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Falcon Brigade Takes Charge

by Staff Sgt. Tad Browning

There were no passing of the colors, no salutes, nor Soldiers on a parade field listening to loudspeakers. The transfer of authority (TOA) did not even happen behind doors in a private room where colonels chatted about what needed to be done. The TOA was planned months ago while the Soldiers of the aviation brigade were still state-side.

The 3rd Infantry Division's Aviation Brigade took authority of the aviation mission in the Baghdad area in a seamless transition from the 4th Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division February 18th at Camp Taji. The TOA was not a ceremony, but instead a preparation and training environment that allowed the aviation brigade to take over and perform the day to day operations in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom III.

"1st Cavalry Division's, 4th Brigade, set us up for success, and we intend to build on that success," said Col. Ronald Tuggle, commander, 3ID Aviation Brigade.

"The TOA means that we now assume responsibility for all helicopter operations in the Baghdad area," said Lt. Col. Tom Climer, brigade operations officer.

The aviators learned 1st Cavalry Division's mission, worked with them in that mission and learned the tactics, techniques and procedures, what worked, what didn't and what type of things to look for



Photo by Spc. Derek Del Rosario

Maj. Gen. William G. Webster, 3rd Infantry Division Commander, arrives Camp Taji Airfield and is escorted by (right) Col. Ronald D. Tuggle, Aviation Brigade Commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Richard D. Stidley, 3rd ID Aviation Brigade Command Sergeant Major, to a transfer of authority briefing.

on the ground, Climer said. The Aviation Brigade brings with them all of the necessary equipment and other assets to ensure the continued support for the multi-national division in Baghdad.

see FALCON BRIGADE page 8

Commander's Column

With the Transfer of Authority (TOA) between the 1st Cavalry Division's 4th Brigade and the Falcon Brigade complete, our brigade became the first 3rd Infantry Division unit to assume its mission for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) III.

This task could not have been

completed without the dedication and the professionalism of you...the Soldiers of the Falcon Brigade. It was through your hard work, professionalism and sense of duty that enabled the brigade to complete this task not only on time but more importantly...safely! Both Command Sgt. Maj. Stidley and I are extremely

proud of each and every Soldier in this brigade. You hit the ground running in Kuwait and haven't slowed yet.

Our mission will go beyond that of providing for the safety and security of the Iraqi people and assisting the Iraqi Transitional Government. We can expect to

see COMMANDER page 2

Commander's Column

continued from page 1

assist the newly formed Iraqi Army as they grow and assume more of the security mission here in Iraq. The Falcon Brigade too will play a part in this as well, as we assist with the newly formed Iraqi army aviation battalions here at Camp Taji.

In addition to our day-to-day mission, we are working at improving our facilities and maintaining Soldier quality of life here at Taji. Most recently a newly remodeled portion of our Administration Logistics Operations Center (ALOC) was completed and construction has begun on the other half. Our Tactical Operations Center (TOC) will also see a facelift some time during our deployment. Both facilities already provide a safe and secure environment for the Soldiers working here, and the construction will facilitate the Army's new expanded Aviation Brigade.

As this issue of the Falcon Flyer highlights, Soldiers are very

pleased with the living arrangements here at Camp Taji. As promised, our dining facility is featured in all of its glory. Truly, a first-class operation and an integral part of our day-to-day life here at Taji. The Soldiers load their cargo pocket with cans of Red Bull as they exit the DFAC.

Finally, I want to re-iterate again, the fantastic work that has been accomplished to date by the Soldiers of the brigade. I ask that you keep safety in mind always; don't get complacent in your work and stay connected to your families at home. They need to hear that you are doing well. There are plenty of opportunities and ways to keep in touch with them. I encourage you all to take the time to keep your families up to date on your time here in Iraq.

"WINGS OF THE MARNE"
Col. Tuggle

Equal Opportunity Corner

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

In 1915, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a historian, founded the Association for the study of Negro Life and History. It was through this organization that he began pressing for a "Negro History Week" to explore and recognize the contributions of Black Americans. This dream became a reality on February 12, 1926. Dr. Woodson chose the 2nd week of February, in honor of the birthday month of two individuals whom he felt had affected the lives of Black Americans: Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. In 1976, Black History Month succeeded Negro History Week. It is a month to recognize African American heritage, struggles, achievements and progress. Each year a theme is chosen. This year's theme is "The Niagara Movement."

Ethnic observances are a way to show the importance of understanding diversity. The Armed Forces are the most diverse organization in our nation and diversity is our strength. Nothing describes this concept better than the Army motto. "An Army of One," an Army grounded in opportunities, challenges, contributions, dreams and expectations, all working to make our Army-team the best it can be today and forever into the future.

What was your initial impression of Camp Taji?

I definitely love the chow hall, it's the nicest one I've been to on this deployment. I like all the food, but I'm an ice cream and cake man.



Sgt. 1st Class
Barry L. Pearson,
3/3 Aviation



2nd Lt. Tammy K.
Guillet,
HHC 603rd
Maintainence

The DFAC is amazing. We're going to need to take a PT test because of how good the food is. It's a good thing the gym is so nice.

It's a lot more organized than I was expecting. I like the presentation of the food. People want to eat food that looks good.



Pvt. Trisha M.
Washington,
HHC Aviation
Brigade

It's not as bad as I thought it would be. There's not as much sand as I was expecting.



Spc. Richard L.
Anderson,
4-3 Aviation

Photos by Spc. Brian P. Henretta

New Home for Aviation Brigade

by Spc. Derek Del Rosario

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- Yuri returns to his room in the evening, exhausted from the day's work. His room is very organized; his bed is made with his shoes neatly tucked underneath. He looks on his wall and imagines what new art work he can put up. Yuri takes off his work boots to relax his feet, turns on his laptop to listen to some relaxing music. His roommate Michael enters the room; his side of the home is a little more cluttered. Random items are sprawled on his bed, but it is in this disorganization he finds organization. He takes a quick glance at his family pictures that are above his bed, cracks open a can of Dr. Pepper and relaxes by playing his Nintendo Gamecube.

At first glance this might seem to be your average college dorm room, but the occupants of this room are actually Pfc. Yuri Armstrong and Spc. Michael D. Boyle, both assigned to HHC, 1/3 Attack Recon Battalion, and just a couple of Soldiers out of many who are living in these rooms here at Camp Taji.

Most Soldiers and contractors working here live in trailers that room up to three people. The rooms come furnished with a twin bed and wall locker for each service member. These trailers are set up in small communities known as pods, which are spread out over the camp. Each pod has additional trailers used for male and female latrines, which are cleaned daily and contain flushing toilets, sinks and individual showers.

According to some Soldiers, it's easy to get the wrong impression on what to expect when being deployed to Iraq. Armstrong was pleasantly surprised when he opened the door to his new room.

"My living situation cannot be better," said Armstrong. "There was a lot of buzz back in the U.S. -- that we would be living in tents and that the housing was going to be bad, but we actually have it pretty good."

Most Soldiers here first stayed in tents when they lived in camps in Kuwait prior to movement into Iraq. These camps acted as staging areas before being stationed at a base in Iraq, and wall lockers, beds and flushing toilets were a rarity. After coming from Kuwait, Armstrong's roommate was expecting worse. "This is way better than any tent," Boyle said. "This living situation is ten times better. We have a roof and it keeps the wind out -- I cannot ask for more."

The concept of a roommate might also be new to some of the Soldiers here. While many Soldiers came from living in barracks at their duty station in the U.S., there are many Soldiers here who are married and lived off-post, or are activated reservist who have not lived in barracks for an extended period, so they have not had a roommate in a long time. Despite what



Photo by Spc. Derek Del Rosario

Pfc. Yuri Armstrong (left) and Spc. Michael D. Boyle, both of HHC 1/3 Attack Recon Battalion, share a room here at Camp Taji for the duration of their deployment. Rooms come furnished with beds and wall lockers.

living conditions Soldiers are leaving behind in the states, some of the Soldiers here understand the dynamics of sharing a room with another service member.

"We haven't had any troubles with each other yet," Boyle commented on having a roommate. "But people are always going to get into little arguments with roommates. All roommates bicker, especially considering the situation we are in here. People here work through it though; we all understand we are deployed here for at least a year."

Some Soldiers also wish the rooms were bigger, but according to Boyle, Soldiers should appreciate the living situation here.

"Some people here complain about the space; that it is too cramped and there is not enough space to put your things," he said. "I think despite this, they can still appreciate not living in a tent. I am happy just to have a roof over my head and having a place to relax." For Armstrong, the hospitality is what he appreciates most, and he feels that actions are being taken to make sure Soldiers are happy with their living situation.

"Camp Taji and the unit are taking care of us, the Soldiers," said Armstrong. "Hospitality helps us feel at home, which is important for Soldiers on deployment."

Home is definitely where most soldiers hope to see soon, but in the meantime, it seems the soldiers of the Aviation Brigade are making the best of the situation and trying to live as comfortable as possible here at their temporary home at Camp Taji.

CAMP TAJI

Photos by Spc. Derek Del Rosario



Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) Building



Staff Sgt. Tyrone Murphy celebrates while playing dominoes with Sgt. Cheree Lozada and Sgt. Keith Gainer, all of Charlie Co. 2/3 General Support Aviation Battalion. "I can sum up the MWR here in one word: Hooah," said Murphy.



Internet Cafe



Phone Center



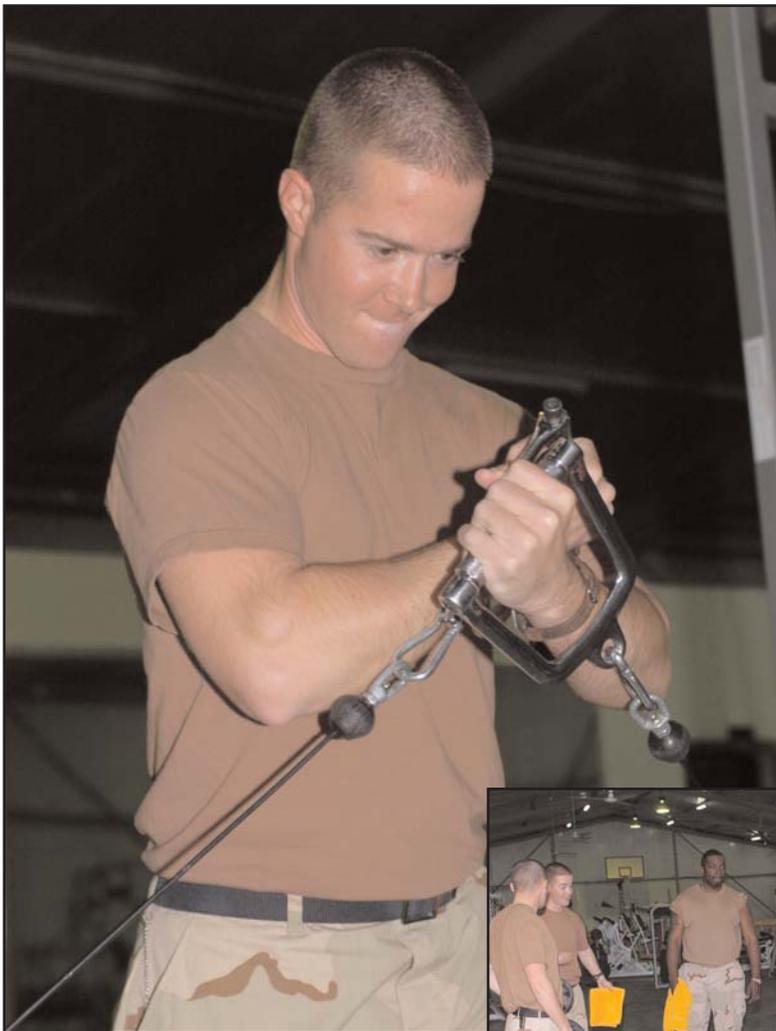
Sgt. David Samuel, 603rd Aviation Support Battalion, plays Playstation 2 in the video game room available at the MWR.



The 24 hour Post Exchange (PX)

Dining Facility

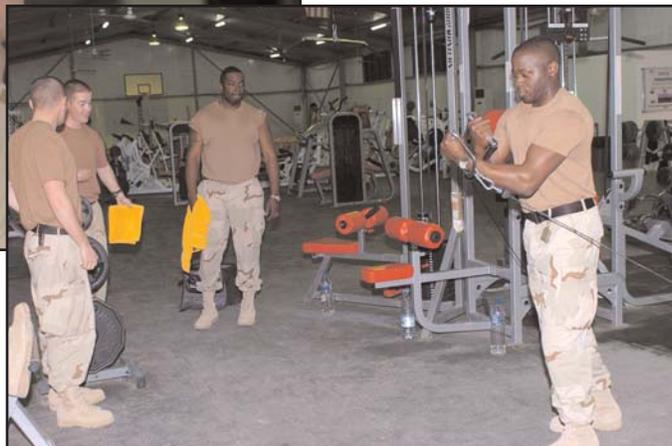




Laundry Facility



(above) Sgt. Conrad Meeks, 3/3 Attack Recon Battalion, sorts out laundry to get ready for wash. (upper left) Sgt. Brandon K. Mckillip, 1/3 Attack Recon Battalion, does cable-crossover exercises at the gym.



Staff Sgt. Derrick T. Salter, 1/3 Attack Recon Battalion, has an afternoon workout while (left to right) Sgt. Daniel P. Lewis, Sgt. Brandon K. Mckillip and Staff Sgt. Courtney B. Drayton, all of 1/3 ARB, wait their turn.



Camp Taji Fitness Center



Soldiers here can get a taste of home by purchasing fast food at the Subway, Burger King or Pizza Hut that is available to them.

Aviation Soldiers Save Lives

by Sgt. 1st Class David Abrams

CAMP BUEHRING, Kuwait -- It was the kind of final exam that no one could have predicted—a bloody, fiery test of two 3rd Aviation Brigade Soldiers' medical skills one day after they graduated from the Army's Combat Lifesaver Course.

Staff Sgts. Byron Montgomery of LaVernia, Texas, and Miguel Rocha of Homestead, Fla., were heading to Rocha's home on Dec. 31 to put his truck in storage before the two deployed for Operation Iraqi Freedom 3 when three miles south of Jacksonville a van traveling in the opposite direction was cut off by another vehicle, hit the guardrail and flipped on its side.

Montgomery and Rocha, roommates and co-workers in A Company, 603rd Aviation Support Battalion, 3rd Avn. Bde., 3rd Infantry Division, had just received their CLS diplomas the day before, so they immediately stopped their vehicle and got out to assist.

"We knew exactly what to do from class - it all came flooding back to me, so that was a good feeling," Montgomery said.

In the van were a mother, her adult daughter, two 15-year-old boys, a 14-year-old girl and a 10-year-old girl. One of the boys had died on impact, but the two



Photo by Spc. Brian P. Henretta

Staff Sgt. Byron Montgomery (left) and Staff Sgt. Miguel Rocha, both of 603rd ASB, received their CLS diplomas a day prior to assisting passengers of a car crash.



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class David Abrams

(front to back) Sgt. Peter VanHeyde, Pvt. Jason Sullivan and Pvt. Jeffrey Leviner used their knowledge from a Combat Life Saver Course to aid people in a car crash.

Soldiers knew they needed to help save the others.

"I grabbed a hammer, so I could break out the windshield," Montgomery said. He also cut the seatbelts to free the trapped passengers.

The van caught on fire and the amount of rescue time immediately narrowed from minutes to seconds. By this time, a crowd had gathered and several others helped lift the burning van and set it upright so that the trapped victims could be freed more easily.

Rocha said someone grabbed a fire extinguisher, but it couldn't douse the flames.

"Time flew by," Montgomery said. "I just wanted to get them out of the burning car."

Soon, all occupants were out of the wreckage and Montgomery found himself trying to comfort one of the young girls. "She asked me if she was going to die and I told her no, we were there to help make sure that didn't happen," he said.

After the ambulances had whisked everyone away and the accident scene was under control, Montgomery and Rocha got back in their truck and continued on their journey, not telling anyone in their unit about what they'd done. Aviation Brigade leaders only learned of the two lifesavers after the unit had deployed to Kuwait and Rocha was looking at photos he'd taken of the accident scene.

"We didn't want to make big deal about it," Rocha said.

Unbeknownst to them, another trio of Aviation Brigade Soldiers had assisted in a similar highway accident a week later.

Sgt. Peter VanHeyde of Houston, Texas and Pvts. Jason Sullivan of Chicago and Jeffrey Leviner of Spartansburg, S.C., were traveling back to Fort Bragg, N.C., Jan. 7 after picking up donations a Charlotte, N.C., radio station had collected for the OIF 3-bound Soldiers' unit, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd General Support Aviation Battalion, 3rd Avn. Bde. Suddenly, a vehicle in the opposite lane lost control and crossed the median. The airborne car landed down a steep embankment and VanHeyde said he could see the driver hit his head twice on the dashboard.

While Leviner called 911 and Sullivan made sure there was no fuel leak, VanHeyde began lifesaving measures on the victim. "He was semi-conscious and moaning, so I started doing what I could for him," VanHeyde said. He'd taken the CLS course eight months earlier and said he automatically knew what to do in the 15 minutes it took Union Emergency Medical Services to reach the crash site.

Later, the Soldiers learned that the victim was a military veteran who'd had a heart attack while driving.

"I will tell you that the three Soldiers' help was nothing short of

see CLS SOLDIERS page 10

4/3 Aviation Convoys into Iraq

by Spc. Brian P. Henretta

They had been awaiting this moment for months. Everything they had talked about and had only heard of was now about to become reality. All of the Soldiers had their game faces on, and if anyone was afraid, they were too afraid to show it.

The Soldiers of the 4th Battalion, 3rd Aviation Brigade sat in their vehicles near the border between Kuwait and Iraq, in the dark, moonless sky of early morning Feb. 9, only a few minutes and a few miles away from beginning their first step into their deployment to Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom III.

For 1st Sgt. Roger J. Nickel, HHC 4th Battalion, 3rd Aviation Brigade first sergeant, this was the best he has felt in his career.

"I've never felt better trained, never felt better prepared. We were ready; we knew we were ready and there wasn't a doubt in anyone's mind who's been here before," said Nickel. "The Soldiers knew our unit has never been better."

4/3 AHB was very sure about themselves before beginning their 400-mile convoy to Camp Taji, however that was after months of exhaustive training and preparation. This included learning basics such as driving with correct spacing and speed, navigating obstacles and communication skills, said Nickel.

The pieces began falling into place during the unit's rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, La., in October, Nickel said.

"Out there at JRTC is when it all came together. We actually practiced a convoy live-fire," said Nickel. "And it's where we learned the navigation skills we need to get from Kuwait to Iraq."

After returning from JRTC, 4/3 AHB conducted a paintball live-fire course where they had OPFOR attacking them with paintballs so



Photo by Staff Sgt. Tad Browning

The 4/3 Aviation Brigade completed the approximately 400-mile convoy to Iraq on Feb. 20. The Brigade is providing aviation support at Camp Taji.

the Soldiers could learn how to react to actually being shot at, Nickel said.

Key leaders also received Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and were given GPS classes, said Nickel. All vehicle crewmembers participated in four separate land navigation and map reading exercises. All of this training was a build up to arriving in Kuwait and participating in a convoy live-fire exercise.

The live-fire was a three day training exercise which consisted of reflexive fire drills, reacting to improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and small arms fire while on a convoy, radioing in medical evacuations and setting up landing zones for helicopters.

"The live-fire training we did in Kuwait was the best training we had done to that point. They could re-create scenarios we couldn't create at our home station," said Nickel. "Things like (mortar) simulators and improvised explosive devices; we would try to set them up at home, but in Kuwait they

had it set up exactly the way you would see it up north."

After training was complete, the last thing left to do before moving to Iraq was fixing any last minute problems to vehicles and communication equipment, Nickel said.

"We did a lot of vehicle testing before we left to make sure they were ready to go. All the foreseeable problems with the vehicles were solved before the convoy," Nickel said.

The great efforts of the maintenance and communication units kept everything mission-ready, said Nickel. An example of this happened the night before the convoy north.

"We had a fuel pump go bad and we didn't get the part to fix it until a day prior to movement," Nickel said. "The maintenance crew worked until 4:30 a.m. to get the part back together without any complaints."

Finally the morning came when it was time to execute their move-

see CONVOY page 11

BOLT Offers Legal Help for Soldiers

by Spc. Brian P. Henretta

No soldier wants to end up with legal troubles, but if trouble finds you, there is help.

The Brigade Operational Legal Team (BOLT) can provide legal assistance to Soldiers with matters of landlord-tenant or debtor-creditor issues, powers of attorney, wills and the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act.

They also deal with rules of engagement, laws of war and detainee operations cases, as well as prosecuting all administrative law, said Michael M. Murphy, Aviation Brigade Command Judge Advocate.

The BOLT advises Soldiers on

tax issues as well. Soldiers can put in an extension with the IRS so they don't have to file their taxes for 180 days plus the number of days they are in theater during that tax-period, said Murphy. If a Soldier is married, they can get their spouse a special power of attorney so they can file taxes jointly.

The command judge advocates are Murphy and Cpt. Anthony P. Foley. They have a team of paralegal specialists who speak with clients first to make sure the Soldiers problem is a legal issue and not a finance or personnel problem, said Murphy.

All information shared with

Murphy, Foley and any of his paralegal assistants falls under attorney-client privileges and is strictly confidential, said Murphy.

Soldiers facing Article 15 or other criminal charges still need to speak with Trial Defense Services.

BOLT is located in the ALOC building. Their hours are 0900 to 1900 daily for walk-in power of attorney assistance and Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays from 1000 through 1200 hours and 1300 through 1500 to schedule legal assistance appointments.

Falcon Brigade Ready to Take the Reigns

continued from page 1

Getting prepared to return for OIF III was challenging and not without obstacles to overcome, said Maj. Patrick Wright, operations officer, 4/3 Aviation Battalion.

The battalion got back from Iraq in February 2004 and in the March/April time frame, they were notified that they would be coming back for OIF III, said Wright. All of their aircraft were in maintenance, getting reset which limited aviation assets available to get all of the crews qualified.

In addition to routine aircraft maintenance, mandated aircraft modifications and additional equipment were installed to make the aircraft less vulnerable to missiles, said Wright.

"Overall, modifications will help the aircraft perform better. We had our vehicles up-armored for survivability during convoy operations," said Wright. "Detailed maintenance was probably the key to making sure that everything worked."

"Just getting set up and ready to do aviation maintenance was the biggest challenge for 603rd," said Lt. Col. Terry Rice, commander, 603rd Aviation Support Battalion. "The aviators fly a lot of hours per month and it requires a lot of maintenance, a lot of work on the aircraft and a lot of phases. Biggest piece was getting boots on the ground, getting tools set up, getting the 150 contractors that we merged with and getting them integrated with our Soldiers to do aviation maintenance."

The success of the mission will depend on the

readiness of the aviation brigade and its support elements.

"Our motto is 'no mission denied'. We accept all tasks as long as we can do them. We have the manpower, the tools, equipment and capability to do the mission, whatever it is," said Rice.

Working towards a free Iraq, the aviation brigade will continue where 1st Cavalry Division left off.

"We will continue to fly the same missions. Some will change in quantity. 1st Cavalry Division flew a few Iraqi army soldiers here and there to assist," said Climer. The future of our mission may be more support for the Iraqi army units because in the last two weeks an Iraqi army brigade was stood up and now conducting operations working along side 3ID. It's another brigade in this multi-national division so we will have responsibility to provide them aviation support, and if you look at the plans, eventually all of this will be under the control of the Iraqi army. As they incrementally expand out their battle space, we will start providing more aviation support to them.

Through all of the preparation and training that have led to the aviation brigade's arrival, it is evident that they are capable and ready for a successful mission.

"We're very well prepared, and we had a very good training program at home station as well as training modeled off this environment," said Climer. "Getting our pilots trained, getting the aircraft re-fit from 3rd ID's first go around and the training we did in Kuwait has prepared us. I think we are really set up for success."

Battalion Pre-Deployment Reports

1/3 Aviation Battalion

by 1st Lt. James Lewis

The 1st Battalion (Attack), 3rd Aviation Regiment, flying the AH-64D Longbow Apache Attack Helicopter, is one of the 3rd Infantry Division's most lethal war fighting assets. Based out of Hunter Airfield, Georgia, they arrived in Kuwait throughout the month of January in preparation to join the efforts in Central Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom III.

Although the battalion had received training prior to arrival in Kuwait, they were still required to perform many essential training tasks prior to moving North. This training was vital to the Soldiers as it taught them current operations and procedures being used in the theater of operations. This training will help the Soldiers to protect themselves and others while performing their missions. Soldiers received an Improved Explosive Devices (IED) class where they learned the necessary techniques, tactics and procedures on how to deal with roadside bombs that explode while they are driving down the road, minimizing the impacts on the troops. Every Soldier thought it was valuable training.

An excellent training tool for the commanders was the room clearing drills that prepared Soldiers in the event they were tasked to enter a building in which its security was in question. The Soldiers were presented with scenarios in each room. As the Soldiers occupied the room, instructors would talk about how a typical home in Iraq would be arranged and how the culture of the people would affect the situation of entering a room. During this training, the battalion was also conducting a convoy live fire, which allowed the Soldiers to hone their skills of firing weapons from vehicles while conducting convoy operations.

The aviators of 1-3rd Aviation Regiment were required to conduct environmental training to familiarize them with the challenges of flying in the dusty environment. They were required to take off and land on sand during day and night time to build their proficiency. It also introduced them to the different techniques on how to handle various situations they may find themselves in during operations in Iraq. Every aviator completed this training with excellent results.

Although the Soldiers of the 1st Battalion (Attack), 3rd Aviation Regiment performed much of this training at home prior to the deployment, this additional training prior to proceeding to Iraq was necessary to clear up any questions, update any old information and help to improve their proficiency. In the beginning of February, the battalion completed this training and is now posturing to relieve the 1st Cavalry Division and conduct operations as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom III. The Viper Battalion is confident, extremely well prepared and proud to take part in this important mission as part of the Marne Division.

2/3 Aviation Battalion

by Capt. Carolyn Krahn

The Knighthawk Battalion initiated the deployment with an advance party of approximately thirty Soldiers that helped to lay the groundwork to receive the main body. The majority of the battalion departed Hunter Army Airfield over several days beginning around the middle of January. Approximately three hundred thirty Soldiers of the Knighthawk Battalion descended on Kuwait. Upon arrival in Kuwait, the Soldiers of the Knighthawk Battalion began the Reception, Staging and Onward Movement Integration (RSOI) portion of the deployment. A major responsibility for the Knighthawk's was running the brigade's small arms range. The battalion successfully re-qualified approximately 1,200 Soldiers on their personal weapon, ensuring that each weapon was functioning properly. During this time, Alpha Companies UH-60 Blackhawk's and Bravo Companies CH-47 Chinook aircraft completed all environmental training for the pilots.

With RSOI completed, the Knighthawk Battalion was ready to embark on the arduous journey north into Iraq. Our aircraft departed in late January, and by sun-up all were headed north to Taji. Escorted by the Apaches, all aircraft successfully made it to the final destination of Al Taji on that day. Following them to Iraq was the convoy of approximately 50 vehicles and approximately 115 Soldiers. The convoy prepared with a three-day course in Kuwait, and proved themselves successful rolling into Camp Taji in the early morning hours the first week of February without a major incident. The Soldiers were on an adrenaline high for being so successful in this mission. The last group to arrive were those Soldiers that traveled by C-130 from Kuwait to Iraq. After spending the night at Camp Anaconda, they were picked up by the familiar faces of Bravo Company pilots and their CH-47's and flown to Camp Taji.

While the majority of the battalion was making the trip north into Iraq, approximately 20 Soldiers and several UH-60's remained behind in Kuwait to support the 3ID General Officers. These Soldiers joined the rest of the battalion approximately 10 days later.

Since the Knighthawks arrival in Al Taji they have successfully completed approximately 280 air missions supporting both the 1st Cavalry Division, and our own 3rd Infantry Division. Throughout these various missions, we have carried almost 7,000 passengers. These encompass a total of six hundred and sixty-nine flight hours, split almost half way between the CH-47 and UH-60 crews, while maintaining and overall operational readiness of 80%.

NOTES FROM THE DESK OF THE BRIGADE SURGEON

by Maj. Christopher McGraw

I am glad to report that the Soldiers of the Falcon Brigade have overall been healthy. Aside from the occasional case of the "Krud", few Soldiers have gone beyond the "I feel awful" stage.

We have a robust medical team providing care for our Soldiers here at Camp Taji. We currently have seven physicians, one physicians assistant (PA), and environmental science officer (ESO), and approximately 25 medics. Over the next few months, we will be adding several additional PA's to our staff, which will only enhance the capabilities we have to care for our Soldiers.

In addition to our aid station, and the capabilities we have, the Division Support Brigade (DSB) provides dental, optometry, radiology and laboratory support here at Camp Taji.

Of course, if we can't take care of the problem, there is a higher level of military medical care in the Baghdad area. Soon we will begin doing flight physicals for our aviators and crew-members. Bottom line, we can treat just about any medical complaint here at Camp Taji.

We will do everything possible to ensure that the Soldiers of the Falcon Brigade stay healthy during their deployment to Iraq.

CLS Soldiers

continued from page 6

a miracle as far as our crew was concerned," said Tina Busby, an administrative assistant with Union EMS. "The medics who responded to this call quite possibly couldn't have gotten this patient out of the wrecked vehicle nor carried him up the slope to the ambulance without their help because of the steep embankment where the vehicle had veered off the road."

In a letter Busby wrote to the 3rd Avn. Bde., she added, "They were nowhere to be found by our medics once the patient was secured in the ambulance and seemingly appeared and disappeared like guardian angels."

Six days later, the unit deployed to Kuwait and 1st Sgt. Tim Edsall of Hammondsport, N.Y., said he didn't learn about his Soldiers' actions until someone put three Army Commendation Medals in his hand. "I think it's awesome that they took the time to stop and give lifesaving aid," Edsall said. "But knowing the kind of Soldiers they are, that's what I'd expect from them."

PREVENTATIVE MEDICINE MEASURES IN TAJI DO'S

DO wash hands regularly, especially after using the latrine.

DO use lip balm to help prevent skin dehydration.

DO use bottled water to brush your teeth.

DO drink plenty of water and other fluids, ensure your intake equals your output and you urinate often. Watch color of urine; darker color indicates the onset of dehydration.

DO bathe often. Keep clothing clean and dry. Keep feet and crotch area clean and dry. These measures will help prevent painful and irritating infections.

DO personal hygiene such as regular bathing, maintain clean hair and a clean shave (recommended).

DO ensure living areas are maintained well and bed linen should be changed often.

DO clean up a generator spill if the generator is owned by your unit. If it is KBR owned, submit a work order through your S4.

DO store, handle and dispose of hazardous materials (hazmat) properly

DO clean air conditioner filters regularly with soap and warm water.

DON'TS

DON'T expose yourself to sun or dry, arid air for long periods of time unprotected.

DON'T keep pets or mascots. Stray animals may carry rabies and other diseases. Submit work orders through your S4 to have the animal captured and removed

DON'T go for long periods without water. Arid climates may require as much as one quart per hour.

DON'T go without frequent hand washing and bathing

DON'T go without eating, but don't eat large meals. Spread food consumption over the course of the day.

Questions may be addressed to Capt. Lalini Pillay, brigade environmental science officer.

"Prevention is the Key"

Convoy: Success Due to Training

continued from page 7

ment across the border into Iraq. The long drive was free of enemy contact and they suffered almost no problems with vehicle breakdowns.

"Most of the breakdowns during the convoy were with vehicles from other units which 4/3 would pull over to help," said Nickel. "We've always been team players, so we'd go help them out. It's not just 4/3 that has reaped the benefits of the professionalism of our Soldiers. Many other groups benefit from our hard work."

"During these breakdown scenarios, all of the crewmembers' awareness was raised, and Soldiers were pointing out the most minor things that seemed out of place. Everyone was aware of the potential threat out there," said Nickel. "We didn't allow anyone to get near the convoy. It couldn't have gone any better."

It was a big relief to finally have the convoy to Baghdad over and begin to get the unit set up here and running, said Nickel. But some members of the unit would have liked, in a small way, the opportunity to put their training to the test.

"They all anticipated something happening," Nickel said. "And in one way, they kind of wish something would have happened so they could use the training we received. On the other hand, I don't think



Photo by Staff Sgt. Tad Browning

Soldiers from 4/3 AHB pull security while stopped on their convoy to Baghdad. The battalion's vigilance helped make the drive a success.

anyone is too unhappy, we all made it here safely."

Nickel is proud of all of the Soldiers in 4/3 and is happy his unit did the small things it takes to conduct a successful convoy, he said.

"I think the whole professionalism of the unit showed. This might sound like a silly thing, but it's little things like painting your up armor so you don't look raggedy that makes all the difference. All of our stuff looked very professional," said Nickel. "If I was the enemy, I'd see our convoy come through and say 'I'll wait until the next one.'"

Nickel offers advice to future convoys that will be moving into Iraq in the future.

"There was a lot of time and effort put into the preparation phase. A lot. You can't underestimate preparation, and don't underestimate the vigilance you have to show when you're driving through," Nickel said. "I was very confident in our abilities; we could have dealt with anything. I believe this unit was the most trained on convoys out of any other aviation units out here."

Now that 4/3 is getting settled into their home for the next year, they look forward to conducting their mission of providing air assault capabilities to the 3rd Infantry Division and improving the quality of life for the Iraqi people.

A Day in The Life of An Army Chaplain

Cpt. Donald Bickel, Chaplain

"What is it like being a Chaplain?" I've been asked this question several times. Let me attempt an explanation.

As Chaplain, I am a staff officer who works directly for the battalion commander as a subject matter expert to meet the religious needs of soldiers in the battalion. I may perform religious rites, ceremonies and conduct worship; or I provide for Soldiers who

are outside my faith group. Providing includes: coordinating with another Chaplain of distinct religion/faith group, contacting a civilian religious leader, or through a soldier who is a "distinctive faith group leader."

In addition to worship and religious rites, etc., I counsel Soldiers and their families on personal, Army, or other issues. I provide training in: marriage and family, suicide prevention, Army Values, ethics/morals, and other topics. Finally, I advise the commander on issues of: ethics, religion, morals, and morale.

The dual role of staff officer/religious leader is a challenge, but one that brings joy and fulfillment to my life each week!

Good Food, Atmosphere at DFAC

by Spc. Brian Henretta

What's your favorite time of day at Camp Taji?

Most Soldiers enjoy taking a hot shower, watching a DVD or conducting a good PT session, but who here doesn't love to eat a delicious meal at the dining facility.

Soldiers here value a good meal more than just about anything, especially the food served in the Command Sgt. Maj. Eric F. Cooke Sports Café.

There are various food-stations within the dining area, each serving a different, special type of food every meal. Breakfast offers both omelet and eggs to order grills; three main lines which serve bacon, hash browns, scrambled eggs and more; a Mexican breakfast bar; and a self-serve bar with pancakes, French toast and fruit.

During lunch and dinner there are three main entrée and side dish lines, two short order grills, a Philly cheese steak grill, an ethnic bar with either Chinese, Mexican or Indian food, a full made to order sandwich bar, salad, snack, ice cream sundae, fresh cake and pastry bars and 17 beverage choices.

The Cooke Sports Café is designed to feed more than 7,500 people each meal. The walls are adorned with sports memorabilia from many professional, college and high school teams from all around the country, ranging from the Buffalo Bills to the University of Texas Longhorns. There are televisions throughout the dining area with news and sports programs on.

It hasn't always been this nice of a place.

Before the current manager and staff came under contract, the chow hall was on a three day rotation or pork chops, spaghetti and chicken, said Warrant Officer Roberta M. Sheffield, brigade food advisor with HHC Aviation Brigade. Michael A. Leight, Cooke Sports Café manager, took over this past

Thanksgiving Day after the previous contract expired.

"My first day we served more than 21,000 people for the holiday meal. We stayed open the entire day and had a constant flow of people the whole time," said Leight. "It was a good way to jump head first into the job."

The dining facility operates on the Army's 21-day menu rotation which is designed to provide well-balanced meals. Leight took the menu choices he was offered and decided to 'enhance' them for a better variety of meals, he said.

"We take the 21-day menu and tweak it. For example, if we order turkey cutlets, we'll serve them as is, or we'll make other meals such as turkey a la king," said Leight. "There's a recipe for every food dish; we just have our cooks follow the steps."

While Leight has only recently taken over manager responsibilities of Cooke Sports Café, he has years of experience running overseas military dining facilities. He previously managed facilities in Bosnia, Kosovo and Romania. It was working in these locations where he developed the ideas he has brought to Camp Taji, such as offering a wide-variety of foods and decorating the walls. This is also where he learned how important a good meal



Photo by Spc. Brian P. Henretta

Sgt. Azizia Y. White, of HHC 2-3 Aviation, and Denzil Alahakoon, a baker at the Cooke Sports Cafe, fill a pastry with cream.

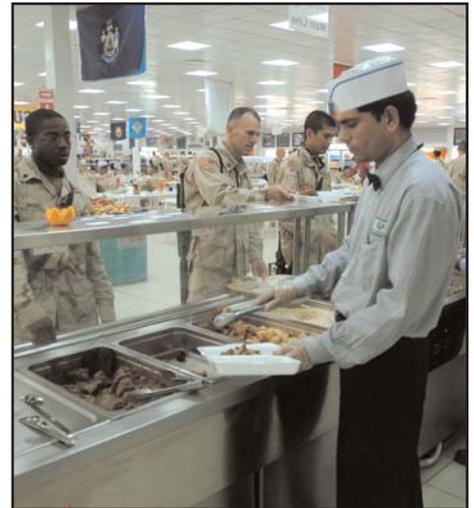


Photo by Spc. Brian P. Henretta

Servers in the Cooke Sports Cafe serve approximately 18,000 meals a day to Soldiers and civilian workers.

is for the morale of Soldiers far away from home, he said.

The kitchen is run by two head chefs who work in 12 hour shifts giving guidance to the kitchen staff. There are just under 200 employees who busily work in two 12-hour shifts as cooks, servers, bakers, cleaning staff or dishwashers ensuring everyone is fed, said Leight.

All food is U.S. Department of Agriculture approved and shipped in from all over the world. Much of the non-perishable items are sent from New York City, while seasonal goods such as fruits and vegetables come from Spain, the Caribbean, Africa, Kuwait and other locations, Leight said.

With so many options, Soldiers can easily choose to eat healthy, well-balanced meals. The calorie content of the food is posted by each item, which helps make nutrition decisions easier, said Sheffield.

As good as the dining facility is now, it's constantly being improved upon. There will be a fresh-fruit frozen-smoothie bar installed shortly, Leight said. "It will get better as we go along."

More DFAC photos on page 13

Safety Corner

M-9 (9MM) SEMIAUTOMATIC PISTOL

Unloading and Clearing Procedures

- Orient weapon in safe direction. (Clearing container if available)
- Place decocking/safety in "safe" position
- Depress the magazine release button to remove magazine
- Grasp the slide narrations and fully retract the slide to remove the chambered cartridge
- Lock the slide to the rear using the slide stop and visually inspect chamber to ensure that it is empty
- Release the slide stop allowing the slide to return fully to the forward position
- Place weapon on fire
- Squeeze trigger
- Place weapon on safe

M-16 RIFLE (5.56MM)

Unloading and Clearing Procedures

- Orient weapon in safe direction. (Clearing container if available)
- Remove the magazine from the weapon.
- Lock bolt to rear. (ensure weapon is on safe)
- Inspect the receiver and chamber to ensure no ammunition is present.

-With NO ammunition in chamber or receiver, allow the bolt to go forward

Two key steps: Magazine removed and bolt/slide locked to the rear prior to inspecting chamber- you'll have no problems.....

From the "I'm Glad You Asked Column:"

- Generators must have proper grounding techniques employed.
- Vehicles driving on the airfield ramp will use extreme caution. The speed limit is 10 MPH. Vehicles will give way to taxiing aircraft. Pay particular attention to aircraft entering the ramp from B and C taxiways. Several instances of Gators and other vehicles (including bicycles) not clearing the taxiway before crossing and interfering with an aircraft's taxi.
- For personnel that are transiting between the barriers on the aircraft parking pads. DO NOT ENTER a pad that has an AH-64 conducting runup operations. Internal boresight operations may be in progress creating an eye/laser hazard. So if an Apache has its APU running do not enter the aircraft parking pad area. Go around.
- **SMOKING:** Smoking is not authorized in buildings, around fuel points, in vehicles or around aircraft. Open flames are prohibited (that includes your propane stoves).

DFAC Photos

Photos by Spc. Brian P. Henretta



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Department of Defense or Department of the Army.
3ID Commander: Maj. Gen. William G. Webster
Aviation Bde. Commander: Col. Ronald D. Tuggle
Aviation Bde. PAO: Maj. David J. Weis
Editors, Staff Writers: Spc. Derek Del Rosario, Spc. Brian P. Henretta