



# DISPATCH

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## Task Force Liberty Soldiers roll on with up armored vehicles



*Soldiers of the 42nd Infantry Division depart Camp Buehring, Kuwait in their up-armored vehicles for their ground assault convoy north into Iraq.*  
Photo by Staff Sgt. Raymond Drumsta

By Master Sgt. Corine Lombardo, 42nd Infantry Division

FORWARD OPERATING BASE DANGER, TIKRIT, IRAQ -- Soldiers of Task Force Liberty deployed into Iraq better prepared for the mission than their predecessors, and they continue to strengthen their capabilities each day.

In addition to a full complement of individual body armor, which includes Kevlar helmets and eye protection far greater in capability and numbers than any prior troop rotation into theater, Task Force Liberty Soldiers' greatest strength is its armor protection for its fleet of Humvees. Humvees transport the vast majority of Soldiers on the roads of Iraq.

The greater majority of all Humvees in North Central Iraq have either Level 1, 2 or 3 armor protection. The remaining few unarmored Humvees were transported from Kuwait into Iraq on flatbed trucks, to avoid placing Soldiers in unarmored vehicles. This small number of Humvees fulfill the administrative and support requirements on the well-protected operating bases and do not depart the base for combat

missions, said Task Force commander, Maj. Gen. Joseph J. Taluto.

Level 1 armor for Humvees are those vehicles produced at the factory with all the protective measures installed. These continue to arrive in theater and are issued to units as rapidly as they are received. Since arriving in Iraq, Task Force Liberty has added over 200 Level 1 Humvees to the nearly 1,000 left behind by the previous division task force, giving the 42nd Infantry Division and Task Force Liberty an almost 25 percent increase in capabilities over the preceding division.

Level 2 armor provides for much of the same individual protection and is provided as an add-on-armor kit in the Army supply chain. Task Force Liberty logistics and maintenance Soldiers in North Central Iraq continue every day to add these kits to the balance of their vehicles.

Level 3 armor, depicted so frequently as welded metal plates, is designed to protect Soldiers against the fragmentation of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), the most lethal weapon used against troops in Task Force Liberty. While less effective against direct fire attacks, they are invaluable in protecting Soldiers against the hazards of shrapnel and

fragmentation from IED detonations. Currently, Task Force Liberty includes over 70 percent Level 1 or Level 2 Humvees for combat patrols and combat logistics patrols. As the availability of Level 1 and Level 2 armored vehicles continues to increase, fewer level 3 vehicles are employed in operations.

While staged on bases in Kuwait, 42nd Infantry Division and Task Force Liberty Soldiers, with the expert help of the 699th Maintenance Company and 276th Maintenance Battalion, installed much of the add-on-armor. All vehicles received their necessary armor installation before moving north into Iraq to conduct combat operations.

"Once they get up north, their commanders designate which vehicles will be out on the road, all the time, doing patrols," said Sgt. First Class Kenney, platoon sergeant and chief of the 699th's Service and Recovery section. "It depends on what your mission is. Then they may get Level 2 or Level 1 Armor." Level 1 Armor and Level 2 Armor are factory built and come with ballistic glass, he added.

Task Force Liberty Soldiers provided the basic labor for the maintenance companies' Soldiers, who welded the Level 3 Armor to the vehicles, Kenney said. He sees the armor installation as another example of Soldiers adapting in order to accomplish their missions.

Assisting in the armor installation was Sgt. Niko Oliver, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 42nd Infantry Division, which is the command and control unit for Task Force Liberty. The armor saves Soldiers' lives, Oliver said.

"I feel 100 percent safer with [the armor on]," Oliver said. "It'll help keep our manpower intact. It means another Soldier looking out for Iraqi interests, another Soldier to keep Iraqis safe."

The posture for armored vehicles is equally impressive for the fleet of heavier trucks, those used for logistics movements throughout the area of operations. While there currently is no Level 1 protection for the Army's heavy trucks, the Department of the Army has recently introduced Level 2 add-on-armor kits to supplant the Level 3 armor currently being used. These Level 2 kits are now in the Army's supply system and are being installed by maintenance and logistics Soldiers as they are received in North Central Iraq.

"I could not be more pleased with the performance of our logisticians in providing the men and women of the 42nd Infantry Division and Task Force Liberty the best possible force protection of the fleet," said Taluto, adding "even before this add-on-armor program achieves its pinnacle, over 80 percent of our fleet of heavy trucks currently provide Level 2 or Level 3 armor protection for the crew".

## Operation Crayon provides supplies to Iraqi children

By Capt. Monte Hibbert, 116<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

DIBBIS, Iraq - Soldiers of the 116<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team's (BCT) 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 148<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery recently delivered a little bit of hope to a small school north of Kirkuk, thanks to literally hundreds of unseen donors.

Members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 148<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Unit Ministry Team (UMT) and Battery B delivered packages of school supplies to local Iraqi Army, police and government officials to be given to children and teachers at the North Hatin School.

"Many of the teachers do not have the proper equipment or supplies to teach properly," said Sgt. Sebron Farmer, a member of the battalion who participated in the event. "The supplies that were provided and handed out were greatly appreciated."

The school supplies were donated and shipped to Iraq by individuals and organizations in the United States. Once the supplies arrived in Iraq, coalition Soldiers packaged them into standard packages and delivered them to local authorities for distribution. Operation Crayon is a charitable program that gives schools pencils, crayons, paper and other materials necessary to teach children.

"Operation Crayon is a way for people to make a real difference in these children's lives," said Sgt. Imelda Remillard, coordinator of the program for the 116<sup>th</sup> BCT. "It also provides an opportunity for Soldiers to build a relationship with the children of Iraq."

The Soldiers delivered around 100 Operation Crayon packets to the Iraqi officials, which were then given to students and teachers.

The Soldiers also brought several newly-repaired desks which were unloaded by Iraqi Army soldiers and taken into the school. Also, local government, police, Iraqi Army, and coalition forces leaders walked through the school to do an inspection while the packets were being delivered to the children.

"Hatin School is in very bad shape," said Chaplain William Nicholson, leader of the UMT. "The building is very old and in need of restoration."

Local leaders, in cooperation with the 116<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team, are making plans to restore and rebuild the school building.

Iraqi officials who handed out school supply packets include local Iraqi Army Commander Maj. Yawar, the Dibbis Chief of Police, Dibbis Mayor Hadi Mustof, and others. Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army soldiers also helped to pass out packets.

After all the students had received a packet, several teachers came forward and they were given packets also.

"The whole activity was very enjoyable for Iraqis, U.S. Soldiers, and all who were there. It shined a positive light upon Iraqi officials," said Nicholson. "It was easy to see when we finished that the Iraqis were happy - happy for being included, happy for being made to look good, and happy for being able to help their fellow citizens."

In all, 95 student packets and 4 teacher packets were distributed. The teacher packets contain supplies expected to last about a year.

## Iraqi soldiers' heroism earns coveted Cavalry Spurs

Story and photos by Spec. Christopher Connelly, 42nd Infantry Division

**BALAD, Iraq** - In every dark cloud there is a silver lining, and March 7 was no exception as Soldiers of Company C, 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Combat Team (BCT) and the 203<sup>rd</sup> Iraqi Army Battalion celebrated an auspicious occasion.

That evening Soldiers of 203<sup>rd</sup> Iraqi Army Battalion received the Cavalry's highest internal award, the coveted Cavalry Spur, which is only awarded to those Soldiers that show exceptional ability and courage, according to Lt. Col. Jody Petery, 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment commander.

"This is the first time the 1<sup>st</sup> BCT, and possibly any cavalry unit, has awarded an Iraqi Battalion the coveted Cavalry Spur," said Petery.

The Iraqi Army battalion earned their spurs when they risked their lives on February 13, when 11 members of 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, Company C who were driving in a convoy at night rolled over a narrow road and into a canal.

This was the last time anyone saw the Soldiers in vehicle two.

Investigators believe the Soldiers' Humvee, rolled over and became submerged in the canal.

When the rest of the convoy realized what happened, they began jumping into the freezing water to save the Soldiers.

Not realizing that there was a very fast undercurrent, the Soldiers kept coming back up for air and praying that they would find them.

After a period of time in the fast moving, freezing water, they began to suffer from hypothermia and had to be medically evacuated. Only three Soldiers of Company C were left to retrieve their fallen comrades. Then a platoon of Iraqi Soldiers from the 203<sup>rd</sup> Iraqi Army Battalion showed up.

The Iraqi soldiers began to strip down to enter the freezing water but were stopped by Capt. Phillip Poteet, Charlie Company commander. The Iraqi soldiers however, pleaded with Poteet to let them go into the water and try to find the lost Soldiers.

"If I can just give something back, to show our thanks for everything the U.S. Soldiers have done for us it would be worth the risk," Iraqi soldier Abdul Mutalib said later.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Military brought in an



Lt. Col. Jody Petery 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Combat Team commander (left) presents the Cavalry's coveted Spur to Col. Shujaa Jawad Hussein, 203<sup>rd</sup> Iraqi Army Battalion commander

aircraft filled with metal-detecting equipment, and Navy Seals to find the Soldiers.

Navy Seals combed the canal for hours unsuccessfully, depleting their oxygen tanks. The Iraqi soldiers ran to a nearby garage and made a tool that looked like a 20-foot long coat rack. They began working both sides of the canal in 10-man teams. They lowered the tool in the water with ropes, dredged, pulled up the tool and then dredged again until they found the Soldiers - who they referred to as their fallen brothers.

1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Muhammad Borhan, 203<sup>rd</sup> Iraqi Army Battalion is one of the brave Iraqi Soldiers who risked his life to find the Soldiers.

"It's not that I am not thankful for this honor," Borhan said of the award. "It is just that they would have done the same thing if it were me down there... I tried to give them life."

The evening included a dinner of Iraqi delicacies and American cuisine. American and Iraqi Soldiers tried the foods of each other's country, and laughed and talked like old friends.

The Soldiers of Company C were full of smiles, and the Iraqi soldiers looked as though a large weight was lifted from their shoulders.

This night there was no sign of the past, but only a glimpse of the future.



Cavalry spurs on display prior to being presented to soldiers of the 203<sup>rd</sup> Iraqi Army Battalion