. Detrick Jenkins, HHC 1/156th AR
-One specification of wrongful use of a controlled substance (marijuana), a violation of Article 112a.
-Sentenced to reduction from E4 to E2, forfeiture of 1/3 of one months pay and 20 days confinement in a military detention facility.
6. Pvt. Dexter Draper, HHC 1/156th AR
-One specification of wrongful use of a controlled substance (marijuana), a violation of Article 112a.
-Sentenced to reduction from E4 to E1, forfeiture of 2/3 of one months pay and 30 days confinement in a military detention facility.
7. Pfc. Kevin Traxler, A Co, 199th FSB
-One specification of wrongful use of a controlled substance (marijuana), a violation of Article 112a.
-Sentenced to reduction from E4 to E3, forfeiture of \$500.00 pay for one month, 8 days extra duty and 30 days confinement suspended for 6 months.
8. Pfc. Julius Hobdy, A Co. 199th FSB
-One specification of wrongful use of a controlled substance (marijuana), a violation of Article 112a.
-Sentenced to reduction from E4 to E3, forfeiture of \$500.00 pay for one month, 15 days confinement suspended for 60 days.

The Tiger Brigade Strikes Back

Maj. Roderick Alvendia
256th BCT Deputy SJA

The recent murder conviction of the insurgent who killed Staff Sgt. Henry Irizarry of A Co. 1/69th Inf. Reg., received widespread response from Soldiers throughout the theater of operations, as well as from the media. In the wake of that successful verdict, the Tiger Brigade SJA leads the way as justice continues to be dealt to insurgents at the Central Criminal Court of Iraq, or CCCI. Task Force Wolfhound is responsible for the capture of several of insurgents with large weapons caches, and received the maximum life sentence, 20 years, dealt by the Iraqi court system.

TF Steel, 2/156th Inf. Bn., joined the fight with convictions involving insurgents detained for illegally processing weapons. TF Geronimo,

1/156th Armor Reg., dealt blows to the insurgency at the CCCI, as well, as seen in their growing convictions. TF Bandit, 3/156th Inf. Bn., had their first investigative hearings on July 26 and 31, regarding an IED triggerman, and the much talked about sniper video case, respectively.

To date, 47 initial hearings were held involving these Task Forces and other units of the 256th BCT, and over 350 insurgents, all captured by Soldiers of the 256th BCT were sent to Abu Ghraib, and will ultimately face justice at the CCCI.

"The 256th conviction rate is one of the highest in theater," said Lt. Randolph Stone, a naval lawyer serving with the 134th JAG liaison cell in the International Zone. Stone attributes

the 256th successes to the patrols' high quality of evidence gathering, as well as the thorough preparation of the Soldiers who testify at the CCCI.

Sgt. Nathaniel Orphey, detainee operations paralegal, and I focus on the CCCI daily, working in close coordination with intelligence analysts from the 256th and the 3rd ID SJA.

Upon returning home, "Operation Enduring Justice" will ensure the Tiger Brigade continues to fight against insurgency. Our Soldiers will continue to testify from the United States in the remaining 100 trials for the 256th. This is possible through the technology of video teleconferencing (VTC), and will take place at the Soldier's nearest equipped National Guard Armory. This effort is the first of its kind in the nation.

256th BCT HUMANITARIAN MISSIONS

Serving those in need



FALLEN SOLDIER

YOU ARE FOREVER IN
OUR HEARTS

STAFF SGT. JORGE PENA-ROMERO

A Soldiers Story

I was that which others did not want to be
I went where others feared to go
And did what others feared to do
I asked nothing from those who gave nothing
And reluctantly accepted the
thought of eternal loneliness....Should I fail
I have seen the face of terror
Felt the stinging cold of fear
And enjoyed the sweet taste of a moments
Love I have cried, Pained, and Hoped
But most of all I have lived times
Others would say were best forgotten
At least I am able to say that
I Am Proud of what I was....A Soldier

-Anonymous