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RAIDERS DOWN RANGE



Volume 1 Issue 18

Diary of the Soldiers of the 1st Brigade Combat Team

December 15, 2005



photos by Staff Sgt. Alfred Johnson

An Iraq citizen drops his vote into the ballot box after voting for his candidate at the Al Magreb Al Arabi election polling station, Samarra, Iraq. December 15 marked the day that Iraqi citizens vote for a new free parliamentary Iraqi government.

Iraqis show up in droves to vote

1st BCT PAO
News Release

TIKRIT, IRAQ – Voters in Salah Ad Din province flocked to the polls today as nearly 92 percent of the province's 564,483 voters voted for members of Iraq's national assembly.

Approximately 520,581 voters in the province's nine cities cast votes today at the province's 221 polling places. While officials had predicted a strong voter turnout, today's numbers were an unexpected surprise.

"I am very excited," said Abdul Fattah Salim Mohammed, an interpreter with the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq based at the Salah Ad Din Provincial Joint Coordination Center in downtown Tikrit. "I am excited for the future of our new country."



An Iraq citizen takes a ballot to vote for a new free parliamentary Iraqi government at the Al Magreb Al Arabi election polling station, Samarra, Iraq.

Turnout was especially high in Samarra despite threats of violence and a mortar attack late Wednesday on one of the polling sites. More than 98 percent of registered voters went to the polls in Samarra.

"Everything went very well in Samarra," Abdul said. "Samarra is one of the hot spots in the Salah Ad Din province."

Voter turnout was more than 80 percent in October when voters approved Iraq's new constitu-

tion. The higher turnout today was attributed to a wide participation among many groups who had not voted in the nation's earlier elections this year.

The Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq is charged with overseeing the nation's election process. It will count the ballots and announce the winners who will take the 275 seats in Iraq's national assembly.

(For coverage of the Iraqi elections in Samarra turn to page 8)



Iraqi citizens show their inked index fingers demonstrating that they took part in voting for a new free parliamentary government for Iraq at the Al Magreb Al Arabi election polling station, Samarra, Iraq. More than 98 percent of registered voters went to the polls in Samarra.

Voices and Viewpoints

Gentlemen (and ladies) start your engines!

Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills
1st BCT PAO

Not too long from now the days of looking like a mushroom head, advanced combat helmet firmly in place, will be over.

The days of lugging our heavily laden individual ballistic armor vests will be gone. At least for a little while.

I can't say that I'll miss those days.

It'll be nice to climb aboard my motorcycle and go wherever I want, whenever I want, work permitting, of course.

I'll be able to get up when I want on the weekends, and do whatever I want to do without worrying about incoming, outgoing or IEDs.

Maybe, just maybe, my poor old feet and legs will stop aching from lugging this gear over rocks and uneven pavement, among all the other obstacles so common here in Iraq.

In fact, one of the best parts of the whole homecoming experience will be that I'm getting old now. I'll be turning 40 soon after we get home.

Some of you may think that's a bad thing, but I don't see it that way. With age comes a measure of wisdom.

When I was much younger, as a jun-

ior enlisted Soldier and UH-1H Huey crew chief, coming home from deployment or the field was quite the experience.

I was in Alaska with the 6th Infantry Division and we spent an inordinate amount of time in the field or somewhere else training.

When we'd come home to our barracks we'd grab our survival rucksacks and our A and B bags out of the CUCV, and stagger up the stairs to the third floor.

We'd be fighting gravity, and each other, all the way up the stairs. It was a race to see who could get to the showers first.

After breaking many land speed records for showering and getting ready to go out, we'd all pile into whatever car we had in running order and go out on the town.

Many times we'd break land speed records with that car as well.

There we'd stand, heads bobbing to the music in some bar in downtown Anchorage, our ears still highlighted with camouflage stick, with not a thought in the world but, well, you know what we were thinking.



Invariably, over the course of a training cycle, several of us in the flight platoon would do something really dumb upon returning from deployment or the field.

Sometimes the punishment for stupidity would be a black eye and a stolen gold chain, and sometimes it would be a night in jail and the loss of some rank or money.

The other day I was visited by an old friend from those days. He's stationed with a unit that has been flying out of Taji.

We spent most of the day or two he was here reminiscing about the old days and all of our crazy antics.

We both agreed that it's amazing that we somehow survived those days when we were single Soldiers.

Some of the things we did weren't even fun; they were just plain dumb.

I would ask the junior enlisted Soldiers in the brigade to take it slow and careful when we get home, knowing what I know now, but I won't waste my time. They won't listen to me.

Instead I'd like to appeal to the leaders of those Soldiers.

Don't lose track of the junior enlisted Soldiers when we return. For many of them their engines are just beginning to rev up. They're on the starting line and they're ready to begin breaking whatever land speed records they can.

When we get back plenty of Soldiers will do something dumb and the punishment will range from mild embarrassment to death.

They'll be hopping on their newly purchased motorcycles without training and blasting down the road going wherever they want to, whenever they want to (sometimes work not permitting). They'll be racing each other to the clubs along the riverfront in Savannah. There will be drinking and driving, and other madness upon our return.

Looking at the big picture that stuff is almost unavoidable.

The number of Soldiers getting into trouble, though, can be below expectations as long as the brigade's leaders use their considerable energy and experience to help the situation.

It's something to think about, leaders. Remember all the stupid things you did when you were younger and help your Soldiers avoid making the same mistakes.

Chaplain's Corner

Soldiers' expectations never change

Ch. (Maj.) Mark Nordstrom
1st BCT Chaplain

Nearly 2000 years ago a young Roman soldier wrote home, asking his father's permission to marry his girlfriend.

In another letter, he asked for boots and socks to keep his feet warm during a cold winter. And he told how he must violently put down those who revolt and riot in Alexandria, Egypt.

Tiberianus, who lived in Roman Egypt, was just another soldier who served in a far off country and wanted to go home. When it comes to soldiering and bearing the hardships of separation, nothing has changed much, really, in 2,000 years.

Letters like these are a fascinating link to soldiers in the past, and the discovery of these letters serves to remind us that all soldiers and their families have shared similar hardships, struggles and uncertainties. We are really not so different from each other.



Soldiers have always borne these hardships and longed to go home - to marry, to rejoin family members, to do the normal things that normal people get to do.

Soon you will be able to do all these things again, and more. That has been your expectation for almost a year now, and soon you will be home.

Expectations about what reunion will be like, questions about how much family and friends have changed, and uncertainties about how you will fit in - these issues and more are common to every returning soldier and waiting family.

What is also common is that most soldiers do very well on returning home. There really is no place like home. If you've listened to the redeployment briefings and borrow a little bit of wisdom from those who've done this before, you'll do well.

After block leave, there are some retreat opportunities for you to strengthen your marriage and family and for single soldiers to get away, have some fun and learn a few things about establishing long term, successful relationships. I'd encourage you to talk to your Battalion Chaplains about these retreat opportunities and make plans to attend.

If you find yourself struggling with reunion, having difficulties adjusting, please talk to your chaplain. He's a confidential source of advice and patient counsel. What's more, he's "been there, done that, got the T-shirt" so he can speak to you about how he gets through this, without you feeling like you are the only one to go through these things. You can trust him.

I look forward to seeing many of you without body armor or ACHs - back in the world of soft caps, weekends, holidays with family - all the good things we've fought for and now go home to enjoy. God bless you and thank you for your service.

See you at Ft. Stewart!

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New helmet saves Soldier's life

Staff Sgt. Mark Wojciechowski
133rd MPAD

TIKRIT, IRAQ (December 6, 2005) - For many Soldiers, the Kevlar helmet is a necessary evil. It can be cumbersome when in the dining facility trying to handle a tray of food and it can cause headaches and tension in the neck when worn on lengthy missions.

Sgt. Shawn Snyder of 3rd Infantry Division's 2-7 Inf. Scout Platoon is one Soldier who will never complain about wearing his helmet again and with good reason: it saved his life.

Snyder was a Humvee gunner escorting an Explosive Ordnance Disposal detail securing explosives found in a building.

"What we do is block off each end of the street so that they [EOD] can go in and pick the stuff up," Snyder said.

Snyder was standing up in the turret scanning his sector and waving off traffic for about 15 minutes when it happened. He recalled hearing a shot and feeling "a little jerk."

Snyder quickly called out to his driver and team commander (TC) to ask who was firing. Then he saw the Kevlar particles flying around so he jumped down in the vehicle and wondered if he was dying.

Snyder removed his Kevlar and felt around on his head finding no blood. The round, most likely a 7.62 mm from a sniper rifle, ricocheted off the upper left side of the helmet, shredding the outside and slightly cracking the inside.

"I didn't get a concussion, didn't even get a headache," Snyder said.

Snyder is married with a 13-month-old boy. When the 25-year-old Snyder told his wife what had happened, "she took it as best as a wife could, knowing a round almost killed her husband a month before he got home," he said.

He will get to keep the helmet when he returns to Fort Stewart Ga., in less than a month as a memento of an event that will never be forgotten.



Staff Sgt. Mark Wojciechowski

Sgt. Shawn Snyder shows off the helmet that saved his life. Snyder was a gunner on a Humvee during an Explosive Ordnance Disposal detail when he was hit by a sniper. The 7.62 mm bullet ricocheted off his helmet leaving Snyder uninjured.

A/2-7 hands out school supplies

Staff Sgt. Mark Wojciechowski
133rd MPAD

TIKRIT, IRAQ - The Soldiers of 3rd Infantry Division's 3rd Platoon, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment were given a slightly different mission than they are typically accustomed to.

The usual mission of Alpha Company, also known as "Rage," is to sweep the streets hunting for insurgents and conducting patrols to make the area safe for the people of Tikrit.

Today, however, much needed school supplies, toys and games were delivered to the children of Abua Jeel school.

The excited children between the ages of 6 to 12 smiled from ear to ear as they stood in formation waiting for their gifts from the Soldiers.

The supplies were donated by a Girl Scout troop from Westchester, Pa., earlier in the summer months. A letter was sent back to the states requesting these essential supplies for schools in this area.

"The children of Iraq have gone through a lot, and for us to be able to do a little bit for them means a lot to us," said Capt. Scott Mras, executive officer, Company D, 3rd Forward Support Battalion, 2-7 Inf. and coordinator of the Girl Scout donations.

The children eagerly filed past the Soldiers and received a toy, a pack of markers and a notebook.

When the final box of notebooks was handed to one of the teachers, the Rage Soldiers loaded up and traveled back through the busy streets of Tikrit to Forward Operating Base Remagen.

Gaining the confidence of the Iraqi people with goodwill missions such as these are critical in the withdrawal of Coalition Forces.

"When we go out and hand out presents and supplies to kids and families," said Staff Sgt. Howard Googe, the convoy commander of the mission, and Matter, Ga., native. "We get a chance to intermingle, they learn a little about us and we learn a little about them."



Cpt. Scott Mras hands out school supplies to an Iraqi boy near Tikrit early in December.

Staff Sgt. Mark Wojciechowski

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

Confirm : the device

Clear : the area

Call : EOD

Cordon : the perimeter

Control : site access



A last look...



photos by Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.

Two Iraqi women walk down the street in Ash Sharqat near Baiji. The clothing worn by women in Iraq range from contemporary fashion to traditional wear, depending on many factors including religion, tribal affiliation, economic situation, and geographical location.

This is the last edition of *Raiders Down Range*, at least for Operation Iraqi Freedom III, and so the last edition of a little photo section we like to call "A look at our home in Iraq." In this edition we've compiled some photos we've featured in the past, and a couple we didn't, as a last goodbye to what was 1st Brigade Combat Team's "home" for a year.



An Iraqi boy gives the thumbs up in an Ash Sharqat market.



A musician plays a sitar while taking a break from his keyboard at the opening of a community center in Al Alam.



A Soldier at the former FOB Dagger looks out over the Tigris River.



A farmer drives his tractor down a dirt road with the sun rising behind him on a farm near Al Butoma, north of Tikrit.



Three Iraqi children play in a waiting room at the governmental building in Samarra while their parents speak with 3-69 AR Soldiers.



Staff Sgt. James Currence, 2nd Platoon, Company D, 2-7 Infantry, searches a car at a check point near the city of Tikrit early in December. photos by Spc. Lee Elder

'DIRTY DOZEN' DELIVERS

Calling themselves the 'Dirty Dozen,' one platoon rounds out a deployment filled with diversity

Spc. Lee Elder
133rd MPAD

MUKAYSHIFAH, IRAQ – They're known as "The Dirty Dozen."

It was a name coined by members of 2nd Platoon, Company D, 2-7 Infantry, 3rd Infantry Division, to describe themselves. It's been a moniker they have carried through-

out an eventful deployment.

"We were trying to think up a nickname for this platoon," said Staff Sgt. James Currence, platoon sergeant. "Every time, we come out of this sector, there's always 12 of us. With the different array of people we have in the platoon, it fits us perfectly."

A defining moment for the platoon

came on Aug. 12th when an improvised explosive device (IED) exploded on a nearby road. The blast ended the life of platoon's leader, 1st Lt. David Giamio.

"It was our second death in our platoon," Currence said. "When the LT got hit, it broke us down pretty hard."

Also wounded in the blast was Pfc. Miguel Jaco, who was sitting behind Giamio when the blast occurred and still bears scars on his neck from the shrapnel.

For Jaco, the blast left a lot more than scars. He said he felt the loss personally.

"I grew up without a father," Jaco said. "(Giamio) and Sgt. (George) Cruse were the closest thing to a father that I've ever had."

Jaco has recovered from his wounds. He now serves as one of the unit's gunners, but remembers the incident clearly.

"It's one of those things you will never forget when someone passes away in front of you," Jaco said. "It makes you realize this is a

war.

"You take it personally because you know where this was planted that it was meant for somebody in our company."

The unit's noncommissioned officer leadership then tried to rally the Soldiers. It was a daunting task.

"The NCOs we have try to keep the guys in with them to make them feel like a family," Currence said. "We are pretty tight. We've been through a lot together."

The platoon's tour here is rapidly coming to a close. This poses a new challenge.

"I don't want them to get complacent these last couple of weeks we are here," Currence said. "You can see we've got two weeks and I don't want them to start thinking about home when we've still got a mission to complete here."

So far, Currence said Soldiers are responding to the task before them. He sees no let up in their performance.

"My guys are pretty good about keeping their heads in the game, but I keep reiterating every few days to them so I can refresh their memories about it," Currence said. "I want to get them back home to their families."



Staff Sgt. James Currence, 2nd Platoon, Company D, 2-7 Inf., searches the trunk of a car at a check point near Tikrit in early December.

Iraqi Police resurgence equals economic boom near Tikrit

Spc. Lee Elder
133rd MPAD

MUKAYSHIFAH, IRAQ – The resurgence of the Iraqi Police and a growing Iraqi Army presence have led to an economic resurgence in this community near Tikrit.

Standing on the roof of a rebuilt police station, Capt. Dene Leonard, company commander of Company D, 2-7 Infantry, 3rd Infantry Division, looks over his area of responsibility.

"I've got 14 new stores going in over there," Leonard said. "I've got 120 being occupied and I've got over 30 being built. The security here is important and it plays a major role in that."

Police must remain vigilant. Their station is often the target of would-be drive-by snipers even though armed guards are constantly stationed on the station roof.

U.S. forces give the force logistical support as well. Lights are being installed on the station roof and new radios will allow the station to remain in communication with officers who are patrolling in the community.

The local police are more confident in their abilities.

"When we first got here, you had a hard time getting them to come out of their building," said Staff Sgt. James Currence, who serves as 2nd Platoon's platoon sergeant. "Now, they are out conducting patrols all the time and people call them if they see anything suspicious."

The force will continue to be trained by other Iraqi and U.S. organizations. "The training process is something that is constantly happening," Leonard said. "They are constantly training."

"It never ends," Leonard said. "You just keep up with who they've got."



Sgt. Miguel Arellano, Co. D, 2-7 Infantry, assists an Iraqi Police officer with mounting a rifle atop the police station here. The presence of Iraqi Police has meant a boom in the economy of Mukayshifah where new stores and businesses are being built. Spc. Lee Elder

Raider Soldier queen of the odd jobs

Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills
1st BCT PAO

Flexibility is the key to being a Soldier in today's Army, especially for non-commissioned officers.

For Sgt. Sherrie Cooper, a fuel handler with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, being flexible is her main occupation.

If you ask Cooper what she does for a living the answer isn't as simple as it would seem. She holds, Cooper said, "odd jobs" around the company.

The list of odd jobs is long: HHC equal opportunity small group facilitator, safety NCO, weight control NCO for females, hazardous material transportation NCO, combat life saver, mail handler and all around helper in the motor pool. While the 1st BCT was headquartered at FOB Dagger, a small palace just south of



Sgt. Sherrie Cooper counts out change for a 1st BCT, 3rd ID customer as manager of the tiny PX on the former Forward Operating Base Dagger near Tikrit.

Tikrit that was recently turned over to the Iraqi Army, Cooper ran the tiny Post Exchange as well. Occasionally she'll handle fuel, said Cooper.

"I refuel the refuel van, keep the (tanker pump unit) full, and we go to bulk fuel to pick up fuel," said Cooper. But day to day there isn't much to do, said Cooper, hence the odd jobs.

"There's not much of a mission for fuelers here," said Sgt. Frank King, HHC 1st BCT motor NCO. King said Cooper is a big help in the motor pool because she takes care of a lot of the extraneous things, which frees up he and his mechanics to turn wrenches.

Cooper also sees her roll there as moral support. "They (the Soldiers in the motor pool) work really hard," said Cooper, "and I try to be the one who brightens their day."

Cooper's sense of humor is something that sets her apart.

"She's very funny," said Ray Williams, DA Civilian and safety officer for 1st BCT. "She has an honest way of speaking that is kind of shocking because she'll say something outrageous in a normal tone and it'll stop you."

"She's hilarious," said Sgt. 1st Class David Hoag, 1st BCT Air Defense, Airspace Management Cell non-commissioned officer-in-charge. Hoag should know. Recently he fractured his right foot in an accident and Cooper has become his nurse of sorts.

Cooper has made sure Hoag gets to breakfast, lunch and dinner each day while he recuperates. "She won't let me sleep," joked Hoag.

Williams said Cooper's sense of humor doesn't take away from the fact that she likes to stay busy.

"I think the thing with her is that she seems to be trying really



Sgt. Sherrie Cooper, HHC, 1 BCT, 3 ID (right) works on "injured" Spc. Jermetta Hannor, 1-3 BTB, during a mass casualty evacuation exercise.

hard to improve herself all the time," said Williams.

Always industrious, Cooper has two degrees, medical assistant and medical transcriptionist, from the Atlanta College of Medical and Dental Careers. Cooper joined the military in Atlanta at the age of 26, she said, to see the world.

"When I joined the military I was trying to get away," she said. Since then she's gotten away to Korea, Fort Lewis, Wa., Fort Drum, NY, and twice to Iraq.

During Operation Iraqi Freedom I Cooper was with the 528th Quartermaster Battalion from Fort Lewis from April 2003 to April 2004. The 528th QM worked mainly out of Logistic Support Area Anaconda near Balad during OIF I where Cooper helped set up the Fuel Supply System Point, a huge field of fuel points. The FSSP, Cooper said, serviced the endless trains of resupply convoys during OIF I as it still does.

Cooper said the difference between OIF I and III has been significant.

"During OIF I, I really had to do my (military occupational specialty),"

Cooper said.

On top of that during OIF I Cooper was stuck on LSA Anaconda. With her current unit, 1st BCT, 3rd ID, she spent much of her time on the tiny FOB Dagger near Tikrit.

There Cooper had to pull guard duty and go on combat patrols outside the wire, a big difference from the life on LSA Anaconda.

Because of that Cooper said that the leadership in her current unit has been much different than her old unit of OIF I.

"With this unit you have to soldier harder," Cooper said. Despite the differences Cooper said she really can't complain. "Both have been good deployments. So far this has been a good deployment."

Cooper said she fully expects to come back to Iraq in the future. "I feel like it'll be a lot better next time," she said. "I'll have a lot more knowledge next time."

Though she expects the next deployment to Iraq to be a good one, it won't be easy because, Cooper said, "There's always something you'll have to overcome."

Paladins fire from Speicher for first time

Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills
1st BCT PAO

FOB SPEICHER, Iraq - Glory's Guns in the form of 1st Platoon, Battery A, are making their presence known at Forward Operating Base Speicher near Tikrit. The platoon, from 1st Battalion, 41st Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, were stationed at FOB Summerall near Bayji.

The move was made soon after the 101st Airborne Division's 3rd Brigade took over the Bayji sector, said Cpt. J.T. Townsend, assistant fire support officer, 1st BCT.

"They were brought down (to FOB Speicher) because of the increased indirect fire threat," said Townsend. "Once Danger closed there was a higher indirect fire threat (to the Division Headquarters on Speicher)."

Their coverage of Bayji since their move to Speicher from Summerall has not changed significantly, said Townsend.

1st Platoon was busy during their tenure at Summerall. While there, Townsend said, they shot the second highest number of rounds in the 1st BCT area of operations. They were also one of only two platoons to conduct artillery raids.

During one raid, said Staff Sgt. Donnie Neal, a Memphis, Tenn. native and the 4th Section chief, the platoon rolled outside the gates of Summerall to the outskirts of Bayji.

"It was fast and furious," said Neal. "We pulled in, shot and then left."

Besides the occasional artillery raid Neal admitted



Maj. Richard Bartosuk

A 1st Platoon, Battery A M-109A6 Paladin is engulfed in dust, sand and smoke immediately after firing recently on Forward Operating Base Speicher.

that manning the gun day in and day out "gets kind of old."

"(Operation Iraqi Freedom I) was different," said Neal. They moved fast and reacted to where the enemy was, he said. "OIF III it was more planned out."

1st Lt. William Dennison, 1st Platoon platoon

leader, said living at Summerall wasn't bad at all. "We were totally detached (from our battalion)," said Dennison. "It was just me and the platoon sergeant. We were on our own."

"(The platoon's deployment to Iraq) was what we expected," he said, "except maybe not to shoot so much."

1-33rd CAV joins 1st BCT in Samarra

Spc. Lee Elder
133rd MPAD

CAMP OLSON, SAMARRA, Iraq – It's been a year full of transitions for Soldiers with Troop C, 1-33rd Cavalry Squadron.

The former members of Company C, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, made the switch from a light, air assault company into its new role as the dismounted reconnaissance troop for the 3rd Brigade Combat Team after it returned from the 101st Airborne Division's first tour of Iraq in 2003. The transition was complete just in time for the unit to begin training for its deployment here.

The unit's commander, Capt. Sean McGee, said his Soldiers have put their new skills to good use in Iraq.

"It gives us a little edge," McGee said. "Having both the light infantry and reconnaissance training gives us an extra tool in the kit bag."

The new skills learned in the transition have come in handy when the unit began its current mission last month patrolling in and around Samarra, a city of more than 100,000 that lies on the banks of the Tigris River in northern Iraq. Unit Soldiers conduct both foot and vehicle patrols of the area daily in what has proven to be one of the most active sectors in this region.

In its new role, the company is given the task of providing reconnaissance, surveillance and target



Pvt. 2 Garrett Haverkost, a soldier with Troop C, 1-33 Cavalry, takes aim at a target downrange during a qualification range here.

acquisition for the 187th Infantry Regiment – known as "the Rakkasans." This places them 50 to 100 kilometers in front of the division forces on the conventional battlefield.

Iraq is hardly a conventional battlefield. Thus, the unit has now somewhat reverted to a conventional light infantry role of urban fighting, foot and vehicle patrols.

One of the unit's mainstays is Sgt. 1st Class Mario Terenas. He has served with the unit for three years and was there when it participated in the first Operation Iraqi Freedom rotation in 2003 and took part in its transition.

Terenas said the transition brought many new soldiers and different military skills into what had been a unit solely made up of infantry soldiers.

"It took us a little bit of time to get used to it," Terenas said. "There were different (military occupational skills) and shifting of our job to a reconnaissance force from being a strike force."

Spc. Rocky O'Neill III is a two-year unit veteran who also went through the transition and serves as a Squad Automatic Weapon gunner in the company's 3rd Platoon.

"We can pretty much go anywhere and do anything now," O'Neill said. "We can handle all kinds of weapons and do what needs to be done."

The unit was one of the first 101st elements to cross over into Iraq on its current deployment, McGee said.

Unit members conduct daily foot and vehicle patrols. Their missions average 24-30 hours at a time and they operate during both daytime and night time.

The threat of constant contact by insurgents and local tribal factions force the unit members to keep sharp.



Pfc. Ryan Garner, Spc. Ryan Penna-Dailey and Sgt. Aaron Fitch (left to right) take a break from training. All three are members of Troop C, 1-33 Cavalry.

"It's pretty crazy sometimes," said Spc. Derek Karl, a SAW gunner with 3rd Platoon. "It's always a reality check."

Dealing with the prospect of enemy fire is when the training kicks in, Karl said.

"Whenever we first took small arms fire, we didn't freak out," he said. "We got organized and then took off after them."

Karl has never laid eyes on those firing at him and his fellow Soldiers.

"We never see who is shooting at us," Karl said. "They take a couple of shots, and then they are gone."

Besides their conventional mission, the unit is also assisting other Coalition Forces in the area working with local police to secure Samarra.

A unit in transition is helping Iraqis make a transition of their own.

"We're working to turn control of the city back to the Iraqis," McGee said. "We know this is our ticket out."

"I don't want to have to have to be here for OIF 14 or 15."

Mechanic keeps PB Olson running

Spc. Lee Elder
133rd MPAD

CAMP OLSON, Samarra, Iraq – If something mechanical breaks at this base camp in northern Iraq, chances are the first person who gets the call is a lanky Michigan native who serves as a mechanic here.

Spc. Jonathan Nohel is, in fact, the only mechanic at this base located in downtown Samarra along the banks of the Tigris River that houses the 101st Airborne Division's C Troop, 1-33 Cavalry. While he is trained to repair light-wheeled vehicles, like the Army's Humvees, Nohel often finds himself working on the unit's 5-ton trucks, gen-

erators and air conditioning systems.

"They say if you are a mechanic, you can fix anything," Nohel said.

An Owosso, Mich., native, Nohel, 21, has even toiled with plumbing and electrical outlets in the facility housing the unit soldiers. The facility was once a government-owned hotel.

The company has two mechanics, but only one on site at a time. They rotate back and forth between Camp Olson and nearby Forward Operating Base Brassfield-Mora. The mechanic on site does whatever repairs he can while higher maintenance is done at Brassfield-Mora, according to Nohel's commander, Capt. Sean McGee.

For his part, Nohel likes the arrange-

ment.

"I get to set my own hours which is nice," Nohel said. "Plus, I don't have any extra duties."

There is always plenty to do with his wide range of responsibilities caring for the vehicles and other key systems that support the mission at Camp Olson. The infantry and Cavalry Soldiers here patrol the area in and around Samarra, a hot spot in northern Iraq for insurgent activity.

This afternoon finds Nohel tearing into a large wooden crate using a crowbar. He removes a new transmission and prepares to install it into a Humvee.

As if to underscore the importance of the task, the vehicle's driver drops by to check on its status. He misses "his" vehicle and is anxious to get it rolling again.

Keeping the unit's fleet of vehicles running is a challenge, Nohel said. The conditions in Iraq – the blistering heat,

damaged or non-existent roads and the threat of small arms fire and explosives – heighten the task.

Getting the needed part is often a challenge unto itself.

"You have to beg, borrow and steal sometimes," Nohel said. "Getting supplies can take three or four days here."

A key element with the unit's extra-armed humvees is the heating and air-conditioning systems. During Iraq's summer days – when temperatures soar to more than 130 degrees – the air-conditioning system must function.

"In the summer, it deadlines the vehicle if the air-conditioning doesn't work," Nohel said. "If that happens, you can't use them."

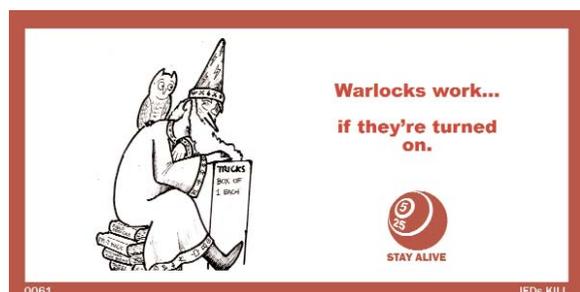
Despite the challenges, Nohel said he likes what he does here.

"Every day, you're doing different stuff," Nohel said. "We have up and down days, but there's always something that needs to be fixed."



Spc. Lee Elder

Spc. Jonathan Nohel, Troop C, 1-33 Cavalry, works on a transmission at his shop here. The Owosso, Mich., native is Mr. Fix It at this base camp in northern Iraq.





Elections officials relax outside a polling site early in the morning December 15. Samarra was the site of a huge turnout of voters for the parliamentary elections.

ISF run the show in Samarra during elections



Iraqi Security Forces guard the front of a polling site in Samarra December 15.



Voters emerge from a polling site in Samarra during the December 15 national parliamentary election.

Staff Sgt. Mark Wojciechowski
133rd MPAD

SAMARRA, IRAQ- Third Infantry Division's 3-69th Armor stood back and watched the Iraqi Security Forces take control of their polling sites just as they did earlier this year when votes were cast for the Iraqi constitutional referendum.

Capt. Ryan Wiley commander of Company B 3-69 Armor said, "We are just here if the Iraqi Security Forces need help, they are running the show."

Sgt. David Barton, a Scout with the 3-69th Armor and gunner for QRF2 (Quick Reaction Force), has seen a significant improvement in the 11 months his unit has been here.

"The Security forces are established and it is pretty much in their hands now," said Barton who is an Albany, New York native.

Iraqi people turned out in the thousands around the city of Samarra to bravely cast their votes in an area that was known as a "hot zone" only a few months ago.

Kahlid Hassim, the director of a polling site here in Samarra, and member of the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq said, "It is a good day for the people of Iraq to vote. They can feel safe and be able to choose."

Iraq's security and the establishment of a democratic government are moving in a positive direction despite sporadic anti-Iraqi force violence.

Naeem Farhain Jussem, a Samarra resident, and , who is a work operator for the city of Samarra, feels good about the security of the polling sites here.

"I will vote in the election; I want to choose which candidate is best for me," said Jussem.

Jussem also believes that it does not matter who you vote for as long as you have the ability to choose.

"I will vote just as I did in the last election," said Jussem.



An Iraqi Army soldier stands guard at the gate to a polling site in Samarra December 15. The Iraqi Security Forces controlled the security of Samarra during the elections.



Voters enter a polling site in Samarra during the December 15 elections.