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U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Walker

Iraq's future: Children and democracy converge as Iraqi youth parade in the Shula area of western Baghdad celebrating the vote and publicizing candidates on election day.

Elections set milestone for Iraqis

Story by Spc. Dan Balda
4th Brigade Combat Team

BAGHDAD — The day seemed downright festive: children marched in impromptu parades, men wore suits (on their day off no less), entire families took long walks from their homes to polling sites.

The Iraqi parliamentary elections Dec. 15 gave Iraqis a chance to showcase the pride they have in their country and the hope they have for the future.

“Nationalism is defined by the actions of the people,” said Maj. Ross Coffman, 4th Brigade Combat Team executive

officer. “It only takes a moment to see their faces as they vote, to see their pride, not only because they are voting but because they are part of something bigger. That is promising; not only for the efforts we’ve made, but also for the future of the country.”

The future seems to be the center of Coffman’s focus and for good reason.

“Today, they chose their leaders for the next four years,” Coffman said. “If someone chooses to vote as many did, they chose to vote because they believe in the future of their country. It’s another step for democracy for this country, but it also shows that Iraqis believe in their future.”

Hundreds of thousands of Baghdad residents were able to vote because of the security at polling stations provided by Iraqi Security Forces.

Coffman said the violence stayed at or below normal levels. There were a few terrorist attacks with improvised explosive devices and isolated indirect fire incidents, but otherwise election day was very safe, he said. This can be directly attributed to the ISF, who took the lead on all matters electoral.

“The ISF took the front, just as they have for the last two

PERSPECTIVES

Making the best of your situation

By Maj. Sam Morgan
46th Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron

I have made an observation over my last few months at Balad; for being at war we are spoiled rotten. Sure, I'd rather be at home spending the holidays with my family, and I'd rather not be the target of random mortar and rocket attacks. I always am discouraged when one of our fellow war fighters is killed or wounded in the line of duty, but I understand my job here is important and someone's got to do it. Why not me, and why not make the best of it?

I stopped trying to complain about conditions here. I used to write home to milk the 'woe is me' factor. I wanted to have everyone feel sorry for me, but I couldn't help feeling a little guilty. I'll certainly owe my wife when I get back. She's had her hands full since I left and has cared for everything I treasure while I focus on the job here. That's quite a responsibility and her acceptance of that challenge is heroic to me. I am spoiled to have such a wonderful wife.

My routine is now fairly standard, and as the "Groundhog Day" effect kicks in, I've noticed things I'm sure are taken for granted. I wish I could thank whoever filled and placed all the thousands of sandbags and barriers around the trailers for added protection while we sleep. The hike to the shower is a little longer than I'd like, but those new sidewalks are nice. The number of alarm clock snoozes I need to wake up determines whether or not I get a hot shower, but I still haven't had to wait in line to clean up. These are all simple things to be thankful for.

On the way to work, I stop by one of the dining facilities, and the food is terrific. Each DFAC has more choices than a \$12 Vegas buffet, some healthy, some not. By focusing on the healthier options I was able to drop a few pounds ... something I've noticed a large percentage of us have been

able to do. During my downtime there are more theaters, gyms and post exchanges than I know what to do with, and there is even an indoor pool. The computer morale drive has many movies to watch. I have access to the Internet and e-mail. No matter where I look there's a good supply of used books and magazines to read during my off time. Every now and then I take advantage of a morale call and talk with family. These are all benefits many others serving in Iraq don't have.

Thanks to the many anonymous care packages from churches and organizations back in the United State, I haven't had to buy soap, shampoo or toothpaste since I arrived. In fact, the only thing I've had to pay for is my physical training gear and haircuts.

I'm thrilled I don't have to fight my way through aggravating city traffic to and from work, an extra hour saved each day. I've also lost interest in shopping, fast food and television, hopefully habits I can keep with me. I'm excited to get back to the real world of fresh air, chores, free time and hobbies, but until then I hope to make the best of this experience. I will remember how much better we have it at Balad than others in southwest Asia.

My list could go on, and I'm sure every one of us has our own list of different things we appreciate here. One look at a Balad Top 10 list shows the humorous look at "complaints" people have. We're all in this assignment together, a team of strangers united to support a sincere effort to make the planet a better place for humanity.

Whatever your outlook, spin, or attitude is mostly depends on your character and how you interpret the situation. Some people can make some serious gourmet lemonade with the lemons life hands them; others complain if the \$20 bill you give them has wrinkles.

Take advantage of your opportunities here, stay focused on your mission, rely on your training and leave here a better person than when you arrived.

Whatever your outlook, spin, or attitude is mostly depends on your character and how you interpret the situation. Some people can make some serious gourmet lemonade with the lemons life hands them.

Scimitar Pulse

Do you think auto racing is a sport?

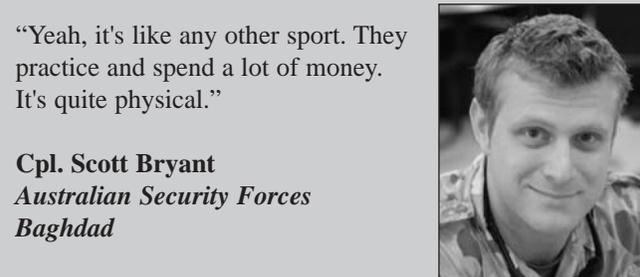
"No way! The pit crew does show some sport-like tendencies. It's more of a way of life."

Anderson Cooper
CNN journalist
Baghdad



"Sure. There are a lot of weird sports out there and people are willing to pay money for it."

Army Sgt. Melanie Walker
351st Civil Affairs Company
Baghdad



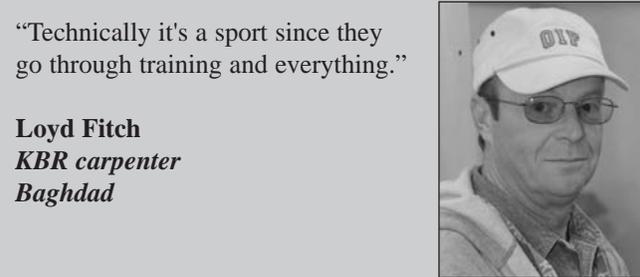
"Yeah, it's like any other sport. They practice and spend a lot of money. It's quite physical."

Cpl. Scott Bryant
Australian Security Forces
Baghdad



"Of course it is. It certainly takes a lot of skill, physical endurance, good judgment and decision making."

Army Capt. Ali Palmer
Gulf Region Division
Baghdad



"Technically it's a sport since they go through training and everything."

Loyd Fitch
KBR carpenter
Baghdad



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Traffic control points keep people in line

Story by Spc. Anna-Marie Risner
133rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

KIRKUK — On the streets of Iraq, vehicle searches and traffic stops can mean the difference between life and death.

Soldiers with 2nd Squad, 2nd Platoon, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, assisted Iraqi Army Soldiers in setting up and manning a traffic control point in Kirkuk, Iraq, Nov. 23. The point occupied a small stretch of road that saw a considerable amount of terrorist activity in the past week.

Staff Sgt. Chad Kuck, 2nd Squad leader, said Some Iraqis did not have their state-issued identification card, but most of these were Iraqi government officials or police. They were reminded to keep their state I.D. on them at all times, then sent on their way.

One Soldier said, that the show of force was just as important as checking I.D.s

"It's good to show a presence," said Pvt. Brian Brown, 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry. "We are

going to be checking."

"They're more confident when we go out with them," he said. "[In addition], when we go out, we can see their strengths and weaknesses."

Pvt. Brian Brown

One reason for the joint-mission was to continue training the Iraqi Army Soldiers, who will be mentoring and monitoring the country's fighting forces over the next year. Another reason, said Kuck, is to help instill self-reliance in the

young Iraqi military.

"They're more confident when we go out with them," he said. "[In addition], when we go out, we can see their strengths and weaknesses."

Kuck said that the Iraqi Soldiers have made drastic improvements in the years since the Screaming Eagles left from Operation Iraqi Freedom I. He said one of the biggest strides has been in the accountability of troops. The Soldiers who have stuck with the Army are here because they want to help Iraq gain its independence.

Another benefit to training with the Iraqi Soldiers falls to Coalition Forces, said Brown. While American Soldiers teach Iraqis how to be a fighting force, the Iraqi troops teach U.S. forces about their culture, which may be the biggest barrier for some, but begins to wane as both pick up words and phrases from the other.

Despite many differences, similarities between the groups abound.

"They want to help out their country and make it as peaceful as possible," Brown said, "and we're here doing the same."

Back in the saddle

Soldiers bring wheels to Iraqi man

Story by Spc. Dan Balda
4th Brigade Combat Team

BAGHDAD — The Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 184th Infantry Regiment frequently bring humanitarian aid to residents of small villages near Baghdad. The projects take different forms: food, soccer equipment, and medical aid.

Recently the Soldiers delivered something a bit out of the ordinary: an "arm-cycle." The new wheels will be used by a man who lost his legs as a teenager.

The Soldiers frequently visit the village — a small collection of thatched homes in the middle of a farming area — and informally named it "Estradaville" in honor of one of their fellow Soldiers who was murdered while on leave in California.

The battalion's Command Sgt. Maj. Edgardo Coronado struck up a friendship with the people of Estradaville during a patrol when the Iraqis offered his Soldiers hints on how to navigate the rough terrain in the area.

Mohammed, the head of the clan, struck Coronado as different. Not because he has lived without legs since he lost them in a car accident when he was 13, but because of how hard he worked without the aid of his legs.

"This guy has specially rigged a tractor so he can still plow his fields, and he is going out every day looking to do some kind of work," Coronado said. "I've got Soldiers who complain about working too hard here. I tell them to come out here and see how productive Mohammed is."

Mohammed's productivity declined when his wheelchair broke, and he was forced to rely on his nephew or his own hands to get from his house to his tractor.

Coronado decided to do something about it. He went to his motor pool in search of a mechanic willing to build something for Mohammed's needs. He found a group of people who were willing and able, and who didn't mind putting in extra hours each day on top of the normal work day at Forward Operating Base Falcon.

One Soldier was uniquely qualified to help Mohammed. Sgt. Edward Dominguez, a mechanic assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, is a mechanical designer in Irvine, Calif. He assured Coronado he and his Soldiers could do the job, they just needed the parts.

"We had no parts, no materials, so I searched the whole FOB every day looking through trash cans," Dominguez said. "We found a lot of scrap lying around the motor pool."

Once they had the beginnings of the arm-cycle, Dominguez modeled the concept on his computer in three days. Then it was time to start cutting steel and hand-shaping every part of the bike except the nuts and bolts.

The post exchange donated broken bicycles and one of Coronado's Soldiers picked through the junkyard to find every conceivable part that could be used on the project.

The arm-cycle was completed in three months, including many nights when Dominguez stayed up until midnight or later.

Although he did not collect any overtime pay, he was repaid more than he could have hoped when he accompanied the Soldiers who presented Mohammed with his new mode of transportation.

"This is the best feeling I've had in a long time," Dominguez said. "It's like a little kid on Christmas. It's hard to live in this country as it is ... he does what he can for his family, his clan. That's why I wanted to do the project for him."

For Dominguez, it was a tangible example of all the hard work the military has put into rebuilding Iraq.

"I'm just glad that we could help this guy and to see that we are really doing something here," he said. "This makes all the hard hours worthwhile."



Mohammed thanks Sgt. Edward Dominguez, the main designer of the "armcycle" for his gift. Mohammed told the mechanic and Irvine, Calif. native, "You are now my brother."

Courtesy photo

Coming together as one

Story by Sgt. Jason Mikeworth
207th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Sometimes people do get a second chance for a first impression. The 220th Transportation Company stationed at Logistical Support Area Anaconda recently arrived in theater with a group of Soldiers from a variety of backgrounds and filled with a depth of experience. Some unit members are veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Others served during Operation Enduring Freedom while some cut their teeth on Operation Joint Forge. Even the commander wears a combat patch earned during Operation Desert Storm.

The 220th, a Reserve unit from Keene, N.H., drew Soldiers from across the United States in preparation for deployment to Iraq.

"We're a cross level unit like many of the Reserve units in Iraq. We're a conglomeration of many units brought together to form a single unit," Capt. Lance Oliver, the commander of the 220th, said. "The senior NCO leadership in the company is very good. Most of them are veterans of OIF I. We built the company around their leadership experience."

Oliver said organizing the unit to meet the needs of their mission has been challenging.

"It's been a little stressful just getting started. We've had to do some reorganization in the company to create a gun truck platoon," Oliver said. "But we've been concentrating on learning our mission and 'improving our foxhole.'"

Spc. Nicholas Ducharme, a gunner with the 220th's guntruck platoon, said he feels the training is paying off.

"I think I take the training here a little more seriously than I would back in the states because you know it's that much closer," Ducharme said. "Some of the training we've done, I've started to trust a lot more of the guys."

Trusting their leadership is an act that comes easily to the platoon.

"That's one huge thing you've got to have is confidence in your leaders," Spc. Paul Watkins, a gunner and veteran of OEF, said. "A lot it is going to be learning on the fly. The preparation was great but it's still going to come down to instinct and learning on the fly."

Sgt. Jonathan Daige, a gunner and truck commander who served in OIF I said he felt confident in his leaders.

"When something comes down, we don't question it," Daige said. "We just put it together. They inform us pretty good."

Sgt. Michael Tetlow, a truck commander for the 220th, said a lot of his confidence comes from seeing the experience of other unit members being applied to the current mission.

"We've got a lot of guys here that were over here before that are on their second or third tour, so it helps out a lot."

Spc. Rick Mazza, a driver and gunner with the 220th on his second tour in Iraq, said a lot has changed since his first trip during OIF I.

"The first time, we were living in tents, sleeping in

dirt," Mazza said. "Now we've got a better quality of life."

Mazza also noted that the mission outside of the wire has changed too.

"During the war you had to worry about small arms and rocket propelled grenades," Mazza said. "Now you have to worry about sand bags on the side of the road. You know [threats are] there, and you know you have to drive by them."

"It's just part of the job though," Daige said.

Both Mazza and Daige said they're impressed with how much the supply system and available equipment has improved.

"Supplies are great now. Last time, if you needed anything you had to wait months," Daige said. "They try to get us everything new."

Mazza added, "You need it you get. For the most part, the equipment we get is awesome. It seems a little bit more prepared this time."

Oliver said the living conditions were a welcome relief compared to what he endured during the Gulf War.

"I was here in '91," Oliver said. "We didn't have bases in '91. We just stayed out under camouflage netting."

Watkins, who served with a military police unit at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, handling prisoner transport, said he feels he is seeing a bigger picture of events in Iraq here than he was seeing back in the States.

"I'd say you don't hear anything on the news [in the States] about what's really going on here," Watkins said. "Once you get here, you hear a lot more of the truth."

Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Clark, an assistant platoon sergeant with the 220th, said he thinks the unit is more than ready for the mission.

"The train up was some of the best training I've had in 20-plus years," Clark said. "It was pretty high-speed."

Clark, who transferred through two units to join the 220th for their deployment to Iraq, said the unit is excited about its mission.

Sgt. Cindy Fournier, a driver and truck commander with the 220th who served during Operation Joint Forge, said she is adjusting well to her new duty position.

"I was originally a train mechanic," she said. "I volunteered to come over. It's a little different driving a truck than a humvee, but it's not hard to figure out."

Tetlow, a former heavy equipment operator who had left the military for eight years before deciding to rejoin to support the effort to free Iraq, said the 220th sees the value of their mission to the Soldiers they support.

"Nothing happens without transportation," he noted.

Oliver agreed with Tetlow.

"That's what we do. We drive trucks and protect those who drive them," Oliver said. "Hopefully, we're providing aid and comfort to our fellow Soldiers deployed over here as well as hopefully helping with the larger picture of creating a stable, more secure Iraq."

Geocaching for fun in Iraq

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

BALAD AIR BASE — Searching for hidden treasures might seem like child's play or the stuff that pirate movies are made of. However, to a group known as geocachers it is an afternoon outing.

"The best thing about geocaching is that it encourages people to go outside and do something fun," said Staff Sgt. Robert Campbell, 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing client service administrator. "Geocaching takes you places you would not see otherwise."

Geocachers hide prize caches all over the world and share the location and global positioning satellite coordinates of their caches on the Internet, Campbell said.

Once a cache's coordinates are posted online, individuals can use a GPS receiver which will get them within the vicinity of the cache, so they can begin their search.

After locating a cache there are certain customs which should be followed.

"Caches contain a log book and your first duty is to log in your visit with a user name," Campbell said. "Once your entry is logged, you can trade out a treasure if you wish and then you should re-hide the container."

There are five active geocaches on Logistical Support Area Anaconda and Balad Air Base.

"The number fluctuates as some become inactive for various reasons," Campbell said.

"The hard part about placing a geocache here is safety," Campbell said. "A standard geocache in the states is camouflaged and hidden, so you usually have to look harder to find it."

In the United States the standard geocache is placed in an empty .50- or .30- caliber ammo container because they are watertight and will last a long time. However, due to the dangers of unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices, geocaches here must be placed in clear plastic containers.

When a geocacher finds the container, they will find prizes inside ranging in value from 50 cents to \$5.

"Prizes found in geocaches range from a deck of playing cards to hacky sacks," Campbell said. "There are also special prizes called travel bugs and geocoins, that are meant to move from cache to cache. The Geocoins are just like military challenge coins. The travel bugs are usually attached to a toy. Both have tracking numbers attached to them so the originator can keep track of where they are and where they have been."

Individuals who wish to begin geocaching can buy a GPS receiver at the West Post Exchange on Balad and should log onto www.geocaching.com.

"I began geocaching after I arrived at Balad," Tech. Sgt. Fred Gamblin, 332nd AEW safety office. "My first time out, I just went because the location caught my attention. The next time, I went along with Campbell as he was looking for a brand new cache. I have been hooked ever since."

"This is a great activity that I want to share with my family when I go back to Germany," he said. "Geocaching will take us to so many



Toy cars, trolls, cards and more can be found inside geocaches hidden around the world for treasure seekers to find.



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Iraqi port opens docks for trade

Story by **Suzanne M. Fournier**
Gulf Region Southern District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

CAMP ADDER — The Basrah Province learned that the third of three sunken wrecks was successfully removed from the navigation channel at Khor Az Zubayr Port earlier this month.

The wreck removal news was announced to the Iraqi news media at the Khor Az Zubayr Port observation tower by Iraqi Minister of Ports, Capt. Hussan M. Abdallah and Mr. Razzak, advisor to the minister of transportation for Iraq.

The three docks are used for import and export of fuel products, and the capability to moor three barges simultaneously is vital to Iraq's economic prosperity.

Oil is one of Iraq's major exports, but importing fuel products such as kerosene, gasoline, diesel and LPG, will continue until Iraq refinery facilities are able to produce enough fuel products to meet consumption demands within the country.

This latest \$2 million wreck removal is the second effort to clear the Khor Az Zubayr

Port. An earlier \$5.7 million contract raised four wrecks and removed more than 3 million cubic meters of dredged material from the navigation channels at docks 9, 10, and 11.

While dredging the docks to get an 11-meter channel depth, the three recently-raised, wrecks were discovered in the soft sediment bottom blocking dock 10 and obstructing passage to docks 9 and 11.

Without the 11-meter depth, a fuel barge can only navigate into this area of the port during high-tide water depth of 13.5 meters (41 feet).

While unloading, the barge sits on the soft sediment bottom, as the tide recedes to a depth of 7 meters (23 feet). The barge is stranded at the dock until the next high tide.

The Iraqi Port Authority can now resume their annual maintenance dredging at docks 9, 10 and 11 at Khor Az Zubayr Port to achieve 11-meter (36-foot) depth without the risk of damage to their equipment from the sunken wrecks.

The two Khor Az Zubayr Port contracts were accomplished by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Southern District using Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Funds.

School tired, students eager

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

BAGHDAD — The Najaf Industrial School serves as a vivid example that it will take much time and considerable resources to rebuild Iraq after years of neglect suffered under Saddam's rule.

U.S. funds are only a part of the overall, broader effort that, with Iraq's own enormous human and capital resources and the support of other donor nations, will continue to guide this country on the road to rehabilitation.

The school sits on a large, tree-lined campus off a main city thoroughfare. Neatly dressed teachers and students gather across the grounds and await the beginning of classes.

During a recent U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region Division site inspection, an entourage of military and civilian employees, including Col. Richard Stevens, GRD Deputy Commander, visited the site. They drew a crowd of Iraqis eager to observe them as they observed the school and toured the facility.

An Iraqi teacher who spoke English explained that the school provided a secondary education to more than 1,000 students who attended classes in shifts conducted by more than 130 teachers. The curriculum focused on electrical, mechanical, auto repairs, welding, and woodworking.

"After 25 years of neglect, this industrial school is just one of thousands of recon-

struction projects competing for U.S. reconstruction money. Those substantial funds were never meant to be anything more than a "jump start" until the resources of the Iraqi people and the rest of the world could be energized to continue the reconstruction effort," said Stevens.

Students attend the school for three years and, upon graduation, seek employment as tradesmen or continue on to university for an engineering degree.

Although the scope of work approved for the Najaf Industrial School was 100 percent complete, the facility still was far from meeting Western standards.

The original contract called for mostly electrical repairs, replacing windows, and repairing bullet holes in the walls. Compared to the school's needs, these repairs were merely a drop in the bucket.

One example was the school's lecture hall. Broken windows riddled the room and acted as more than an eyesore. They served as an easy entranceway for birds and windswept dirt.

The teacher commented on the school's condition by stating, "The school is tired."

"In a short time," said Stevens, "we have made a huge difference for the people of Iraq, but, as this school so accurately reflects, there is much more to be done."

The Najaf Industrial School, as well as countless sites throughout Iraq, requires additional work and attention. Others must step forward to put a new face on this "tired" school.



Vice President Dick Cheney greets an Iraqi Soldier from the 1st Brigade, 9th Mechanized Infantry Division from Taji on Dec. 18. Cheney made a surprise visit to Iraq as part of a six country tour of the Middle East.

Surprise! Cheney visits troops in Iraq

Story and photo by
Spc. Orlando Claffey
Scimitar Staff

AL ASAD AIR BASE — Vice President Dick Cheney made a surprise visit to Iraq on the heels of the country's historic parliamentary elections on Dec. 18, visiting with dignitaries in the morning, eating lunch with Soldiers in the afternoon, then speaking to Marines in the embattled Al Anbar Province in the evening.

It was the vice president's second trip to the country, the first coming in 1991 when, then Secretary of Defense Cheney, met with troops in southern Iraq after the liberation of Kuwait.

"What has started here in Iraq has had a tremendous impact throughout the region," said Cheney.

"The election was a great milestone. I am encouraged by the tremendous results. There was participation all across the country."

The trip was kept so secret that Iraqi President Jalal Talibani was unaware he was meeting with the Vice President until Cheney greeted him in front of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad's residence in Baghdad.

"We are proud to have our good friend here," he said. "It is a honor to have [Cheney] with us in Baghdad."

Iraq and the United States have the same enemy, said Talibani, and are both partners in the War on Terror.

The Iraqi people "suffered under the worst kind of dictatorship," but said he was grateful

the American military helped liberate Iraq.

Cheney also met with Prime Minister Ibrahim Al Jaafari, who thanked the vice president for his efforts.

"The year 2005 is the most important in Iraqi history," said Jaafari about the successful elections. "Even those who were supportive did not realize we could do it in such a short period of time."

After talking with senior military advisors, Cheney flew by Blackhawk helicopter to Taji Air Base, west of Baghdad, where he ate lunch with Iraqi and U.S. Soldiers and reviewed two brigades of the 9th Iraqi Mechanized Infantry Division.

The unit, comprised of tanks and troop carriers assembled from scratch by Iraqi engineers, secured 73 polling sites during the parliamentary elections and is just a month away from operating independently of Coalition support.

Cheney then traveled to Al Asad Air Base, the second largest air base in Iraq and staging point for many operations in the Al Anbar Province. There he spoke to Marines from the 2nd Marine Division during a rally.

"Because you are here, a rising democracy can succeed," said Cheney.

"Each one of you is helping to write a proud chapter in our nation's history. The only way to lose this fight is to quit."

The terrorists are in Iraq, he said, "It is your job to make them miserable."

This is the first stop on a tour, which will take him to Oman, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.



Staff Sgt. Joshua Carter, with the 332nd Expeditionary Communications Squadron and a mailroom volunteer, checks a package's address as he sorts through one of the mail trucks.

Airmen, volunteers spend hours sorting holiday mail

Story and photos by
Senior Airmen Bryan Franks
332nd Air Expeditionary Wing

BALAD AIR BASE — Homemade cookies, hard candy, Iowa Hawkeye sweaters and Spam all have one thing in common at Balad — they have come through the 332nd Expeditionary Communications Squadron Mail Address Office.

Senior Airman Christopher Sellers, 332nd ECS postmaster, and Airmen 1st Class Dana Goodman, 332nd ECS mail clerk, are responsible for the MAO and ensuring that all Airmen at Balad get their mail.

"We handle the packages and mail that come in and we take care of the free mail going out," Sellers said.

An aircraft comes in everyday loaded with mail for all of the Air Force and Army post offices here and on LSA Anaconda. Then the mail is separated by the different APOs at the mail control authority.

After they get all of the Air Force's mail sorted from the mass, Sellers and Goodman bring the letters and packages to the Balad MAO where they sort it according to office and squadrons. Squadron mail representatives then pick up the mail from the mailroom.

"We've been sorting through more than 7,000 pounds of mail a day since the beginning of November," Sellers

said. "We will probably get close to 1 million pounds of it through this rotation because of the holiday season."

The two Airmen work between 12 and 15 hours a day to ensure everyone gets their mail as soon as possible.

"If it wasn't for the volunteers that help us unload the trucks, we would be working a lot more hours," Sellers said.

Both Airmen volunteered to deploy to Balad as third country national escorts, but were picked to work the mailroom after their arrival. Sellers works in the finance office at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., and Goodman is an ammo troop from Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D.

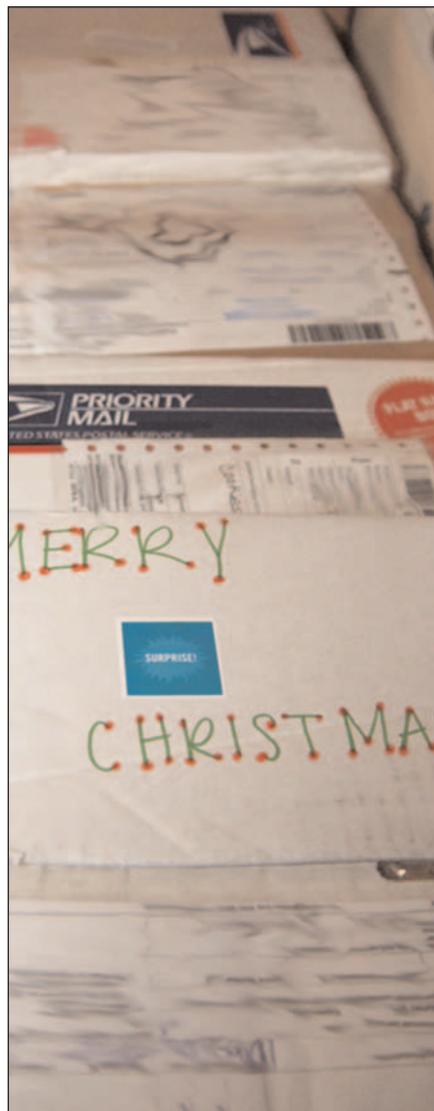
The Airmen said they enjoy the job they do here.

"I like the feeling that I am actually doing something that makes other people happy," Sellers said. "I like seeing the smile on people's faces when they're carrying the packages they got in the mail."

The importance of these Airmen's work is not overlooked by their flight commander.

"They do a great job in the mailroom," said Capt. Steven Pena, 332nd Expeditionary Communications Squadron Support Flight commander. "They help keep people connected to their family and friends back home.

That one package from home can change a bad day or week into a good one."



Airmen will sort these holiday packages.

U.S. Trucks start Iraqi vet project

Story by Col. Thomas D. Farrell
322nd Civil Affairs Brigade

BAGHDAD — Iraq's National Animal Health Program began today with a ceremony in Baghdad marking the delivery of the first contingent of a total of 49 surplus U.S. trucks to be donated to the Iraq Ministry of Agriculture.

"This plan aims to vaccinate over 17 million livestock and farm animals throughout the country, affecting over 750,000 Iraqi farmers," said Army Lt. Col. Jim Cummings. A veterinarian with the Army Reserve's 322nd Civil Affairs Brigade of Honolulu, Hawaii, Cummings helped develop the program in partnership with the Ministry's Iraqi Veterinary Service.

"This plan aims to vaccinate over 17 million livestock ..."

As the plan evolved, it became clear that the ability to get veterinary supplies and doctors around the country would be the critical link in the vaccination project. The Iraqi government had neither the vehicles nor the funds to obtain them. "We need to distribute our drugs and chemicals ... so these trucks will assist us to distribute all our drugs and chemicals to all veterinary clinics in Iraq," said Dr. Dawood M. Sharief, Iraq's director general of veterinary services.

The surplus Army trucks were made available through the "Humanitarian Assistance Program-Excess Property," which allows the U.S. government to donate materiel which is no longer needed, but still serviceable. The trucks were headed for the scrap yard. The military no longer needed them and the cost of shipping them back to the United States exceeded their value. U.S. Central Command's Humanitarian Operations Center in Kuwait saved the trucks and matched them up with an Iraqi agency in need. The Army Reserve's 1158th Transportation Company made minor repairs and arranged to move the trucks to Baghdad, where they were repainted from desert camouflage to civilian white by Iraqi crews using equipment loaned at no charge by Kellogg Brown & Root.

Col. Jose Uson, the brigade's commander, presented a certificate of ownership to Dawood, saying, "On behalf of our unit and all those involved here, we're really proud to present these vehicles to you." Army officials estimated the value of the donated trucks at about \$1.8 million.

Dawood said the animal health plan will allow Iraqi cattle breeders to control brucellosis, a huge problem in Iraq that has cost farmers and slaughterhouses over five trillion dinars (USD \$3.4 million) per year. In addition, the trucks will deliver supplies to be used in Iraq's program of vaccination and surveillance to prevent and detect outbreaks of avian influenza. Dawood estimates that more than 500,000 Iraqis raise poultry.

According to Uson, this donation has "opened the door" on using the excess property program to assist Iraq's public health agencies. "There are other humanitarian assistance supplies, both medical and other, that will be coming because of the process that they've established by getting these vehicles here.

11 million Iraqis

Insurgent attacks low and voter turnout

Story by Sgt. Matthew Wester
3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armor Division

TAJI —Iraqi Army Soldiers northwest of Baghdad voted three days before the country's national elections, freeing them for duty on Dec. 15.

Soldiers had been working to make polling sites throughout the area secure prior to election day. On Dec. 12, thousands went to the polls themselves and voted at a site in Assariya village, near Camp Taji north of Baghdad.

"I am very glad. This is good for all Iraqis, not just for us," said Pvt. Zaheer, an infantryman with 9th Iraqi Army Mechanized Division.

This is the third time in a year Iraqis have participated in democratic elections, after the success of the interim government elections in January and the Constitutional Referendum in October.

The Iraqi Soldiers formed long columns and marched to the polls. Other IA Soldiers guarded the Assariya site.

"The Iraqi Security Forces vote early so they can do their job on election day, which is primarily to provide security for the citizens of Iraq, so that they have an opportunity to vote in a safe environment," said Capt. Richard Hicks, a team leader for A Company, 490th Civil Affairs Battalion. His team works with the citizens of the area to improve infrastructure and quality of life.

"The Iraqi Security Forces are the lead element in providing this security. They are the ones people see at the polling sites," Hicks said.

"It's just a very warming experience to see democracy in action."

Capt. Richard Hicks

"It's a further demonstration of their ability to take the lead as they will guide their country following the election."

The Soldiers took charge of security during the recent referendum vote and were successful at curbing attacks

and ensuring citizens made it to the polls safely.

After voting, some troops danced and sang patriotic songs. One Soldier led his comrades in a chant extolling the virtues of their favorite candidates.

"It really means a lot to see how much enthusiasm they have," Hicks said.

"It's just a very warming experience to share that with them here and see democracy in action," he said

"I hope for democracy and security for this country," Zaheer said as he headed to the polls to cast his vote.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matthew Wester

An Iraqi Soldier displays an ink-stained finger to show that he voted in the national elections on Dec. 12 at a polling site near Taji. More than 6,000 Soldiers were expected to participate in early voting at the site. Members of Iraqi Security Forces voted early so they can provide security at other polling sites on Dec. 15.



An Iraqi man, displaying his ink-stained finger, stands in eastern Baghdad.



An Iraqi Army Soldier displays his ink-stained finger Dec. 15 in east Baghdad.

turn out to vote

out high makes for successful election



U.S. Army Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Walker

stained finger, walks with his wife and child away from a polling area in the Ameriyah area of west-



U.S. Army Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Walker

An Iraqi boy wears a patriotic banner while another behind him displays an ink-stained finger celebrating the election day at a voting area in the Shula neighborhood of western Baghdad on Dec 15.



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Teddy Wade

s patriotic pride with a flag and an ink-stained



U.S. Army photo by: Staff Sgt. Kevin Bromley

Nearly 6,000 Iraqi Army Soldiers from the 9th Iraqi Army Division head to the polls early in Taji, on the morning of Dec. 12.



U.S. Army Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Walker

An Iraqi citizen (center) and two International Election Commission officials display their ink-stained fingers outside a voting area in Abu Ghraib on Dec 15.

Iraqis display democratic digit



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. William Servinski II

U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matthew Wester

An Iraqi woman smiles at the camera showing her inkstained finger proving that she voted on Dec.15, 2005 in Baghdad.

An Iraqi man northwest of Baghdad proudly displays an ink-stained finger to show that he voted in the national elections on Dec. 15. Thousands of Iraqis turned out at the polls on election day.



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. William Servinski II

An Iraqi man smiles at the camera showing her inkstained finger proving that he voted in Baghdad.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matthew Wester

An Iraqi woman in Husseinia proudly displays an ink-stained finger proving she voted in the national elections.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Walker

Iraqi men display their inked-stained fingers outside a voting area in the Shula neighborhood of western Baghdad.



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Teddy Wade

An Iraqi man is all smiles and shows V for victory after he votes during the national elections in east Baghdad.

Iraqi baby born on election day

Story by Spc. Rick Rzepka
Scimitar Assistant Editor

BAGHDAD — During the early morning hours of parliamentary elections, a fortuitous birth took place at the 10th Combat Support Hospital here.

On the outskirts of Habbaniyah, near Fallujah and 50 miles west of Baghdad, an expectant 38-year-old mother knew she needed help. Her water had just broke and election curfew restrictions were near, forcing her to make a tough decision. She knew her midwife could only provide limited care and that if she and her baby were to survive, she would need a miracle.

“Did I save the mother and baby’s lives ... maybe,” said Col. Brian Crisp, M.D., who is the chief obstetrician/gynecologist at the hospital. “The bottom line is that you would not electively deliver a breached baby out there,” he said.

Crisp, who has delivered more than a thousand babies during his career, said the mother was breached with an abnormal presentation, meaning that the baby was coming out with her bottom down.

“She was the first democratic baby in Iraq and he saved her,” said Capt. Ron White, M.D, an anesthesiologist at the 10th CSH.

The mother came under Crisp’s and the hospital staff’s care through some quick decisions made by the Iraqi Army Soldiers, who were contacted by the mother’s mid-wife. The IA Soldiers shuttled her to a nearby forward operating base, where she was flown into Baghdad.

“It’s a sign,” said the baby’s grandmother on the child’s being born on the day of the election. The baby, whose name is Tamarra, will grow up in a safer and more secure Iraq now, she said. “I just want peace on Earth.”

“This is a very cool thing,” said Crisp. “It’s a nice change to be bringing life into the world. She’s the most spoiled baby in Baghdad right now; all the nurses are clamoring over her.”

Only two babies have been delivered at the CSH, and they were both born on Iraqi election days, symbolizing a new era in Iraqi governance.

“A beautiful baby like that can give us hope for the future in this troubled land,” said Crisp.



Col. Brian Crisp holds the baby he delivered on election day.



Spectators watch as a member of the officer team takes a run with the ball during the 4-11th FA Battalion annual Toilet Bowl football game Dec. 2.

NCOs win annual Toilet Bowl

Story and photo by Sgt. Ashly Rice
101st Sustainment Brigade

FOB QAYYARAH-WEST — The noncommissioned officers of 4th Battalion, 11th Field Artillery Regiment, triumphed by a score of 18-13 over the officers during the annual Toilet Bowl football game on Dec. 2.

“This means we have to spend yet another year in the toilet bowl,” said Lt. Col. Scott Wuestner, the battalion’s commander, and a resident of York, Pa.

If a team loses the Toilet Bowl, a toilet seat acts as a frame for the losing team’s picture for a year. But the NCOs’ third consecutive victory didn’t dampen the spirits of the officer team.

“[It] was a good game,” said officer team captain 1st Lt. Steven Stanearth. “The NCOs came better prepared and had a couple of better players this year. The NCOs did a great job.”

“NCOs lead the way!” said NCO team captain Staff Sgt. Antonio Morris, an M-198 howitzer section chief, of Tuskegee, Ala. “We are happy to win the Toilet Bowl.”

Grandma sews pillowcases for Soldiers

Story by Spc. Maria Mengrone
Task Force Baghdad

CAMP LIBERTY — A retired Florida school-teacher wants Task Force Baghdad Soldiers to have sweet dreams, or, at the very least, lay their heads on brightly-colored pillows each night.

Many people in the United States do whatever they can to help Soldiers cope with a deployment by sending care packages and letters of thanks and appreciation.

Debbie Leslie, of Clearwater, Fla., however, found a unique way of sharing her gratitude for Soldiers serving in Iraq with her handmade pillowcases.

“It’s so little for me to do, especially if it brings the thought of home and that someone is thinking of them, thanking them, and praying for their safe return,” Leslie said.

She spends her free time with a local quilt guild and through her craft finds the time and energy to send batches of pillowcases to Soldiers serving in Iraq.

The 71-year-old grandmother of two has close ties to the military. Her son is serving in the Navy.

Being the mother of a military man gives her insight into the sacrifices military personnel make each day, she said.

Being creative, Leslie uses different themes and patterns for her pillowcases.

“Most were patriotic, but she also added some patterns that would appeal to females more than males,” said Sgt. Robert J. Mayo, operational law noncommissioned officer-in-charge with Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division.

Mayo said that when the pillowcases arrived they were popular with the troops and “were gone in no time.”

“I realized there were some NASCAR fans in our group, so I asked her if she could make a couple of NASCAR pillowcases and she was more than happy to make them,” Mayo said.

Leslie has sent nearly 100 pillowcases in five separate shipments.

“Everyone I have shown the pillowcases to has loved them,” Mayo said. “A lot of Soldiers want to get more than one pillowcase.”

Aside from pillowcases, Leslie has also made a lot of friends. Many troops regularly exchange letters and e-mail with her.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Detainee Voter Turn Out Overwhelming

BAGHDAD – Nearly 90 percent of all eligible security detainees in Multi-National Forces-Iraq Theater Internment Facilities participated in the democratic vote on the Iraqi National Ballot, Thurs., Dec. 15.

MNF-I took special care to ensure that every eligible detainee who wanted to vote was afforded the opportunity. Balloting opened early in the morning and continued until all eligible detainee's passed through the polling stations.

Voting took place at Camp Bucca, Abu Ghraib and Fort Suse TIFs. Extending the vote to all eligible Iraqis is an example of how the rule of law is helping to strengthen the Iraqi society. The right to shape a free and representative democracy is not a privilege for few, but a right of all Iraqis.

Iraqi electoral commission comes of age

BAGHDAD - The Iraqi independent electoral commission, one the few in the Middle East, has proven its ability to organize three polls that have met international standards despite endemic violence in the country.

For general elections on Dec. 15, as well last Jan. 30 and a constitutional referendum on Oct. 15, the commission vetted candidates, revised electoral lists and printed and distributed leaflets and posters.

It has broad support from the United Nations and United States. Dawn Liberi of the official US relief agency USAID said her group had worked along with the UN to ensure technical support for the commission, focusing on logistics, voter information and staff training.

"The commission is fully independent of the legislative, legal and executive branches of the state and it is the only electoral authority in Iraq," stated an official website.

"The commission was set up to respect UN criteria and its members have been chosen by that body," noted Adel al-Lami, a senior member of the body.

He told AFP the body's work would continue after the vote to select 275 deputies for four-year terms.

"The commission was recognised by the constitution... it will have a role from now on between elections, revising electoral lists, organising training session for party cadres and employees and overseeing political activities."

Iraqi Army finds stockpiles of terrorist weapons

BAGHDAD — Iraqi Army Soldiers discovered multiple large weapons caches suspected of being a terrorist restocking location south of Baghdad Dec. 10.

During a routine garbage pickup and patrol, the Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division noticed a number of tank-fighting positions near their forward operating base. The Iraqi Soldiers investigated the positions and found several large weapons caches.

The caches were located on a route traveled by local residents daily. Many different munitions and explosives were discovered, some in perfect condition.

After searching one position, it was clear this was a major find and there would be more weapons caches in the area. It was no surprise when the Iraqi Soldiers searched another tank-fighting position, resulting in another cache discovery.

After completing the search of the fighting positions, the Soldiers uncovered weapons, bombs, mortars and miscellaneous explosives including 186 stripped tank rounds, six complete tank rounds, eight 120-millimeter mortars, 107 50-caliber rounds, 66 tank grenades, and 35 primers and fuses.

The Soldiers of the Iraqi Army continued to secure and search the area as they gathered all the munitions, weapons and explosives for an explosive ordnance disposal team which later destroyed the stockpile.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Matt Wester
A child waves an Iraqi flag while citizens vote in Rashadiya, Iraq on Dec. 15.



photo courtesy of MND-South
An abundance of AK-47s siezed by the Iraqi Army.

CHAPLAIN'S TALK

Celebrating Christmas

By Chaplain (Capt.) Mark Thompson
2-229th Infantry Battalion
Hilo, Hawaii



It's my hope and prayer that Christmas '05 will be one of the very best for each of us and our families. While we won't be together like many families during this Christmas, I still believe it can be one of the best ever. Like most great Christmas' though, it won't be great simply because the 25th of December arrives. There are two questions that will determine what kind of Christmas we will enjoy this year:

What is Christmas? Wow! There can be so many answers to that question! Christmas is _____. Fill in the blank. Christmas is fun, family, a party, the birth of Christ, the arrival of Santa, the time we get presents, Advent, time off from school, shopping and more. Each one of these answers has become part of the holiday season. We look forward to this time because of what Christmas is to each of us.

The what question reveals the event. And like most events in our lives, they come and go and we share a variety of feelings and memories. But this question can give misleading answers. It doesn't give the motive or purpose of the event, simply that

there is an event. And when this event passes we remember all those who could not be with us and feel disappointment. But love is not bound by the events of life. "What are you doing for Christmas?" "We are getting together with family, having a big dinner and opening presents." But why gives us the reason for our actions, and it is this reason that reveals our hearts.

Christmas is not simply an event but is an eternal purpose. It is a belief that should impact us every day and allow us to feel close to our loved ones whether in the same house or half way around the world.

Why is Christmas? This question gets us beyond the superficial events of the holidays. Christmas reaches beyond time and space. We are free from the restrictions of celebrating only at the end of December. We are able to remember and enjoy this time year round, even though we be away from our loved ones. Christmas is God's communication with humanity through the birth of His Son, Jesus. He draws us into the loving relationship with Him that was intended from the beginning of history.

John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." John describes Jesus as the Word because he was born to tell us about the Father, and how we can restore our relationship with Him. To those who believe, the Word is a source of joy and comfort in times of stress and trouble. What better encouragement is there than to be able to talk to the Savior, Jesus Christ who was born in Bethlehem.

Christmas is not simply an event but is an eternal purpose. It is a belief that should impact us every day and allow us to feel close to our loved ones whether in the same house or half way around the world. Our hearts and hopes are the same. Remember, we are connected and never alone, both with the Child King and each other.

Mahalo and Merry Christmas!

NEWS IN BRIEF

Renovation of school complete

AL-KUT - Multinational Division Central South soldiers completed a project to help Iraqi schools in Al-Kut Dec. 12.

Ukrainian soldiers specializing in civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) began renovating a school for 300 children. in November of this year in Rukhae of Al-Kut.

The project included the rehabilitation of the school building and replacement of the sanitary facilities. Some of the work included roof repair, painting the exterior and interior walls, new electrical wiring, new water and sewage pipes and air-conditioners. The classrooms have new tables, blackboards and carpets as well as computers, tv's, refrigerators and book shelves.

Children also have a new playground. The project included many other things like repair of the exterior school fence, installation of new doors, new window's and sidewalks around the building. The cost of the project was about 53,000 US dollars. The project also led the creation of 20 temporary jobs for local Iraqis.

Iraqi, U.S. Soldiers pursue terrorists

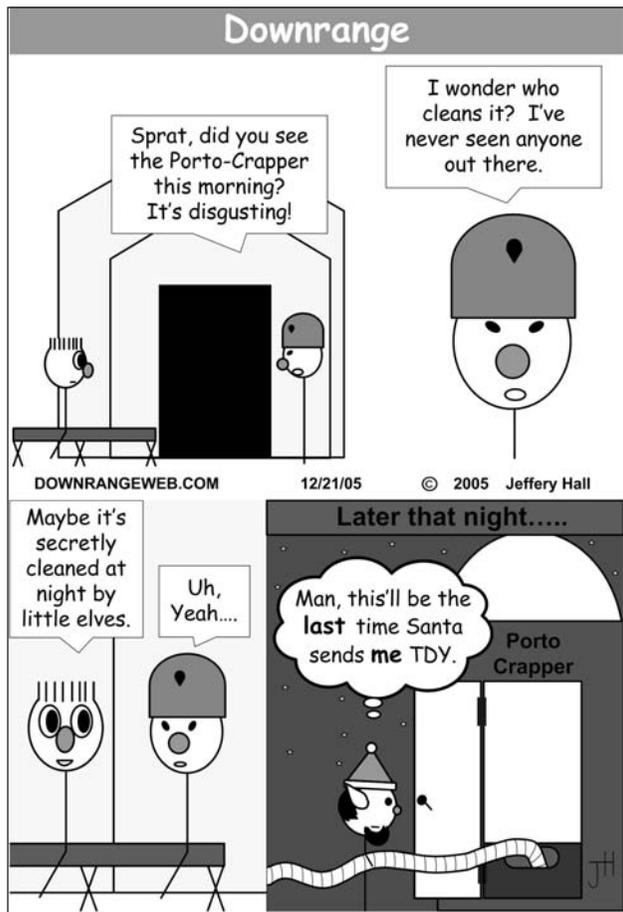
BAGHDAD – Iraqi Security Forces and Task Force Baghdad Soldiers continue to aggressively pursue terrorists in east Baghdad.

In the early-morning hours of Dec. 12, elements of 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry launched a raid to capture three suspected terrorists who were eventually detained and will be processed into the Iraqi judicial system.

Later that morning, elements of the 3rd Public Order Brigade in Salman Pak reported discovering a roadside bomb. Acting on information from a local citizen, the POB identified the device before it could be detonated. The bomb, hidden in the carcass of a dog, contained an unknown amount of explosives.

Around midday, Iraqi Army Soldiers responded to the report of a car bomb. The Iraqi Police and Iraqi Soldiers quickly secured the site and evacuated the wounded civilians to a local hospital. Iraqi Security Forces and Task Force Baghdad officials continue to encourage all Iraqi citizens to report suspicious behavior by e-mailing baghdadtips@yaho.com or calling one of the TIPS hotlines at 07901737723 or 07901737727.

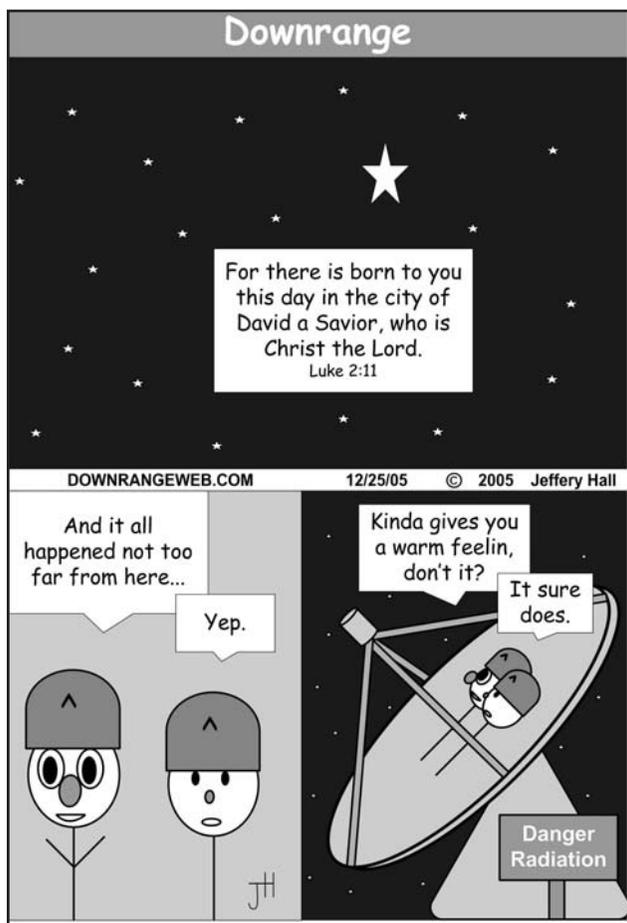
Scimitar Slapstick



Art by Jeffery Hall



Art by Maj. James D. Crabtree



Words of the Infidels

1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
13								
14						19		
		15		9				
8						20	12	
		17						
					10	11		
18			22					

DOWN

- Jabba the ____
- Iron ____
- .50 Cal nickname
- Navy butterbar
- either way
- periodic symbol for gold
- to insult
- ____ ranch
- Acronymn for German Hardware Network
- system for public broadcast
- Clooney TV show
- waitress wages

ACROSS

- going all the way
- flour and water
- ____ rally
- Iran is trying to get some
- Turner, Kennedy, Nugent
- black ball
- Turner's network
- enforces equal rights
- internal affairs
- gay alien
- Johnny ____ no evil.

Words of the Infidels solution from Dec. 16, 2005

C	I	B		P	O	O	
A	E	R	O	B	I	C	S
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E		G	E	N	X	O	
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First Responders

Soldiers teach firefighters new tricks

Story and photos by
Sgt. Rachel Brune
101st Sustainment Brigade

FOB QAYYARAH-WEST — Combat medics from Company B, 101st Brigade Troops Battalion, brought the 101st Airborne Division's combat lifesaver course, the Eagle First Responder class, to troops and firefighters on Forward Operating base Qayyarah-West on Nov. 29 through Dec. 1.

"I think everyone should take the opportunity to learn this," said Pvt. Benjamin Burdick, a Company B combat medic from Fulton, N.Y. "You'll never know when you're going to have the opportunity to save someone's life."

The class was the second Soldiers from Company B taught in theater, but the first time Burdick and fellow instructor Spc. Amber Powell, Company B combat medic, have taught the "battle-stressed" first responder course to civilians.

"Being able to work with the Soldiers is a plus," said Wes Cook, a firefighter from Lima, Ohio. As firefighters, he and his crew are trained as first responders to give medical aid.

"I would say they gave us new ways to treat wounds and injuries quickly, as well as a really swift patient assessment," said Cook.

That patient assessment, also known as a primary survey, consists of checking for bleeding, breathing and an open airway in a wounded patient.

In the care-under-fire phase, the most important goal is to gain and maintain fire superiority as well as to control life-threatening bleeding.

"This [course] is battle-stressed," said Powell, who is from Sacramento, Calif. "You're not any good to your patient if you can't achieve the mission."

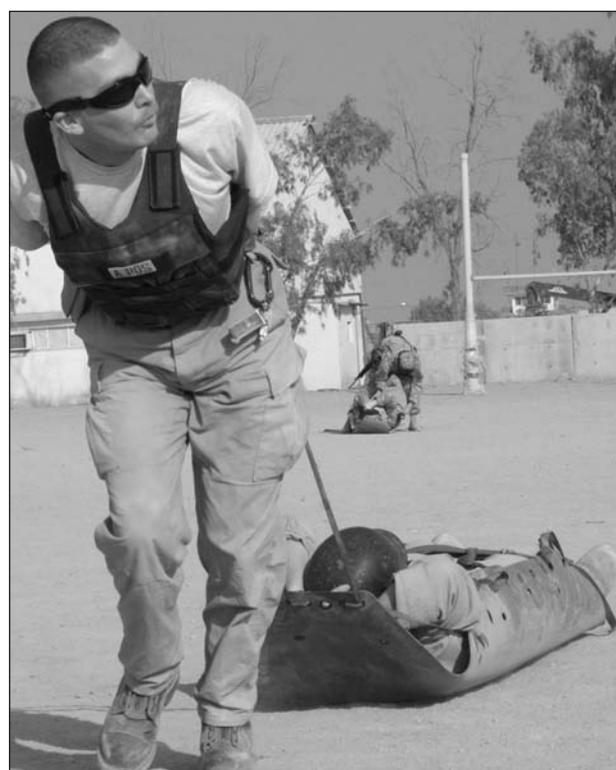
One important thing for EFR students to learn is using creativity to assess a patient, said Powell. "You won't always know what [the injury] is, but you need to find out."

Burdick and Powell also taught the class how to give fluid therapy, including inserting an intravenous catheter and closing the line with a saline lock, leaving the catheter in the patient's arm while providing an opening for the next medical worker to insert another drip.

The course is normally four days long, but instructors taught an abbre-



Martin A. Bowen, Q-West firefighter, helps Spc. Mitchell Case, HHC 101st Sustainment Brigade mechanic, strap Pfc. Randell Romero, Company A, 101st Brigade Troops Battalion JNN switch operator, onto a litter in preparation for loading him into a front line ambulance during the obstacle course portion of the Eagle First Responder course.



Cory Bouldin pulls Justin Alvarez during the obstacle course portion of the course

viated three-day version because of other missions, Burdick said.

"We're still teaching everything we taught in the rear," said Burdick. The difference between taking the

Sustainment Brigade's home station at Fort Campbell, Ky., and on deployment is the facilities available for teaching.



Spc. Mitchell Case, HHC 101st Sustainment Brigade mechanic, drags Pfc. Randell Romero, Company A, 101st Brigade Troops Battalion JNN switch operator, onto a litter during the obstacle course portion

EFR course at the 101st

One example is in the obstacle course. At Fort Campbell the medics have an actual obstacle course where they can test Soldiers' abilities to get patients off the battlefield. At Q-West, the students assembled

at the base football field.

"You have to know what to do from start to end," said Spc. Mitchell Case, HHC 101st Sustainment Brigade mechanic, from Waterloo, S.C.

Thicker than water

Soldiers collect blood, save lives

Story by Spc. Rick Rzepka
Scimitar Assistant Editor

Baghdad — In less time than it takes you to watch a pirated movie, the medical professionals at the 10th Combat Support Hospital here can help save a life anywhere in theater. In less than two hours, they are able to draw blood platelets from a donor here in Baghdad and have them delivered anywhere in Iraq, giving patients in the field a better chance of survival.

The 10th CSH utilizes a state-of-the-art technology called apheresis to get the precious blood elements to injured servicemembers in the field.

Apheresis is a unique blood donation process which allows a donor to give specific blood cells to a casualty, said Maj. Gregory A. Johnson, chief of laboratory services at the CSH. "The system is really a lifesaver. Without it we would have more battlefield deaths," he said.

Whereas most blood is donated as whole blood, it is possible through this process to donate specific elements, such as platelets. Platelets are key in helping blood coagulate and help stimulate the immune system's response to microbial assaults, said Johnson. They also release protein that kills bacteria and reduce a patient's chances of acquiring transfusion-transmitted infectious diseases.

A bag of fresh platelets looks like chicken soup and is equivalent to 6 bags of whole blood. The donation process takes longer than a whole blood donation but yields more product, which saves more lives, said Johnson.

Platelets can be given up to 24 times a year, four times more than whole blood, and unlike whole blood, platelets do not have to be type specific.

During the donation process, the platelets are separated from the red blood cells by centrifugation, and then are returned to the donor.

"When you donate blood, usually you feel drained, but not after apheresis," said Sgt. 1st Class Craig Mason, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. "With this, you actually get your



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Orlando Claffey

Spc. Joseph Sneed with the 10th Combat Support Hospital turns over blood platelets, which helps with clotting, to a operating room technician at Ibn Sina Hospital.



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Orlando Claffey

Staff Sgt. Johnny Arterson, with the 10th Combat Support Hospital checks the needle of blood donor Sgt. 1st Class Craig Mason, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, at Ibn Sina Hospital.

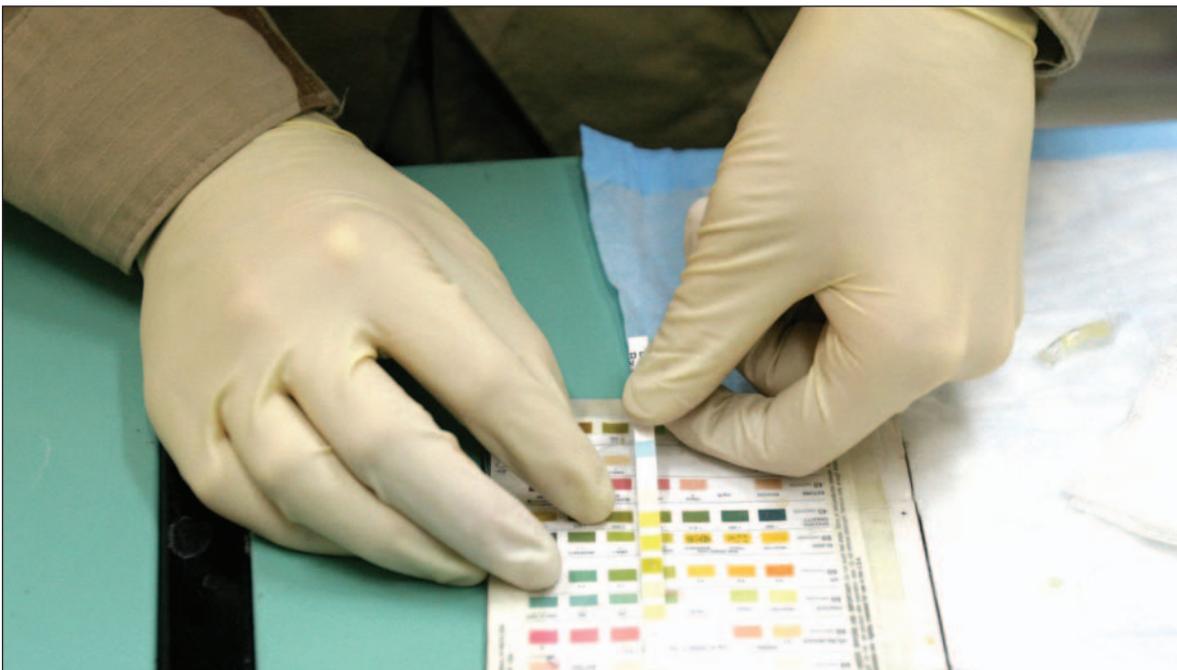


U.S. Army photo by Spc. Orlando Claffey

Bags of blood stored at Ibn Sina Hospital in Baghdad.

oxygen carrying red blood cells back."

The development of the apheresis program here has had a myriad positive effects for the CSH and servicemembers. "It's saving lives, money and space. It's a great program," said Spc. Nicole Willis, a medical lab tech at the CSH.



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Orlando Claffey

Spc. Joseph Sneed with the 10th Combat Support Hospital checks the pH level of blood platelets

In one day, the CSH issued more than 300 blood platelet products, which is more than most major trauma centers in the U.S., said Johnson.

The platelets, however, only have a shelf life of 5 days so the need for donors is high.

Participation in the platelet donation program by servicemembers and civilians is steady, but the CSH is always looking for new blood.

Anybody who wants to donate should contact Staff Sgt. Johnny Arterson at 914-822-0262 to schedule an appointment.

Iraq & Roll ...

Marine rocks in Operation Iraqi Freedom

Story and photos by
Cpl. John E. Lawson, Jr.
2nd Marine Logistics Group

CAMP TAQADDUM — “Mama told me, when I was young, come sit beside me, my only son, and listen closely to what I say ...” Lynyrd Skynyrd’s lyrics echo across the dark Taqaddum night, accompanied by the ringing tones and slight buzz of an acoustic guitar.

The source of the ballad is the smoky, dimly-lit area near the Iraqi tea shop of Camp Taqaddum. Among the U.S. servicemembers sitting in the small patch of dusty ground surrounded by garden lights and a few trees is Lance Cpl. Jeremiah K. Barr.

The fiscal clerk serving with Quick Reaction Force, Provisional Rifle Company, Headquarters and Service Battalion, 2nd Marine Logistics Group, sits alongside fellow Marines and Soldiers, strumming his guitar and singing with a lit cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth. Sometimes other guitarists, from the novice to the well-experienced, join in; sometimes there is a banjo or an acoustic bass guitar, too. But there is always Barr, and sometimes there is only Barr – Barr and his guitar.

The King, N.C., native has been playing the guitar for about seven years, he said, having taught himself after finding his father’s guitar and picking it up as a child.

“Music is a great thing,” he said. “You can express so much with music.”

While Barr plays rock ‘n roll and country music from many famous musicians, he also writes his own songs and frequently improvises. He hopes to eventually record and release an album, having already made arrangements to record with a friend after he completes his year-long tour and returns to Camp Lejeune, N.C., early next year. He also does some recording on his laptop computer.

Barr draws on his past experiences to write his material; the death of a loved one, past relationships, the distance felt by deployed servicemembers.

“I play to relieve stress, control my emotions, suppress my anger, and show how I feel,” the 21-year-old Marine said. “It gets my mind off what’s going on.”

He said he has always taken his guitar with him, wherever he goes, including a tour of duty in Japan: the source of one of his favorite guitar-



Lance Cpl. Jeremiah K. Barr sings and plays the guitar here during his spare time.



Lance Cpl. Jeremiah K. Barr strums the guitar.

related memories.

“There was this park at the bottom of a mountain on the island of Miyajima. I sat down and started to play when a bunch of [older] Japanese guys who had been to an English class asked me to play some song,” he said.

“So I played it, and the next thing I knew I had a whole crowd around me listening. They just kind of showed up.”

Guitar is Barr’s life, he said. “When I am not playing guitar I am sleeping, eating or working.”



Lance Cpl. Jeremiah K. Barr shows his callused fingertips and tattoos while taking a break from playing his guitar.