



RAIDERS DOWN RANGE



Volume 1 Issue 12

Diary of the Soldiers of the 1st Brigade Combat Team

September 15, 2005

Raiders remember fallen of Sept. 11

Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.
1st BCT PAO

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, Tikrit, Iraq – Soldiers of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Brigade Combat Team and 1-3 Brigade Troops Battalion, held a ceremony September 11 on Forward Operating Base Speicher at their headquarters building in remembrance of those who were killed during the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

Soldiers who attended the ceremony voiced their opinions on why the ceremony was important, and why it is important to remember the attacks that killed more than 3,000 innocent Americans.

"I think it is an honor to recognize an event that opened American minds to the threat of terrorism," said Command Sgt. Maj. Terry Purdin, 1-3 BTB command sergeant major. "By keeping it fresh in Americans' and Soldiers' memories, we pay tribute to the 3200 lives lost during the attacks."

Other Soldiers, like Spc. Shane Propst, an HHC 1st BCT human resources specialist, said he remembers the attacks well, and it is the reason many Soldiers are over in Iraq fighting terrorism.

The ceremony was also a chance for Soldiers to reflect on the pain and anger caused by the attacks.

"I was sad for the families who lost loved ones, and especially bad for the ones that were left behind," said Spc. James Creech, an HHC 1st BCT



Spc. Kenneth Jones, a 1/3 BTB measurement and systems intelligence analyst, raises the 1st BCT's colors in front of the 1st BCT HQ while 1st BCT Soldiers watch during a ceremony here Sept. 11.

human resources specialist. "They are the ones that are really suffering today. It also made me angry something like that could happen on American soil."

The attacks affected Americans in a way they will never be able to forget, said Sgt. 1st Class Charles Izard, the 1-3 BTB logistics noncommissioned officer in charge. "When we lost all those innocent people, it reached out and touched everybody," he said. "It was one of those moments you can never forget, even if you wanted to. That day truly brought America to its knees in my eyes."

Overall, Soldiers agree that the attacks are the reason why they risk their lives everyday, and remembering the tragedy helps them deal with the harsh reality of war in Iraq.

"For me personally, I was mobilized after Sept. 11," said Maj. Bethany Aragon, Tactical Psychological Operations Detachment 1460 commander. "I have been on orders ever since then. My time up until now is directly related to the attack. I am glad we are celebrating, because it serves to reenergize the memory and me. It makes me proud to be over here serving."

During the ceremony, a 42nd Infantry Division remembrance flag was raised along with the 1st BCT's colors on separate flagpoles in front of the HQ. While 1st BCT has been here at FOB Speicher since July, Sept. 11 was the first time the flag and the 1st BCT colors have flown in front of the HQ, said Lt. Col. John M. Charvat Jr., executive officer for 1st BCT.

Iraqi Soldiers work to improve Salah ad Din province

Staff Sgt. Thomas Mills
1st BCT PAO

FORWARD OPERATING BASE, SPEICHER, Tikrit, Iraq – Over the past months in Salah ad Din Province the fledgling Iraqi army has continued to grow and mature under Coalition Forces' tutelage said a military transition team member.

The 1st Brigade, 4th Iraqi army division has shown vast improvement during training and operations, said Maj. David N. McNutt, MITT officer-in-charge, 1st Brigade Combat Team.

"IA units are conducting independent operations with Coalition support up to the battalion level," McNutt said. "Although validations are ongoing at the company and battalion level, a majority of IA companies are conducting limited counter-insurgency operations with...Coalition (liaison) teams."

This comes on the heels of the second brigade-level command post exercise for the 1st IA Bde. Aug. 2.

"The CPX was a huge success," McNutt said. "Significant improvements were made in the aspects of (command and control), (tactical operations center) operations and reporting."

A CPX is an exercise designed to train the functions of command posts,

said Cpt. James B. Thompson, assistant OIC for team. "Good military command posts can receive information, distribute information, analyze information and make recommendations to the Iraqi commander."

The focus of this CPX, Thompson said, was to train the battalion and brigade staffs in counter-insurgency operations. Most of the lower-level units in the IA, such as platoons and companies, can conduct counter-insurgency operations, but the higher-level staffs have to be able to synchronize those lower level operations.

McNutt said the Iraqis made improvements in overall situational awareness, the sharing of military intelligence and the execution of TOC operations by noncommissioned officers and enlisted soldiers.

"They integrated NCOs and soldiers into their command opera-

tions, which was a huge step in the right direction to becoming a successful fighting force," said Sgt. Benjamin J. Dilts.

The IA brigade was able to adapt and overcome many obstacles the 1st BCT MiTT Soldiers placed before them, Dilts added.

Besides finding success in training operations such as the CPX the IA are also finding success in the real world of fighting an insurgency, McNutt said.

"They have executed combat operations under fire and performed excep-



Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.

An Iraqi Soldier sits on the back of a truck and provides security at a government center in the city of Ad Dujayl Sept. 7.

tionally well with the presence of Coalition (liaison team) assistance," he said.

Knowing that CF are in support has helped the IA withstand enemy indirect fire, small arms and rocket-propelled grenade attacks, McNutt added.

The team is working on the positive aspects of some Iraqi's experience to help build a professional force that can defend the country, he said.

"Former soldiers, NCOs and officers in the old regime army who are working in the IA now have years of experience and knowledge," McNutt said.

By mentoring, teaching, training and equipping the IA, he said, Coalition Forces are promoting professionalism and an increase in pride, morale and dedication to duty.

"That dedication and pride shined through during the CPX," Thompson said.

"These NCOs and Soldiers responded with great determination," he said. "Each one of them had a fire in their eyes I had not seen before. It was very exciting to watch."

McNutt said with every day the Iraqis grow stronger.

"We have to remember that the IA is in its infancy and continues to improve on a daily basis," he added.

Voices and Viewpoints

Have no fear if you secure your gear

Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.
1st BCT PAO

What is a Soldier without his gear? The things we are issued and responsible for help us do our jobs and may even save our lives. Yet I see Soldiers everyday treating their gear with something less than love.

I guess you have to be brought up by your parents to be responsible for your belongings. When I think of how I learned to take care of things, memories of my dear old dad come rushing back to me. My dad taught us to secure our gear and treat other peoples' property with respect.

My old man collected records; Elvis, The Beatles, you name it. If it came out in the late 1960s, my dad had a copy of the album unopened in the plastic. He loved his album collection, as any man in his early 20s would.

My father, bless his soul, came home one day to find my siblings and me playing in the house, obli-

ous to his presence. We had taken his albums, removed their plastic and placed them halfway down the hallway. We then took turns running full speed, jumping through the air, landing on the albums and sliding the rest of the way down the hall.

I remember turning around after having a go on his precious collectible Beatles White Album and seeing him purple in the face, handfuls of freshly torn-out hair in his hands. I asked no questions, I just took off running as fast as my seven year-old legs would carry me. My brother and sister weren't as quick on the jump as I was, and fell victim to the full force of his wrath.

After a thorough cordon and search of the area, my father found me outside hiding in the doghouse. Thankfully he was somewhat worn out from the sound thrashing he had delivered to my siblings, whose wails could be heard clear outside.

My father swore to me on that occasion as well as many others that



by the time we left his home, he would not have anything of value left, and he would work up until the day he died trying to own something nice.

Through countless thrashings, I learned to be responsible for objects left in my possession. My father's tool collection suffered many casualties before this lesson was learned, however.

My father, in his infinite wisdom, patiently continued to lend me his tools until one day he suggested I buy my own, and severed me from all future tool borrowing privileges.

It all ties in to securing your gear and caring for it. I see TA-50 (Army issued gear) lying all over the place, unsecured. Much of the equipment we use everyday and take for granted, the enemy doesn't have. I believe

one of the reasons we are superior in battle is because of the technology we possess. If we can't take better care of our equipment, there are countless negative scenarios that could occur.

I try to take care of my gear. One reason is because I would rather have money for things I want than to replace lost, stolen or damaged Army equipment. I realize the Army is an entity with a seemingly endless supply of funds, but we all know that isn't true. When the books show losses, our units suffer. There comes a point when we have spent so much trying to replace what is gone that we can't get the new stuff.

It isn't hard to take care of the gear you are issued. From your uniform down to your weapon, the Army has many services and equipment to help you care for these things. If your parents didn't beat it into you, maybe paying for it out of pocket will. Secure your gear, Soldier!

Chaplain's Corner

Don't lose focus; try to see things as all one piece

Chaplain Mark Nordstrom
1st BCT Chaplain

Sometimes we lose our way on the journey to professional success, financial stability or a happy family. We start out thinking we will do well in all parts of our life but end up focusing on one and falling short or failing in the others. We struggle to pull out one piece of our life at a time, doing well at work but short-changing our family, trying hard as a parent but watching our marriage drift away from us like a boat slipping out on the tide. Like a musician trying to play a one string guitar, our lives seem to be full of noise, but not much music.

The answer is to focus, focus, focus. If we focus on strength of character or our core values it will give us the best shot we have at being a success in all parts of our life. In a word, we've got to view our lives as a whole, each part bound to the other and dependent on the other pieces. I have a good friend, now a major



general and commanding in combat who says, "Mark, it's all a piece." What he means by that is what we do in one part of our lives has an impact on the other parts. Though it's possible to gain promotion and lose your family, you are much more likely to get promoted, find professional success and keep your family intact if you pay attention to a few critical things in life. You can be like a musician who plays on all the strings of a guitar, making not just noise, but music.

It's hard to see things as all one piece when we focus on accomplishments rather than character and spiritual development. It's like this: when we see our promotion as the result of our hard work as a soldier, and forget that our spouses and children have provided the critical environment for us to succeed, we are playing

with only one string. When we make decisions about spending money saying, "I've worked hard for this money," and forget that our children need our support and did not volunteer for this assignment of life - we "volunteered" them - we stretch that guitar string to the breaking point. As leaders in the Army, when we don't love our soldiers or view them as the reason for our success, we put poison in our own soup and wonder why no one wants to follow us.

I'll focus on one critical core value as an example: selfless service. This same value can bring focus to your role as a parent, a brother or sister or any other role in your life. At heart it's a spiritual value. Jesus said, "If you seek to save your life, you'll lose it. If you lose your life for my sake, you'll find it." There is a spiritual truth there that applies to every part of our life, not just our relationship with God. Think first, "How can I put others first?" and you'll soon find you are marching to success in all areas of your life. It's all a piece.



From dusk to dawn...

A humvee drives down a dirt road near Forward Operating Base Speicher while conducting a daylight presence patrol.

Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.

Use the five C's to secure an IED site.

Confirm : the device
Clear : the area
Call : EOD
Cordon : the perimeter
Control : site access



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Soldiers man OPs to keep streets of Samarra safe

Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.
1st BCT PAO

SAMARRA, Iraq – Soldiers stationed in the city of Samarra, Iraq see action almost daily. Within the city limits, Company A and Company B of 3rd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment, stationed at Forward Operating Base Uvanni, set up observation posts throughout the city. From these OPs they watch for insurgent activity and try to make the streets of Samarra safer for its citizens.

There is one Soldier to about every 300 people in Samarra. Samarra is a city where chaos is a daily thing, and Soldiers have to be ready for anything, said Pvt. Jeremiah Johnston, a Co. B, 3-69 Armor squad automatic weapon gunner from Carrolltown, Pa. "A normal day around here is really not so normal. You never really know what you are doing until ten minutes before you do it."

Most of the morning and early afternoon of August 27 all was quiet, except for the occasional explosion or sound of automatic gunfire. The four Soldiers of Co. B 3-69 Armor team leader Spc. Shim Welch's group took turns manning a bunker for two hour shifts. Traffic moved through the busy intersection and people walked up and down the streets, stopping to shop or talk to each other in the shops lining the street.

Around 1 p.m., the streets went dead. Not a soul could be seen, and all the shops were closed. Not one car drove through the intersection.

"Something is fixing to happen," Welch said. "I bet we take contact here real soon."

Johnston was up for bunker guard. The remaining Soldiers, Welch, Pfc. David Campbell, a Co. B, 3-69 grenadier and Pfc. Terry Hees, a Co. B, 3-69 Armor assistant gunner from Eldon, Mo. waited on the rooftop, talking and drinking water.

The first sounds of close range AK-47 automatic gunfire sounded at around 2 p.m.

"We got contact!!" Hees yelled. He raced to the edge of the rooftop, swung his M249 SAW over the top of the wall, scanned his sector for friendly troops and started sending rounds down range toward the building where the gunfire originated. Welch was right behind him, taking careful aim with his M4 rifle and popping of shots at windows in the same building, which was about 300 meters away.

"Hear that?!" Campbell asked Welch. "That's AK fire coming from that building. Let me put a 203 round right in the side of it!"

"Hang on, let me find out if the ground is clear," Welch said, and headed off to the radio in the bunker.

After getting the all clear from the company net, Welch returned. "I want you to put a round right in the side of that wall over there," Welch told Campbell as



Spc. Shim Welch, a Co. B, 3-69 Armor team leader from Asheville, N.C., tells Pfc. David Campbell, a Co. B, 3-69 Armor grenadier from Tampa, Fla. where to fire a grenade from his M-203 grenade launcher during a firefight in Samarra Aug. 27.

they ducked behind the wall. Hees continued to fire his automatic rifle at the building where the insurgents were firing on their position, providing cover for Welch and Campbell.

Campbell peeked his head over the wall, as Welch, who is from Asheville, N.C. stood behind him and pointed to where he wanted the grenade launched. Campbell ducked down and loaded a grenade into his chamber. He stood back up, took aim and fired his weapon. The grenade hit its mark, and took out half the wall.

Johnston was steadily spraying 7.62 millimeter rounds into the side of the insurgents' position. Welch got back on the radio and called "cease fire, we have units on the ground!"

At that moment, two Bradley Fighting Vehicles raced past the OP toward the insurgents' position. The BFVs took positions on either side of the building and began pumping 25 millimeter rounds into the building from the cannon on the front of their vehicles for suppressive fire.

The insurgents must have fled the building, because the BFVs suddenly became mobile. One of the BFVs knocked down a wall separating the building they were firing at and a soccer field. Another BFV came around the side and knocked another hole in the wall about 50 meters away. Soldiers dismounted from the back of the BFVs, and ran up to a building on the soccer field, kicked in the door and entered the building. Minutes later two AH-64 Apache helicopters from the 8th Battalion, 229th Aviation Regiment showed up in the sky to support the troops on the ground.

This was just another day on the job for Welch's team. "We wake up every morning expecting to get shot at," said Campbell, who is from Tampa Fla. "I wouldn't put that on any man. It was scary when we first got here, but as time goes by it gets easier to deal with."

Many of the Soldiers were fearful of what was ahead when they first arrived at Uvanni. After dealing with a few extreme situations, their job got easier for them to perform.

"When I first got here my biggest fear was that I wouldn't measure up to what I was called to do," Hees said. "A perfect example of handling this was when I did first aid on a buddy who got shot. I also had a fear of dying. Now I only see it as the highest honor to give that sacrifice."

The Soldiers who man the OPs knew they wanted to do this kind of work, even before they joined the Army. "Honestly this is something I always wanted to do, since I was a little kid," Welch said. "My dad was infantry in the Army, and I wanted to be like him."

"I signed up knowing what I was going to do," Campbell said. "It's my job, and I love every minute of it."

Hees said he wanted to be in the military his whole life. He said there are many rewards for facing the dangers he does every day. "There are very few jobs where you get to save somebody from tyranny or even save their lives. That is the ultimate reward from God for doing what he called me to do."

The Soldiers who work fighting the insurgency in Samarra say one of the most important things about the job is the Soldiers they work with.

"There's a special bond between me and the guys I work with," Campbell said. "Once that bond is there, you can't break it."

"I'm just doing for my buddies what any of them would do for me," Johnston said. "Doing the job together



Photos by Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.

A Bradley Fighting Vehicle assigned to 3rd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment races down a street in Samarra towards a scene of enemy contact August 27.

with them makes it not so bad. I wouldn't want to be out here with anybody else."

While danger and chaos is a daily part of the Soldiers' jobs, they do have the bigger picture in mind; keeping the streets of Samarra and its citizens safe.

The Soldiers' job is not only to locate and root out the enemy but to also protect the citizens of Samarra so they can have a little taste of freedom, Johnston said.

The Soldiers feel differently about the citizens of Samarra who are just trying to live in peace. They know the people are not all out to hurt them.

"The people here in Samarra, they're not bad people," Welch said. "They're just trying to get by. They want to see us get the terrorists as bad as we do. Their lives are miserable because of the insurgent activity here."

"We're trying to give them a better place to live," Campbell said. "We want them to see that Saddam (Hussein) is gone and they don't have to be afraid anymore."

"We are trying to show the people that they can enjoy their lives and live them to the fullest," Hees said. "They don't have to live in fear if they have a sound government."

Those stationed at FOB Uvanni and working in Samarra face other challenges than just the insurgency. Doing the same thing hour after hour can seem redundant, but the Soldiers have to be careful. Insurgents can attack at any time.

"The biggest challenge to being out here everyday is battling complacency," Welch said. "Everyday you're out in the heat, just working all the time, and after so many hours it makes it hard not to want to cut corners."

Becoming complacent can be dangerous for the Soldiers.

The smallest breakdown in security, like not scanning a sector thoroughly, is really all it takes to get someone hurt or even killed, Welch said.

Living at FOB Uvanni can also be trying on the Soldiers' patience. Johnston said one day he saw the heat index at 151 degrees Fahrenheit. Not only are the Soldiers of 3-69 Armor attacked almost daily, their living conditions would be hard on anyone.

"We've definitely forfeited a lot of comforts of life to be out here," Welch said. "It really makes you appreciate the smallest things, like constant running water, hot meals everyday or even just being able to look out of the window."



An Iraqi civilian vehicle comes to a stop as two Bradley Fighting Vehicles assigned to 3-69 Armor move toward an intersection in Samarra Aug. 27.

Soldier proud to serve in the strongest Army of all

Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.
1st BCT PAO

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, Tikrit, Iraq – The United States of America is a country of immigrants. People of all races and all nations came to America to find a better life. Some of those people wanted more than just better opportunities; they wanted a chance to give something back to a country that has given them a better life by serving in its military.

One such person is 25 year-old Pfc. Svetlana Nikolaeva, supply specialist for 1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division Brigade Troops Battalion. Nikolaeva was born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. She immigrated to Anchorage, Alaska from Uzbekistan in December, 2002.

"I wanted a better life," Nikolaeva said. "There weren't as many opportunities in Russia as there are in America. It was hard to get a job."

Nikolaeva had a minimal proficiency in English before leaving Uzbekistan. She continued learning English upon her arrival to the states.

"I started taking all the classes I could, and volunteered at the University of Alaska in the Russian-English Center," she said.

Nikolaeva met a man from near Moscow while in Alaska. The man's

name was Alexander, and the two got married. After being in Alaska for a little over a year and a half, Nikolaeva decided to join the Army. She said she had been thinking about it for a some time, and left for basic training on May 12, 2004.

"I wanted to join the Army, I dreamed of it for a long time," Nikolaeva said. "I wanted to experience how to be a Soldier, become physically stronger and learn how to use weapons. I told my recruiter if he let me join, I would buy him lunch."

When Nikolaeva moved to Alaska, she had a couple of friends, but she wanted to be a part of something bigger.

"It is part of the reason I joined the Army, to be part of a community," She said. "If I was going to stay here, I wanted to give something."

While she wanted to be a part of something, Nikolaeva had many reasons for joining. Part of that was a feeling of pride for her new home.

"I joined the Army because I wanted to give something to the country, I wanted to be a part of it," Nikolaeva said. "It will benefit me in many ways. The Army takes care of you."

Nikolaeva went through many changes in a short time since leaving Uzbekistan. The Army was a big step, but she knew she was up to the challenge, while she still reserved a few small fears.

"I knew I was strong, I knew I could

handle the training because I was morally strong," she said. "My biggest fear was understanding English. I didn't even know what at ease meant. I kind of had to start over."

Nikolaeva said she knew she was coming to Iraq; she had been informed repeatedly to be ready since joining the Army.

"I was already prepared for the deployment," Nikolaeva said. "In basic training they told us every-day 'you're going to Iraq'."

Since coming to Iraq and actually getting to experience a Soldier's life, Nikolaeva said it will all be worth it in the end.

"I enjoy the Army; it opened me up and introduced me to so many new people," Nikolaeva said. "I got new friends. I am honored to serve in the strongest Army of all. I will always have stories to



Courtesy photo

Pfc. Svetlana Nikolaeva, a supply specialist with 1-3 BTB, listens to a briefing at Forward Operating Base Dagger. Nikolaeva is an Uzbekistani immigrant who says she is proud to give something back by serving in Iraq.

tell my children, and they will be proud of my service. I am just proud to serve my country, and it is my country."

Nikolaeva's parents still live in Uzbekistan, and she has two brothers who live in Russia.

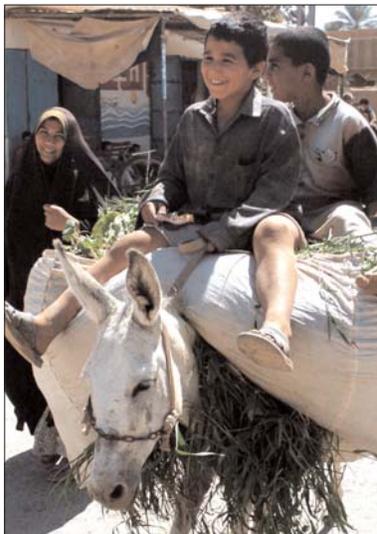
She plans to get out of Army and go back to school, majoring in international relations at the University of Alaska, Anchorage.

A peek at our home in Iraq



Photos by Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.

An Iraqi man leads a flock of sheep and goats down a street in the city of Al Abayachi. Livestock can often be seen inside of town limits in most places in Iraq.



Two Iraqi boys smile as they ride on a donkey carrying bags of grass in the city of Abayachi.



Many Iraqi homes are surrounded by walls and cannot be seen from the street. Once inside, many yards have gardens and trees.



A cow sticks its head outside of a shed behind a house. Livestock is housed anywhere they can be.



Spc. James Green

Many mosques, like this one in a field out in the country near Al Abayachi, are built with blue tile on the spiral domes.



Two Iraqi boys peek out of the window of a mosque at a Coalition Forces patrol in Shihab.

Soldiers improve quarters despite hectic schedule

Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.
1st BCT PAO

FORWARD OPERATING BASE O'RYAN, Iraq – When Soldiers of Company C, 1st Battalion 128th Infantry Regiment first arrived at Forward Operating Base O'Ryan, the accommodations were slight. Most of the FOB is made up of empty ammunition bunkers; more or less a 25 foot high concrete shell semi-circle. The Soldiers made up their minds that if they were going to stay here for a year, they were going to make the place livable.

"When we first came here, this place was an empty bunker," said Sgt. Robert Cahow, a Co. C 1-128 Inf. truck commander from Duluth, Minn.

Since the bunker in its previous state was uninhabitable, the Soldiers had to



Courtesy photo

Soldiers of C Co., 1-128 Inf. were given an old, empty ammunition bunker to live in when they first arrived in Iraq at FOB O'Ryan.

find quarters elsewhere until they could complete the project.

"We stayed in another bunker smaller than this," Cahow said. "There was like 42 of us sleeping all crammed in there. We stayed there for about a month and a half."

While the Soldiers had set their minds to fixing up the bunker, they still had daily missions to complete.

"We all wanted out of that bunker we were living in, but we were still running two missions a day," said Sgt. Jason Herman, a C Co., 1-128 Inf. truck commander from Hatfield, Wisc. "It was hard after being out all day to come home and work on this place."

The Soldiers were resourceful and used whatever assets they could get their hands on, including knowledge some of the Soldiers had from their civilian jobs.

"We assigned different people to different jobs during the day," Cahow said. "First, we pulled a five ton into the bunker and painted the walls and roof. There are a couple of guys here who are carpenters who were the foremen for the framing part of it. Other guys were plumbers and electricians so they helped us running the wiring and setting up the showers. We moved and built everything ourselves."

While the Soldiers had ambition, they lacked building materials and tools to work with. They put their heads together and got the stuff they needed.

"We were given raw lumber, and some of the guys got tools sent from home," said Sgt. Edward Johnson, a C Co., 1-128 Inf. truck commander from Hinckley, Minn. "We built everything in this place."

The Soldiers were in country for a couple of months before they could get the project underway. Problems such as having no outside help and the lack of lighting hindered their progress.

"We were here probably a month or two before we started building all this," said Spc. Paul Risch, a C Co., 1-128 Inf. platoon sniper from Merrillan, Wisc. "It took us about two months, because we didn't have any outside help. We didn't get electricity for almost two months."

"It was hard because we didn't have electricity, so when it got dark we had to stop working," Herman said.

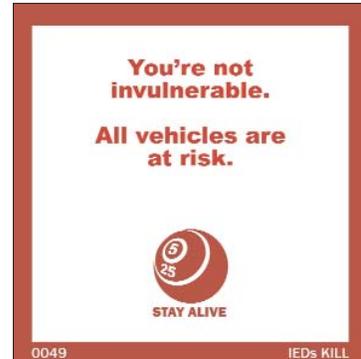
The Soldiers say they are comfortable in their new quarters. Compared to the old bunker, they say it is a great improvement.

"I guess you can compare it to living in dorms," Risch said. "It's nice to have privacy, but at the same time you can walk outside and talk to somebody, so you still get that sense of community. It was a 100 percent improvement from living in that last bunker, that's for sure."



Courtesy photo

After a couple of months of building in between and after patrol missions, Soldiers of C Co., 1-128 Inf. were able to turn the bunker into comfortable, separate living quarters.



Road clearing patrol encounters IEDs almost daily

Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.
1st BCT PAO

FORWARD OPERATING BASE O'RYAN, Iraq – The most effective weapons the insurgency in Iraq has against Coalition Forces are improvised explosive devices. IEDs can be detonated from a distance, keeping insurgents out of the direct sight of CF Soldiers. While some Soldiers dread the idea of encountering an IED, other Soldiers such as Company C, 1st Battalion 128th Infantry Regiment of the Wisconsin National Guard deliberately go looking for them.

"IEDs are part of our everyday routine here," said Sgt. Robert Cahow, a Co. C, 1-128 Inf. truck commander. "As the TC in the lead truck my crew is always scanning the shoulders of the road as well as looking for potholes, depressions, basically anything that seems out of place."

Soldiers go out twice a day to clear the roads and make them safe for travel, as well as patrolling communities in the area looking for enemy contact.

"From the time we got here in December, 2004 we have done two combat patrol missions a day," said Spc. Arturo Veloz, a Co. C, 1-128 Inf. dismount. "We patrol all the villages in our area of operation, trying to find the bad guys. We regularly encounter IEDs. We find them before they go off mostly. Three or four times they have gone off before we found them, but we have found countless IEDs before they have gone off."

There are procedures the Soldiers follow when they find something they suspect is an IED.

"Once you do find something, you initially try to get out of the kill zone," Cahow said. "You find a secure place to park and do a (five and 25 meter) sweep of the area and around your vehicle."

There are two types of IEDs, according to Cahow; ones that have detonated and ones that haven't. There are ways to deal with both.

"There's two ways of thinking," Cahow said. "One is that you want to see if the IED is going to blow up; and two, we stay in the vehicle and count to 10, because you are actually safer inside the vehicle if it does blow up. You don't want to just jump out."

If we find one that hasn't blown up, then it's a totally different story. We look for a trigger person, but it's hard because a lot of time there are civilians out in the fields working. It's hard to differentiate who is guilty



Photos Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.

An explosive ordnance disposal team, Soldiers of Company C and K Troop, 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment watch the aftermath of an IED detonated by the EOD team on a road near Al Abayachi, and who isn't."

When there aren't civilians around, sometimes reacting to an attack with force leads to a positive outcome.

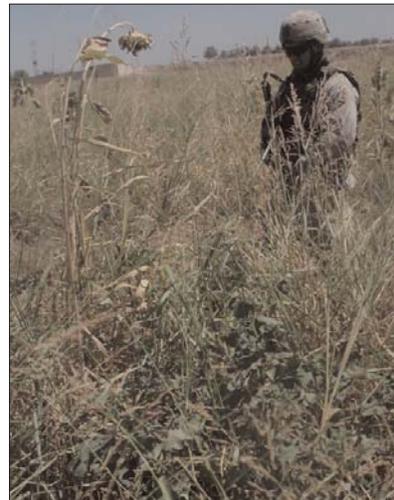
"The last time we were hit, we reacted with violence," said Sgt. Edward Johnson, a Co. C, 1-128 Inf. TC from Hinckley, Minn. "I think that's critical, because in that case we stopped the attack. We were also able to catch the bad guys. I don't think that would have happened if we had reacted passively to that situation. We went through thousands of rounds that day."

Despite the danger the Soldiers face everyday, they can keep the bigger picture in mind; making the roads safe for traffic in their area of operation.

"Our mission is to make sure routes are clear for the (combat logistic patrols)," Cahow said. "We have a little joke. They say a route is green when it is clear of IEDs; we say it is clear after an IED blows up because we just cleared it."

The Soldiers feel lucky that they haven't taken more casualties than they have because of the nature of their job.

"Basically we are just trying not to get blown up everyday," said Spc. Paul Risch, a Co. C, 1-128 platoon sniper from Merrillan, Wisc. "We are very lucky. We've had a (staff sergeant) kick over dirt and right there was some rounds and a bunch of wire. We could talk all day about how many close calls we've had."



Spc. Arturo Veloz, a Co. C, 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment dismount, sweeps through a field of grass looking for wires or other IED detonating material near Al Abayachi.

Iraqi army nabs suspected insurgents on night raid

Sgt. Matthew Acosta
22nd MPAD

FORWARD OPERATING BASE PALIWODA, Balad, Iraq- Recently units in the Iraqi army have started taking over the role of Coalition Forces by spearheading operations.

Using its intelligence assets to gather information, Company D, 3rd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 4th Division is now planning, rehearsing and executing missions with little or no Coalition Forces help.

"They are almost completely independent of our support," said Army Capt. Phillip Poteet, commander, Troop C, 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry, 1st Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty. "The only reason we're there is to coordinate air medical evacuations in case the event arises and to ensure quality control."

The Iraqi army does have medical vehicles available to them, Poteet said, but since Coalition medical technology is better and more effective, he makes it available to the Iraqi soldiers if needed.

"Other than that, these (Iraqi Soldiers) gather intelligence, plan and conduct the missions flawlessly at times," Poteet said.

During a mission Aug. 26, Company D soldiers raided a small village outside Balad that yielded three men suspected for operating an improvised explosive device-making cell.

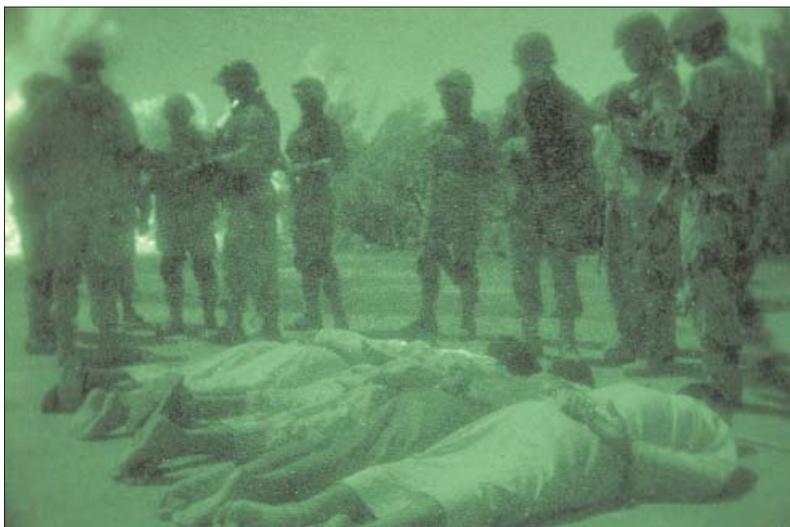
"By the time I had gotten out of my vehicle and walked up to the objective, these guys had all the males rounded up outside in the front yard, searched the men and had them lying face down, with their target already identified," Poteet said.

The efficiency level they operate at is a tremendous improvement since last year, he added.

"After the mission I gathered with my men and talked about it," said Iraqi Army Capt. Ahmed Hikmet Abdul-Jabar, Co. D commander. "They told me that we should do missions like that everyday and they are proud to be taking bad guys off the streets."

Although the Coalition Forces have newer technology than their Iraqi counterparts do, there is something the Coalition Forces lack.

"Because the Iraqi army lives here they can talk to the locals better than we can, therefore they have better intelligence gathering capabilities when talking to people on the street," Poteet said. "They know when they're being



Sgt. Matthew Acosta

IA soldiers from Co. D, 3rd Bn., 1st Bde., 4th IA Div. secure the males in an Iraqi household. The men are suspected to be involved in a terrorist cell responsible for making improvised explosive devices in Balad.

lied to, and they know how to use informants and can use them more effectively than we can."

Poteet said one reason they can utilize the locals for better "street knowledge" than Coalition Forces, is because they are trusted more since they are part of the community, where as the Coalition Soldiers are foreigners.

"It's good for the people because they feel safe knowing the Iraqi army is here making them safe," Ahmed said. "Sometimes they are scared by the American Army but we live here and they are not afraid of us."

This fearlessness is shared by the locals and those who vow to protect them.

"When my men wear this uniform, working on patrols and raids they are not afraid of anything," Ahmed said.

"(Coalition Soldiers) taught us everything they know

about moving with the squads and security around objectives, and when we do it, we do it well," Ahmed added.

Since the training started, the Iraqi soldiers have made advances in their proficiency, moving toward the eventual goal of assuming total responsibility for security in Iraq.

"I'm really proud of them for the job they have been doing, and it's an honor to sit back and watch them execute the mission they planned and researched," Poteet said. "They receive the training very well and apply it to the missions they execute."

"They are making great strides in taking over the responsibilities of these operations and the security of this country. The more they do, the less we have to do, which also gives my guys a chance to rest and breathe easy."

Coalition Forces still make presence known in towns

Sgt. Matthew Acosta
22nd MPAD

FORWARD OPERATING BASE PALIWODA, Balad, Iraq- As the Iraqi army and police forces continue to take charge, constant Coalition Forces patrols are still crucial in protecting the development of Iraq and its security forces.

These patrols show a presence of military power and law enforcement for Coalition Forces as well as the Iraqi police.

"Our patrols are conducted with the Iraqi police and army to show the Iraqis they area capable of enforcing the same law and order we enforce," said Cpl. Robert Miller, infantryman, 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry, 1st Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty. "When we go out with them and let them take charge, it shows the people that we respect them as a security force, and in return, the people respect them more."

One step in handing control of the roads to the Iraqi police is to build police checkpoints at strategic or problematic areas where there may be high insurgent activity.

Miller said before they couldn't tell the police apart from the everyday citizens because they had no uniforms, but now they have uniforms, and are building police checkpoint facilities that have enough rooms for them to work in as well as sleeping quarters.

Months of training, supervision and support shaped the police force into a



Sgt. Matthew Acosta

Soldiers of the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry, Task Force Liberty stop to talk with a group of Iraqis on the street while patrolling the city of Balad, Iraq.

more professional security element.

"Now these guys have so much pride in themselves and what they're doing here," said Sgt. Timothy Gardner, infantryman, 5-7 Cav. "You can totally see the difference in their performance from several months ago."

Gardner said the police take their jobs seriously, especially since they got uniforms and actual checkpoints instead of just a shack on the side of the road.

"It gives them motivation and purpose," he said.

Although many of the policemen are taking law enforcement more seriously, there are still some who may "look the other way" when a small crime is being

committed, said Lt. Col. Jody Petery, commander, 5-7 Cav.

"People are selling propane on the side of the road, maybe one or two containers to survive, but the fact of the matter is that selling fuel outside a gas station is illegal," Petery said. "If we give the appearance that small crimes are OK then we will never take complete control of the crime situation."

Several people were caught stealing fuel from a broken pipeline earlier this month, said Petery.

"What we need to do is let these officers know the Iraqi government is losing \$4,000,000 every day because of fuel theft and illegal sales, with this money we

could easily buy 20 or 30 new police vehicles and build multiple checkpoints."

According to Petery, insurgents will damage the pipeline, causing delays in Iraq's economic development. When the fuel leaks out other Iraqis collect it and use it or try to sell it.

"We can't look the other way on this, it's a growing problem," Petery said. "These people need to be arrested and jailed for their crimes. Just because they aren't the ones who damage the pipeline, they are still stealing from the government and it needs to stop."

"If the police let them get away with it, they should be the ones arrested because they are allowing this by not doing something to stop it," Petery added. "We need to be stern with this."

Miller said when the Iraqi policemen are confronted with something they have never encountered before or something where they don't know how to react, they quickly adapt to the situation with a little help from the Coalition Forces.

"If they don't understand something or know what to do, we show them how to handle a situation, and they pick it up real fast," Miller said.

"There's no doubt in my mind these guys will be fine when we finally turn (Balad) over to them entirely," Miller said. "They learn more everyday and are more proficient at what they are doing, it's just a matter of time before we finally step back and leave their city in their hands."