



# SCIMITAR

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U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. James L. Harper Jr.

Army Spc. Kyle Shelton kneels next to a wall as he provides security for his fellow soldiers during a search in Mosul. Shelton is attached to Company C, 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team.

## 3rd ACR troopers receive valor medals

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks  
3rd U.S. Cavalry

Thanksgiving Day for several troopers of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment included turkey, dressing, sweet potato pie and medals for valor.

Lt. Gen. John R. Vines, who commands the Multinational Corps Iraq, paid a visit to Forward Operating Base Sykes to personally commend the troopers for their acts of heroism and to thank the troopers of the regiment for their sacrifices in the war against terrorism.

"Sometime today on television, a sports announcer will talk about the hero of a football game," Vines said before a formation of nearly 150 3rd ACR troopers. "Well these Soldiers standing before me are the true heroes of our nation."

Capt. Daniel Anderson, Chief Warrant Officer Milton Walker, Sgt. Jerome Shai and Sgt. Kevin Doyle were pinned with the Air Medal with Valor for their heroic actions on Aug. 29.

Assigned to 1159th Medical Company (Air Ambulance), 36th Medical Evacuation Battalion, the air medical evacua-

tion team conducted a rescue mission, under direct enemy fire, to evacuate two seriously injured pilots from a downed OH-58D Kiowa Warrior aircraft in the city of Tal Afar.

In less than seven minutes, the crew of Smuggler 62, lifted off under night vision goggle conditions. Their aircraft received small arms fire to the rotor blades and inside the pilot and crew compartment.

Shai, from Gambrills, Md., was the first of the crew to identify and report the small arms fire and the location of the firers. Shai rapidly assessed the aircraft for damage and

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# Arabic linguist aids in searching females

Story and photo by Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills  
1st Brigade Combat Team

In spring 2005, early on in their deployment, Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry, attached to 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, 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, 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 Sgt. Michelle Gragg. Gragg, 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 Gragg said she was losing much of her language skills. 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 more than 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 on almost 15 missions and 3rd FSB has realized 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 Capt. 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,"

Lewis added.

Gragg said she's an adrenaline junky and was excited to go on these missions. She also said 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 on can vary from all day long patrols during elections to participating in cordon and searches, she said.

"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, Ariz., Gragg was hoping to join a government agency. With that goal, Gragg said she did some research and found the best way to get a job was to be proficient in a foreign language. The best way to become proficient in a foreign language was to join the Army.

Army linguists don't get to choose the language. They are placed.

"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."

With a lot of studying, practice and hard work, Gragg made 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. "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, Gragg simply shrugs and smiles. "I have no fear of anything," said Gragg. "I'd go infantry if they'd let me."



Sgt. Michelle Gragg

## VALOR

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reported to the pilot commander, Anderson, that the aircraft could continue the mission.

Anderson, from Sacramento, Calif., and Walker, from Bel Air, Md., immediately used emergency procedures to avoid the continuing volley of fire from the ground.

Concerned for the pilots on the ground, the men of Smuggler 62 continued to fly toward the downed aircraft.

After exiting the aircraft, Doyle, from Peabody, Mass., began searching for the casualties. He identified two Soldiers and ran to them.

All three men came under immediate enemy fire. While the two Soldiers took cover and returned fire, Doyle ran across open ground to the injured Kiowa pilots, who were in a Bradley fighting vehicle.

"The bravery and the courage of these aircrew members of the 1159th Air Medevac exemplifies what is good about Army Aviation and the efforts of our troopers here in Iraq," said Maj. John Scott, commander, Longknife Squadron, 3rd ACR. "I'm extremely proud of them."

## Confidant of al-Zarqawi dead, says relative

**BAGHDAD** — A close family member as well as Coalition sources said earlier this week that a gatekeeper and confidant of Abu Mu'sab al-Zarqawi, Bilal Mahmud Awad Shebah, aka Abu Ubaydah, who reportedly met weekly with the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, is dead.

Abu Ubaydah was reportedly killed Oct. 14 when Coalition Forces raided several suspected terrorist hideouts in the Albu Ubayd neighborhood north of Ramadi. Although intelligence analysts assessed Abu Ubaydah was killed during the mid-October raids, they could not determine his death with certainty at that time.

In late November, Coalition Forces received information from knowledgeable sources and a close family member of Abu Ubaydah claiming independently that Zarqawi's confidant and gatekeeper was killed as a result of the Oct. 14 raids.

Detained members of al-Qaeda claim Abu Ubaydah served as an "executive secretary" for Zarqawi; met

with Zarqawi frequently; served as a messenger and gatekeeper for Zarqawi; screened all messages and requests for meetings with Zarqawi; was one of Zarqawi's most trusted associates; provided Zarqawi with safe house locations; and used intimidation and death threats to gain the cooperation of the Iraqi people to support al Qaeda in Iraq terrorist activity.

During the course of the raids, several weapons caches containing mortar rounds, small arms and ammunition, were found and destroyed. Mortar rounds were also emplaced along the road leading to the safe houses, serving as improvised explosive devices against incoming vehicle or foot traffic. The forces were engaged by small-arms fire upon their arrival to the suspected terrorist location and immediately returned fire. Combining the ground attack with the use of close-air support, the terrorists' hideout locations were destroyed.

No Coalition forces were injured or killed during the raids.

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## PERSPECTIVES

## Saddam Hussein's many palaces: Legacies of a warped perception

**Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills**  
1st Brigade Combat Team

It never ceases to amaze me how important perception was to Saddam Hussein and the other members of his Ba'ath 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, many of which would be considered palatial. On Nov. 22, the United States handed Danger 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 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 the palaces 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 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, seven 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.

According to the engineers, he did have a couple of favorite spots on Danger, one of them the so-called "Floating Palace" 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, the "Water Palace," was built to his exacting standards and he slept in it once. Then he said 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, and 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 headquarters, was dedicated to the people of Iraq, I was told. 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 teamwork.

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.

Togetherness and 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, 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. It won't be pretty.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills

**The "Water Palace" stairway in former FOB Danger. Saddam is said to have spent only one night in this palace.**

## An Army evolving ...



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Gul A. Alisan  
**An Iraqi Army 1st Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Brigade 5th Division Soldier stands guard on his truck during a presence patrol of Al Hizam village, Diyala Province.**

## Scimitar Pulse

**Do you think the transfer of authority to the Iraqi government is going well?**

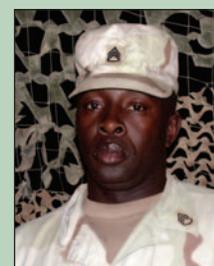


"With a little more effort the transfer will work well."

**Spc. Sandra Vazquez**  
918 MP Company  
Camp Speicher

"Iraqi police have started to take over some patrolling areas in Bayji from us."

**Staff Sgt. Michael Lee**  
2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry  
Camp Speicher



"It's going pretty well. They need more responsibility and a little more training and they'll be fine."

**Pfc. Sidney Adams**  
Headquarters Company, 501st  
Sustainment Brigade  
Camp Speicher

"They're making progress. They're making an effort to run their own country. It will take a little time, but they will get the mission accomplished in the future."

**Staff Sgt. David Jones**  
501st Sustainment Brigade  
Camp Speicher



Thanks to Staff Sgt. Mike Winters and Spc. Lee Elder of 133rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment for this week's Scimitar Pulse photos.

## Police station upgrades instill pride

Story by Denise Calabria  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

**BAGHDAD** — Two recently renovated, Iraqi police stations provide more than 250 Iraqi police a safer vantage point from which to serve and protect Najaf citizens, and for the first time in their careers, the means to do so with pride.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region Division follows a two-pronged strategy in carrying out the Iraqi reconstruction. GRD is working large-scale capital projects such as power plants, water treatment plants, and oil infrastructure facilities.

These endeavors are expensive, take longer to build, and often are not seen by many Iraqis.

However, the servicemembers, Army civilians and Iraqi national employees of the GRD also are working small-scale projects such as schools, clinics, police stations, local power and water distribution facilities that are much less expensive to build, but more visible to the Iraqi people.

On a recent inspection in Najaf, Col. Richard Stevens, GRD deputy commander, toured the two police stations and met with police officers as well.

Stevens viewed the new guard shacks and new bathrooms and witnessed the pride in the faces of the police.

This station is a great example of Iraqi forces having the ability to transfer security responsibilities to civil authorities, said Stevens.

The police chief, Maj. Hakim Kamsaid he and his officers are happy with the improvements because they feel safer as a result.

Maj. William Smith, Najaf-Karbala resident engineer and liaison officer, served as the tour escort. He is a member of the 35th Engineer Brigade, a Missouri Army National Guard unit augmenting the Gulf Region South.

Smith said the two police units occupying the renovated stations are crucial to the citizens of Najaf.

"One is an IP traffic checkpoint unit that controls "Route Miami," said Smith. The other is an investigation unit that handles homicides and burglaries, he said.

Smith said the renovated stations also represent a "visible sign of authority" to the community.

"Through these renovations we are giving the IP of Wafa District something they can be proud to be a part of."

"Our theory is to treat them with respect and they, in turn, will generate respect," Smith said.



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Raymond Piper

Civilian food specialists prepare the 750 pounds of dressing that was served during the Thanksgiving meal at FOB Prosperity.

# Cooks serve thousands

## Troops toast turkey, Thanksgiving Day treats

Story by Staff Sgt.  
Raymond Piper  
4th Brigade Combat Team

**FORWARD OPERATING BASE PROSPERITY** — It was an early-morning mission for the food specialists at Forward Operating Base Prosperity: prepare a Thanksgiving feast for Soldiers deployed more than

3,000 miles from home.

Starting at 1 a.m., the Soldiers and civilians who work in the dining facility began to give it a new look.

The inside of the dining facility was changed to give Task Force Baghdad Soldiers a very different dining experience than they find day-to-day. Displays made of food — such as the gingerbread model of the palace

within which the Soldiers were eating, ice sculptures and other decorations — adorned the facility. A Soldier dressed as a pilgrim and an interpreter dressed as an American Indian greeted the Soldiers as they entered.

"The meal was excellent. It definitely took you away from Baghdad," said Sgt. Timothy Hartung, an engineer with Headquarters and Headquarters

Company, 4th Brigade Combat Team. "The meal really showed that the staff cares about making us feel like we're at home."

The dining facility staff expected at least 4,000 people and prepared a cornucopia of Thanksgiving favorites.

"We put a lot of emphasis on Thanksgiving because it's one of the biggest meals of the year, and it's a way for us to say thanks to the Soldiers

for what they do every day," said Clyde Randolph, dining facility supervisor.

Cooks prepared 2,500 pounds of turkey, 1,200 pounds of prime rib, as well as ham hocks, a whole pig, 500 pounds of Cornish hens, 600 pounds of roasted ham, 700 pounds of collard greens, 800 pounds of mashed potatoes, 600 pounds of corn on the cob, 750 pounds of dressing and 2,500 pies.

"We asked quite a few Soldiers what they wanted for Thanksgiving. A lot (of them) wanted ham hocks, collard greens, pumpkin pie and pecan pie, so we made a big effort to make sure we had all those things today," Randolph said.

Thanksgiving is a day for many to spend time with their families and loved ones when they are at home, and the staff wanted to create the same feeling here.

"They're away from their families and this is a home away from home, so we wanted them to feel like they're at home and give them what their mama would fix," Randolph said.



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jennifer D. Atkinson

Capt. Chris Watroba of Company B, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, watches a cook slice turkey.



Courtesy photo

Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 6th Division of the Iraqi Army and Company D, 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry inventory weapons.

# Soldiers seize 'gun show' caches

Story by Spc. Carlos Caro  
1st Battalion, 87th Infantry

**BAGHDAD** — When local residents provide information on where terrorists are hiding their weapons, Iraqi and American forces are quick to respond.

An anonymous tip prompted Iraqi Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division and U.S. forces from Company D, 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, to conduct searches in west Baghdad Nov. 20-21. It was a mission that eventually rooted out hidden weapons and terrorists.

"The amount of weapons and munitions found (on the first day of searches) was enough to arm a small cell, maybe eight men," said Sgt. Paul Casiano of 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry.

The American and Iraqi forces found caches hidden inside four parked cars on

Nov. 20 and rounded up three suspected terrorists.

"The weapons inside the cars were enough to lay down some serious firepower, should they have been used," Casiano said. "Luckily, the insurgents were discovered along with the cache."

The cache included 10 assault rifles, six machine guns, six hand grenades, two rocket-propelled grenade launchers with eight rounds, a mine, and thousands of rounds of ammunition for the rifles and machine guns.

"I couldn't believe that we found this many weapons in four small cars," said Staff Sgt. Robert Cortez. "It is really awesome that we found all these weapons and detained the (suspected terrorists). All the hard work of gathering intelligence and gaining the trust of the local nationals has really paid off."

The next day proved even more productive. The Iraqi and American Soldiers turned up even larger caches on a large section of farm-

land that once belonged to Saddam Hussein. Less than 20 minutes after beginning their mission, the Soldiers found a mortar round hidden inside a bus parked in an old garage. Once Soldiers began thoroughly searching the vehicle, they could barely believe their eyes.

Inside a hidden compartment was a large cache. The Soldiers seized 37 blocks of explosives, 75 demolition charges, 400 feet of detonation cord, hundreds of blasting caps, 33 mortar rounds, 30 hand grenades, 29 RPG rounds, 20 hand-grenade fuses, 86 assorted radios, four night-vision devices, four light anti-tank weapons, three mortar fuses, two submachine guns, a sniper rifle, a video camera, a laser range finder, and several thousands of rounds for different weapons.

"It was a gun show," Casiano said. "With all the weapons, munitions, improvised explosive device materials and shoulder-launched missiles that were brought out from a hidden panel inside the bus, there were enough weapons to

arm at least 30 men. Thankfully, the hard training of the Iraqi Army battalion allowed them to conduct the searches with success."

However, the morning had just begun. Less than 30 minutes passed before the Iraqi and American Soldiers found two more caches. These caches contained 50 12.7 mm rounds, 18 rounds of linked 40 mm high-explosive grenades, dozens of mortar fuses, old Iraqi Republican Guard uniforms, five gas masks, five parachutes, two mortar rounds and two artillery shells.

The Soldiers also discovered six already-prepared IEDs waiting to be picked up and used against Iraqi civilians, Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition Forces.

"I feel a considerable dent was put into the local insurgency," said Pfc. Michael Wilmott of 1/87. "With the December elections coming up quickly, it is a good thing to have the locals tip us off as to where weapons caches are."

# New Soldiers provide smiles, security to Iraqi neighborhood

Story and photos by  
Spc. Jeremy D. Crisp  
Multi-National Corps – Iraq

**MOSUL** — They're the new guys on the block, and they're not hard to spot.

Not because they rumble through the streets in their Stryker light-armored vehicles, for those have been there before.

It's a new attitude; it's a new uniform on smiling faces with determination to get the job done.

The Soldiers of Company B assumed responsibility for one sector of the streets of Mosul.

They smile at the Iraqi citizens on the streets, but at the same time they will kick the doors in on the terrorists who plan to spread upheaval.

"We are out here doing what we like to call PR – public relations," said Sgt. 1st Class Thomas M. Pickerel, platoon sergeant with Company B, 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, based at Fort Richardson, Alaska.

"Our patrols are designed to let the citizens of Iraq know we are here for them, and we are out here every day."

The unit spends parts of their days in vehicles, driving around

with a 'Hey, we're here,' attitude before dismounting to walk the streets on foot.

"We get on the ground as much as possible because that's really the only way you get to know the people in the area," Pickerel said.

Company B recently replaced Soldiers from the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team of Fort Lewis, Wash., and has hit the ground running.

"This used to be called the Wild Wild West, but the unit ahead of us did a lot of work here," said Pickerel. "We've got all the kinks worked out, and things have calmed down quite a bit since we've moved in."

Patrolling streets nicknamed "Canal," "Broadway," and an area known as "Yankee Stadium," — complete with alleys called "1st Base Line" all the way around to "Home Plate," — doesn't come easy.

While shaking hands and giving candy to kids, the Soldiers of Company B move up and down miles of concrete, laden with weapons, ammunition and 40 pounds of armor strapped to their backs. All that gear is essential when the troops have to get to the business of being infantrymen.

"We're out here looking for the bad guys," said 1st Lt. Anthony E. Cerullo, a platoon leader.

And the bad guys are out there. The unit takes on sporadic gunfire and deals with drive-by shootings and improvised explosive devices almost daily, said Cerullo.

"We take intelligence that has been gathered, and we look for certain vehicles that we know are to be possible insurgent vehicles. We do standard patrols where we look for suspicious activity – anything out of the ordinary," Cerullo said. "We look for IEDs before they go off, and we also take care of guys we catch emplacing them."

"We talk to citizens in the neighborhoods and do random searches to see if we can find anything, information or other-

wise," he said.

"It's a dual-facet mission," said Staff Sgt. Austin S. Fernandez, a squad leader. "We let the citizens know we are here to help them, but we are also here to let them know that we don't take any (mess)."

On top of the patrols, a day isn't complete without a trip to see their counterparts-in-arms. The platoon stops daily to speak with the Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police, seeing what they need and talking about future missions.

"We've done joint patrols with the IA and the IP, and we are going to do even more now because it's their country, and they are going to be the ones doing it after we leave," Cerullo said. "The more we can teach them how to do it the right way

and help them along in that process, the better off they'll be."

Helping the cause is a Soldier who speaks Arabic. Fernandez learned the language from interpreters, and it has helped tremendously, he said.

"I don't have any kids, but I can speak Arabic pretty well and the kids come to me naturally," Fernandez said. "It helps out a lot with relations, being able to talk to the Iraqis a little."

During a recent patrol, a gaggle of 20 Iraqi children hung onto and held hands with Fernandez. His M-4 assault rifle was put out of harm's way for the time being. The infantrymen saw parents lining the streets with smiles on their faces and gestures of "thumbs up" for blocks.



Spc. Andrew D. "Doc" Nelson, a medic with Company B, 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, looks over his shoulder providing cover for fellow Soldiers.



Spc. Aaron A. Ebbert, left, radio telephone operator, Company B, 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, and 1st Lt. Anthony E. Cerullo, a platoon leader, call in a report to their headquarters.



Soldiers from Company B, 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, line the streets during a patrol.

# Combat engineers build for brothers

Story and photos by  
Sgt. Josh H. Hauser  
2nd Force Service  
Support Group

**HUSAYBAH** — The Marines start this day at 5:30 a.m.

They emerge from their sleeping bags, weapons in hand, and rise from the ice-cold concrete that has been their bed for the past three nights.

To ward off the cold, some head to a small fire used to burn trash. They brush their teeth or rake a dry razor across their dusty faces. Spirits are raised when there is talk of one of today's tasks — install an outhouse.

Breakfast is Meals Ready to Eat. Lunch and dinner will be the same, if time allows.

The Marines have called this bombed-out train station in Husaybah home since they arrived, and soon others will as well.

But accommodations will be much better for future tenants.

These Marines are combat engineers assigned to Combat Logistics Battalion 2, 2nd Marine

Logistics Group, and this is not the first time they have faced such conditions since being deployed to Iraq.

Traveling throughout western Iraq's Al Anbar province and living in squalor is all part of the job.

The Marines of CLB-2 are tasked with creating forward operating bases for future coalition forces, to work as cities are cleared of terrorists. They are constructing a number of these fortifications as part of Operation Steel Curtain, an offensive to drive terrorists from the cities of Husaybah, Karabilah, Sa'dah and Ubaydi.

"Our job is to make sure those in the fight have a safe place to sleep at night," 1st Lt. Jason R. Berner, a platoon commander with CLB-2 said. "The guys we share blood and mud with will be staying here, so our guys put their hearts into their work."

The 33-year-old Syracuse, Neb., native said that despite the conditions and constant workload, his men know their job and what to expect and they are committed to staying until the mis-



Combat engineers assigned to Combat Logistics Battalion 2, 2nd Marine Logistics Group position a staircase they constructed to access a scout position at a forward operating base in Husaybah.

sion is complete.

"We've been on the road for awhile and doing more with less on each mission, and I still haven't really heard any [complaining]," Berner said.

It's a testament to his unit's Marines, considering they've continued their work while firefights and explosions ring out in the nearby city.

Sgt. Troy M. Gardner, a combat engineer and squad leader, said the most challenging aspect of their mission was security prior to beginning the project.

"Securing the area and actually starting work here was the toughest part considering the limited number of Marines we have," the 25-year-old Overland Park, Kan., native said. "One thing I notice

though is that these Marines perform at their best and then some, no matter what's asked of them."

One of those Marines is Alta Vista, Va., native Lance Cpl. Brian D. Davis. At 19, Davis said his service in Iraq has been great.

"It's a lot of hard work, but I think we all expected that," he said. "Besides, it makes the time go faster and we know who we're doing this for."

Young men are the backbone of coalition efforts here and their commitment and dedication to a free and democratic Iraq is something that fuels the amazement and admiration of many of their commanding officers, Berner said.

"They have more responsibility at 18 and 19 years old than most grown people," he said. "History is being written by an 18-year-old with an M-16 over here. It's incredible."

## 'Cable Dogs' keep Baghdad talking

Story and photo by  
Sgt. Andrew Miller  
Task Force Baghdad

**CAMP LIBERTY** — Before they deployed to Iraq, most of 3rd Signal Company's cable platoon's Soldiers did not know what their jobs would be.

In fact, the cable team didn't even exist.

Upon arriving in theater, 1st Lt. Shawn Boles, 3rd Sig. Co. executive officer, learned he would lead a new team that would be responsible for the installation and maintenance of Task Force Baghdad's entire communications network. Many of the team's 18 Soldiers were to be working outside of their intended jobs.

The newly-formed team relied heavily on the knowledge of its four cable specialists. Eventually, through experience and collaboration with other units, they discovered the best way to get past hurdles.

Sgt. Rebecca Willard, a cable specialist, said it was difficult at first to work with Soldiers from outside of her specialty. This was especially the case when they were working with fiber optics, because such tasks are highly technical. She said her team members have since come a long way.

"They have learned a lot of what it takes to do the job and they take great pride in it," Willard said.

Boles said experience came easily to the cable team because they had endless work. The early days evolved into many late nights.

When they arrived in Iraq, much of the task force's network was not working. Sgt. 1st Class Janeen Whiteside-Harris, the cable team's platoon

sergeant, said existing cables and fiber optics lacked the organization and labels necessary for efficient troubleshooting.

"We had to pull everything out and start from scratch," Whiteside-Harris said.

In light of their mammoth mission, Boles said interaction with other organizations has been invaluable to his team's success. One unit in particular, 35th Signal Company's cable platoon, assigned to 18th Airborne Corps, has been trading experience and parts with Boles' team throughout their deployments.

The ability to trade parts reduced their wait for supplies, sometimes drastically. Reducing the wait helps get the inoperable systems working faster, thus enabling Soldiers to work on other projects.

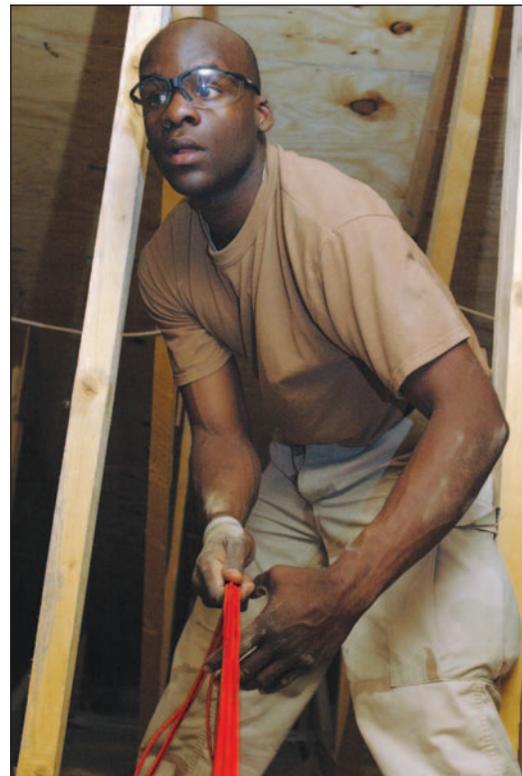
Whiteside-Harris said they also benefited from working with their civilian counterparts. Experts with civilian companies shared years of fiber optics experience and extensive equipment knowledge.

Whiteside-Harris said three Soldiers are on the brink of earning certification with The Fiber Optic Association.

"We have a team of professionals," Whiteside-Harris said, smiling. "I am so proud of them."

She said her team members have conducted independent research on some of their projects, making improvements on how they do what they do. Such research repeatedly changed the way she thinks of her job, and she began requesting new and different equipment based on the Soldiers' findings, she said.

These new techniques and equipment enabled a small cable team to turn a large, unreliable network into one that is organized,



Spc. Neville Rose, a signal support systems specialist with 3rd Signal Company, Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division, runs cables and listens as his supervisor shouts instructions through the ceiling.

operational and sustainable.

Boles said he expects all of the task force's existing buildings to be similarly wired by the end of his tour.

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# U.S. troops no longer

## Iraqi government takes over FOB Danger,

Story by Pfc. Cassandra Groce  
133rd Mobile Public  
Affairs Detachment

**TIKRIT** — The Iraqi government took control of Saddam Hussein's palace complex from U.S. forces in a historic ceremony Nov. 22 in Tikrit.

Four different U.S. Army units have used the complex as a forward operating base since 2003.

"Now it is the property of the Iraqi people," said Hamad Hamood Shekti, governor of the Salah Ad Din territory. "Tourists will be allowed to see the palaces."

Commander of 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, Col. Mark McKnight, handed the "key to the city" to Shekti during the ceremony, signifying the release of U.S. control.

"The passing of this facility is a simple ceremony that vividly demonstrates the continuing progress being made by the Iraqi government and their people," McKnight said. "Two years ago, coalition forces fought to rid this nation of an oppressive regime. Since that time, coalition forces have resided on FOB Danger, working alongside Iraqis to protect the four provinces of north central Iraq."

Although 24 other operating bases have been turned over to the people of Iraq, the Tikrit palace complex is the most significant transition. The complex is on more than 1,000 acres of land along the Tigris River. There are 136 buildings on the property, with a combined 1.5 million square feet of administrative and living space.

The province was, and will stay, "a symbol of national unity and brotherhood in Iraq," Shekti said.

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**"Now it is the property of the Iraqi people."**

Hamad Hamood Shekti  
Salah Ad Din territory governor

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"[Today], we celebrate the transfer of the presidential palaces to the patriotic Iraqi hands, signifying the many aspirations and goals of the great citizens of the Salah Ad Din province," Shekti said.

Shekti said he looks forward to Iraq's independence, when all multinational forces are able to leave Iraq, and wants to prove the people of Iraq can manage their issues independently.

"These palaces are owned by not one person anymore," he said, "and no one will be prevented from entering them in the future,



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dallas R. Walker  
**U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Dr. Zalmay Khalilzad talks to a reporter from SD TV at the transfer ceremony in Tikrit. Khalilzad was one of many distinguished guests at the ceremony.**

because now it is the property of the Iraqi people."

The palace complex was initially secured by the 4th Infantry Division in 2003 and designated as Camp Iron Horse during Operation Iraqi Freedom I. Saddam Hussein was captured near Camp Iron Horse in December 2003.

The base was redesignated FOB Danger once it came under the control of the 1st Infantry Division out of Wurzburg, Germany.

The 42nd Infantry Division, a National Guard unit based in New York, took over the FOB on Feb. 14, and in July began the process of returning the complex to the Iraqi people.

The 101st Airborne Division took authority of north central Iraq, including the palace complex, under Task Force Band of Brothers on Nov. 1.

Many Iraqi officials attended the momentous event, including Lt. Gen. Shahid Aziz, commander of the 4th Iraqi Army; Rasheed Ahmad, chairman of provincial council; and Judge Abd al Hussein Shandal, the minister of justice. U.S. Ambassador Dr. Zalmay Khalilzad and Gen. George Casey, commander of Multi-National Force – Iraq, were also in attendance.



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Cassandra Groce  
**Omer Saeed Osman directs the 4th Division, 2nd Brigade, Iraqi Army Band.**

# er in Danger

## *Saddam Hussein's former palace complex*



Deputy Governor of Salah Ad Din Province, Abdullah Hussein, talks with Gen. George W. Casey, commander of the multinational force in Iraq, before the ceremony, top. The deputy governor greets U.S. Soldiers before the ceremony, above. Hussein raises the Iraqi flag, left. (U.S. Army photos by Pfc. Cassandra Groce)

U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dallas Walker

Abdullah Hussein, deputy governor of Salah Ad Din Province, raises the Iraqi flag in a symbolic moment in history as the people of Iraq took control of Forward Operating Base Danger

# PRESENCE:

## Keeping terrorists in target

**Story and photos by  
Pfc. James Wilt  
82nd Airborne Division**

**TALL AFAR** – The sound of a lone shot defiled the peace and serenity of the cool, crisp morning air.

Reacting to the contact, a small element of Soldiers, who were in the open, made a break for cover, while other Soldiers in an overlooking position scanned the area for a shooter.

In a series of deliberate movements, both groups of Soldiers leapfrogged toward the area the attack came from in an effort to find the shooter.

Everyday, paratroopers from Company C, 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, conduct presence patrols through neighborhoods here in an effort to be seen by the local people and the local terrorists.

“It just lets people know we’re still here, we’re out patrolling the area,” said Staff Sgt. Haven Crecelius, 25, an infantryman from Denison, Iowa.

The people see the paratroopers on the street. The residents often

approach Soldiers to speak to them.

But, the terrorists also see the paratroopers on the street and more than once have attacked them.

Terrorist attacks against the paratroopers, while dangerous, play into the hands of the Soldiers.

“In our minds, it is a movement to contact. We’re trying to draw the insurgents out, so that we can take

them down,” Crecelius said.

Though the paratroopers conduct presence patrols at least twice a day, the men rarely come under fire.

“We don’t usually take contact; it’s just been a few separate times,” Crecelius said.

When the paratroopers do receive enemy fire, they react quickly.

“We move on shots. Wherever shots come from, we move to them ... we try to get to the shooter itself,” Crecelius said.

While moving through the city on foot makes the men of Company C targets, they said being dismounted from their vehicles is to their advantage.

“We can maneuver better on the ground than in vehicles.

Vehicles can get somewhere quicker and cordon off an area, but dismounts; we can maneuver, take cover and we can locate ... the shooter better than the vehicle can,” Crecelius said.

Despite being a dismounted unit, the Soldiers still rely on vehicles.

“If we get contact, we have vehicle support,” said Spc. Scott Johnson, 25, an infantryman from Albert Lea, Minn.

Vehicles are used to cordon off an area, allowing the dismounted Soldiers to search the area, Crecelius said.

Despite danger on the streets, the paratroopers of Company C are committed to the patrols.

“We have to do this because, besides informants, this is the only way we can identify exactly who is bad or an area they are operating out of,” Johnson said.

The paratroopers also realize the impact it has on the inhabitants of the city.

“As the activity has been picking up, the people see us still on the streets even though it’s been getting heated again. They know we’re not going to leave, we’re going to finish what we started,” Crecelius said.



**Using a wall for cover, paratroopers from Company C, 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, scan rooftops and radio for air cover after receiving fire from a terrorist.**

# Fighting flight line FOD

Story and photo by  
Tech. Sgt. Pamela Anderson  
332nd Air Expeditionary Wing

**BALAD AIR BASE** — Keeping the airfield at Balad Air Base free of debris is a lot of work, but members of the 332nd Expeditionary Operations Support Squadron Airfield Management Flight and 332nd Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron Pavements and Equipment Shop are up to the challenge.

“Basically, we oversee the whole process of sweeping operations,” said Tech. Sgt. Jason Kretschmer, 332nd EOSS airfield manager. “We funnel the request for sweepers to CE, then inspect afterwards to ensure the airfield is operational.”

And keeping it operational is an ongoing process with civil engineers operating the sweepers 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week.

“Seventeen people rotate responsibilities throughout the (air expeditionary force) cycle,” said Senior Master Sgt. Jeffrey Hannaford, 332nd ECES operations superintendent. “The individuals will perform sweeper operator duties for one week phases, so everyone will get the opportunity to gain experience in sweeping and air-

field operations.”

Since the Balad airfield is the second busiest single runway in the world, behind Heathrow Airport in England, the operators are acquiring plenty of experience.

There are about 15,000 sorties a month, Kretschmer said, with 280,000 total in fiscal year 2005.

The terrain and types of aircraft flying here has an impact on FOD, or foreign object damage, prevention.

“With both fixed wing and rotary aircraft here and the number of sorties each day, sweeping takes on a new role,” Hannaford said. “Since we do not have the comfort of green grass, small rocks and other debris have a tendency to find their way onto airfield surfaces from open areas of the airfield and vehicles. If everyone entering the airfield would keep their vehicles on hard surfaces this would help eliminate a majority of FOD, especially during the rainy season.”

Though the overall condition of the runway is good, certain parts of the runway have bigger FOD concerns than others, Kretschmer said. The south end of the runway takes the heaviest beating. Plans are in the works for a complete runway renovation.

In the meantime, airfield management prioritizes areas needing work and where the sweepers should focus their efforts.



Staff Sgt. Jason Putt, 332nd Expeditionary Civil Engineering Squadron, cleans off a road sweeper before turning it over to the Airman working the next shift.

“They spend a lot of time near the HASs, (hardened aircraft shelters) on the taxiways and, of course, the runway,” said Kretschmer. “Our biggest concern is the F-16 because its engines are so low to the ground and have major sucking power.”

It’s a legitimate worry since debris could make the aircraft inoperable and affect overall mission capability.

“These aircraft rely on the sweepers to pro-

vide a path that is FOD free,” Hannaford said.

The pavements and equipment personnel are doing their part to fulfill that need.

“Sweeping can be very tedious at times and it’s a job that goes unrecognized,” said Staff Sgt. Jason Putt, 332nd ECES pavements and construction equipment craftsman. “But we know what an important role it plays in the overall mission, so I’m glad to be doing it.”

## Airmen help renovate hospital

Story and photo by  
Staff Sgt. Tammie Moore  
332nd Air Expeditionary Wing

**BALAD AIR BASE** — Airmen from across the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing are revamping the Air Force Theater Hospital, creating a brighter and safer environment for patients and providers.

The 332nd Expeditionary Civil Engineering Squadron, 332nd Expeditionary Communications Squadron and the 332nd Expeditionary Medical Support Squadron have the lead roles in the project, which is designed to improve patient flow, relocate the specialty clinics, and replace the current tents, which are fire hazards.

“Without the help of the 332nd ECES, 332nd ECS and the volunteers, the success we have experienced thus far would not be possible,” said Lt. Col. Patrick Dawson, 332nd EMDSS commander and hospital administrator. “The motivation and morale of the more than 120 people helping with this project is high. There is a great amount of synergy going on here. This is teamwork at its best.”

The project, which will replace 95 percent of the hospital tents, about 35,000 square feet of tent space, began Oct. 30 and is expected to be completed by Dec. 1, if the weather remains agreeable.

“Our goal is to not lose any medical and surgical capabilities whatsoever during this move,” Dawson said. “We want to keep all of



Airman 1st Class Jeremie Wilson, 332nd Civil Engineering Squadron, prepares a concrete pad during the renovations at the Air Force Theater Hospital

our resources active to be 100 percent mission ready at all times.

Volunteers have also helped with tasks such as moving patients and medical equipment from several ICU wards during tent replacement.

“We are very appreciative of this help. The teamwork is outstanding,” Dawson said.

## Eyes are on skies in Balad

Story and photo by  
Senior Airman Bryan Franks  
332nd Air Expeditionary Wing

**BALAD AIR BASE** — A director producing a blockbuster film must know where each actor and camera is at all times to ensure the right shot.

Air traffic controllers from the 332nd Expeditionary Operations Support Squadron must be just as diligent to ensure aircraft take off and land safely at Balad.

The 332nd EOSS air traffic controllers are responsible for all moving vehicles on the airfield and aircraft in the skies around Balad, said 1st Lt. Erin Decker, 332nd EOSS airfield flight operations officer.

“The tower is one of two units responsible for all flights in and out of Balad,” Decker said. “A tower crew is made up of four members, each with different tasks to ensure traffic flows smoothly.”

The local controller is responsible for all runway and air traffic. The ground controller handles all vehicle traffic on the airfield including taxiing aircraft. The flight data controller is the point person for contact between different air traffic agencies and coordinates between local and ground controllers. The watch supervisor monitors all the communication between the three controllers, aircraft and vehicles.

The controllers are all qualified to work local, ground and flight data positions. However, in addition to monitoring commu-

nications, the watch supervisor is on hand to give the controllers a break when needed.

“Our team has to watch each other’s backs,” said Staff Sgt. Drew Spradley, 332nd EOSS watch supervisor. “A lot rides on the fact that we have to get it right every time.”

More than 500 flight operations take place each day through Balad’s tower and more than 25,000 ground operations occur a month.

“I like air traffic control; it’s always different up here,” said Senior Airman Sean Strong, 332nd EOSS air traffic controller. “Every day there is something challenging happening. Being the local controller is the most challenging and fun part of being an air traffic controller. You have to take everything you learned and put it together and try not to let the stress bother you.”

On some of the tower teams, the Australian Royal Air Force air traffic controllers work alongside the American controllers.

“I think it’s a great experience to work in a joint environment,” said Flying Officer Catherine Rubin, Australian Royal Air Force air traffic controller. “It’s a chance to learn and share different procedures and improve them.”

The controllers’ days are full of activity, working one of the busiest airfields in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

“Working in the tower really makes the days go by faster,” said Senior Airman Leslie Alonso, 332nd EOSS, air traffic controller. “I love being an air traffic controller. I wouldn’t want any other job.”

# Iraqi Army activates brigade



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matthew Wester

Iraqi Soldiers at Camp Taji stand at attention during a ceremony marking the creation of a new armored brigade. The 9th Division now has a 2nd Armored Brigade equipped with battle tanks and other armored vehicles. The division conducts security operations northwest of Baghdad.

## *Iraqi public health clinic to serve generations*

Story and photo by Denise Calabria  
Gulf Region Division  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

**BAGHDAD** — In a Najaf neighborhood, local workers are busy constructing the Hai Al Jaml'a Public Health Clinic; while Soldiers and civilians of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region South provide oversight.

To the USACE employees, the project is one of 149 Public Health Clinics under construction across Iraq. To be sure, they are hard-working, dedicated and proud of their involvement; but because of the temporary nature of their role in Iraq, their involvement is fleeting.

To the local Iraqis building the clinic the involvement will be long term. Therefore, they truly are stakeholders in the clinic.

At this site, it is evident Iraqis are planning and implementing reconstruction efforts because it is their future and they have the responsibility and capability to make it work.

Akmed, a young Iraqi mixing cement by hand, was quick to voice his opinion through a translator.

"It is very important in this area," Akmed said of the PHC. "We need this because there is only one other hospital and it is under repair."

Akmed said he feels good to take part in the building of the clinic.

Barely out of his teens, he is not yet married. He imagines one day he will be, and that his future wife and children will come to the clinic.

"I will tell my children that I was part of building it," he said.

Ali, the Iraqi safety coordinator, is also a Najaf native. He shares the same challenges of safety coordinators across Iraq, mainly because the Iraqi workers have a hard time adjusting to wearing hardhats and the right type of clothes.

The workers reached a compromise by wearing the mandatory hardhats over their "schmag;" – the checkered cloth head covering that signifies different tribal affiliations.

The safety coordinator did not smile, however, when he said that he has had to let employees go home for showing up for work in open-toed sandals.

"I was sad to do it, but I had to. Soon, they come to realize that I am doing this for their own safety," said Ali.

It was obvious that Ali was making an impact. All of the crew was wearing proper headgear and footwear when officials arrived for a surprise inspection. Being a part of this particular construction project has prepared these workers to work safer in their future employment.

The Iraqi site supervisor, Mohammed, said he is thankful for the practical experience he derives from this project.

"I also feel good because I am involved with this for my country and my city," he said of his involvement with the construction project.

Mohammed, a local, is married with two young children. His mother and father also live in the neighborhood, thereby making it possible for three generations of his family to benefit from the formation of this public health clinic.



Local Iraqi workers construct an interior wall at the Najaf Public Health Clinic.



Two-person rafting teams wait for the start of the first Camp Bucca Raft Race. More than 17 Air Force, Army and Navy teams participated in the event.

# Soldiers win first Camp Bucca Raft Race

Story and photos by  
Tech. Sgt. Mark Getsy  
386th Air Expeditionary Wing

**CAMP BUCCA** — Airmen, Soldiers and Sailors traded their military vehicles and weapons for homemade boats and paddles to take part in the first Camp Bucca Raft Race.

The Air Force-sponsored race, held on a small pond here, matched the talents and ingenuity of 17 teams vying for the top prize and camp bragging rights.

Air Force Master Sgt. John Oblinger, of the 886th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron, said the objective was for a two-person team to build a raft from any material they could find, navigate it around a small island, and return to the

finish line.

“Camp leaders wanted a different way to build morale and give people a different outlet to release energy instead of going to the gym,” Oblinger said.

Of the 17 teams, only two all-Air Force teams competed in an Army-dominated event.

Victory wasn’t in the cards for the teams in blue.

Finishing first, way ahead of the competition, was “Team Wilson,” made up of Army Staff Sgt. Fawn Armstrong and Mark Khoury. She works at the Theater Internment Facility supply squadron; he is a camp interpreter. They won more than \$100 worth of merchandise.

The best Air Force finish was by Airman 1st Class Micah Spicer and Senior Airman Cameron Riely, security forces troops. They finished sixth overall.

The second Air Force team, Staff Sgt. Ashanti Charles and Airman 1st Class Christie Swehle, also security forces troops, didn’t fare well. The team didn’t make it more than 10 yards before trouble began.

“Our technique didn’t work as well as we had hoped,” Charles said. “We just kept going around in circles.”

Part of the problem could have come from pre-race nerves. Swehle was amazed at her competition’s rafts before the race.

“I was scared [seeing the rafts],” she said. “We tried our best, but just couldn’t get [our rowing] coordinated.”

After struggling for what must have seemed like a lifetime, they decided to hang it up, jump off the raft and kick their way back to shore. The team was awarded a prize for not finishing the race and coming in last.

Both Langley Air Force Base troops said they would do it again.

“It was a blast,” Charles said. “It was great fun and a great boost in morale.”

Oblinger said this type of event builds camaraderie between the services.

“These events give (Camp Bucca troops) a chance to meet their fellow comrades outside the normal work environment,” he said. “We hope the race becomes a tradition at Camp Bucca.”



Staff Sgt. Ashanti Charles and Airman 1st Class Christie Swehle resorted to kicking their way back to shore when their boat did not finish the first-ever Camp Bucca Raft Race. The 886th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron troops made up one of 17 teams to enter the event.

# Coalition Corner

... highlighting countries serving with MNF-Iraq



## Azerbaijan

local name: *Azarbaycan Respublikasi*

The Republic of Azerbaijan is in Southwest Asia, bordering the Caspian Sea, Armenia, Georgia, Iran, Russia and Turkey. Size-wise, it is slightly smaller than Maine with a population of 7.9 million. Azerbaijani is the official language here, but some Russian and Armenian is spoken in various regions.

Azerbaijan has a republic government, and the Azerbaijani manat is its official currency. Azerbaijan has a wonderful mix of history and modern attractions. This country is believed to be one of the initial cradles of human culture; research suggests primitive man settled in this area almost two million years ago. Baku, the nation's capital, is home to an important fire temple of the Persian religion Zoroastrianism, a prevalent regional religion in older times. Ichari Sharhar, a medieval walled city also known as the Inner City, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited areas of the Middle East. The Apsheron Peninsula begins just a few miles away from Baku, and it boasts several medieval castles as well as mosques. It also is home to the famous Atesgah Fire Temple, believed to be a sacred Zoroastrian since the 6th century. The village of Qobustan features over 39 square miles of rock paintings, some dating over 10,000 years. The amazing open-aired Qobustan Museum features Neolithic rock drawings with over 4,000 inscriptions dating back 12,000 years and Latin graffiti dating back 2,000 years.

Not only does Azerbaijan have brain-stimulating attractions, its popular dishes stimulate the tastebuds. One of the most popular national foods is plov, a rice pilaf that comes in more than 100 varieties. Another favorite is piti, a savory mutton-based soup with chickpeas, onion and potato, slow-cooked to perfection. Dovgha, a yogurt and spinach-based soup with rice and meatballs, and kutab, pastries stuffed with spinach or pumpkin, are just two of many delicious Azerbaijani dishes.

Besides historic lands and delicious food, Azerbaijan is also home to world-famous people. Musa Manarov, an Azerbaijani, was the first human to stay in space for more than a year, and Faroukh Bulsara, who is better known as Freddy Mercury of the legendary rock group Queen, was born in

Tanzania to Azerbaijani parents. Azerbaijan — yet another piece of the Multi-National Force — Iraq puzzle, dedicated to rebuilding Iraq.



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## CHAPLAIN'S TALK

So close yet so far? Laugh a little.

By Lt. Cmdr.  
**John M. Hakanson**  
Multi-National Corps - Iraq  
Deputy Operations

We were inoculated for many potential illnesses when we came into theater. There is one inoculation many of us missed that was designed to keep us from getting "So-close-and-yet-so-far syndrome."

I am not sure when it was given, but I definitely missed it.

It is one of those things that comes and goes. When it does come, it seems to come at the most inopportune times.

Like the time I was in Al Hillah, with a polling station right around the corner. But the direct route was not clear, so we had to take the scenic tour. You can travel miles between forward operating bases in a short time by helicopter, and then wait for hours for the convoy to take you the last mile.

I saw one guy who really had

it bad when he was on the last section of the presentation and then realized he still had 36 slides to go.

Other times it hits in the evening, when you have checked your 'Baghdad Doughnut' and realize that you have just 60 days left in your tour. But there are holidays in there, so though it is close, it seems so far.

The syndrome plays with your head when you are trying to do the math:

**When it is especially hard to get through, is when you are all by yourself, and you spin up your laptop to watch a \$1.50 hit movie only to find out it is in an unidentifiable language subtitled in French.**

Chaplain Hakanson

thinking about desert and blink twice because you could have sworn the sign said: "31 minus 26 Flavors Ice Cream."

It is especially hard to get



Chaplain Hakanson

through when you are all by yourself, and you spin up your laptop to watch a \$1.50 hit movie, only to find out it is in an unidentifiable language subtitled in French.

What is the treatment for this syndrome? There may be

quite a few therapies, but nothing works for me like laughter. It says in Proverbs 17:22 "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit dries the bones." That must have been written not too far from here. Actually, it was.

It takes a person to decide to focus on the comical aspect of the situation rather than the solution that would make sense back home. Don't try to make sense of it. Just roll with it, like leaning into a sharp turn. It does not help to lean outward. You just get sore.

This is also a place where we can help each other, by pointing out the oddities of living here. Sometimes the process will make the time go fast.

Other times it may simply make a memory you can laugh about years from now.

This place can be very dry; don't let the dryness into your bones. Laugh a little.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### MND-CS Soldiers build asphalt road in al Hillah

**CAMPECHO** — Multinational Division-Central South Soldiers completed a new road in al Hillah.

Before the project, the area was a dirt road, which turned to mud after every rain.

The project, prepared by Salvadoran Soldiers, lasted 30 days and consisted of hardening the ground and laying 1,250 meters of asphalt.

Since the start of their mission in Iraq, the Salvadoran Soldiers completed 78 projects worth more than \$3 million. Additional projects are ongoing.

MND-CS has been actively engaged in improving the lives of Iraqis.

The Soldiers organize the reconstruction of the civilian infrastructure and provide humanitarian relief for Iraqi citizens.

During the past two years, civil military relations specialists com-

pleted 2,100 projects; including water purification plants, electrical power stations, schools, medical clinics and administrative buildings. They have helped more than 500,000 Iraqi people.

### Busy day for Iraqi, Coalition Forces

**TIKRIT** — Iraqi and U.S. forces continued the fight against terrorists operating throughout the north central region of Iraq Saturday.

Sixteen suspected terrorists, including one female, were captured in a series of unrelated events.

In an early morning cordon and search mission near Baqubah, Iraqi and U.S. Soldiers detained nine suspected terrorists and seized fuses used for detonating explosives along with several anti-aircraft artillery rounds.

Police in Samarra investigated an explosion that occurred at a gas station southeast of the city Saturday at about 11:30 a.m.

Four 155 mm artillery shells,

converted into IEDs, detonated before they could be moved from the station, killing nine suspected terrorists and injuring four others.

The four injured suspects were detained by the Samarra Police.

In the nearby city of Balad, U.S. Soldiers detained a suspect at a checkpoint after he attempted to avoid questioning.

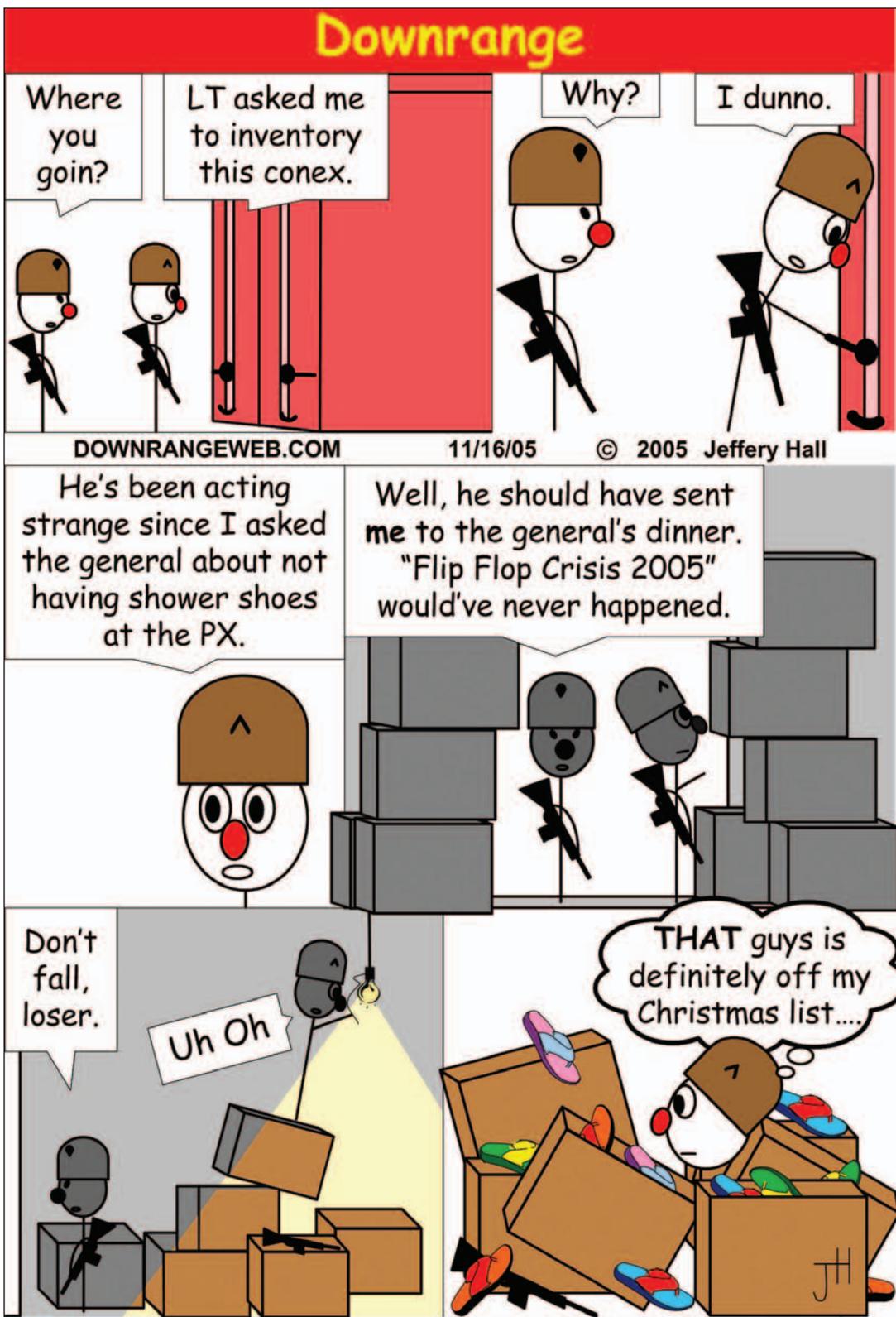
A search revealed that he was carrying more than \$3,000.

To finish off the day, U.S. troops conducted a clearing operation in Baqubah in the evening.

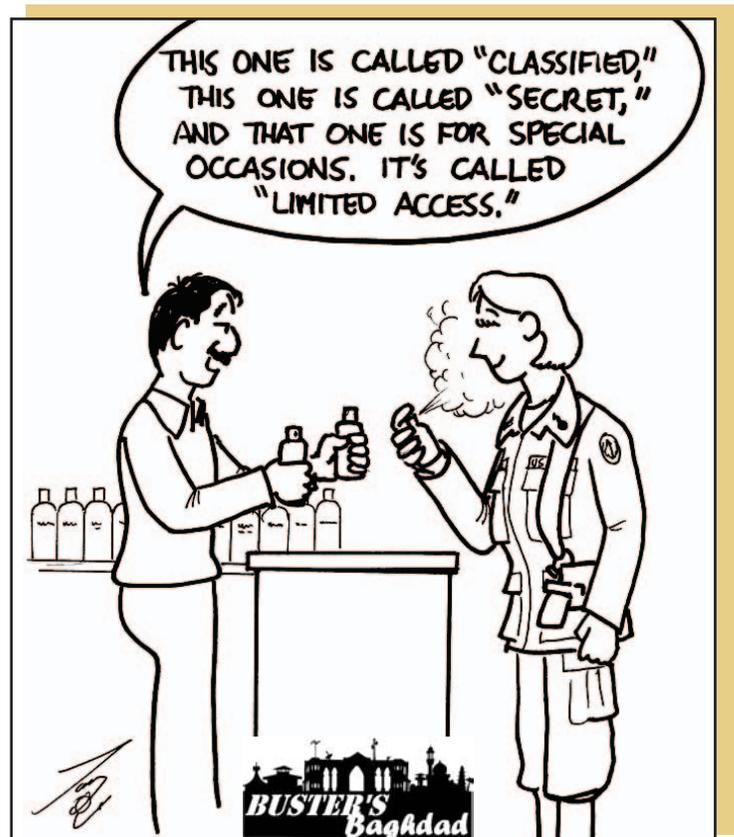
The Soldiers detained a man and a woman after discovering them with eight blocks of C-4 plastic explosive, an AK-47 with several hundred rounds, blasting caps and various other IED-making materials.

— Briefs submitted by Sgt. 1st Class David Abrams, 3rd Infantry Division public affairs office plans and operations NCO.

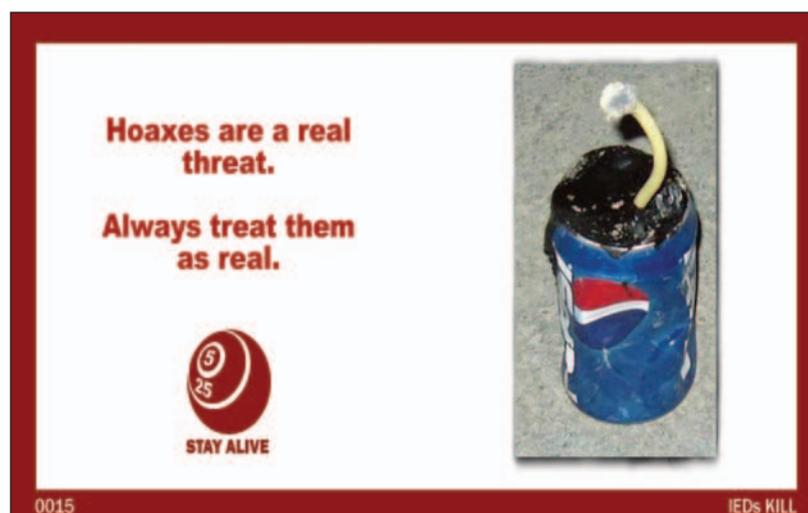
# Scimitar Slapstick



Art by Jeffery Hall



Art by Maj. James D. Crabtree



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Send to the *Scimitar* for consideration at:  
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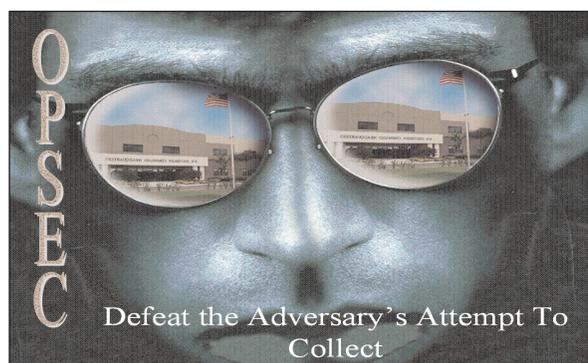
**Have you heard?**

	"Mark in the Morning" 6 - 10 a.m.	Sgt. Mark Howell
	"Retro Recon" 10 a.m. - Noon	Staff Sgt. Jamie Leake
	"Country Convoy" Noon - 2 p.m.	Staff Sgt. Jamie Leake
	"The Broadcast Bunker" 2 - 6 p.m.	Staff Sgt. CJ Sheely
	"The Landing Zone" 6 - 10 p.m.	Spc. Cody Graves

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# Runners tear through 'Turkey Trot'

Story and photos by  
Spc. Derek Del Rosario  
Task Force Baghdad

**CAMP LIBERTY** — Runners endured a brisk, chilly morning and began their Thanksgiving Day by participating in a Morale, Welfare and Recreation 5-kilometer Turkey Trot race.

The breath of runners rose through the cool air. Some runners wore jackets and gloves, while others bravely ran in shorts and T-shirts. All 75 participants finished the race that started shortly before sunrise.

The top finisher was Spc. Derrick Jackson, a mechanic in Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 612th Engineering Battalion, with a time of 17 minutes, 45

seconds. The second-place finisher completed the Turkey Trot shortly after Jackson, but was such an enthusiastic runner that he kept on going after the run, and did not attend the awards presentation afterwards. The speedy civilian contract worker was only identified as "Kurt from Washington." Third place went to 2nd Lt. Peter Euler, a platoon leader with 546th Transportation Company, who finished in 18:27.

With a time of 22:08, Master Sgt. Silvia Marchan, 3rd Infantry Division's equal opportunity noncommissioned officer in charge, took first among the female runners. Second-place finisher Capt. Sarah Knudson, 504th Military Police Battalion, trailed Marchan by a second. Third-place female was 1st Lt. Marietta Squire, Company B, 92nd Engineering Battalion, with a time of 23:18.

The three fastest men and women were awarded T-shirts; first-place finishers in both categories additionally received gift cards, while the second-place male and female finishers received food certificates.

This was Jackson's sixth race since arriving in Iraq in January. A runner in college, he said he was happy with the win, but there is still room for improvement. His races here in Iraq have helped improve his running as well as boost his morale, he added.

"I wanted to run in a low 17 (minute) time for this race, but ultimately I would like to get back to running in the 16s," Jackson said. "I think races like (the Turkey Trot) are a big morale booster for the troops. They definitely are a stress reliever for me. Participating also reminds me of home."

Marchan is an avid runner who placed first

in Camp Liberty's 4th of July and Labor Day races. Marchan said she was trailing Knudson most of the way, but was able to overcome her about half a mile before the finish.

"(Knudson) was really hauling butt the entire race, but I just stayed on pace and was able to pass her near the end," Marchan said. "I am happy with the race overall. We had a good turnout despite the (cold) weather, and it was good to run for what might be my last race (during Operation Iraqi Freedom 3)."

While there were many competitive runners participating in the Turkey Trot, some runners ran for unit morale, including 12 Soldiers from 30th Medical Brigade. "Thanksgiving is a time for family, and that's why we are all out here running together," said Maj. Jeffrey Yarvis, the brigade's civil military officer.



Master Sgt. Silvia Marchan, 3rd Infantry Division equal opportunity noncommissioned officer in Charge, sprints to the finish of the Turkey Trot.



From left, Master Sgt. Silvia Marchan, 3rd Infantry Division equal opportunity noncommissioned officer in charge, Capt. Sarah Knudson, 504th Military Police Battalion, and 1st Lt. Marietta Squire, Company B, 92nd Engineering Battalion, braved the cold and finished Morale, Welfare and Recreation's 5K Turkey Trot in first, second and third, respectfully, among women runners.

## Sickness follows Thanksgiving Day meal

Story by Spc. Rick Rzepka  
Assistant Editor

**BAGHDAD** — More than 100 personnel stationed in or around the International Zone have been seen at the Mission Medical Clinic here for food poisoning following the Thanksgiving meal.

The illness, which Dr. Curt Hofer, a State Department regional medical officer here, calls a gastrointestinal illness, causes "severe nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhea."

The exact cause of the illness is under investigation by the preventative medicine team here, said Hofer.

"All of the people who got sick ate the shrimp," said

Hofer, referring to the Thanksgiving Day meal held at the palace dining facility. "There are several variables to consider in determining what caused the infection," he said.

"I feel the DFAC does an excellent job at cleanliness. I personally visited the kitchen without notice, and it's as sterile as an operating room," said Hofer. "It's not a systemic problem."

Some victims of the illness have reported having more than 30 bowel movements in one day, said Spc. Ashely Morrison, a health care specialist at the clinic.

"It's basically your body's way of getting rid of the bad bacteria," said Morrison.

Hofer, who treated 20 people for the illness, warns of the potential damage done to the body by excessive diarrhea.

"Drink lots of water. Staying hydrated is one of the most important things when you have diarrhea.

"(Dehydration) is one of the biggest causes of diarrheal death," said Hofer, who advises people who pass more than five to six diarrheal stools a day to go to sick call.

"If someone is feeling uneasy, we will see them anytime," he said.

The most important thing someone can do to prevent this sort of illness is to wash their hands, said Hofer. Also, if the food tastes funny, don't eat it, he said.

Those who are experiencing symptoms should focus their diet on foods high in starch, while avoiding fried or greasy food. Foods such as bananas, rice, soups, and applesauce help by absorbing the bacteria, said Morrison.