

HAMMER TIMES

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Upcoming elections show Iraq devoted to democratic plan

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

The union that will join a new democratic Iraq with a constitution that is by and for the people is approaching its final stage of permanence.

October 15, citizens of Iraq will say "I do" or "I don't" in a nation wide popular vote that will ratify or reject the new Iraqi constitution.

Although it was the Soldiers of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty who walked with them through the transition to self-reliance, it is Iraq who will walk on its own down the election isle.

The Independent Election Commission of

Iraq has been devoted to the planning, the balloting and it is they who will process and tally the votes at the elections end.

Coalition Forces will advise, and provide where the Iraqi Government may need assistance.

"We are doing everything we can to set the Iraqis up for success in what will be an Iraqi led operation," said a confident Maj. Mark Borowski, 3rd Brigade Operations Officer.

A major factor in making the upcoming elections a success is security. During the past nine months the Sledgehammer Brigade has been operating in the Diyala Province, they have been working with the Iraqi Army and the

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3rd BCT commander, Col. Steven Salazar, along with members of the Independent Election Commission of Iraq, listen during an Oct. 1 rehearsal at Forward Operating Base Warhorse in preparation for the Oct. 15 elections.

3rd BCT confident security is up to par

Continued from Pg. 1

Iraq Police to ensure competency for events such as this.

Security for the polling sites located in and around Baquba has been a concern for both the Iraqi citizens and the Iraqi Security Forces but Maj. Richard Sele, commander of Company C, 445th Civil Affairs Battalion, is confident security is up to par.

"From where I stand, it looks as though the IA and the IP are eager to take the lead on security," he said.

Borowski explained the ISF in Diyala are creating their own plan of protection for their citizens.

To assist, Coalition Forces will provide security measures in areas the ISF may lack, such as air support and precision fire.

One resolution the election committee came up with to facilitate

security issue was to move and consolidate polling sites, Borowski said. This would allow the ISF more manpower in less of an area making them easier to secure.

It is the job of the Coalition Forces to offer perspective on decisions such as this.

"We play the honest broker and say 'maybe you should look at the perception that could be created if you start closing polling sites,'" Borowski said. "Movement like this could create conditions where not everyone will be getting an opportunity to vote."

In the end, the election committee decided not to close or consolidate any polling sites.

According to Sele, the Provincial Joint Coordination Center, in downtown Baquba, will take control of public transportation to polling sites during the elections ensuring people

will have the means to make it out to the polling sites.

"There are certain areas that need to have bus transportation to get to the polling sites," Sele said.

He believes the referendum will run smoother than the elections last February, saying he feels the concepts of the voting process and lessons learned have provided helpful insight.

If the constitution is ratified, citizens will move out to the polling sites once again in December to cast their vote for a new permanent government as set forth by the new Iraqi constitution.

Even if the constitution is rejected in October's elections, the December elections will still be held, however, the Iraqi voters will take part in a ballot for a second National Assembly. 

Deputy Commander Promoted to Colonel

Photo by Sgt. Sean Riley

Sledgehammer's Deputy Commander, Col. Daniel Kessler, was promoted to colonel during a ceremony at the 3rd Brigade's operations center on Forward Operating Base Warhorse Sept. 30. Maj. Gen. William G. Webster Jr., Task Force Baghdad commanding general, pinned the new rank on the colonel's collar while Kessler's family watched via video/teleconference. During the emotionally charged ceremony, Kessler thanked his wife, children and his many friends and colleagues, stating he could not have gotten there without them.



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Medic finds challenge — and husband — in Iraq

By Mick Walsh
Columbus Ledger/Enquirer

Spc. Tiffany Catron is officially a 91 Whiskey, Army lingo for medic.

But when traveling through Diyala Province with the brigade commander's party, she's often cast

in a different role, that of Humvee driver.

Until, that is, there's an incident, usually sparked by the detonation of a roadside bomb.

Then she does what she knows best — patching up folks until they can receive more thorough medical care.

Such was the case recently when 3rd Brigade Combat Team commander Col. Steve Salazar and his team of 12, including interpreters, were on an early morning operation near Baquba.

"We could hear an explosion up ahead and we went to check it out," said Catron, a 23-year-old native of Monroe, N.C. "A mortar round had gone off and an Iraqi civilian was in the road, bleeding from a head wound where he'd been hit by shrapnel. I treated him the best I could, then saw him off to the nearest hospital.

"Fifteen minutes later, we found another civilian who'd been shot in a cross-fire. I was able to patch him up and get him evacuated, too. I wish there was some way I could follow up on them and see how they're doing."

After caring for the wounded civilian, Catron took on another mission.

"She was passing out candy and stickers to a group of Iraqi children," said Capt. Scott Mangum, Catron's boss and a fellow member of Salazar's team. "She's a great Soldier, both medically speaking and the way she works with the local children. I'm lucky to be able to work with a Soldier like that."

Catron's main job, when she's not behind the wheel, is to provide medical care for team members when needed.

"But we do care for civilians when we have the opportunity," she said.

Actually, she likes to talk about her driving as much as her life-saving skills.

"It's nothing like driving back home," she laughed. "Here, we drive right down the middle of the road. If anyone's coming in the opposite direction, they have to pull to the side of

the road."

The fear of an improvised explosive device attack is always with her. In April, the gunner on her truck was injured by flying shrapnel. Luckily, he wasn't injured seriously.

Shrapnel, of course, can kill or maim, or leave the victim with just a scratch.

"It depends on how big the shrapnel is and where it hits you," she said from Forward Operating Base Warhorse, home of the brigade.

It was on one of her early missions with Salazar that Tiffany met civilian security guard Mick Catron.

"His boss and my boss would often have meetings together and Mick and I would wait for them in the hall," she said. "It began with casual conversations..."

And ended in marriage two months later.

"He'd already gone back to the states and I took R&R and we got married. Then I came back here," she said.

And Catron is counting the days until she is reunited with her husband.

"One hundred and twenty," she said.

Until then, she's sharing quarters with Staff Sgt. Layla Elbel, Salazar's military interpreter.

"We're probably exposed more to combat than any of the other women here," Catron acknowledged. "But we're certainly not the only women that are. We have a lot of female truck drivers in the transportation units."

Mick Catron, who now is working for an executive protection agency in Washington state, knows that his wife is in harm's way almost every day.

His advice?

"He tells me never to get out of the truck," she said. ☑



File photo by Spc. Natalie Loucks

Hope for hard times

By Chaplain (Capt.) Derek Murray
1-10 Field Artillery

through pain and pleasure and provide them with an incomparable, indestructible refuge. If God is for [them], who can be against [them]? (Romans 8:31)



MURRAY
1-10 FA Chaplain

Christians believe that sooner or later all sorrows, pains, disappointments, losses, tragedies, and horror will somehow and someday work out for good. Christians are free to see through hard times, because they know that nothing will happen without a divine purpose. This confidence is not some weird karma or fate, nor is it a false hope that all things have their own way of working out. Moreover, it is not optimism that all things work out for all people.

As hard as it is to believe, long deployments, troubles back home, heartache, and pain can be used by God for His glory and your good. When God says that He uses "all things" to accomplish His purposes,

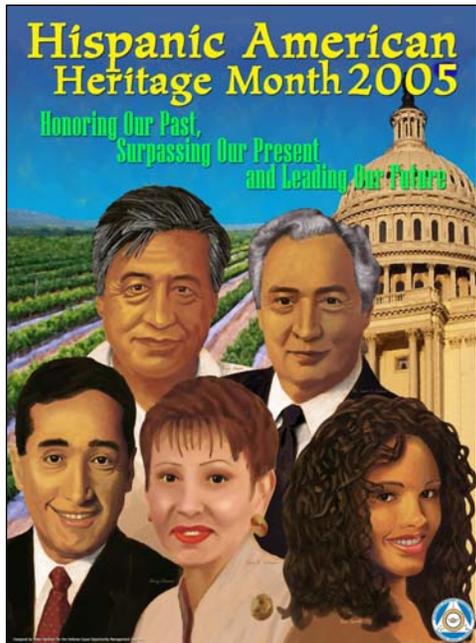
The lovers of God can look into this promise and see all events in their lives are utilized by God for his glory and their ultimate good. *"And we know that in all things, God works for the good for those who love Him who have been called according to his purpose."*

He means that He uses "all things", which includes both the evil and the good. Can you grasp that promise and call it your own?

– Romans, Ch. 8 Verse 28

They can live within that promise and know that God has a planned end state. This promise can guide them

Trust God rather than blame Him. Pain is not always a punishment; oftentimes pain is God's passionate plan to develop your faith. ☑



Fob Warhorse Presents:
The National Hispanic Heritage Month
Celebration



3rd Brigade Combat Team
Hosted by: HHC BRIGADE

Requests the pleasure of your
company as we celebrate:

Friday
21 October 2005
1130-1300
Faulkenburg Theater

Guest Speaker: CW2 Serrano

POC: SFC Lawrence Jordan
584-3011
Food, Latin Dancing, & Music

IA, CF Joint Raid in Khalis

Photo by Sgt. Sean Riley

Members of the 2nd Iraqi Army Brigade pass through an IA and 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Task Force Liberty checkpoint in Khalis, Iraq. 3rd BCT supported the 2nd IAB during a raid searching for insurgent leaders in the early morning hours of Sept. 23.



STAY ALIVE

Stop and Think!

**IEDs are deadly
killers.**

**Conduct 5 and 25
meter checks around
your position.**

3rd Brigade's top NCO says 'seasoned vets' crucial

By Mick Walsh
Columbus Ledger/Enquirer

Jesse Lee Andrews thinks the Army needs a few more Soldiers like, uh, well, Jesse Lee Andrews.

It's not that he envisions his mug on recruiting posters.

But as a battle-tested veteran of 25 years, Andrews knows that success in combat can often be measured by the experience of those involved.

"Seasoned vets make a strong brigade combat team," said the Lincolnton, Ga., native, who is the Fort Benning-based 3rd Brigade's command sergeant major. "And about 60 percent of our team over here is seasoned, most from Operation Iraqi Freedom I."

So how does Andrews, 43, convince young men half his age, who have spent the past eight months dodging bullets and roadside bombs while living with few of life's luxuries, to re-enlist?

"I tell them how much the Army needs them and challenge them to answer a higher calling. The Army needs experienced Soldiers like themselves to lead the young troops of the future."

And?

"Well, of course, there's the tax-free re-enlistment bonuses, which so far have run into the millions of dollars," he said, speaking by telephone from the brigade's headquarters near Baquba, Iraq. "That could be a factor."

And, yes, he did laugh at that last remark.

As the brigade's top NCO, Andrews serves as a liaison between the enlisted force, which numbers more than 4,000, and Commander Col. Steve Salazar. He's Hammer 7 to Salazar's Hammer 6.

He takes his job seriously, just as he did in 2003 when he was Lt. Col. Jeffrey Sanderson's sergeant major with the 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment.

"He taught me how to visualize the battlefield," said Andrews of Sanderson. "To be a tactician. It's something I hope I can pass on to



Photo by Spc. Natalie Loucks

Command Sgt. Maj. Jesse Andrews, left, recognizes achievement by Spc. Juan Velazquez during a visit by 3rd Infantry Division command sergeant major, Command Sgt. Maj. William Grant at the Forward Operating Base Warhorse Dining Facility Sept. 20.

the guys in the brigade."

The 2-69 was at the front of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and Andrews would have been more than content to remain with the group after its return.

"I'm an armor guy," he insisted.

But when Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Baker retired, Andrews was tapped by Salazar as his successor. "This job wasn't even on my radar screen back then," he said.

— Command Sgt. Maj. Jesse Andrews
3rd BCT Command Sergeant Major

But his relationship with Salazar has strengthened over the past two years, reaching the point where "we're singing off the same sheet of music."

While Andrews insists the Soldiers of the brigade are among the best trained and best equipped in the Army, the fact remains that a dozen Soldiers have been killed since the unit arrived in January.

"Certainly it hurts — one casualty is too many," he said. "But as much as it hurts me, I have to

remind myself that it's the nature of the business I'm in. After we lose a Soldier, I make it a point to visit our guys and tell them that the Soldier didn't die in vain and remind them that we're in a dangerous environment."

Is revenge a motivating factor?

"We tend to fight even harder after a death," he explained. "Sometimes it takes a while, but we will find the bad guys responsible for it."

Andrews doesn't see an immediate solution to the problems facing Iraq. In fact, he's convinced he'll serve at least another tour in the war-torn country before he retires in August 2010.

"I knew in 2003 that we would be coming back some day," he said. "And I know now that we'll be back again. It's not a matter of 'if,' it's just a matter of 'when.'"

Though he never played sports at football-rich Lincoln County High School — he was a drummer in the school band — Andrews likens himself to a coach nowadays. "And I'm coaching an all-star team of Soldiers. They're the best." ▣

Preparing for the day: Oct. 15 elections loom

By Maya Alleruzzo
The Washington Times

MUQDADIYAH, Iraq - U.S. forces view Iraq's constitutional referendum in less than two weeks as a dress rehearsal for the day when America's presence fades and Iraqis take charge of protecting their fragile democracy.

To help prepare for that day, Staff Sgt. Hilario Dominguez taught a platoon of young Iraqi soldiers how to control an angry crowd without casualties.

"The best thing to do is just detain them," Sgt. Dominguez of Okeechobee, Fla., explained as his American platoon demonstrated what is known as a "graduated response."

The goal: to bring an excited crowd under control with no one getting hurt.

"Show the crowd your weapons. If they don't disperse, shout. Tell them to stop, go away, whatever. Physically push them away, if necessary. Use the least amount of force," Sgt. Dominguez explained as long shadows from the eucalyptus trees of Forward Operating Base Normandy slowly disappeared with the setting sun.

"If that doesn't work, arrest the instigator. We don't want everyone to be so scared that they don't want to vote. If you're shooting up in the air or beating people up for no reason, they're going to be scared to vote," Sgt. Dominguez said.

An interpreter repeated his words in Arabic, and the Iraqi soldiers began to talk among themselves until one spoke up.

"There are no demonstrations in Iraq like this. They'd just use a bomb," one said.

At dusk, when the temperatures have begun falling from their daytime highs of more than 100 degrees in the lush Diyala River valley 54 miles northeast of Baghdad.

The river runs along the base and the adjacent regional hub of Muqdadiah, a small city that serves a sparsely populated region of about 300,000.

The Diyala gives the region its nickname, "breadbasket," for the abundance of grapes, pomegranates, dates and livestock that its waters support.

Bombings were not part of today's lesson plan. But Sgt. Dominguez, 27, seized the moment to drive home the importance of his instruction.

"If a bomb goes off, there's going to be a big crowd of people trying to get in," he said. "You're going to have to keep order. If you start shooting, then no one will come out and vote."

For emphasis, Sgt. Dominguez added that he has a personal stake in the success of Iraq's transition: If no one votes, he said, "then I can't go home."

For many members of Task Force 1-30, the unit of the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division's 3rd Brigade that is assigned to Normandy base, this is their second tour of duty in Iraq.

The division led the charge from Kuwait to Baghdad in the spring of 2003. It is back in Iraq with a new mission, to help build a professional Iraqi army capable of fighting an escalating guerrilla war with terrorists and insurgents.

Here and elsewhere, Iraq's army and a separate Iraqi police force are in training to take over from the 140,000 U.S. troops.



Men such as Col. James H. Coffman Jr., senior adviser to an Iraqi special police commando brigade, are in charge of making the plan work.

Col. Coffman received the Distinguished Service Cross for leading a team of Iraqi commandos sent to rescue a police station that was under siege during the November battle of Mosul.

Though the battle is remembered for the Iraqi police who ran away, Iraqis under Col. Coffman's command stood their ground.

Rocket, mortar and machine-gun fire killed 12 Iraqi commandos and seriously wounded all but one of those who survived, including Col. Coffman. He continued to fight with one hand badly wounded and useless — at times the only one able to return fire — until reinforcements arrived four hours later.

The colonel, a West Point graduate, kept fighting until the battle ended and made sure he was the last Soldier evacuated for medical treatment.

"He was treating the fallen, he was fighting and he lifted the spirits of our soldiers," Iraqi Police Maj. Gen. Adnon Thabit told guests at Col. Coffman's medal ceremony in August. "The blood that you shed will never be forgotten. It will be written in the history of Iraq with shining letters."

Tiger Battalion

The U.S. task force at Normandy base lives and works with the 2nd Iraqi Army's "Tiger Battalion."

One week earlier, Iraqi and American soldiers came under fire while patrolling Himbus, a village of mud huts and concrete houses about five miles away.

The operation began with a tip about weapons buried in an orchard, which sent Iraqi and American troops to search the area.

They found nothing. But as the trucks rolled out, a rocket-propelled grenade screeched from a nearby palm grove, followed by a barrage of rifle fire.

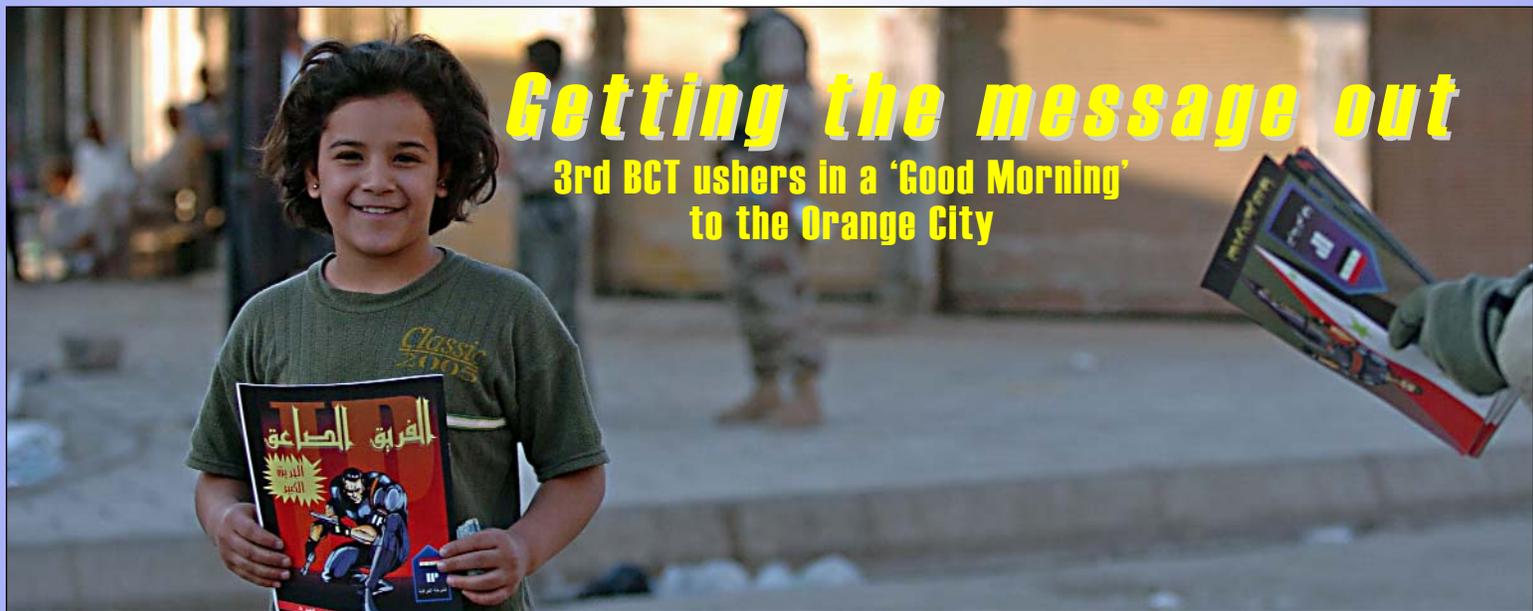
That began a cat-and-mouse battle, with American and Iraqi forces returning fire at an unseen enemy that would shoot, move and shoot again.

The joint force arrested four suspects in a house-to-house search before returning to base. There were no casualties, but on the way home, a bomb placed in their path blew out four tires of a Humvee, which had to be towed back to base.

The attack will not go unanswered.

Two weeks later, Lt. Col. Roger Cloutier of Lewiston, Maine, and Col. Theya Abed Ismail al-Tammimi, a former officer in ousted dictator Saddam Hussein's army, huddle together to plan a large raid into Himbus to kill or capture insurgents.

Col. al-Tammimi's intelligence officers have developed several leads on where to look.



Getting the message out

3rd BCT ushers in a 'Good Morning' to the Orange City

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

Soldiers of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team along with Iraqi Soldiers of the 2nd Iraqi Army Brigade welcomed a "Good Morning Orange City" to citizens in the Baquba area Oct. 2, during an operation by the same name. The purpose of the mission was to prevent future attacks to the city and also to set conditions for the upcoming referendum by putting a stop to all anti-Iraqi force activity. The operation started by setting a cordon around Baquba. Drivers who were out before curfew end were stopped and searched. After combat operations were complete, Soldiers of both the 3rd BCT and the 2nd IA Brigade handed out fliers and comic books to the citizens of Orange City to encourage them to vote in the upcoming elections on Oct. 15. ☑



Injuries no barrier for commander's mission

After recovering, Lt. Col. Spellmon returns to work of rebuilding nation

By Mick Walsh
Columbus Ledger/Enquirer

The toughest part of Lt. Col. Scott Spellmon's rehab after a severe leg wound wasn't the physical therapy, as painful as it was, but the fact that most of it was done away from his Soldiers.

"I hated leaving the guys," said the Brigade Troops Battalion commander, who is now back in Iraq with Fort Benning's 3rd Brigade Combat Team after seven surgeries on his left leg, several skin grafts and 90 days of recovery time back home.

If Spellmon's lament sounds a bit like an injured football player, forced to watch from the sideline as his teammates block and tackle . . . there's good reason for it.

He was a three-year letterman at West Point from 1983-85; played in two winning bowl games, scoring a touchdown in the '85 Peach Bowl vs. Illinois; and his 157 receiving yards in a 1983 game against Lehigh has not been topped in 22 years.

But nothing on the gridiron was as devastating as his injury on the battlefield.

"I'm still not 100 percent. I can't really do much running, except for a slow jog on the treadmill," he said via telephone from Forward Operating Base Warhorse. "It may be a couple of years before I'm back to where I was before April 14."

That was the day the armored Humvee in which Spellmon was riding in downtown Baquba hit a roadside bomb. Shrapnel from the blast tore a fist-sized chunk of calf muscle from his leg and shattered his fibula. But none of the major arteries in the leg were severed.

"Twenty years ago I would have probably lost the leg," Spellmon said. "But the doctors of today were able to save it."

He shrugs off his injury. "It's the business I've chosen to be in."

That Spellmon would want to



Photo by Spc. Natalie Loucks

Lt. Col. Scott Spellmon, center, the 3rd Brigade Troops Battalion Commander, stands with fellow Purple Heart awardees after a ceremony in their honor Aug. 12 at the 3rd BCT operations center on Forward Operating Base Warhorse.

speed up his rehab and return to his battalion doesn't surprise a former Army teammate, Lt. Col. Rob Roggeman, the commander of the 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment.

"He epitomizes the selfless leader," he said of Spellmon, who served in Desert Storm in 1991.

Spellmon, 41, a native of Bloomingdale, N.J. — a town less than an hour away from his beloved West Point — has been in charge of the Brigade Troops Battalion since June 2004, when it evolved out of the old 317th Engineers outfit. It comprises of a signal company, a military police platoon, an engineer platoon, a civil affairs company and several other detachments, with the primary responsibility of Iraqi reconstruction and providing governance training.

While bridge builders in both the literal and figurative senses, the brigade under Spellmon is nonetheless combat savvy.

The Support Platoon's Explosive Ordnance Disposal team has neutralized more than 80 improvised explosive devices and three tons of explosives, making the roads in Diyala Province much safer to travel.

But there's been a cost.

"While we are having significant

success in our mission," he said, "our area of operation remains complicated and challenging. To date, 16 have qualified for the Purple Heart, and over 75 Soldiers have met the criteria for the Combat Action Badge, Combat Medical Badge, or the Combat Infantryman's Badge. Our BTB Soldiers are more than doing their part in maintaining the security throughout this province."

In a recent note to the families of his Soldiers, Spellmon skipped over his own wounds to focus on those of three BTB members — Sgt. Rebecca Payne, Staff Sgt. Antwan Austin and Sgt. Kareena Lechner, who recently returned to duty at the Provincial Police Station.

Also, within the past two weeks, Spellmon has been able to send 12 of his Soldiers back to their homes in areas flattened or flooded by Hurricane Katrina. "It's important to them to go home and help their families," he said.

Over the first seven months of the battalion's deployment to Diyala Province, its Civil Military Operations Center in Baquba has initiated over 273 reconstruction and development projects with a total investment of more than \$213

See BTB, Pg. 12

Interpreter's Arabic skills 'invaluable'

By Mick Walsh
Columbus Ledger/Enquirer

Layla Elbel, then 22, wanted to be part of the Coalition of the Willing when U.S.-led forces invaded Iraq in 2003.

"I spoke Arabic better than anyone at Fort Huachuca and I wanted to go," recalls Elbel, now a 24-year-old Army staff sergeant. But she was bypassed in favor of several Soldiers with weaker linguistic skills.

So she stayed in Arizona while the Army, led by Soldiers of Fort Benning's 3rd Brigade, overpowered Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard en route to overthrowing Iraq's tyrannical government.

Now let's jump ahead to 2005.

The brigade is back in Iraq, stationed near Baquba, a center of insurgency with the reputation of Dodge City. And this time Elbel is front and center.

Literally.

She's the military interpreter for brigade commander Col. Steve Salazar.

"Wherever he goes," she said via telephone this week from Forward Operating Base Warhorse, "I go."

And if that means occasionally getting into harm's way, so be it.

"We've had a few close calls," she said. "We've been hit by two IEDs, but thank God neither was a direct hit. We're well protected, so I'm not scared of going with the colonel, no matter where we might go. It's a great adventure."



Photo by Spc. Natalie Loucks

Staff Sgt. Layla Elbel readies to hand out stickers and information packets to Iraqis during a bridge construction site review.

The Arabic language comes easily for Elbel, who was born in Amman, Jordan, of American missionaries, and who was educated in Jerusalem.

"Most of my life has been in the Middle East," she explained. Long before she was enrolled in the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, Calif., Elbel had learned Arabic in a private girls school in Israel. And she attended Arabic church services almost every weekend.

"It still took me a while after we got to Iraq to understand some of the local dialects," she said. "It's like moving to Georgia from New York. The written language is the same but the spoken form is a lot different."

Salazar, who has studied Arabic, nonetheless relies almost entirely on Elbel's translations.

"She's invaluable to the brigade and to the Army," said Salazar, who has commanded the 3rd since July 2004. "She is a young NCO with intelligence, courage and maturity who has a unique skill."

Elbel also possesses the people skills that Salazar looks for in an interpreter.

"She's made a huge impact, particularly when we engage Iraqi women," he said. "They are comfortable around her and they open up to her. Her cultural insights have been particularly valuable to me, and her compassion has made a difference with the Iraqi people."

The Iraqi people are worth fighting for, she says. "Freedom is new to them, they're just now being allowed to think for themselves. Most of these people are building new lives from scratch."

After graduating from high school in 1999, Elbel began building a new life for herself. She moved to the U.S. and enrolled in a small New York college. But she quickly became disillusioned, left school, visited friends in Ohio and later returned to Israel.

During a return trip to the U.S., she saw an Army commercial on television. "The Army seemed to provide me another option for my life," she explained. And she took it, with the provision she could go into military intelligence as a signal analyst.

Three years later she is at Salazar's side. "There really isn't a normal day, or a daily schedule," she contends. "There might be a firefight somewhere at 4 a.m. and the colonel may have to go. Then we'll come back for a series of meetings. Before you know it, it's 6 o'clock at night and you've put in a full day."

Salazar says he uses Elbel as a gatekeeper. "She carries my cell phone and answers dozens of calls a day from Iraqis. She deals with 90 percent of those calls personally. She solves problems for Iraqis every day and that leaves me free to focus on larger issues."

Another strength of Elbel is her ability to distinguish between fact and fiction.

Can she detect when someone is lying to the colonel?

"Absolutely! She picks up on all the atmospheric in a room," he said. "She hears side conversations and can put issues into context. Her observation and analytical skills are extraordinary."

Though she's loved the 4 1/2 years she's spent in the Army, she fully intends to separate later this year and give college another try. "I want to study Hebrew and maybe later work for a company that does international development work," she said. "I've experienced a lot in my first 24 years and want to experience a whole lot more." ▣

Missions move on despite frequent attacks

Continued from Pg. 6

Over a swimming pool-size model of the village sculpted in sand, Cloutier gives instructions to American and Iraqi officers, who will lead their men into battle.

"Once we have the city set," Cloutier said, "that area belongs to the Iraqi army. No American forces will move into the town without talking to me first. Once they've cleared the city, do not shoot into the city."

Directing his attention to the Iraqi officers, Cloutier offered words of reassurance. "I know the Tigers are strong. If you need combat power, I have a platoon ready to support you."

Moving out

Shortly after 2 the next morning, the American-Iraqi convoy moved out, Americans in armored Humvees and Iraqis in the beds of open pickup trucks.

The moon sank low on the horizon under a canopy of stars when the deafening blast of a roadside explosion sent shrapnel and debris flying at Iraqi soldiers in one Toyota pickup.

The front window was shattered. Tracer fire lit up the night sky and bullets ricocheted off trucks.

Gunners from the 1-30 fired machine-gun rounds into palm groves that provide ready cover for the enemy.

After about an hour, Cloutier called into headquarters to report two insurgents killed, possibly the same men who detonated the roadside bomb as the convoy drove past, plus one dead donkey.

"Today was the first time I shot something that hit the ground," said Sgt. Luke Buccholz, 24, of Paonia, Colo. "It was a donkey. I don't want to go down as an ass killer."

Luckily, no one was hurt except for minor cuts and bruises suffered by the Iraqis who had been blown out of their truck. They climbed back in, and the convoy proceeded.

They entered Himbus, a village of about 3,500, under cover of darkness and began moving door to door.

They knocked at the front gates of the courtyards that typically surround an Iraqi house. If no one answered, they climbed over the gate, unlatching it and let their fellow soldiers in.

They wait long enough to let the women cover themselves before mov-

ing inside, looking for young and middle-age men whom they suspect are part of the insurgency. The raid netted one prisoner and one rocket-propelled grenade with its launcher.

As dawn broke and roosters crowed, Col. al-Tammimi announces in Arabic over a loudspeaker for the entire town to hear:

"We have arrested some of the terrorists who kill people in your area. Our aim is to arrest these bad guys who fight the Iraqi army and [who fight against] justice, freedom and democracy in Iraq. We're sorry if we have caused you trouble, and Himbus is still a good place in our hearts."

Securing a future

With the sun up and the town secured, Cloutier and his men walked through town with Capt. Wahab of the Tiger Battalion. Humvees with Soldiers manning mounted machine guns drove slowly, offering cover to the Soldiers on foot.

Like most Iraqi soldiers interviewed for this article, Capt. Wahab preferred that only his rank and first name be used.

He and others like him have chosen a career with the new Iraqi army and have cast their future on the success of America's "nation-building" effort.

They will be here in Iraq long after the Americans leave and, most likely, they and their families will be targets for terrorists and insurgents for years to come.

Cloutier appreciated the mission just performed by his Iraqi colleagues, and his growing confidence in the ability of Iraqi forces to take charge is evident as he turned to Capt. Wahab.

"The people know that the Iraqi Army is strong. Now they will think twice before they attack us," Cloutier said.

Exit strategy

The American exit strategy from Iraq depends on the ability of Iraqi soldiers such as those under the command of men like Col. al-Tammimi and Capt. Wahab to gradually assume the duties now performed by 140,000 U.S.-led coalition forces.

Initial disappointment over the performance of Iraqi troops going to the first battle of Fallujah in the spring of 2004 have given way to a belief among American forces and their

Iraqi understudies that the plan is working.

During a month spent with Iraqi and American soldiers at the Normandy base, this reporter was able to witness the training, day-to-day interactions with local leaders, the tension that follows each ambush and lighter moments of friendship between Iraqis and Americans.

Bonding prevails in a shared life. When the danger of battle passes, shared laughter readily fills the void.

"We are their friends, first and foremost," said Capt. Michael Whitney, 29, of North Bend, Ore. "Once you build that personal relationship, and something happens, it would be a personal offense to them."

Building trust begins on the base, said Capt. Whitney, commander of Task Force 1-30's Alpha Company. "Here I have the luxury of spending time with them. It's not limited. Personal relationships always come first."

One evening, the Soldiers of Alpha Company and their Iraqi army sibling Muqdadiyah Company broke bread at a feast of grilled fish that they had caught that morning in the Diyala River, which snakes along one edge of the 2.5-square-mile base.

"A meal like this is a blessing from God," said Lt. John Newton, 31, of Hague, Va. "I get e-mails from my friends back home. They watch the news every day, and they worry for me. I wish they could see me right now."

His colleague, Lt. Talib, agreed while reaching with a piece of fresh-baked bread for a scoop of catfish, tomatoes and onions from a shared platter.

"We get the same thing. Our families see things on TV, but they would never guess that we are eating and swimming and fishing," he said.

'Build, not fight'

Two days after the raid into Himbus, Cloutier and al-Tammimi sat down with a group of sheiks from the region in a building just outside the base. The sheiks asked for help with local problems. Security woes and high unemployment go hand in hand.

"I came here to build, not to fight," said Cloutier. "But the more time I spend fighting, the less time I can spend on schools and roads. Attacks

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DROP THE HAMMER

Will the upcoming elections make a difference?

"It's ground breaking, it's history in the making, it's our goal, it's why we're here and I just hope it works."



– 2nd Lt. Sarah Millsaps
C Co., 117th Signal Bn.

"I think it's good that everyone has the right to vote because now they have the chance to be in control of their own country."



– Sgt. Will Nievaart
HHC, 3rd BCT

"It's good that we can hand over their country to them and let them do what they have to do so we can go home."



– Spc. Tyrone France
B Co., 203rd FSB

"It's going to be an opportunity for them to have the right to vote and in their right to democracy it's a big step."



– Capt. Patrick Caukin
HHC, 3rd BTB

"I think it's a good step toward Iraqi democracy by their people, for their people."



– Spc. Conrad LaRocque
445th Civil Affairs Bn.

"It's about time they have a constitution. It's about time democracy comes in and the Iraqi people have some kind of laws they can go by."



– Private 1st Class Milena Krawczynski
HHC, 203rd FSB

"I think the elections are a good thing but it's going to be hard to get it started. This country isn't used to a democratic government."



– Sgt. Eric Bryant
A Co., 203rd FSB

"I think the elections are going to be good for this country. It'll give them a fresh start. If everything goes well, then the sooner we get to go home."



– Staff Sgt. Wayne Ayres
A Co., 203rd FSB

"The referendum is needed in a step towards their constitution and hopefully we get that approved."



– 2nd Lt. Justin Below
HHC, 1st Bn., 30th Infantry

Hammer Times will accept your stories and photos! Send your submissions digitally by e-mailing 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. ☑

Getting voters to the polls the key

Continued from Pg. 10

here were going way down until about a month ago. The terrorists are afraid of what is happening in Muqadiyah.”

The sheik from Himbus took the opportunity to ask the two colonels: “Why are you raiding my village? These are my uncles and cousins.”

Col. al-Tammimi’s reply begins with a handful of photographs:

“Here are pictures of your uncles and cousins in Syria,” he said, showing pictures of foreign fighters who had joined with locals in the village.

“Here are pictures of your uncles and cousins with the weapons we found in their homes.”

The sheik’s long robe ruffles ever so slightly as he steps forward to examine the photos. “OK, now you’ve got me,” the sheik said, throwing up his hands.

His words still hung in the air when gunfire erupts down by the river several hundred yards away. Iraqi and American soldiers, joined by Iraqi police, scramble to take up positions.

Cloutier wounded one man who is shooting from the river bank. Then, he gives instructions: “Let’s let the Iraqi Army fight this fight,” he said.

“Let these guys know we are supporting them. They are not alone. Remember, these guys are in unarmored pick-up trucks.”

Endgame

At some point, the entire base will be turned over to the Tiger Battalion, and many of the American Soldiers here will move on to the next mission, elsewhere in Iraq and then back to their families in the States.

Capt. David Smith, 30, of Grand Rapids, Mich., and the Military Transition Team he leads will remain behind, to serve as both a liaison to the Americans and to continue mentoring Iraqi units.

During missions, Smith will serve as an observer, and when the Iraqis need backup or bigger firepower, he will be able to call in the Americans.

“I’m here for one thing, and that’s to make these guys better. Everything else is gravy after that,” he said.

In the days before the Oct. 15 referendum on the proposed constitution, soldiers in the Tiger Battalion will help distribute election material, including printed copies of the constitution that voters will be asked to ratify.

“We all know the elections are coming,” Smith told Iraqi officers. “These are very important for the future of your

country. Once we get copies of the constitution, it will be printed in newspapers and broadcast on television.

“I need you to encourage your soldiers and the Iraqi people to vote. Tell them that it doesn’t matter how you vote but that you vote. But you must read [the constitution].”

He then repeated a warning that one often hears in Washington from President Bush and others — an upsurge in attacks is likely in the days ahead.

“We are looking for the bad people who want to disrupt the election. Be listening for those people and be ready for your missions. You must be ready to fight,” Smith said.

“Make sure your soldiers wear their equipment and they are ready to shoot, because [the terrorists and insurgents] are going to shoot at us.

“It is very important that we show that the Iraqi army and Iraqi police are working together to provide security so they are not afraid to vote.

“Our job is to help you and to watch your soldiers. It is merely a tool to see what you may need help with. It’s nothing bad, so please don’t be offended. It is good to have other eyes.”

Lt. Newton, the executive officer of Alpha Company, has been tapped to observe one pre-election mission in the Khalis, a town near Baquba, about an hour’s drive from base.

The Tiger Battalion fanned out into the neighborhood, and Newton watched as teams of Iraqi soldiers knocked on each door.

An Iraqi lieutenant holds a list of names of wanted people. They hand out fliers with phone numbers to call if the residents witness any trouble.

As a former Army Ranger instructor, Newton is comfortable with his role as both an observer and an evaluator.

“Almost as important as checking the names on the list is getting the flier out and showing the people here that they are capable of securing the area,” he said.

As the mission concluded, Newton and 1st Sgt. Thomas Hitch, 30, of Columbus, Ohio, paused to chat with their Iraqi comrades.

Newton turned to his Iraqi counterpart, Lt. Haydar to ask if he is tired.

“We are never tired. No sleep,” Haydar replied in English.

“I guess that’s how Iraqis express their hooah,” Hitch said. ☑

BTB commander ‘hooked’ on making mission a success

Continued from Pg. 8

million. That includes the renovation or construction of 96 schools, 46 water projects, 17 electricity projects and 15 health care facilities.

“I recently visited a neighborhood that was receiving electrical power for the first time ever and the positive response of the Iraqi

people in the village was simply overwhelming,” he said.

The battalion began making an impression on the Diyala people almost from its arrival by repairing a bridge across the Tigris river in the small town of As Sindiyah.

“It costs us about \$20,000,” Spellmon recalls. “It took us about a month to repair what had been a floating bridge and make it a key

crossing point across the river again. It required divers and welders, but we were able to bring it back up and make it serviceable. On the day it was reopened, the people came up and thanked us.”

He’s been hooked on rebuilding the province ever since, be it a new women’s center in Muqadiyah or an electrical upgrade project in Baquba. ☑