



THUNDER EAGLE MAGAZINE

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Back to the Future:

Over Thirty Years Later

Pilot Flies With Comancheros

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For questions, story ideas or concerns regarding Thunder Eagle Magazine, please e-mail SGT Susan Redwine, susan.m.redwine@us.army.mil, or SSG Kevin Doheny, kevin.doheny@us.army.mil.

For questions, story ideas or concerns regarding Thunder Eagle Magazine, send mail to:

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159th Combat Aviation Brigade Units:

HHC BDE



7-17 CAV



4-101 AVN



3-101 AVN



7-101 AVN



C 1-58 ATC



50th MED



563rd ASB



Brigade Commander:
COL Jeffrey Colt

Brigade Command Sgt. Maj.:
CSM Craig Rinde

Staff Writer/Editor:

SGT Susan Redwine e-mail: susan.m.redwine@us.army.mil

Public Affairs NCOIC/Layout & Design:

SSG Kevin Doheny e-mail: kevin.doheny@us.army.mil

Cover: Chief Warrant Officer Michael Alford shown while in Vietnam in 1967. Alford flew in combat with Company A, 4th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment.

Going full circle:

Soldier concludes Iraq tour with same unit from Vietnam



*By Sgt. Susan Redwine
159th CAB PAO*

Few Soldiers can claim to have a career spanning 38 years, but one pilot on the LSA not only has those bragging rights, but can also say he concluded his career with the same unit he began it with.

Chief Warrant Officer Michael Alford began his military career as a pilot in Vietnam with Company A, 4th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment in 1967, and recently was able to fly with the very same company in Iraq.

Alford arrived in Iraq last year with his National Guard unit, 1st Battalion, 126th Aviation Regt., from Rhode Island, and has been flying UH-60 Blackhawk missions throughout the country.

Alford said the veterans of Company A form a very active network and he learned through Internet correspondence that his old unit, nicknamed the Comancheros, were deploying to Iraq to the very same base as his current National Guard unit.

After that, it was just a matter of touching base with his former unit to arrange to go out on a mission and come full-circle in his military career.

“Before they even arrived in country, I had been e-mailing back and forth,” Alford said. “So I had a good idea when they arrived in country and what they were going to do. I sort of forced myself on them after that.

“One of my first rides was with the Comancheros,”



Redwine/159th CAB PAO

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael Alford, 1st Battalion, 126th Aviation Regiment, shows off the patches he has flown with during combat mission spanning over 38 years. The patch on his uniform is from Company A, 4th Battalion, 159th Combat Aviation Brigade, also known as the Comancheros. The patch in his right hand is his current one, and the patch in his left hand is the original patch he wore in Vietnam.

he said. “I wanted one of my last flights to be with them. I don’t plan on coming back again.”

The unique nature of Alford’s mission also made an impression on current Comancheros.

“To see something like this come about and materialize is one of the most motivating things that I could have for my Soldiers and myself,” said 1st Lt. Robert Massey, a platoon leader for Company A.

Alford, who works full-time for the Social Security Administration and lives in Framingham, Mass., said he left the military after his tour in Vietnam, but joined

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TF Thunder Soldiers man eastern outpost

By Sgt. Susan Redwine
159th CAB PAO

In a small eastern forward operating base, Iraqi Soldiers are trained by a small number of American troops in order to eventually take responsibility for their country's security. On this small outpost, Task Force Thunder has a foothold.

Approximately 18 Soldiers from 563rd Aviation Support Battalion and 11 Soldiers from Charlie Team, 57th Medical Company, both a part of Task Force Thunder, are stationed at Forward Operating Base Caldwell, not far from the Iranian border.

Though the main purpose of the base is training Iraqi troops and most of the inhabitants are not American, there is a need for the skills Task Force Thunder Soldiers can offer.

The Soldiers from 563rd supply any aircraft that might land with fuel and ammunition, said Sgt. 1st Class Michael Hurts, platoon sergeant for the Forward Arming and Refueling Point. He said his crew specializes in handling petroleum, oil and lubricants and services Blackhawk, Kiowa and Apache helicopters.

"The Iraqis are interested in learning about Americans," Hurts said.

Hurts said his platoon is usually away from the rest of the unit because of the hazardous nature of the chemicals, but he added, "I didn't think we'd be this far away from the company."

"I think it's good training for the Soldiers," Hurts said.

"It gives them the opportunity to do training in another aspect of their MOS because they usually deal with bulk

fuel and here they're refueling aircraft."

Another major mission at Caldwell for TF Thunder is the medical evacuation mission.

"It's just the way MEDEVAC works," said 1st Lt. Scott Sorquist, pilot and team leader for Charlie Team. "We send smaller units to support combat units, to support other Soldiers."

Sorquist said his unit hasn't seen as much action as some of his company's other teams, but he takes downtime to conduct training, not only within his team, but with the American and Iraqi soldiers stationed at Caldwell.

Hurts admitted one of the obstacles of being on such a small outpost is the lack of AAFES facilities. Mail and personal supplies arrive through the Medical Company's routine missions.

Although they are physically cut off from the rest of their unit, they still have cyberspace to keep in touch. Hurts said he e-mails the unit at LSA Anaconda several times a day.

Sorquist mentioned the tightness between he and the other members of his team.

He said what's not lacking with the Soldiers at Caldwell is camaraderie.

"I think it's a benefit being in a smaller team, especially the crew cohesion," Sorquist said. "It improves the level of trust and communication within the unit."

"It's way better with a small group," said Sgt. Cedric Bowie of Company A, 563rd. "We get along really well. It's a pretty close-knit group."

"The guys like being out here," Hurts said. "These guys get along well. They work out together, go to the gym together. They're good."

EAGLE ATTACK:

BRINGING FIREPOWER TO IRAQ

By Sgt. Susan Redwine
159th CAB PAO

Nobody argues that the Soldiers on the ground conducting patrols and door-to-door missions have the toughest job in the Army. Soldiers not physically walking the ground do what they can to offer support to the ground guys, especially the Apache pilots of 3rd Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment.

“The mission is to support the ground guys,” said Capt. Ryan Kelly, 3-101 operations officer. “The ground guys are the ones knocking on doors.”

The unit is responsible for force protection and providing deterrence against enemy forces that would hinder ground units from doing their mission, Kelly said. In addition to that key mission, the unit also provides security for the LSA and escorts VIPs flying on the brigade’s other lift helicopters, but attack pilots have a particular sense of urgency for ground-support operations.

“Our whole job in life is to support the guys on the ground,” said Chief Warrant Officer Dale W. Miller, instructor pilot for Alpha Company. “That’s our favorite mission. If they need us, we’ll be there.”

The unit is comprised of 24 attack helicopters armed with 30 mm guns, 2.75 inch rockets and Hellfire missiles, Kelly said. One company of Apaches is stationed on the LSA, with another company supporting units in the north and another in the south.

The flight schedule is based around intelligence reports and requests from ground units, he said. The helicopters are used to support ground maneuver units in the counter mortar and IED fight, as well as with other deliberate operations aimed at insurgent forces.

“We make ourselves known,” Miller said. “It’s a real show of force. If you mess with them [troops on the ground], you mess with

us. You can tell in the ground guys’ voices, they’re glad we’re there.

“Those are the guys taking all the fire,” Miller went on. “Those are the guys we have the most respect for.”

Captain Ryan Eisenhauer, Company A platoon leader, said the Apaches are mostly a deterrent for force-protection missions and their presence has lessened the amount of mortar attacks on the LSA.

“The mission is pretty much ideal for what we have around here,” Eisenhauer said. “The addition of the cavalry assets will make us more effective and lessen the load,” he added referring to 2-17 Cavalry Regt., a unit of OH-58 Kiowa Warrior scouts attached to the battalion.

The Apache pilots have optical capabilities, allowing them to look at suspicious objects on the ground in order to help determine if the object is a threat that should be fired upon. But what makes their air power most effective is communication with the ground units, F-16 pilots and unmanned aerial vehicle controllers.

“It integrates everything for better coverage,”

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Redwine/159th CAB PAO

Two Eagle Attack AH-64 Apaches taxi down a runway at LSA Anaconda before heading out to patrol the skies.

saving lives

*By Staff Sgt. Kevin Doheny
159th CAB PAO*

In one of the chapters in the HBO movie series *Band of Brothers*, a medic named Eugene Roe is depicted bouncing back and forth from foxhole to foxhole trying to ensure the Soldiers in Easy Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, were given the proper medical treatment before the siege of Bastogne in World War II. He is shown as overwhelmed, trying to keep those who had been wounded alive.

In today's combat in Iraq, many Soldiers are still in harm's way. Injured Soldiers may not have immediate access to a medic such as Roe while conducting certain missions.

In an effort to ensure the ultimate level of survivability in combat, Soldiers are now being trained as combat life savers in the Eagle First Responder Course. These Soldiers are taught basic, lifesaving measures to ensure the Soldiers next to them stay alive.

The EFR course has been recently modified to fit the ever-changing battlefield conditions. It trains Soldiers on the same techniques taught in the original CLS course, but with more in-depth information and a change in focus – stop the bleeding.

Soldiers attending the EFR class are taught to effectively stabilize a casualty for transport, according to Sgt. 1st Class Leona Brooks, 563rd Aviation Support Battalion, medical platoon sergeant and noncommissioned officer in charge for the Task Force Thunder Clinic on LSA Anaconda.

"The new class includes the CLS curriculum, but it focuses on controlling the bleeding above all else, and gives Soldiers new pieces of equipment to accomplish this," Brooks said. "It also stresses the differences between the care under fire phase of casualty care, versus tactical field care. If you are actively involved in combat, it is going to change the methods that you use to approach casualty care -- protect yourself first, return fire, while attempting to control bleeding."

Brooks said exsanguination, or bleeding out, is the leading cause of preventable death on the battlefield. Teaching Soldiers how to stop it increases a casualty's chance for survival.

"We can teach them an IV, a needle decompression, and all the fancy stuff, but if they can't remember the basics of stopping bleeding, the Soldier has a decreased chance of survival," she said.

"Knowing that some Soldiers may have fear of blood and trauma situations, we will train and help these Soldiers to overcome their fears," said Staff Sgt. Sterling McCall, 159th Combat Aviation Brigade medical operations NCO. "By the end of the course, they will be ready and capable of stabilizing their fellow Soldier until further medical help arrives."

Brooks added that there is rarely a medic on location when an incident happens, so it is important Soldiers know how to respond when needed to.



Doheny/159th CAB PAO

Sergeant Virgil Goff, Company B, 563rd Aviation Support Battalion assess a simulated casualty during the Eagle First Responder course at LSA Anaconda. The course curriculum is similar to the combat lifesaver course, but focuses on controlling the bleeding above anything else.



Mechanics keep medic mission flying

*By Sgt. Susan Redwine
159th CAB PAO*

Time is critical when wounded Soldiers need to be removed from the battlefield. This makes the job of everyone in a medical company a matter of life and death, especially the Soldiers who keep the helicopters flying.

The helicopter maintainers and repair technicians have a key function in keeping the medical evacuation mission of the 57th Medical Company, which is attached to 7th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, 159th Combat Aviation Brigade.

“We don’t have the luxury of getting a flat tire and pulling over to the side of the road,” said Staff Sgt. Raphael Rodriguez, crew chief with the unit.

He also said anything that could keep a helicopter from flying will be taken seriously and checked out.

“We have contingency plans for just about everything,” Rodriguez said.

“You can’t really plan for MEDEVAC missions,” said Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Faibus, maintenance platoon sergeant. “The different sites complicate the missions.”

In aviation, we have a system of checks and balances,” he went on. “When mistakes are made, people die. The entire unit’s mission is to make sure people don’t die. The unit is very safety-conscious.”

“The guys are smart,” said Chief Warrant Officer Terry Crader, maintenance test pilot for the company.

Crader, a career aviation Soldier,

said the maintenance Soldiers have gotten more savvy about fixing the aircraft because of being around more electronics growing up.

“Everybody’s focused on what they need to do, on what the unit needs to do to accomplish the mission,” said Sgt. 1st Class David Buhl, production control noncommissioned officer in charge and maintenance supervisor.

“There’s an intense amount of trust between the pilots and the maintainers,” Faibus said. “Pilots trust us to make sure the aircraft is safe.”

“They are definitely the unsung heroes,” said Chief Warrant Officer Bryan Myers, quality control officer for the company. “You’ve gotta have those guys to make the mission go.”

Attack continued from Page 5

Eisenhauer said. “Force protection, as far as the forward operating base is concerned, has worked very well.”

The battalion arrived in Balad in September, a month ahead of the rest of the 159th Combat Aviation Brigade.

Kelly said he thinks the mission is going well so far. There have been a few key days when insurgent activity was expected to be high, so the unit planned ahead with missions. Very little happened on those days, such as the day of the referendum vote because of prior planning and the presence of the helicopters, Kelly said.

The battalion is often deployed and has been involved

in operations in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and OIF I. Kelly said 3rd Battalion “just always knows it’s going to be deployed.”

Because the unit has deployed so often, the Soldiers have had the opportunity to work with many other elements, and most of the Soldiers are very experienced.

“Working under another brigade is really a fluid process for us by now,” Eisenhauer said.

“We have no problem working with whoever needs us at the time.”

“We’ll do it and we’ll exceed the standard,” Kelly said.



Four named in Brigade SOQ Board, two win division

By Sgt. Susan Redwine
159th CAB PAO

The Thunder Eagle Brigade dominated the Division Soldier and Noncommissioned Officer of the Quarter Boards at Camp Speicher Dec. 15 and 16, with brigade Soldiers chalked up the top two scores.

Sergeant Jeremy Howell, Company C, 563rd Aviation Support Battalion and Pfc. Carlos Salcedo, Company B, 7th Bn., 101st Avn. Regiment took home the Division NCO and Soldier of the Quarter for second quarter.

The division board consisted of a physical training test, map reading, common task training written and hands-on tests as well as an equipment inspection, said Command Sgt. Maj. Craig Rinde, 159th Combat Aviation Brigade command sergeant major. The second day will be the formal board, he said.

“It feels great,” Howell said. “It’s what I came up here to do, but I have a long road ahead compared to my goals,” he added, referring to his desire to win higher-level boards in the future.

“Everyone’s got their weak areas and everyone’s got their strong areas,” Howell said. “I need to work on my weaknesses for the division Soldier of the Year. It’s all about basic soldiering.”

Soldiers were chosen to represent the brigade at the division board through the first brigade Soldier and NCO of the quarter boards of the deployment, conducted Dec. 5 in Dining Facility 4. Soldiers and NCOs for the 2nd and 3rd quarters were chosen in a tight competition that pitted six Soldiers and five NCOs against each other for the honor of the titles.

The winners for the brigade board were: 2nd quarter NCO – Sgt. William Hallett, HHC, 159th Combat Aviation Brigade, 3rd quarter NCO – Howell, 2nd quarter Soldier – Spc. Jeff Gunter, HHC, 3rd Bn., 101st Avn. Regt., 3rd quarter Soldier – Salcedo..

Rinde said boards are very competitive and often come down to a matter of a few points between the winners. Such competitions help with Soldiers’ promotions, improve the excellence of Soldiers and give units something to be proud of, he said.

“I feel good, I feel like I’ve earned it,” Gunter said of his win at the brigade-level board. He added that he was quite nervous but focused on the president of the board to help with his nerves.

Gunter said he had no specific strategy other than studying to prepare. He said he went over the material by himself again and again until he got it right, or about three hours a day for a month and a half.

The brigade board was the first ever for Salcedo, who echoed the importance of studying as the key to winning. He also remarked that it’s important to focus the nervousness in order to be successful and said he’ll feel more confident going to the division board because he now has experience.

Rinde suggested studying with a buddy who can help drill the Soldier with questions and said leaders can be very influential in the success of Soldiers at the board.

“How much you put into it will help determine whether you win the board or not,” Rinde said.

“My advice is to just keep studying,” Gunter said. “Don’t let yourself accept anything less than winning the board.”

***Pilot* continued from Page 3**

the National Guard in 1988 because he missed flying and the camaraderie of fellow Soldiers.

Current members of Company A are aware of the unique pride that keeps their unit glued together and eagerly point out that they can trace their lineage back to Vietnam.

Chief Warrant Officer Joshua D. Havill, a Blackhawk pilot for Company A, said in his 12 years of service, he never had a unit patch until he became a Comanchero and cited it as an example of how to establish unit pride.

The unit develops a new patch for each deployment or mission. For Alford's last mission, he was able to put on the Comanchero's latest patch and gave his crew souvenir patches with the design he wore in Vietnam.

"The standard for earning that patch is being fully-mission qualified," Alford said. "But you also have to be one of the guys, too. You have to earn it from your peers."

Part of the bond the unit shares comes from the Soldier lifestyle.

"You're away from home and 24-7 you're around each other," Massey said. "This is your family. You depend on each other.

"It's the people that make the camaraderie, that's where the tradition lies," Massey went on. "The people that have come and gone from this unit...people that

are motivated and excited to do the job make it fun."

This enthusiasm is apparent in the Soldiers of the unit.

"I think I'm blessed," said Pfc. Richard Montgomery, Blackhawk crew chief for Company A. "There's no other place I want to go. The people here are really wonderful and there are rich traditions. It sounds kind of corny, but I like it. It's a lot of fun, I love flying with these guys."

Montgomery, who also flew with Alford during the mission, said Alford was very down-to-earth and answered the many questions posed to him. Alford said he was able to mentor the current Comancheros because of his experiences in both Iraq and Vietnam.

"You have to keep in mind that you can get shot at and die any day," he said. "You can't get complacent. You have to keep it in your head all the time."

"I had a lot of questions for him," Montgomery said. "He told me everything I wanted to know." Montgomery said he was able to ask about Alford's experiences in Vietnam, how many flight hours he's logged, the types of aircraft he's flown and even his family.

"Knowledge drips off the guy," Havill concurred.

Alford said he enjoyed the flight he took with the Comancheros here.

"It was great. I loved it. It was fantastic."

Alford has since redeployed back to the United States in December with the rest of his unit.

***EFR* continued from Page 6**

"Medics are rarely there at the point of injury," Brooks said. "If we can teach the Soldiers who work side-by-side with each other these lifesaving skills, the Soldiers have a better chance of survival."

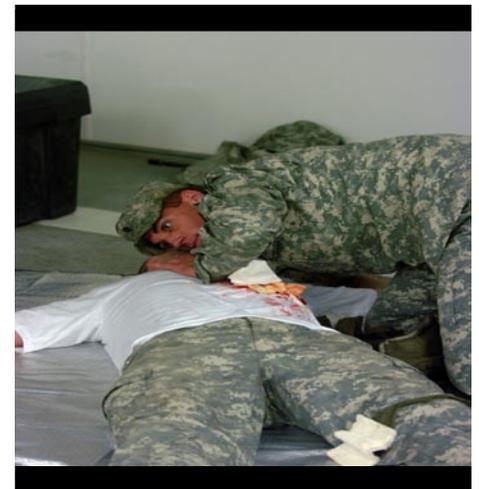
Brooks said the 101st Airborne Division has the lowest number of Soldiers who have died of wounds in theater. This means these Soldiers were treated properly at the time of injury by the first responders.

Brooks credits this success to the division's standard of training the

people who may need it most -- Soldiers on patrols, convoys and in the skies.

"The new course is an excellent effort to teach our Soldiers to take care of each other on the battlefield. It puts the emphasis back on the basics where it should be, as this is the key to casualty survival," she said. "It also teaches the Soldiers to think on their feet, by explaining that the steps presented in class are just one suggestion and emphasizes that while in combat, those steps

may have to adjust drastically to accomplish the mission and save the casualty."





Wings of the Eagle Soldiers pose around a painting of Old Abe after their Combat Patch Ceremony Dec. ?



A crewchief provides security while on a flight near the Iranian border Dec. ??.

THUNDER



Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. Peter Schoomaker re-enlists Staff Sgt. Jason Hildebrand, FSC, 4-101.

IMAGES



Monster Garage, takes a picture with a TF Thunder Blackhawk crewchief during his visit to LSA Anaconda.



The winners of the Thunder Brigade Soldier of the Month/NCO of the Month competition. Two eventually went on to win the division board a few weeks later.