



Two Aviation Brigade Soldiers become America's newest citizens



Photo by Chief Warrant Officer 4 Brian Callahan

Maj. Gen. William G. Webster, Commander of Task Force Baghdad, congratulates Chaplain (Capt.) Felix Kumai, 1-3 ARB chaplain, after the naturalization ceremony on Camp Victory on July 25. See page 5 for story.

Commander's Column:

Since the transfer of authority in February, our Soldiers continue to amaze and surprise me at every turn, and the brigade as a whole has posted some outstanding facts and figures to bring that point home. Like I have been and continue to be, I think that you will be amazed at what you see. In past newspapers we have run stories on the outstanding efforts by the Soldiers that make up our Class 3/5(Refuel and Re-arming Specialists) sections. Since we assumed this mission, these Soldiers have dispensed over six million gallons of fuel, to Coalition aircraft of all types and sizes and to tactical vehicles. What makes this achievement more significant is that they have done it without an accident or incident. The hard work done by these Soldiers has enabled the brigade to fly over 40, 000 hours. This is an incredible achievement and is a testament to the professionalism, dedication and commitment to the mission by the pilots and aircrew members at all levels.

But it doesn't stop there. We have continued to build upon the success of what was started prior to our arrival at Taji. Our Administration and Logistics Center, ALOC, is now completed and all of our critical support functions are located together under one roof. The new Medical Clinic is nearing completion. The addition of the south-ramp has allowed us to set-up three new maintenance hangers, providing us with better working areas, and allowing Soldiers to work on aircraft indoors and stay out of the intense

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Vehicle Rodeo



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Marne Express



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Band rocks Taji



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"Who will win the College Football National Championship this season?"

"Even though the Ohio St. Buckeyes play three top ten teams this season, they will be the national champs. Being a Buckeye fan is like a religion for me."



Spc. Zach Hayes, D Co. 3-3 ARB



CWO Roberta Sheffield, Food Service Advisor

"University of Texas comes close every year, but this year they will take it all the way. They have a good coach that finally has it all together."

"USC has what it takes to repeat. Hiesman winner Matt Leinhart is returning and Reggie Bush is the best player in all of college football."



Pfc. Kevin Phinney, HSC 603rd ASB



Sgt. John Sosebee, Avn Bde Legal Office

"The Georgia Bulldog's QB has been waiting for his chance to prove himself, and behind a dominant running game, UGA will go all the way."

COMMANDER'S COLUMN: Aviation Soldiers showing hard work, dedication

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heat and sun of the summer and the colder rainy days of winter as much as possible. The battalions continue to improve their areas as well providing Soldiers with as many of the comforts of home as possible.

In addition to all of that we have begun a Partnership program with the Iraqi Air Force that we share the same work space with here at Taji. In the coming issues you will see the payoff that this effort has made in forging a strong and lasting relationship between the aviators of our two countries.

As the front page proclaims, the brigade has two of the newest citizens of the United States of America; CHAP (CPT) Felix Kumai of 1-3 Attack Reconnaissance Battalion and SGT Sahadat Khan of the 603rd Aviation Support Battalion. Congratulations to both of you and to your families as well. This is a great achievement that is good for you, the Army and the country. Over the coming months additional Falcon Soldiers will be taking this same oath and we wish them all the luck as they pursue their dream of becoming a United States citizen. The Soldiers of the brigade stand ready to assist in your efforts to achieve a life-long goal.

Lastly, congratulations to LTC Tom Climer for his selection as a battalion commander. LTC Climer is currently the Brigade S-3. He has been selected to command, 2-2 Aviation Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, Seoul, South Korea. LTC Climer will take command shortly after we return to the states. Congratulations to he and his family.

I want to spend a moment and talk about routine. It is an in-avoidable by-product in any long-term deployment that we will settle into a routine. This happens without many of us realizing

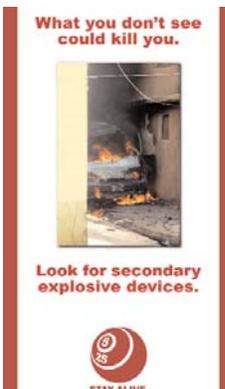
it. While not negative in nature, it can lead to complacency and that is something we all need to avoid. Complacency is simply not maintaining your situational awareness. One area in particular where complacency is most prevalent is while driving a tactical vehicle, Gator or even a bicycle. Leaders at all levels must continue to enforce the standard...helmet use; seatbelt and speed limit are non-negotiable areas, period! Weapons discipline. A negligent discharge is just that...negligent! Leaders need to continue to re-enforce proper weapons clearing procedures. Safety is the key to our success and the success of the mission. Safety must always come first and foremost in everything we do; that can not be stressed enough.

To our families at home, you too need to keep safety in the forefront in everything that you do. As summer begins to fade, as vacations come to an end and as our children head back to school, our spouses will become busier than ever shuttling between school, after-school activities and the routine of running the home. I ask all of our spouses to take that extra minute to ensure that what you or your children are doing is the right and safe thing always!

Finally, be proud of the good work that you are doing here in Iraq. Our mission here is vital for the stability and safety of all Iraqi's, and the region as well. Thank you for all that you do, and thank you to our families for your continued support.

"WINGS OF THE MARNE"

COL TUGGLE



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Tiger sharks pony up skills in vehicle rodeo

Spc. Jennifer D. Fitts

Aviation Brigade PAO

Hollywood conjures up visions of rodeos with hard-bitten cowboys, gleaming horses, frantically bucking bulls and an ever-present layer of dust over shiny hubcap-sized belt buckles and the rodeo queen's sequins.

During the 3rd Battalion 3rd Aviation Regiment (Attack Reconnaissance) tactical vehicle rodeo last month, about the only things in common with Hollywood's idea of a rodeo were dust and horseshoes. Horses were in short supply, found only under the hoods of the tactical vehicles, and no sequins were spotted.

Sgt. 1st Class Jeffrey L. Smith, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3-3 ARB, came up with the idea to give Soldiers a bit of a challenge and a chance to get together and have some fun.

"I started planning (the rodeo) in March," said Smith, "training the Soldiers, gathering the materials, and maintenance."

Preparing for the rodeo required around 60 hours of maintenance on the vehicles, to ensure all the seats and mirrors adjusted correctly and all defaults were corrected, said Smith.

For 1st Sgt. Tim A. Edsall, HHC, 3-3 ARB, there were no doubts Smith would put together a first-class event.

"I knew he'd handle it and do it professionally," said Edsall. "Everything he does over here is professional."

Around 20 Soldiers competed in three categories. Each competing Soldier started with a written test, covering general knowledge of the vehicle and preventative maintenance checks and services. Next, communicating via tactical



Photo by Spc. Derek Del Rosario

While being graded by Staff Sgt. Fabian Oskierko (front), D Co. 3-3 ARB, Sgt. Phillip Hernandez, HHC 3-3 ARB, moves a barrel into the designated square in order to score points for the military vehicle rodeo.

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Maintenance test pilots cure Apache 'symptoms'

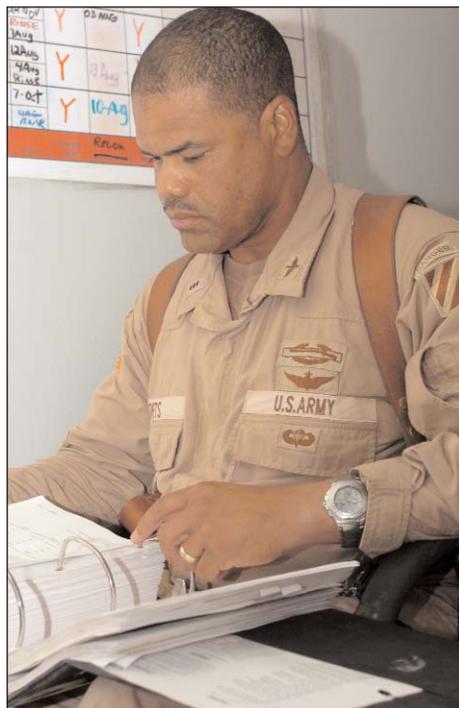


Photo by Spc. Jennifer D. Fitts

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Joseph B. Shorts, a maintenance test pilot from A Co., 1-3rd ARB, looks through a manual to diagnose a problem in an Apache.

Spc. Jennifer D. Fitts

Aviation Brigade PAO

Day in and day out, aviation brigade aircraft are taken apart for routine "phase" maintenance or to handle problems that come up in daily operation. After looking at an aircraft that's been in a million pieces on a hangar floor, and then put back together, it can take a special breed of pilot to be willing to be the first one to take it out for a spin.

In 1st Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment (Attack Reconnaissance), that job is handled by the maintenance test pilots.

Being a maintenance test pilot requires quite a bit of experience in the aircraft, as well as additional training at Ft. Rucker, Ala. A pilot who wants to go through the course at Ft. Rucker must have at least 550 hours of pilot in command time, said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Joe A. Laucius, A Co., 1-3 ARB, but "usually, successful (maintenance) pilots have a bit more time than that."

The four-month-long course is "the most demanding flying course, without a doubt," said Laucius.

Actually figuring out what's wrong with a particular aircraft is a big part of a maintenance test pilot's job, said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Joseph B. Shorts, A Co., 1-3 ARB.

A pilot may bring Shorts an aircraft and a list of "symptoms", leaving it up to Shorts to figure out exactly what's wrong.

Starting at the beginning is an important part of the whole process. Pulling out the logbook is the first step, since that can give indications of what's happening with the helicopter since crew chiefs record details of every flight.

"The big thing is...going through the troubleshooting procedure," said Shorts, originally from Cherry Point, N.C. "We'll figure out what's wrong by what we know, what the book says, what the other guys around you know."

For general maintenance questions, the pilots look in the interactive electronic technical manual (IETM). After figuring out the general scope of a problem, the test pilots dig a bit deeper into other technical manuals.

"There's a lot of information, and knowing where to find that information

See **PILOTS**, page 12

Medevac Co. trained, ready

Spc. Jennifer D. Fitts

Aviation Brigade PAO

When a Soldier is in trouble somewhere within the Multi-National Division-Baghdad area and needs to be transported to the nearest combat hospital, it is a special group of Soldiers assigned to the Aviation Brigade that are called upon to get the job done.

This group is made up of the pilots, crew chiefs and flight medics of the 50th Medical Company (Air Assault) from Ft. Campbell, Ky., who spend their days, and nights, ready to answer the call anywhere in the Multi National Division-Baghdad area.

Although the unit calls the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) home, it is attached to the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment (General Support) for the duration of the deployment. To ensure equal coverage, the unit is divided with part of the unit at Camp Falcon in order to support in the southern part of the MND-B area.

Missions are sorted into three categories; urgent, priority and routine. Daily missions can fall into any of the three categories.

"Generally, when we're called it's 'life, limb or eyesight,'" said Staff Sgt. Jamie J. Rath, referring to the type of missions 50th medical evacuation (medevac) pilots and medics respond to at Ft. Campbell or in other theaters.

That isn't set in stone, though, said Rath, since the 50th medevac will sometimes pick up what might normally be a ground ambulance mission.

The teams are divided into day and night crews, who are on stand by to handle an average of six to eight missions a day.

The pace ebbs and flows depending on operations within theater and medical needs, said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Gary T. Murphy, a pilot from Greely, Nebraska.

It's all day to day, said Rath. "We've had days where all of the aircraft were out, and days where nobody's flying." One of the busiest and more difficult days for the company saw 24 missions completed in 23 hours.

At Camp Taji, shifts generally last anywhere from 10-13 hours, the beginning of each shift overlapping the ending shift by about an hour, allowing time to relay information and brief the incoming crew. Camp Falcon, with a marginally slower operational tempo, runs crews on 24-hour shifts.

With the aircraft ready to go at any time, Soldiers from the 50th are capable of responding to an emergency within minutes. Making sure the helicopters are squared away and ready to go means that maintenance is a team effort.

The company maintenance shop plays a big role in keeping the medevac helicopters mission-ready. "We rely on them pretty heavily, since we're limited on what we can do," said Joshua M. Martinez, a medic from Santa Fe, N.M.

The crew chiefs take care of maintenance that doesn't take the aircraft out of service, with each shift helping out their counterpart. Day crews will take care of inspections for the night crew's birds and the night crew returns the favor. While crew chiefs work maintenance, the medics ensure they have the appropriate medical supplies stocked and ready for the next mission...when ever that comes.

Support from the other aviation units, "the attack assets especially, has been outstanding," said Murphy. "They've been crucial in us performing this mission."

That support is appreciated, said Martinez. "When it's just me and the crew chief running down the road," he said, "it's definitely a little bit of comfort if you see another guy circling around."

In a demanding and fast-paced environment like a medevac unit, all of the personnel, including the medics have to be on top of their game. We've got a pretty good screening process," said Murphy, "and we generally get the cream of the crop."

Although a doctor or a physician's assistant may come along for the ride, the flight times to and from Camp Taji are short so often it's just the flight medic taking care of up to six patients. The crew chiefs are combat life saver qualified, and will help the medics out when possible.

Flight medics can be ground medics who have on the job training for flight, or medics who have attended a flight-medical specific class. No medic is better than any other medic because they went through the flight medic course, said Rath.

Although the busy schedule keeps the Soldiers in the 50th medevac on their toes, the unit keeps each other focused. "We're here for each other, and we've all got our game face on," said Murphy.

Eighty-five percent of the unit has deployed together before. "We're about as tight as we can be," said Murphy, "and we're all mission-focused."

Being there for the guys on the ground is important to the medics and pilots of the 50th medevac company.

To take six, seven or eight Soldiers and get them somewhere to receive medical treatment, it is instant job gratification," said Rath, "We took them out of the worst possible situation imaginable, and took them somewhere safe and I was a part of that."



Photo by Spc. Jennifer D. Fitts

(left to right) Spc. Joshua M. Martinez, Staff Sgt. Jamie J. Rath and Chief Warrant Officer 3 Gary T. Murphy conduct a crew briefing prior to the mission.

Avn. Bde. Soldiers: new U.S. citizens

by Spc. Jennifer D. Fitts

Aviation Brigade PAO

CAMP VICTORY, Iraq - In a former dictator's palace, surrounded by the remnants of the old regime, more than 130 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines raised their right hands to swear an oath of citizenship to a country founded on the ideals of freedom and democracy.

America's newest citizens came from all over Iraq to participate in the ceremony, representing lands as diverse as Africa, South America and Asia. More than half of the men and women present at the ceremony in Al-Faw Palace joined the military after Sept. 11, 2001.

For Sgt. Sahadat I. Khan and Chaplain (Capt.) Felix K. Kumai, two Soldiers from Aviation Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, the July 25 ceremony marked the end of a journey filled with hard work and frustrations and ending with a ceremony naming them as citizens.

Khan, originally from Kingston, Jamaica, moved to the United States eight years ago to find a better life and "get away from bad influences."

Since he'd always wanted to be a Soldier, Khan enlisted in the Army shortly after arriving in the U.S. Over the past three years, he has attempted to pursue his citizenship numerous times, but his case was frustrated by deployments.

"I tried to become a citizen on numerous occasions...my case would get terminated due to no response," said Khan. During this deployment, Khan was in the middle of another attempt at obtaining his citizenship when yet another roadblock popped up.

He received a letter stating his case as "pending" while stationed at Logistics Staging Area Anaconda as a liaison officer. Since all citizenship cases require an interview, and knowing he would miss the date because of the deployment, Khan didn't want this effort to end up dismissed as well.

"The biggest challenge was finding the right people to help (me)," said Khan. "The local legal office pretty much went to bat for me to get my case completed."

Khan encourages Soldiers who are thinking about obtaining citizenship to pursue the challenge. "Do it! I mean if you're in the military, you made a commitment to put your life on the line to defend the country," said Khan.

Having one less worry on his mind has helped with Khan's morale during the deployment. "It's like getting rid of one of the biggest monkeys that's been riding my back for a while," said Khan.

For Kumai, getting his citizenship was necessary to continue his work as an Army chaplain.

Kumai came to the U.S. from northern Nigeria six years ago to pursue his education, obtaining his master's



Photos by Spc. Jennifer Fitts

CAMP VICTORY, Iraq-(From left to right) Lt. Col. Pedro Almeida, commander of 1st Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment (Attack Reconnaissance), Chaplain (Capt.) Felix K. Kumai, Headquarter and Headquarters Co., 1-3 ARB, Col. Ronald D. Tuggle, 3rd Aviation Brigade commander, Sgt. Sahadat I. Khan, Headquarters Support Company, 603rd ASB, and Lt. Col. Terry L. Rice, 603rd ASB, are all smiles after the naturalization ceremony here on July 25. Kumai and Khan were both naturalized as American citizens during this deployment.

degree, and later his doctorate. Although the region where he was born is primarily Muslim, Kumai felt a calling to the Catholic Church.

Joining the Army in New York, Kumai saw it as an opportunity to accomplish great things in his life.

"I love Army discipline, and I wanted to be physically fit," said Kumai, "and I knew the Army would afford me the opportunity to maintain that physical discipline and would be an opportunity to serve God in a very different and very, very challenging ministry."

As with Khan, the interview process was the biggest hurdle for Kumai to overcome on the road to citizenship. Kumai started the process last year, but was already deployed when the letter with his interview date arrived in theater.

"I was given an interview date of March 16, but the letter came here (Iraq) on the 17th," said Kumai.

To keep the process going, Kumai contacted his legal team. Trying to coordinate things through email was his biggest challenge, said Kumai, but "I just trusted everything to fate."

For Soldiers considering pursuing citizenship while deployed, Kumai recommends they work with their legal office and chain of command.

"I'd advise the Soldier to work with them, especially the legal team," said Kumai. "They've been exceptionally good and I'm sure that we were able to pull this off because of them."

The positive reactions of his family as well as the Aviation Bde. and his battalion helped Kumai with needed support during the difficult rounds of emails and paperwork. His family "shouted with joy," said Kumai, who looked forward to the ceremony during hard times in the deployment.

"Fill out that form, start that paperwork," Kumai advised. "There are good Soldiers here who are really willing to help make this happen."



Sgt. Sahadat Khan receives a handshake from Lt. Gen. John R. Vines, Multi-National Corps-Iraq commander, after being naturalized.

Aviation Brigade in action



photo by Spc. Derek Del Rosario

Sgt. Sidney T. Cowan, Alpha company 2nd Battalion 3rd Aviation Regiment (General Support), conducts maintenance on a Blackhawk.

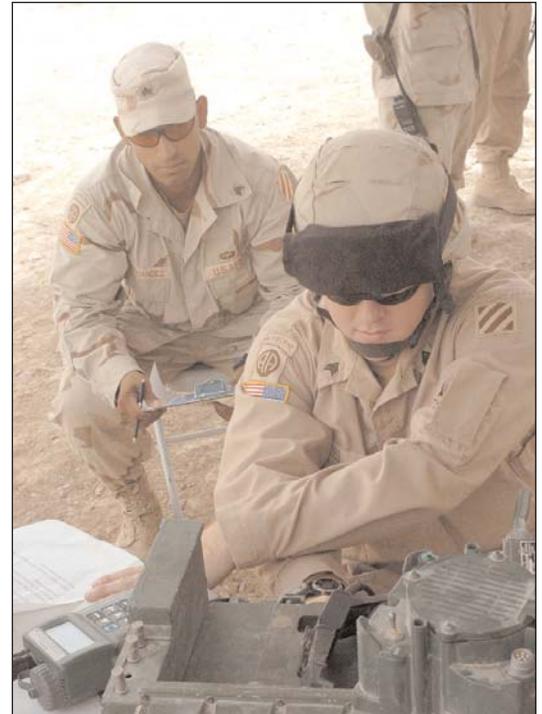


photo by Spc. Derek Del Rosario

Sgt. Adam Cates, Alpha co. 3-3 ARB, is graded by Sgt. Phillip Hernandez, HHC 3-3 ARB, during the radio test portion of the vehicle rodeo.



photo by Spc. Derek Del Rosario

Capt. David Brodsky, Human Resources Officer, looks over some paper work in the Aviation Brigade ALOC.



Photo by Spc. Derek Del Rosario

Sgt. Craig McDonald, A Co. 693rd Aviation Support Battalion, fills in numbers for global positioning.

Marne Express:

Getting Soldiers where they need to go

Spc. Jennifer D. Fitts

Aviation Brigade PAO

Moving Soldiers, civilians and other military personnel from one forward operating base to another by ground convoy in order to attend meetings, to take care of paperwork problems or to send a Soldier on leave usually isn't ideal in light of the sheer number of Soldiers needed for a ground convoy.

Enter the "Marne Express", the air shuttle that hops between military camps in central Iraq.

Hard-working pilots and crew chiefs of the 3rd Infantry Division's 4th Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment (Attack Helicopter) work long hours to transport Soldiers all over the Baghdad area and surrounding camps.

"There were so many requests for aircraft to move personnel on routine business that the division decided to set up a shuttle," said Capt. Mary Beth Thompson, a pilot with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Aviation Brigade. The Philadelphia native sometimes takes the controls as a pilot for the Marne Express, as well as working with supply and logistics for HHC.

The Marne Express provides a quick and easy method of moving Soldiers who are taking care of the day-to-day business of the division.

While it may seem impractical to use aviation assets as a shuttle, the Marne Express greatly reduces the number of Soldiers and equipment needed to transport personnel from one FOB to another. It allows the division to retain the necessary combat power, that would normally be used to transport Soldiers on routine missions, available to conduct daily operations.

Making such frequent trips means a lot of hours spent in the air—so many that in time spent since the deployment in January A Co. has equaled the number of hours they spent in the air through all of Operation Iraqi Freedom 1.

That many hours in the air means more hours maintaining the aircraft on the ground. Between maintenance and flying, Soldiers from A Co. routinely work long days, with little time off.

"We work extremely hard to keep the aircraft going," said Sgt. Randel E. Beyer, Black Hawk crew chief with A Co., 4th Bn., 3rd Avn.

Regiment. "It's not because they're broken, but for routine maintenance."

About six aircraft in A Co. are up and running on a daily basis, handling not only the Marne Express but also day-to-day missions, such as requested personnel movement. The company runs in cycles, a "day heavy" and a "night heavy" cycle. During day heavy cycles, the night shift picks up a lot of the scheduled maintenance, said Beyer, and helps handle the non-scheduled maintenance that comes up. Since there are two shifts, when the night cycle picks up, the day crews help out with maintenance. "It's a team effort," said Beyer. "Besides, who wants to go home with something unaccomplished?"

The days may be long and hard, but A Co. Soldiers don't let that get them down. They get along well and there's no strife in the company, said Beyer. Although that's probably unusual, it doesn't seem to surprise Beyer.

"We're one of the companies that pushes hard. We try to lead," Beyer said. "We're competitive and we'll put in those extra hours to keep the aircraft fixed. We just love our jobs."



Photos by Spc. Jennifer D. Fitts

Top right-Sgt. Randel E. Beyer, A Co., 4-3 AHB, preps a weapon mount during pre-flight checks.

Above-From left to right, Capt. Mary Beth Thompson, HHC, Avn. Bde., Spc. Corey L. Rhodes, A Co. 4-3 AHB, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Ben Carter, A Co., 4-3AHB, and Sgt. Randel E. Beyer all listen closely during the pre-flight crew briefing before setting off to make the rounds on the "Marne Express" shuttle service.

Gina and the Bootleggers sizzle at Taji

Spc. Jennifer D. Fitts
Aviation Brigade PAO

Life on stage is often hot, but stage lights don't usually heat things up to the 120 degrees Iraq sees during the summer months. On a stage made of two flatbed semi-trailers under desert camouflage netting, Gina and the Bootleggers added their own sizzle to the evening.

Gina Notrica and the Bootleggers, a rock and country band from Southern California on a five day tour of Iraq, cranked out tunes from a range of artists, from country greats Martina McBride and Patsy Cline, to the legendary Tina Turner, with original songs adding a personal note.

"I wanted to come here, where I could make the most difference," said Notrica, an Army brat from Huntington Beach, Calif., but she didn't know how. It took about a year, but finally, she found AKA Productions, a Southern Calif. production company specializing in military shows to Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans.



Photos by Spc. Jennifer D. Fitts

Gina Notrica and the Bootleggers, a country band from Southern California, entertained Soldiers at Camp Taji during a five day tour in Iraq.

Several of the band members have been on morale, welfare and recreation tours before, although this is Notrica's first visit to Iraq. After her first tour to the Balkans in 2004, Notrica knew that she needed to come to Iraq to repay a debt she felt she owed to the

Army. While overseas during the Korean War, her father received news that his expectant wife had given birth. The baby, Notrica's older sister, was fine but doctors were worried her mother might not survive complications from the

birth. Twenty men from her father's unit pooled their money, bought a ticket and put Notrica's father on the next plane stateside. Three days after sending Notrica's father home, his unit was

see **BAND**, page 10

Who needs chaplains anyway?



Photos by Spc. Jennifer D. Fitts

During an aviation brigade prayer breakfast here celebrating the 230th birthday of the Army Chaplain's Corps, guest speaker Chaplain (Lt. Col.) James White, (left) 3rd Infantry Division chaplain, not only asked the question, he answered it as well.

"Soldiers in combat need chaplains," said White, "because we're spiritual people and that doesn't stop in combat."

Chaplain (Capt.) Nils Juarez, (right) 603rd ASB chaplain, offers a prayer.

Tactical Operations Center: *Keeping a finger on the pulse of the Avn. Bde.*

Spc. Jennifer D. Fitts

Aviation Brigade PAO

With helicopters in the air, ground assets moving from one point to another, and large numbers of Soldiers to keep track of at any moment, keeping a finger on the pulse of the aviation brigade can be a hectic job.

For Soldiers who work in the aviation brigade tactical operations center (TOC), it's just another day at the office.

The purpose of the TOC is to provide continuous situational awareness of all activities as they relate to the brigade and the overall area of operations in order to provide the commander with instantaneous information on where the aircraft are, and any significant activities that may have happened and or taken place. It is more than one person can handle, and to perform this mission correctly, it takes a talented team of Soldiers to make it happen.

Since they're sometimes separated from units out on patrol and flying missions over Baghdad, the Soldiers rely heavily on information received by radio, allowing them to track division, brigade and battalions operations. What would a TOC be without maps...and plenty of them, in order to provide a birds-eye view of the area.

A typical beginning to the day, or night, in the TOC begins with a shift change brief. This brief provides the incoming shift with important information about what's happened during the previous shift.

The operations specialists that monitor the radios keep the information flowing by relaying important information to the people who need to know. The radios are monitored by two shifts, both approximately 12 hours long.

The Soldiers on the radio are the first step in tracking what's going on throughout the aviation brigade, said the night TOC NCO, Sgt. 1st Class Marlon G. Freeman, Headquarters and Headquarters Company. Freeman, from Syracuse, N.Y., knows that he can rely on the Soldiers who monitor the radios to be professional and quick.

"We run the information up," said Pfc. Josh O. Grassl, HHC, "from sitreps (situation reports) to spot reports. Without us, it would be a lot harder to know what's going on."

Information from the Soldiers manning the radios gets passed to the battle NCO on the way up to the battle captain.

To Sgt. Joseph J. Steele, HHC, being able to foster a sense of profes-

sionalism and self-reliance is an important part of his job.

"The guys here are professionals," said Steele, a Montgomery, Ala. native, "and they know how to get the most important information where it needs to go in the quickest time possible."

Watching these young Soldiers develop the skills to juggle six radios among four operators is a source of pride for the battle NCOs. "I don't have to worry about what's going on and they don't need an NCO standing over them," said Freeman. "Most of these guys don't give themselves enough credit."

From the Soldiers on the radio, important information goes through the battle NCO to the battle captain and battle major. Keeping the rest of the TOC in synch, and piecing all the information together is where the battle captain and battle major come in, said Maj. Jeff A. Rothermel. "We keep track of it all, from the specific information to the whole picture," said Rothermel, a native of Iowa City, Iowa.

Keeping an eye on the ground is also part of the daily routine at the TOC. The fires support officer, FSO, monitors and tracks potential targets and determines whether or not the object is a threat based on past insurgent activity and other information gathered by

various sources.

Taking bits and pieces of all of the information available, the intelligence section in the TOC uses it all to evaluate the level of threat to the aircraft flying in the battle space. Pulling it all together keeps "the pilots as safe as possible while supporting the troops on the ground," said Spc. Ryan A. Boas, from Fairport, N.Y.

To support movement around the division's area of operations, the TOC also handles air mission requests. These requests can be almost anything from moving troops and cargo, to helping support counterinsurgency operations by Coalition forces.

Managing all the information available in the TOC to move aviation assets where they're needed most is what all these Soldiers work together to accomplish, said Sgt. Maj. Becky L. Johnston.

With a set schedule of long days, the Soldiers may not get a lot of down time, said Johnston, but they know how critical their jobs are, and have kept their heads in the game.

"If they lose focus, a lot of people are affected," said the Corps Christi, Texas native, "but we don't miss a piece (of information) when someone calls for help."

"These Soldiers haven't missed a beat yet," said Johnston, "and I don't expect them to."



Photo by Spc. Jennifer D. Fitts
Spc. Candice J. Forney, from Sandusky, Ohio, and Pfc. Joshue S. Morgan, from Atlanta, Ga. make entries in the daily log.

Tiger sharks pony up skills during tactical vehicle rodeo

RODEO, continued from page 3

radio, including finding the correct technical manual, and loading the correct frequencies into the radio. Finally, Soldiers tested their skill in the driver's seat, each type of equipment demanding different skills.

Each event in each category was timed, and points were added based on speed, accuracy and knowledge. The fewer points a Soldier accumulated the better.

The light vehicle category included a humvee with a short trailer. Soldiers had to drive a short course with the vehicle, including backing around a tight 90 degree turn with the trailer.

"Backing up around that turn was the hardest part," said Sgt. Ryan N. Ray, A Co. 3-3 ARB, Apache crew chief. The native of Glen Burnie, Md. has truck drivers in his family. Evidently, "It's in my blood," said Ray.

A large forklift with a pallet of barrels made up the material handling category. Drivers had to maneuver the forklift through a short course carrying the barrels, as then place them in the center of a trailer.

The heavy vehicle category included a hemmitt truck with a light material handling crane and heavy equipment trailer. Soldiers competing in this category had to drive the large truck and trailer through a course, back through a tight turn, and use the crane to move cargo.

"It's a good environment, considering where we're at," said Spc. Roland J. Young, a radio operator with the scout platoon. Young, from Boston, Mass. competed in the light vehicle category.

Capt. Derek P. Story, HHC 3-3 ARB commander, felt that the rodeo provided a well deserved break for the

Tigersharks.

"I thought it was a great idea. I'd heard of them (vehicle rodeos), but I'd never seen one," said Story. "This gets Soldiers away from the daily routine, and is really turning out to be a good event."

Finding time for Soldiers to unwind and relax for a little while is important to Command Sgt. Maj. David Stone, 3-3 ARB.

"We work hard, and the mission can't stop," said Stone, "but those Soldiers who have an off day have something to do other than go to their rooms and watch TV."

"We don't get a chance to get together much," said Stone, "This is team-building, and a good time."



Sgt. Ryan Ray, A Co. 3rd Battalion 3-3 ARB drives a LMTV through a course as part of vehicle rodeo.

Gina and the Bootleggers add sizzle to Taji Fight Night

BAND, continued from page 8

ambushed at a site known as Capitol Hill in Korea and all the men were killed in action.

Like Notrica, wanting to give back to the men and women serving in the Iraq is the reason most of Notrica's band members cite for enduring the hardships of a tour in a combat zone.

To Dave James, the piano player from Tustin Calif., it's a matter of giving back to the military he grew up around. "Politics don't have anything to do with it," said James, "You can ask 50 people and get 40 opinions on this whole thing, but I've had a lucky time in my career and I wanted to pay that back."

The guitarist, Art Holland, wanted to play for Soldiers as a way to give back during this war. The Southern Calif. native had no desire to get involved in Vietnam and "maybe I feel a little bit guilty for not serving there, so this is my way to give back," said Holland.

Band members dubbed the whirlwind visit "The Blackhawk Tour" for the method of transportation around theater, and take its' challenges in stride. The schedule is hectic, with the band arriving at a camp in the morning,

setting up in the afternoon, performing in the evening and leaving for another camp the following morning.

"This many back to back shows is hard," said Notrica of the five shows in five days, "even on tour in the States you get some time off."

Dealing with the heat is another challenge, but the band members get more out of the trip than just dust and pictures in the desert.

"There's a lot of camaraderie and chemistry" between the band members, said James, and they get to see a different view of the war. Talking to more Soldiers, "it's not quite what you see on the evening news," said James.

This tour was more organized than his last, said Holland, and "morale was much better than I anticipated."

Band members aren't the only ones who appreciate getting the chance to come to Iraq.

"I think it's great that we have performers who come over here for people to enjoy the music," said Staff Sgt. Cedric P. Mize, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Aviation Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division. "I just wish more entertainers would do it."

Although Notrica misses her two

daughters, she knows that she's in the right place to give back to Soldiers.

"The shows are the best part," said Notrica, "I get to take the Soldiers' minds off where they are, and that's what I'm here for."



photo by Spc. Jennifer Fitts.

Gina Notrica at Camp Taji Fight Night.

Listen up! Can you hear me now?

Capt. Lalini Pillay

Brigade Environmental Science Officer

This is important so listen carefully as your hearing depends on it. Hearing loss caused by loud noise is the most common injury in the Army.

Soldiers in the Aviation Brigade must pay even closer attention to this message as they may be at a higher risk due to equipment such as helicopters, generators, hammers etc that they operate, maintain or work in close proximity to.

Hearing loss caused by loud noise can become permanent and is not medically treatable.

You can protect your hearing by wearing properly fitted hearing protection. If you have to scream to be heard 3 feet away then you require hearing protection.

Your Environmental Science Officer can test your workplace for dangerous noise levels and tell you what kind of hearing protection to use.

For steady-state noise of 85 to 103 decibels, you must wear single hearing protection, either earplugs or noise

muffs.

Noise from 104 to 108 decibels requires double hearing protection. That's when you wear earplugs in combination with noise muffs or a helmet designed to reduce noise.

Noise greater than 108 decibels not only requires you to wear double protection but also to limit your time exposed to noise.

Common types of hearing protection include earplugs and noise muffs. Foam earplugs (NSN 6515-00-137-6345) are disposable and do not require fitting by medically trained personnel. They come in a dispenser box with an adhesive back that makes it easy to stick the box to a wall or door in your work area. All Soldiers should have received properly fitted earplugs prior to deploying. Noise muffs (NSN 4240-00-022-2946) are considered safety items. You can request them through regular supply channels.

Also, be aware that listening to extremely loud music through headphones can also cause hearing loss.

For more information on this topic or to request a noise survey performed in your unit area, contact the Avn. Bde. Environmental Science Officer, Capt. Lalini Pillay.



Safety Corner: Precautions and safety are simple but important while on flight line

SAFETY CORNER

A recent near-miss has prompted the need to review some fundamentals in operating vehicles on the flightline. There's no great technical competency required - just exercising some basic common sense.

PERSONNEL SHOULD BE AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING SAFETY PRECAUTIONS WHEN OPERATING WITHIN THE FENCE, ON THE RAMP/TAXIWAYS, AND AROUND PARKED AND RUNNING AIRCRAFT:

Inside the fence: Vehicles will not operate at a speed greater than 10 mph (half speed on most gates, the Polaris even less). No vehicle will operate in excess of 5 mph when in close proximity to aircraft.

Only vehicles authorized by ADOC will be allowed on the airfield. The vehicle will be issued an airfield pass.

Foreign Object Damage (FOD) occurs when litter or debris is ingested into the intake of an aircraft engine. FOD damage can be expensive and cause unnecessary maintenance downtime. Watch for and pick-up any debris such as bolts, dirt, rocks, paper, plastics, etc. Report FOD problems to your safety officer. Don't drive

through a mud hole then up onto the ramp.

Before driving on the airfield, operators will insure that all equipment carried on their vehicles is properly stowed and secured.

On the ramp and road adjacent to the ramp: Under no circumstances will vehicles sit in front of or drive into the path of taxiing aircraft. That means stay out of their way!

Headlights shinning toward a moving aircraft at night will be turned off. The vehicle's parking lights will be turned on so its position will be known, but the headlights will remain off until the aircraft is out or range.

Vehicles should never be driven under any part of the aircraft. That means the rotor system too. Remember the near miss from the introduction? That was a vehicle that was traveling on the perimeter road adjacent to the maintenance ramp. Camouflage netting strapped to the top of the vehicle contacted an AH-64 rotor blade as the vehicle drove by the parked aircraft. Luckily, there was no damage to the blade.

All flightline vehicles will come to a full stop before they enter or cross a taxiway. Before proceeding, the oper-

ator will determine visually that the way is clear. 'B' Taxiway can be extremely busy. Stop - swivel head - proceed when clear. Clearance from the tower (light signal or radio) is required to cross the runway.

Vehicles will not be driven within 10 feet of a parked aircraft. For maximum safety, no vehicles will be parked or driven closer than 25 feet when engines are in operation or about to be put into operation.

Around the aircraft: Never drive your vehicle directly at an aircraft. Allow maneuver room if the brakes fail. When parked on the flightline, vehicles will not be pointed directly toward an aircraft. Vehicles will be left unlocked with keys in the ignition when parked on the flightline. When the driver's seat is vacated, ignition will be turned off, brakes set and gear lever placed in reverse gear. Park will be used if the vehicle has an automatic transmission. When maneuvering equipment near and aircraft use a ground guide. Vehicles approaching an aircraft should do so from the driver's side.

Wear ear protection to avoid hearing damage caused by turbine engine noise.

Maintenance Pilots ensure Apaches are flight-ready

PILOTS, continued from page 3

is about 60% of the battle,” said Laucius.

Other aircraft personnel use more of “an operator’s manual,” said Shorts, but the books they use “are the how it’s built manuals.”

After any maintenance is finished on a particular helicopter, Shorts and Laucius take that Apache out on a test flight. Depending on the level of work, or how well the maintenance went, that flight may be done in a day.

After major maintenance, the test flights can take more time. “When they take everything apart and then put it back together, you inevitably find something wrong,” said Laucius. “To get it (the helicopter) back to flying status, you have to troubleshoot a bunch of things along the way.”

Since the Apache is designed as a weapon platform, maintaining stability and smoothness, both in a hover and in flight, are important to the overall performance of the aircraft. It’s not just for pilot comfort, said Shorts.

“Lots of vibration will cause excessive wear,” said Laucius. “Rotor smoothing,” making sure the rotor blades don’t move up or down more than three-tenths of an inch during flight, is a big part of the test pilot’s job, too. While time consuming and precise, rotor smoothing is important to the “health of the aircraft,” the Bethel, Conn. native said.

Being able to see the big picture is part of the training for a maintenance pilot, said Laucius. “We can diagnose the symptoms and let the mechanics treat the problem.”

“We’re kind of like crew chiefs on the enlisted side of the house,” said Laucius. “We may not be trained in

the ‘remove the fuel pump task’, or know every task the crew chief knows, but we know what makes it work, and why it wouldn’t work.”

In a demanding and technical job, maintenance pilots can put in long days, depending on the work flow of each company. The maintenance plan on a particular aircraft will also determine how long a day is.

“If you have aircraft down, you do whatever you have to do to get the aircraft up and flying,” said Shorts, “everything that’s humanly possible.”

On the backside of the deployment, both Laucius and Shorts say staying busy makes the time go faster.

“I’m a little tired,” said Laucius, on

his second deployment after a tour to Korea, “but we’re flying a lot and I like the problem solving and the maintenance.”

“I feel good,” said Shorts. “We’re keeping up our aircraft really well.”

Maintenance is a constant, said Shorts, since you can always fine tune and improve on an aircraft. “It’s never ‘the aircraft came in for maintenance, we did all the checks, so boom, go fly for another however many hours, and don’t come back until it breaks,’” he said.

“There’s no boredom about this job,” said Shorts. “It’s taxing, mentally and physically, but there’s something new every day.”



Photo by Spc. Jennifer D. Fitts

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Joseph B. Shorts, and Chief Warrant Officer 3 Joe A. Laucius, maintenance test pilots from A Co., 1st Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, discuss the best way to solve a suspected problem with an Apache



Aviation History Trivia

In 1843, William S. Henderson, patented plans for the first plane with a engine, fixed wings, and propellers. After one unsuccessful try the inventor gave up. Then in 1848, John Stringfellow built a small model which worked, but could only stay up a short period of time.

Mail your family a copy of the Falcon Flyer

Fold, Staple and mail the paper back home

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