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‘Panthers’ stand proud

2-69 overcomes barriers to
train Iraqi Battalion soldiers

Story and photos by Spc. Natalie Loucks
3rd BCT PAO

FOB SCUNION, BAQUBA, Iraq – When the dust settles and recently captured suspected terrorists are blindfolded and flex-cuffed, it is not the American Flag on the arms of Coalition Forces seen raised in triumph. It’s the chocolate chip desert combat uniforms of the Iraqi army walking away with the win.

American Soldiers are not, however, completely out of the victory.

They are standing proud on the sidelines of the battlefield celebrating their own triumph.

Had it not been for the hard work and dedication put forth by the men and women of the Military Transition Teams of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, a successful mission of this nature would be inconceivable.

Training days are anything but typical for the MiTT team of 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment, Task Force Liberty.

Sgt. Bryan Smith, a member of the training team at Forward Operating Base Scunion said it’s a huge obstacle to train soldiers who don’t understand English but takes satisfaction in what he does.

“If you can train someone that doesn’t understand what you are saying to them, you can train any-

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Sgt. Oscar Gallardo instructs an Iraqi soldier on the proper low ready position.



Brigade honors fallen heroes

Story and photos by Spc. Natalie Loucks
3rd BCT PAO

FOB WARHORSE, BAQUBA, Iraq, — The display was simple. A guidon for each of the seven battalions of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty was presented by a single Dog Face Soldier. Behind them, the battalion’s company guidons were grouped

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Gym dedicated in honor of fallen Soldier

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together in a rack.

A lone platoon formation consisting of Soldiers standing in place of their fallen comrades stood between the battalion display and the National Colors.

In charge of that formation was 1st Sgt. Michael Thompson of Headquarters Company, 3rd BCT.

"Cpl. Jacob Palmatier," Thompson called.

"Cpl. Palmatier is no longer with us 1st Sgt," was the response given for every Soldier who has fallen due to combat actions during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom III.

"Memorial Day is a day to remember the Soldiers who fell during combat for the sacrifices they made," said Maj. Steve Warren, 3rd BCT Public Affairs Officer, "and it's a day to celebrate all they sacrificed for."

May 30 on Forward Operating Base Warhorse meant so much more to

Soldiers of the 3rd BCT.

The ceremony held that day in the newly built gym focused on the fallen comrades of the Sledgehammer Brigade during OIF and OIF III.

Sgt. Maj. Bobby Bowens of the Brigade S-3 said the ceremony was different than any other because these Soldiers were known personally by those who attended.

"To be able to see and hear the operations, asking the question 'has anybody died' fighting alongside of them and watching them lose their lives gives Memorial Day a bigger impact," he said.

Sitting in the audience alongside the Soldiers, non-commissioned officers and officers of the 3rd BCT were four members of the 1st Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, to honor their brothers in arms, Chief Warrant Officers Joshua Scott and Matthew Lourey, whose Kiowa Warrior helicopter crashed May 26 in central Iraq.

"I think the four pilots were

impressed that their buddies were up on our Wall of Heroes and were part of our Memorial Day ceremony," said Bowens. "I really think it touched them."

The gym where the ceremony was held was dedicated to Sgt. 1st Class David Salie. The new structure was named after Salie because he was the first casualty in combat actions during OIF III, Bowens said.

A large, hand painted sign with Salie's picture, name and unit was unveiled to the audience and also to his wife, friends and family who were watching the ceremony in the WTVM, Channel 9 studio in Columbus, Ga., live via satellite to the U.S.

"(Kellogg, Brown and Root) who made the sign went above and beyond their call of duty when they made this," Bowens said.

Bowens said other fallen Soldiers of the Sledgehammer Brigade will be remembered through street signs throughout FOB Warhorse. ☑



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Iraqi soldiers learn the basics

Continued from Pg. 1

body,” Smith said with pride.

Iraqi soldiers are trained in everything that American Soldiers are taught in basic training. They learn dismounted patrolling, map reading, land navigation and even drill and ceremony, complete with Arabic cadences.

They are provided the opportunity and training to become combat lifesaver certified and to conduct proper military communication techniques.

On June 4, 2nd Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division stood in formation facing eight paper silhouettes. The first two squads took a knee as Sgt. Oscar Gallardo, a member of the TF 2-69 MiTT, gave a safety brief on muzzle awareness.

After the briefing, the Iraqi students fell into three even rows in front of the range with all the grace of day 1 U.S. basic trainees.

“Jazime,” was the call from a translator positioned

on top of the HESCO barriers. The students snapped to the low-ready.

“Hadif!” A platoon of unloaded AK-47 assault rifles rose to the targets.

“Boom, boom,” was the response from the IA soldiers before returning to the low ready.

It wasn’t until the instructors felt each soldier was well prepared for live ammunition that the dry fire exercise progressed to live ammunition.

The next task was to conduct buddy team movement towards, along side of, and away from the targets while placing well-aimed fire.

Two at a time, Iraqi soldiers were led down range by American instructors who held the Iraqi’s ballistic vests.

“We hold on to them and lead them down range because we don’t want them to move the wrong way and shoot their buddy in the back of the head,” said Sgt. 1st Class Travis Roark, non-commissioned offi-

See NEW, Pg. 11

TF 1-10 Provides Security for CA



Soldiers from Company A, 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery stack against a wall in preparation to clear a room May 21 in downtown Baquba, Iraq. Task Force 1-10 provided security for the 411th Civil Affairs Battalion as they completed an assessment mission across from the Civil Military Operation Center downtown.

Photos by Spc. Natalie Loucks

While conducting and assessment of local businesses in Baquba, Sgt. Joseph Skelly of the 411th Civil Affairs Battalion located at the Civil Military Operation Center, takes a careful look at the concessions along the sidewalk and chats with store owners. CA teams routinely conduct assessments of area businesses, facilities and services.



Coalition Forces take back seat in recent council meetings

Story and photo by Spc. Natalie Loucks

3rd BCT PAO

KHALIS, Iraq – 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty takes pride in the progress of the Iraqi citizens in their area of operation.

“Where Coalition Forces used to sit at the table during the council meetings, we now sit in the back seats,” said Capt. Chas Cannon, Task Force 2-69 Armor’s S-5. “We will only speak if we are asked a question.”

The councils of Hibhib, Jadeda, Salam, Udaim and Khalis in the Panther’s Area of Operation have come a long way. Where they used to depend on Coalition Forces for help in achieving a functional government, they are now beginning to manage their own self reliant government.

On June 2, 21 representatives from the Qadah (county), cities and surrounding Nahias (sub-districts) sat around a long conference table in a dimly lit room in Khalis. A single fan blew hot air around the room.

There were no lap top computers or coffee machines at this meeting, only proud Iraqi citizens taking their first few steps towards justice for the better of their people.

The meeting brought various issues to the table involving the health and welfare of local citizens.

During previous meetings there was no support for the Iraqi Security Forces, Sadique Al Saddi, chairman of the Khalis City council, now praises the soldiers and policemen who are doing their best to keep his city safe.

“The Iraqi army and the Iraqi police are doing their jobs with dignity and respect,” said Sadique.

Each issue brought to the meeting was considered with great attention and concern.

One hour of the conference was dedicated to discussing changes that need to be made within the city’s health department.

According to the council, bribes, false payments, smuggling, chronic absenteeism and a shortage of medicine plague the Khalis hospital.

The council believes that Ali Abraham, the hospital director, may be corrupt and agreed to bring him before the council to testify. They could vote to fire him.

Council members believe appointing Dr. Eham Ahmed Al Mash, a female doctor, would rectify these problems.

The Khalis counsel, like many Qadah counsels throughout AO Hammer, is steadily transitioning to independence. The largest responsibility that the council has assumed so far is project management. There are over \$20 million of coali-

tion funded projects in Khalis, and the Panthers have transitioned responsibility for planning, managing and executing the projects to the Khalis counsel.

Large projects such as construction and reconstruction of schools, mosques, highways, sewage systems and water facilities are a major part of rebuilding the Khalis community. According to Cannon, funding is the only contribution put forth by Coalition Forces in AO Panther. The transition will continue in 2006 when a budget will be submitted for Baghdad to take over funding to the city.

At the meetings, the council members are more concerned with the well-being of the Qadah as a whole, and less with their own welfare. They listen to the people of their villages and they listen to each other.

The key, according to Cannon, is to make the government look legitimate to the citizens of Khalis and they are doing a great job. 



Chairman of the Khalis council, Sadique Al Saddi, hands documents to a council member during a council meeting June 2 in the city of Khalis.



Bump, Set...

Photo by Spc. Natalie Loucks

The Company C, 203rd Forward Support Battalion volleyball team, the “Painkillers”, take the gold medal in the Forward Operating Base Warhorse Volleyball championship, May 30 sliding past the “Cougars” of the 3rd Brigade Troops Battalion in a two game win. The Painkillers play with a five man team and took 1st place in a 16 to 14 win and another 15 to 10 win.

WARHORSE CHAPEL WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Friday

1 to 3 p.m.
Muslim Juma Prayer

6 to 8 p.m.
Jewish Prayer and Fellowship

Sunday

8 to 9 a.m.
Early Bird Protestant – Chaplain
(Capt.) Smith

9 to 10:30 a.m.
Gospel – Chaplain (Capt.) Pickens

11 a.m. to Noon
Mid-Morning Protestant – Chaplain
(Maj.) Rauch

12:30 to 1:30 p.m.
Latter Day Saints

1:45 to 2:45 p.m.
Roman Catholic

8 to 9:30 p.m.
Evening Protestant – Chaplain (Capt.)
Smith

Bible Study

Tuesday:
6 to 7 p.m. at Education Center –
Chaplain (Capt.) Pickens

Wednesday:
7 to 8 p.m. at Warhorse Chapel-
Chaplain (Capt.) Smith

Mid-Week Service

Thursday:
7 to 8 p.m. at Warhorse Chapel –
Chaplain (Capt.) Pickens

Friday:
10:15 p.m. – Chaplain (Capt.) Smith
'Movie of the Week'

The voice of God at sunset

*Listening to His words
can simplify your life*

By Chaplain (Capt.) Tommie Pickens
203rd FSB Chaplain

Who has not marveled at the beauty of a sunset?

We stand motionless, awestruck, hushed by the flaming sky as the sun moves over the western horizon.

Seeming to hesitate a moment, the glowing orb suddenly drops out of sight, leaving the sky ablaze with brilliant shades of pink, orange, and red.

Somehow the frustration of the day are put to silence by the majestic, yet soothing voice of God as we view a glorious sunset.

Because the sun's rays are

slowed down slightly and bent by the earth's atmosphere, the sun appears to be oval-shaped rather than round.

That, along with dust or smog in the air, explains the dazzling array of colors that gives us so much visual pleasure at day's end.



PICKENS
203rd FSB Chaplain

"The Mighty One, God the Lord, has spoken from the rising of the sun to its going down."

--Psalm 50:1

To Christians, every sunset is an exclamation point given to us by God the Creator to end the day. It's as if the Lord were saying, "Set aside your worries. Rest

from your labors. Forget about those disappointments. I am still here, taking care of My universe.

I am in control. I have not changed. Look up beyond the sun to Me and be at peace." ☑

1-30 Soldier honors Army Value

Integrity was the Army Value running through the mind of Spc. Aaron Clark, an M2A2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle driver for Company B, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Liberty. On May 19, Clark found a wallet containing \$12,000 on a chair outside of the Morale, Welfare and Recreation building on Forward Operating Base Warhorse, Iraq. Where many people might take on a "finders, keepers" attitude, Clark turned the wallet into the FOB Warhorse gym just as he had found it. "I was definitely going to turn the wallet in but I was still afraid people might wonder what I was doing with all that money," Clark said. Camali Colak, the owner of the wallet and also a local national carpet vendor on FOB Warhorse thanked Clark by giving him a free carpet. Colak, who receives visits from Clark on a regular basis said, "It's good to know there are people out there like that."

Photo by Spc. Natalie Loucks



Operation Kalfa Hal

Mission seen as step in right direction for Iraqi self-sufficiency

Photos by Air Force Staff Sgt. Suzanne Day

Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 34th Armor, Task Force Liberty, led by their Iraqi Army counterparts, search houses during Operation Kalfa Hal on May 29, in Quryat Al Islatt, Iraq. The operation was conducted to find contraband and suspected insurgents in and around the village of Quryat Al Islatt. The mission resulted in the arrest of nine suspected insurgents, confiscation of several weapons from AK-47 assault rifles to surface to air missiles, (SA-18s), and illegally obtained Iraqi Army and police uniforms. [Z](#)





Mandatory experience of a lifetime

Privilege, honor felt by those whose footprints linger in Iraq

By Spc. Natalie Loucks
3rd BCT PAO

I love my job. Most people can't say that. Most people can't say a lot of the things I can say after being deployed to Baquba, Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom III.

Soldiers of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty, have been in country for approximately five months and have already witnessed more history than most had slept through in their high school history class.

I remember the exact moment I started thinking of this deployment as an amazing experience rather than merely a year away from the comforts of home.

Freezing cold, I was sitting in the back of an LMTV on my way from Logistical Staging Area Anaconda to what would be my home for the next year or so, Forward Operating Base Warhorse in Baquba.

The ideas I had about what Iraq was going to be like were no comparison to what I was experiencing. And that was just the beginning.

As a Public Affairs Specialist and combat journalist I am fortunate enough to have the opportunity to get out and see Iraq from every point of view and every different MOS.

I have walked with the infantrymen as they patrolled the streets of Baquba in search of high-valued targets and weapons caches.

Hours upon hours of walking in 100 degree weather with my camera and lenses, Justin (my M249 machine gun) and 500 rounds.

Despite the fact we were there to search every nook and crannies of their houses, most of the people were warm and welcoming. They offered food, handshakes and thumbs-up. They would stand with their arms around the American Soldiers and motion for me to take their pictures.

In return, we would offer candy, "Shoran" (thank you) and a wave

as we moved on to the next house.

On other missions, I have walked into schools and seen the smiling faces of children as they flocked to us holding out their hands for gifts that they know we always bring.

"Mista, mista," they said as they gathered their friends and gave me the take-my-picture hand signal. Every American Soldier is a "Mista" regardless of what gender they are.

Moving out into the town and mingling with the local Iraqi people is amazing and completely rewarding.

In one house I went in during a raid, an Iraqi woman hugged and kissed me then started crying on my shoulder. She explained to me, through a translator, how both of her sons were killed by Saddam Hussein. She then held my hand in hers and told me I was her baby. "Appreciated" is only one word and an understatement of how I felt.

In addition to socializing with the local people of Iraq, I have been able to witness, first hand, the new government moving forward towards Iraqi self reliance.

I stood almost on the stage March 24 as former Governor of Diyala Abdulla Rasheed Hassan Al Jaboary handed over the Iraqi flag to Governor Ra'ad Hameed Juwad

during the very first transfer of government through free election.

The transfer was peaceful. I knew a diplomatic transition was something unheard of and inconceivable before Coalition Forces took action.

The government, the Iraqi security forces and the people of this great nation are becoming more and more independent.

We as American Soldiers deployed to Iraq are right in the middle of this amazing transformation.

Coalition Forces are giving the Iraqi people back their country slowly but surely.

In a ceremony held May 1, I was able to witness the unveiling of the new Government building,

I have taken pictures of the Iraqi army training shortly before they move out into their own towns to fight the insurgency.

These soldiers are amazing people. We as American Soldiers are trained to basically fight the "bad guy" but can you imagine if the bad guy is your neighbor? These brave men are fighting their own people.

I am privileged to be fighting beside these soldiers towards a goal of Iraqi self reliance and I am honored to be a part of this great Iraqi history. ☑



Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Suzanne Day
An Iraqi Army soldier gives apricots to Spc. Natalie Loucks, a journalist with the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Public Affairs Office, on May 25, near Hhib, Iraq.

Longer name, same deal

Reports of Survey -- Now they're called Financial Liability Investigations of Property Loss

By Maj. John Moore

3rd BCT SJA

"N'doh!"

Just like Homer Simpson, that's what you say when you look for your stuff and find out you're missing some Government equipment. It could be anything. Your sleeping system. A piece of your rucksack. Worse yet, Night Vision Goggles. Or, maybe you broke something. For example, maybe you backed a humvee into a cheap-o tin building and caused some minor damage. Or, maybe the engine you were working on was found to have faulty rings and ended up damaging the entire system. Even more often, you worked in supply during a change of command and the command believes that your lack of attention to detail may have resulted in some missing items. In either case, you find yourself facing a Financial Liability Officer who is considering whether the Government wants to take money out of your pay because they feel your negligence caused the loss or damage. That cannot be legal!

But it is. Yet, you are not without rights, and the burden is on the Government to show not only that you were negligent, but that your

negligence was the proximate cause of the loss.

But 'taint fair! It seems that way. But if you sit and think about it, if there were no financial penalties for carelessness, many Soldiers would not properly safeguard military property. This would result not only in waste of taxpayer dollars, but also could create security risks, i.e., not securing NVGs.

You get many, many chances to avoid liability. That's because the Army is fair and only wants to take your hard earned dollars if you really deserve it. If financial liability is recommended, you have seven calendar days to submit a rebuttal, and to receive assistance from Hammer Justice in writing the rebuttal. If you are far away, you get more time to rebut.

The Financial Liability Officer must consider your rebuttal. Whether he agrees with you or not, he submits the report, with your rebuttal, to the Appointing Authority, normally the battalion commander. Then the battalion commander forwards a recommendation to the Approval Authority, usually Hammer 6, Col.

Salazar. Hammer 6 will thoroughly review the record. If he believes you should still be held liable, "fawgetaboutit!"

Just kidding. You may still win! You can submit a Request for Reconsideration to H6 based on legal error or new evidence. Again, you can have legal counsel assist you. If you don't get relief at that point, there is yet still more hope. Your Request for Reconsideration automatically becomes an appeal to the Commanding General of the 42nd Inf. Div. At that point, the Appeal

Authority has more flexibility with your request. He can grant, deny, or grant in part. In other words, you can have the amount of your liability reduced, something the Approval Authority is not authorized to do.

Now, what if the CG or his delegate still finds you liable. No problem. If you are enlisted, you may then submit a Request for Cancellation or Remission of Indebtedness, under AR 600-4. This is where you get to tell your sob story and show hardship. It has to be a bona fide privation, not a Vegas gambling loss. If that doesn't work, you can ask for an extension of the collection period. You would see finance about that.

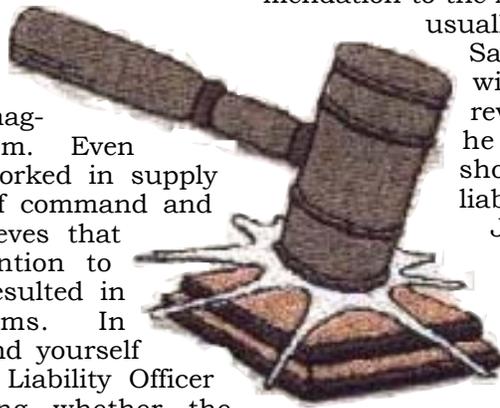
If all that fails, then what? There is more! Officers and enlisted can apply to the Army Board for the Correction of Military Records under AR 15-185 for help. These applications require careful attention to detail and must have a solid basis to get relief. But there is no harm in trying. Maybe the property has been found. Maybe the Government did not follow procedures. Maybe someone in the chain of command has had a change of heart and will vouch for you. You gotta exercise your rights.

Now, back to Homer. Let's say Pvt. Homer Simpson lost his boots while walking barefoot on a field exercise. Before holding him liable, the Financial Liability Officer will have to consider his age and experience in deciding whether or not he is liable. Under this scenario, Pvt. Simpson cannot lose! He is too inept to gain any experience. Or, he is too stupid to be held liable!

HAMMER JUSTICE! Is here to help. ☑



MOORE
3rd BCT SJA



Got a story to tell?

Hammer Times will accept your stories and photos! Send your submissions digitally by emailing the Editor at sean.riley@us.army.mil, or bring them to the Public Affairs Office next to the 3rd BCT TOC on FOB Warhorse. Submissions should be single spaced, non-tab format and are subject to editing of content by the Hammer Times staff. Ensure all identification used in stories includes rank, first name, last name, duty position, hometown and unit. When submitting photos, please include information on all people in the shot. DO NOT embed photographs into the story! Please include author's point of contact information with all submissions. ☑

View from the "Top"

Stay with the Team

By 1st Sgt. Michael Thompson

Special to Hammer Times

I have spoken with several Soldiers about reenlistment and just taking time to tell them that they have options opens their eyes immensely. There are many Soldiers who love their job and the Soldiers they work with, but have not been counseled on reenlistment. Squad leaders must visit their career counselor or reenlistment NCO to receive the best available information prior to sitting down with their Soldier and counseling them. There are many options available but Soldiers must understand their request is based upon their military specialty and the availability of the installation they are requesting. There are several professionals who are available for the Soldiers. These Career



THOMPSON
HHC 3rd BCT

Counselors are working countless hours to ensure their needs are met. These counselors are Sgt. 1st Class Stevens of the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, Staff Sgt. Lucas of the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, Sgt. 1st Class Francis from 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment, Sgt. 1st Class Plodzick of 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, Staff Sgt. Joseph of the Brigade Troops Battalion, Sgt. 1st Class Hamelers of the 203rd Forward Support Battalion, and Staff Sgt. Viera, the Reenlistment NCO for the 2nd Battalion, 34th Armor Regiment. These professionals are ready to assist every Soldier in their quest to stay with the team. Now, this does not mean what you ask for is what you will get. There are certain qualifications Soldiers must meet before the counselors contact the Human Resources Command in Alexandria, Va.

Soldiers can reenlist using the following options:

Current Duty Station, Permanent

Change of Station to a stateside installation of choice (upon availability), and PCS to an overseas duty assignment of choice (Europe, Japan, Italy, Korea, and others).

Reclassification. If you decide to reclassify, you must have a 110 General Technical (GT) score or higher or currently serving in an over strength MOS. Staff Sergeants with ten years of active federal service must reenlist under the Indefinite Reenlistment Program.

If you have a Soldier who is attempting to change their MOS to one that requires a security clearance, ensure you start the request for a clearance well in advance. This speeds up the process and makes the Soldier more motivated in knowing their affairs are in order to reenlist. This is why counseling is so critical.

Each battalion has the best career counselor the Army has to offer and we must take full advantage of their capabilities. They will continue to build the Army for the future. ☑



HAMELERS
203rd FSB Career
Counselor



JOSEPH
3rd BTB Career
Counselor

Comics Bring Laughs to Gabe

Photo by Spc. Natalie Loucks

Reno Collier of the "Comics on Duty" traveling comedy show keeps Soldiers of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty laughing June 4, during a performance at Forward Operating Base Gabe, Iraq. Three other comedians performed along with Collier including James Connolly, Chris Alpine and PJ Walsh, who also opened along with Collier for the famous Larry the Cable Guy of the Blue Collar Comedy Tour. The show was brought to FOB Gabe through the U.S. Army Europe and Morale, Welfare and Recreation and was presented by 2nd Battalion, 34th Armor Regiment. Both Walsh and Connolly were prior service and felt they needed to give something back to the military.



New training for IA soldiers

Continued from Pg. 3

cer in charge of the Panthers MiTT training development and management.

Although muzzle awareness and basic rifle marksmanship is a concern with the Iraqi soldiers, the Panther IA training team is confident in their student's ability to learn quickly.

"The soldiers have come a long way," Roark said. "Their qualifying scores have gone up 37 percent since (TF 2-69) has taken over."

According to Roark, the average rifle qualifying score for the IA soldiers he trains is between 70 and 80 percent.

"This is new training for us," said platoon sergeant Amad Kalaf Gabav through a translator. "We have come a long way."

Roark said the Iraqi soldiers he trains take pride in their country and in their values. "It is evident in their training," he said.

Mohamed Jasim Kuvsed, who injured his elbow lying in the prone unsupported fighting position during a range exercise, expressed through a translator, "None of this is hard really, it's just new. I'm very proud to be in the new Iraqi army." ☑



Sgt. Oscar Gallardo of the 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment explains the proper techniques for holding a weapon at the low ready to Iraqi army soldiers of Co. A, 2nd Bde., 4th IA Div. June 4, at Forward Operating Base Scunior, Iraq.

Care packages from the home front

By Sgt. Joseph Skelly

411th Civil Affairs Battalion

Out here on the forward edge of battle in Diyala, Soldiers may sometimes wonder if Americans at home, 8,000 miles away, ever think of them.

The short answer is: they do. In fact, several organizations in the United States are dedicated to sending care packages from the home front to the front lines in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other theaters of the Global War on Terror.

Their efforts are lifting the morale of troops serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom and demonstrating that we are never far from the hearts and minds of the American people.

There is no need for you to wait for your own parcel to arrive, however, U.S. Soldiers and commanders can request these groups to send packages to their colleagues and units throughout AO Hammer.

"Give 2 The Troops" is one such organization. Its goal, according to its

website, is to support the physical, moral and spiritual health of America's armed forces in combat zones around the world through letters and care packages. It consistently achieves this aim, including right here in Diyala.

Maj. Alvin Schwapp, executive officer of Company A, 411th Civil Affairs Battalion, based in Warhorse in support of the 3rd BCT, sent a letter of appreciation to the group, which appears on its website, www.give2thetroops.com.

"What a wonderful surprise to receive a package from 'Give 2 The Troops,'" he wrote. "I was blown away by your generosity and kindness. On behalf of A Company 411th CA BN, I would like to send a heartfelt 'thank you' to you and all who take the time to make a difference in the lives of deployed military personnel."

Mr. Thomas O'Connell, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, agrees. He has thanked the leaders of the group for "all you have done to support our troops. The effort you have put forth...is greatly appreciated. I commend you on your hard work and dedication to this cause."

"Operation Gratitude" is another

volunteer group that sends gift parcels to American Soldiers.

It is based on the West Coast and was founded by Carolyn Blashek, whose tireless efforts have brightened the lives of over 44,000 Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

On its website www.opgratitude.com, Brig. Gen. Mark Hertling recalls how this past Christmas in Iraq, "in every location, I saw numerous Operation Gratitude packages. Every Soldier received a personalized note, some holiday cheer, and some treats. And you know what? It wasn't the gifts or the cards or the notes that made such an impression...it was the realization that someone cared about our Soldiers as individuals, understood the importance of their mission and appreciated their sacrifice."

Yes, patriotic organizations like "Operation Gratitude" and "Give 2 The Troops" are taking the edge off of long deployments in Iraq. They remind us that we are not forgotten.

Visit their websites for more information about how you can have care packages shipped to your friends in the Army or the Soldiers under your command. Your efforts will be appreciated in AO Hammer. ☑



SKELLY
411th CA Battalion

'5-25' campaign increases IED awareness

MNC-I Public Affairs

Special to Hammer Times

Improvised explosive devices are the number one killers of America's sons and daughters serving in Iraq, and the Joint IED Defeat Task Force at Camp Victory is kicking off an information campaign May 25 in an effort to increase IED awareness and save lives.

The "5-and-25" campaign, as it is called, is designed to increase IED awareness and reduce the effectiveness of the mountain of makeshift bombs being produced by insurgents. Officials say the deceptive devices

account for more than half of the coalition deaths that have occurred since the start of the Iraq war in March 2003.

Efforts to date have reduced the IED casualty rate by more than 45 percent during the period of April 2004 through February 2005 – but that is not seen as enough.

"IEDs are our number one killers here," said Eric Eglend, who works at the Iraq headquarters of Joint IED Defeat Task Force at Camp Victory. The task force is responsible for developing innovative ways to rid the country of IEDs.

The deadly devices are considered a highly effective means of killing people because they can quickly be set up anywhere and be set to blow at any time. They have been disguised as virtually everything from tree trunks and dead animals to bicycles and pregnant

women. Royal Australian Air Force Group Capt. David Stockdale, deputy chair of the IED Working Group at Multi-National Corps-Iraq, said there is no limit to what insurgents will use for IEDs.

Stockdale, who serves as the equivalent of a colonel in the American Air Force, has been actively working the issue of IEDs and their effects since arriving in Iraq a few months ago.

"The IED is one of the most dangerous threats to Coalition Forces," Stockdale said. "To mitigate their effects, we wanted to put together an information campaign that would make the IED reaction drill a normal part of daily activities for the Coalition Forces."

Eglend said several different counter-IED organizations were already delivering good messages and possible solutions out there, but with no real emphasis or impact to the troops who needed it the most. "It wasn't as good as it could be. Some channels just naturally don't flow as well as others," he said.

The working group, deputy-chaired by Stockdale, represents a cross-section of Coalition Forces formed as a result of this issue.

The group's solution for getting vital information to the forces required three objectives: First, ensure information gets to those troops who need it most; second, develop an effective counter-IED organization that can take the fight to the enemy; third, produce pinpointed products from one

organization which can be approved and delivered in a timely fashion.

"IEDs can be any time, anywhere, any shape; the trends change," Stockdale said. "The aim is to get the message to the field. It's dangerous out there."

To push information to the troops anywhere and any time trends change, the working group assembled a small team of designers to brainstorm effective ways to get the word out. The first idea also seemed the most obvious one to start the campaign — military publications.

Task force members agreed they needed some common thread to tie all the messages together — like a logo.

"The [designers] suggested we needed to have [a logo] that everybody recognizes," said Lt. Col. Theodore Martin, field team leader, Joint IED Defeat Task Force-Iraq. "5-and-25" became that logo. "The most important thing Coalition Forces can do is situational awareness when they're outside the wire; it is the most basic [tactic] that you have to master."

"This seemed appropriate because 5-and-25 means awareness," said Master Sgt. William Johnson, one of three designers. "5-and-25 means checking the area around you for a threat. Every time you stop outside a secure area, you always should check. Not checking could get you killed."

More specifically, 5-and-25 requires that troops look for anything out of the ordinary within a five-meter radius of their vehicles, according to counter-IED policies. If halted long enough, forces should then exit their vehicles and conduct a 25-meter sweep around their position. Halting for as little as four minutes can prove costly. 

