

In
this
edition



3-69 works
with Iraqi
Army
page 5



Palaces,
palaces,
palaces
pages 3, 4



RAIDERS DOWN RANGE



Volume 1 Issue 16

Diary of the Soldiers of the 1st Brigade Combat Team

November 15, 2005

Raiders remember...

Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills
1 BCT PAO

FOB SPEICHER, Iraq – Soldiers from 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division gathered to honor one of their own for Veterans Day.

The 1st BCT dedicated their headquarters building to Cpl. Elaina Ramirez, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Brigade, 3rd ID, Brigade Troops Battalion, who died April 15 in an indirect fire attack on Forward Operating Base Dagger near Tikrit.

Lt. Col. Douglas Victor, 1-3 BTB commander, said today's dedication was to honor Ramirez along with all of America's veterans.

"Because Corporal Ramirez earned our respect as a person and as a soldier it

is only fitting to set aside something permanent in her name," said Victor during the ceremony.

"As we celebrate Veterans Day, Corporal Ramirez is obviously one of those American veterans that accepted her responsibility to do something for her country and to defend freedom," said Victor.

During the ceremony a plaque and photo of Ramirez was placed on the building in memoriam.

Ramirez, who's hometown is Hormiguero, Puerto Rico, first enlisted as an administrative specialist with the Puerto Rican National Guard in 1992 and joined the active duty ranks in 2004. During Operation Iraqi Freedom III she was assigned as a 1-3 BTB battalion personal security detachment member.



Col. Mark E. McKnight, commander, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, and staff members of 1st BCT, listen to the invocation at the building dedication and Veterans Day ceremony.



Lt. Col. John Charvat, executive officer, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, attends the building dedication and Veterans Day ceremony.



Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills

The 1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, Brigade Troops Battalion color guard stands ready during the building dedication and Veterans Day ceremony at FOB Speicher, Tikrit, Iraq. The building was dedicated to the memory of Cpl. Aleina Ramirez who was killed in action April 15th during an indirect fire attack on Forward Operating Base Dagger.

Voices and Viewpoints



Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills

The commanding general's quarters was one of many buildings built at great expense to the Iraqi people and then never used.

Saddam's palaces: a legacy of ego

Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills
1st BCT PAO

It never ceases to amaze me how important perception was to Saddam Hussein and the other members of his Baath Party.

Take, for instance, Forward Operating Base Danger, one of Saddam Hussein's palace complexes, in Tikrit. It's all about perception.

There are about 136 buildings on FOB Danger, a healthy handful of which would be considered palatial. Late in November Danger will be handed over to the Iraqis. Notice I don't say "Back to the Iraqis."

The Iraqis didn't own them before, Saddam did.

As you walk around Danger, or any other of the massive palace complexes in Iraq, it's easy to see the great irony in their existence.

They are monuments to one man, Saddam Hussein. They glorify his life and times. In just about every design element his initials are either engraved or printed. Sometimes his full name is used to create a design.

I was lucky enough to take a pre-handover tour of FOB Danger with two Iraqi engineers who worked on them for Saddam. They knew every detail you would be curious about, from how the places are ventilated to

which room Saddam slept in and for how many nights.

I was told that each of the large palatial buildings were manned full time by crews of cleaners, cooks and butlers, who kept the buildings ready for use 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

They were prepared, I was told, for Saddam's arrival. They didn't know when he would show, but if they weren't ready for him when he walked in the front door they would pay dearly.

The engineers were asked which palaces were used by Saddam; which were his favorites?

He did have a couple of favorite spots on Danger, one of them being the so-called "Floating Palace" down on the Tigris. It's right on the water and he could sit on the "front porch" and dangle his feet in the river.

One of the palaces was built to his exacting standards and he slept in it once, pronounced that he didn't like it, and never returned.

The huge palace that housed 42nd Infantry Division Headquarters was used for conferences I was told. It was started right after Desert Storm, and finished in 1999.

I asked how many times it was used



for its purpose. I was told it was used maybe once a year between 1999 and 2003.

Yet another palace, the one that housed the Division commander, command sergeant major, and other staff, was never used. It took nine years to build, I

was told, and no one ever stayed in it until we took it over.

So what was the perception he was trying to get across? What was the perception he was trying to squash?

Saddam's palaces are the opposite of reality in every way. They are grand, larger than life, and meant to represent him. They were created as monuments to his legacy.

He wanted people to perceive that his rule was as glorious, as incredible, as outlandishly grand as those palaces.

He also wanted people to think that he was building these monuments to them.

At least one of them, the conference palace that was Division HQ, was dedicated I was told to the people of Iraq. Of course, not one of those people of Iraq were able to get near "their" palace.

Throughout most of the buildings are images of togetherness, and team-

work.

On one building, "Great Victory Palace" along the Tigris, are scenes of Saddam's "great victories." Included is a scene, etched in the stone, of an Iraqi soldier with his arm around a Kuwaiti. In the background are the distinctive Kuwaiti Towers from Kuwait City.

Together with teamwork. That's why Iraq invaded Kuwait, right?

Saddam's palaces are an obvious example of bending perceptions to suit your needs.

On a much smaller scale I guess we all build our own little "Saddam's palaces" now and again.

No one wants to be seen as something they aren't, and there are plenty of us who don't want people to realize what we really are.

Instead of changing perceptions, maybe it's a good idea to change how you do things.

If you catch yourself building one of those palaces, though, you might want to think about Saddam Hussein.

Eventually someone's going to drag you up out of your hidey-hole and out into the light and it won't be pretty.

(Turn to page 3 and 4 to see photos of some of Saddam Hussein's palaces on Forward Operating Base Danger in Tikrit)

Do you like to write?

Contact the 1st BCT PAO for guidelines:
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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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IEDs KILL



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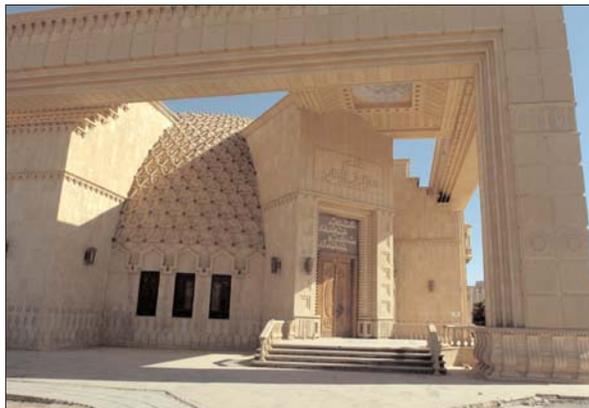
FOB Danger, Tikrit, Iraq



Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills

The stairway in the "Water Palace." Saddam is said to have spent only one night in this palace along a series of lakes on the complex. It was his least favorite building.

Rising up from the dust along the Tigris River is a complex of palaces and elaborate buildings built by Saddam Hussein during his reign. Called Forward Operating Base Danger by the US Army, these palaces are going to be returned to the Iraqi people later this month. They were mostly built between the end of Operation Desert Storm in 1991, and 1999. Staff members in each of the buildings were required to be ready to receive Saddam 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, though he never visited some of them.



Salah ad Din Palace, which housed Co. A, 2-7 Inf., was used as an entertainment center by Saddam. The last time he used it, Iraqi engineers say, was just before Operation Iraqi Freedom, during a birthday celebration in which he hosted a gathering of Iraqi children from all over the country. The domed roof was designed to represent the domed Arabic helmet worn by Salah ad Din.



The building which housed 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry's headquarters was originally a girls' school during Saddam Hussein's reign.



Many of the palaces on FOB Danger are situated on the Tigris River. Iraqis who worked on the palace complex for Saddam said the river palaces were some of his favorites.



A column on the corner of Salah ad Din palace depicts hands supporting each other. These were representative of the Arab world supporting each other in Salah ad Din's day.

FOB Danger, Tikrit, Iraq



Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills

The Floating Palace, situated on the Tigris, was one of Saddam's favorites. When the water was high he would sit on the ledge with his feet dangling in the water.



Above the entryway to the Water Palace is a scene depicting a "medical scholar" as explained by an engineer that worked on construction of the building. Many of the palaces built by Saddam used a mix of artistic and historical themes, ancient and modern design elements, and design elements from various cultures from around the world.



At the bottom of a cliff near the Floating Palace are some century old ruins and this water well which dates back 100 years.



Etched in stone along the eaves of the so-called Victory Palace are scenes from various wars that Saddam "won" while he ruled. Included are the Iran-Iraq war, the Palestinian conflict, his own rise to power, and the Gulf War. Above is a scene depicting Iraqi soldiers and Kuwaitis looking into the future together.



photos by Pfc. Joshua R. Ford

Spc. Philipp Arthur, small arms repairman, 3rd Forward Support Battalion, assembles an AK-47 at LSA Anaconda. Arthur repaired weapons that were then turned over for use by the Iraqi Security Forces.

3rd FSB armory arms ISF

Pfc. Joshua R. Ford
MNC-I PAO

From small arms to M-1 Abrams tank weapon systems the 3rd Forward Support Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division Armory can fix just about any U.S. Army weapon. Then the order came down recently to refurbish 88 AK-47s, most taken from insurgents or found in illegal weapons caches in Salah Ad Din province, and the armorers were up for the challenge.

What began as a request to refurbish a few captured AK-47s has turned into a full-fledged program run by the 3rd FSB armory.

When the Iraqi Police were being put together they were short on weaponry and the refurbishment program was designed to solve that problem, said Chief Warrant Officer Pedro Munoz, the armory's officer-in-charge.

Repairing captured weapons saves the Iraqis money because they don't have to buy new AK-47s, said Spc. Philipp Arthur, small arms repairman.

Explosives ordnance disposal teams, U.S. military patrols and civilian contractors find insurgent's weapons caches then the proper authority will bring the weapons found in the cache to the armory for repair, said Munoz.

"I don't see why we are destroying the weapons we find when we can easily arm the Iraqi forces with those weapons," said Arthur.

"In helping them we are helping ourselves because the program is saving the US and the IA money and bring the country one step closer to being self sufficient," added Munoz.

"We were actually trained by a Special Forces unit at FOB danger. They gave us a base on how to approach the Iraqis and at what level we can train them," said Munoz.

"We used the Special Forces training and trained the Iraqis how to professionally clean, operate and maintain the weapon systems they use," said Arthur. "We also taught them basic skills that all U.S. Soldiers should know."

The basic skills the armorers taught the Iraqi soldiers included how to clean their weapons.

"Before our training the Iraqis were cleaning their weapons with gasoline and kerosene which helps the weapon acquire more dirt and deteriorates the metal the weapon is made out of," said Arthur.

The armorers of 3rd FSB weren't only the teachers, said Munoz. Sometimes they became the stu-

dents.

Some of the things the Iraqis taught the armorers were how to look for booby traps on AK-47s and how to disassemble the weapons faster, said Munoz.

"I never thought I would be working on these weapon systems when I arrived here," added Arthur.

AK-47s are not the only foreign weapons these guys have had to fix though. They also work on machine guns and sniper rifles.

The 3rd FSB arms room Soldiers have fixed hundreds of the weapons for the Iraqi security forces, Arthur added.

The first time the Soldiers were tasked with this mission a explosive ordnance disposal team brought 453 foreign weapon systems to the 3rd FSB armory. The armory was able to fix 420 of them.

"Sometimes you can fix most of the weapons other times you can only fix some of them. It all depends on the condition the weapons are in when you receive them," Arthur added.

"Cross training everyone in the shop has helped out a lot," said Spc. Evan Lewis, fire control repairman, 3rd FSB, 1st Brigade, 3rd Inf. Div.

Lewis works on tanks weapons systems but since he was cross trained he has been able to help with training the Iraqi Army.

It feels good to take weapons out of the insurgent's hands and put them into the hands of the ISF, said Lewis.

"Now that the Iraqis have learned how to maintain a weapon I believe they will be very effective against the enemy," said Munoz.



Chief Warrant Officer Pedro Munoz, armament and repair technician, 3rd forward support battalion, 1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division works on an AK-47 in his shop.



Pfc. Joshua R. Ford

Soldiers from the Iraqi army's 2nd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 4th Division, get ready to convoy to Samarra, Iraq from Forward Operating Base Speicher Oct. 25.

3-69 Trains IA

Pfc. Joshua R. Ford
MNC-I PAO

Forward Operating Base Speicher, Iraq—The 3rd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, is bringing Iraq one step closer to becoming a democratic, independent country.

Soldiers from 3-69 Armor's military transition team have been training Soldiers in the Iraqi army's 2nd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 4th Division, since March, 2005.

The MiTT's mission is to train the Iraqi Army Soldiers to be able to conduct operations on their own.

Approximately 12 MiTT Soldiers train the Iraqi 2nd Bn. staff officers while the 3-69 Armor line units train 2nd Bn. line troops.

"Basically we are trying to teach 2nd Battalion's officers how to run a Battalion and we have been teaching their line units how to conduct raids and patrols," said Sgt. 1st Class Milton Evans, MiTT team leader, 3-69 Armor.

"When we first got these guys they were pretty green," Evans said. "Since then I have seen a lot of progression."

"We have trained the Iraqi troops the same way we would train U.S. Soldiers. They first go through a basic training then go on to their advanced individual training," said Staff Sgt. Marcos Rico, MiTT, team leader, 3-69 Armor.

Because the IA are in the early stages of development, the 3-69 Armor Soldiers are providing the Iraqi Soldiers with armored vehicles, weapons and advanced individual training, said Maj. Philip P. Graham, MiTT officer-in-charge, 3-69 Armor. "This gives the Iraqi Soldiers the extra equipment to get the job done."

The Iraqi troops from 2nd Bn. put their training to the test on the tough streets of Samarra. There they man four checkpoints and running independent operations such as raids and patrols.

When the Iraqi troops started conducting operations in Samarra Soldiers with the MiTT would go with them to make sure the IA troops were professional about the mission.

"Now it has gotten to the point where we will send the Iraqi Soldiers out on missions alone and we will observe them from the tactical operations center," said Rico.

During October's Constitutional Referendum the Iraqi Soldiers were instrumental in securing Samarra.

The IA manned check points, voting booths and secured ballot boxes in Samarra with little help from U.S. Soldiers.

"The Iraqi army Soldiers are doing a good job. They are leaning forward and trying to do more for the people of Iraq. We are getting great strides with all the IA units in the area," added Graham.

Raiders Down Range is looking for your photos, commentaries and stories. Send submissions to the 1st Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs Office via email (richard.bartoszuk@us.army.mil, thomas.mills@us.army.mil) or call us at 670-5127

Arabic linguist expands BCT search capabilities

Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills
1 BCT PAO

In the spring of 2005, early on in their deployment, Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry, attached to 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division and based near Balad, were faced with an almost insurmountable obstacle. They needed to search an Iraqi female who had been acting suspicious, and they were all male.

Culturally it would have caused problems with the woman and her family if the infantrymen had searched her. On top of that problem, she spoke only Arabic and they spoke only English.

For help they turned to the 3rd Forward Support Battalion, 1st BCT, at nearby Logistic Support Area Anaconda, and the 3rd FSB turned to their own Sgt. Michelle Gragg. Gragg, who happens to be the only female Arabic linguist in the BCT, said she was glad to help.

"I'm a crypto-linguist, but I work as an intelligence analyst," said Gragg. As an intelligence analyst with 3rd FSB Gragg said she was losing much of her language skills, and when asked to go out on a combat mission with the infantry to help search a female Iraqi she jumped at the chance. "It was the first opportunity to get outside of the wire and actually speak to some of the local nationals," said Gragg.

What started as a temporary fix to a seemingly temporary problem has evolved. 3rd FSB quickly understood the importance of having female search teams that the infantry units could call upon during special circumstances.

After that initial mission a military police Soldier was brought in and conducted training for over 25 3rd FSB female Soldiers who volunteered to help search Iraqi females.

"I love it," said Gragg. "Some of the other females were skeptical at first." Soon, though, they began to fully understand the importance of their mission, said Gragg.

Since that first mission Gragg has gone out on almost fifteen missions to support the infantry and cav scouts, and 3rd FSB has also begun to realize the importance of having a Soldier like her.

"Sergeant Gragg is a female Soldier that has expanded the boundaries by going out and becoming an asset to the infantrymen on the front lines," said Cpt. Casey Lewis, civil military affairs officer, 3rd FSB. "She has allowed the 3rd FSB to help the combat arms battalions in other ways that don't necessarily fall into a forward support battalion lane," she added.

Gragg admits that she's an adrenaline junky and was excited to be allowed to go out on these missions. She also says that she doesn't like to sit on the LSA, letting her language skills rot. "Not many females get the opportunity to go out on raids," said Gragg.

The female search teams typically go out in pairs with an infantry platoon, one female Soldier searching while the other pulls security, said Gragg. The missions they go out on can vary, she said, from all day long patrols during elections to participating in cordon and searches.

"We've gone on raids to search the females set aside in the houses," said Gragg.

Gragg's road to being a linguist for the Army was not a typical one. As a special education teacher at Arrowhead Elementary School in Glendale, Arizona, Gragg was looking for an opportunity to join a government agency. With that goal in mind Gragg said she did some research and found that the best way to get a job was to be proficient in a foreign language and the best way to become proficient in a foreign language was to join the Army.

Army linguists don't necessarily get to choose the language they are placed in.

"I was hoping for Arabic," Gragg said, and she got it. "That was luck of the draw."

Unfortunately, the only experience Gragg had in a foreign language was the required two years of

Spanish in her high school.

"The majority of people in the class had a proficiency in a language before the class," Gragg said. "I wouldn't say it was a struggle, but it was very intense."

It took Gragg a lot of studying, practice and hard work to make it through the Arabic language course.

That type of attitude is typical of Gragg, said Lewis.

"She never complains and she always puts mission first by actually volunteering for missions outside the wire," said Lewis. "She's eager to make a difference by using the Arabic language she learned in (Advanced Individual Training)."

Lewis describes Gragg as a strong, motivated Soldier who always tries to do better. "She sets an example for our battalion and all Soldiers when she goes out with the combat arms battalions without complaint."

When asked about the danger of the missions they go on Gragg simply shrugs and smiles. "I have no fear of anything," said Gragg. "I'd go infantry if they'd let me."



courtesy photo

Sgt. Michelle Gragg, Arabic linguist and intel analyst for 3rd Forward Support Battalion, Logistic Supply Area Anaconda, poses with children at a Balad school during a school supply drop. Besides helping the 3rd FSB civil military office with school drops and other missions working with local populations, Gragg is also the first member of the 3rd FSB female search team. The female search team members go out on combat missions with infantry soldiers, giving them the ability to search and communicate with female local nationals.



Spc. Adam Phelps

At the ready...

Members of the Provincial High Crimes unit practice clearing a building in Tikrit, Iraq, August 24. The PHC unit members were being trained by soldiers of Co. A, 112th Inf. attached to 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry. The PHC was specifically training to target members of the insurgency wanted by Coalition Forces and Iraqi Security Forces.

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

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

