Iraqi Police celebrate 84th anniversary, page 8

SCIMITAR
MNF-I's Cutting Edge

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U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Stephen M. DeBoard

Demonstrator Post: **Lance Cpl. Jose D. Hernandez, a Company D, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion scout team leader, shows room clearing techniques to Iraqi Soldiers.** ***Story page, 4***

Smaller guns ...

Big role

Artillery Soldiers turn infantrymen

Story by Sgt. Joy Kroemer
2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division

CAMP TAJI — Fighting the war in Iraq has transformed artillerymen into light infantrymen, a job filled with cordon and searches missions, motorized convoys and dismounted patrols.

Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, accepted and excelled in their nontraditional role.

The field artillery Soldiers have dominated a large area throughout the city and rich farmland of Taji, performing in the role of the light infantryman and securing peace for the people of the region.

"We've captured 109 insurgents," said Lt. Col. Rafael Torres, commander, 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment. "We've discovered 15 caches (of weapons), three of which were the biggest ever found in this area. We've taken in excess of 1,500 artillery rounds here recently and destroyed them."

> ***"When we first found out we were going to be doing light infantry, we didn't know what to expect."***
>
> Sgt. Eden Puente

Since their arrival in the Taji area in October 2005, the 1st Battalion, or "Top Guns," has undergone more than just artillery-turned-infantry adjustments.

Coming from Fort Campbell, Ky., and normally attached to 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, "Top Guns" landed in Iraq and were attached to the 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division out of Wiesbaden, Germany.

The Soldiers wasted no time in tackling the light infantry role and taking charge of a larger area of operations than most battalions, said Torres.

"Our units are spread out, so we have the challenge of constantly maneuvering our forces on the battlefield to ensure that we have the right combat power at the decisive point of an engagement," Torres explained. "I think the operational cell and the batteries have done a really good job in being flexible and doing that."

The missions have been overwhelmingly successful, said Torres, despite the loss of six Soldiers since the beginning of operations.

See ***GUNS***, Page 2

GUNS

from ***Page 1***

"I think the fact that we are a team is key," said Capt. Robert Jenkins, whose Battery A has sustained all six "Top Gun" losses.

"Just maintaining that sense of team and keeping that as the nucleus of everything we do, we'll be alright."

"We've taken some hard hits here," Torres said. "Those (six) Soldiers, every one of them, they were here doing their mission and they knew what their mission was."

Working diligently through those tough losses, the "Top Guns" have stepped up as a team to take the war in their area to a different level, and it has paid off, said Torres.

By actively taking the fight to anti-Iraqi forces in the Taji region, 1st Battalion has broken up improvised explosive devices making cells and destroyed the nucleus of different insurgent "gangs," putting most of their members behind bars.

"With us proactively going after these caches, insurgents can't defend them so they just have to watch us dig them out," said Torres.

With six different military occupational specialties making up 1st Battalion's headquarters battery, training with the right Soldiers has made all the difference in becoming infantrymen.

"The 5th Special Forces group trained with us for four months solid at Fort Campbell," Torres said.

"We fired more ammunition between the July timeframe until September when we deployed than the average artillery Soldier has fired in his lifetime."

"When we first found out we were going to be doing light infantry, we didn't know what to expect," said Sgt. Eden Puente, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery. Expert training in infantry tactics improved the Soldiers' confidence.

No matter what the upcoming mission holds for Torres and his "Top Guns," one thing is certain - they are ready.

"I am extremely proud of the (Soldiers)," said Torres. "They have gone above and beyond any of the expectations I would have had of them at this phase of the battle. In my mind, they upheld the name of the 101st. Period. So I'm proud of them."

Hear the choppers coming

U.S. Army photo by Spc. Jose Ferrufino

U.S. Army Capt. Adam Lackey, commander of Company A, 1st Battalion 187th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, watches as four UH-60 Black Hawk aircraft arrive to extract Soldiers after an early morning raid on Bayji Island on Jan. 15.

Navy brakes for airplanes

U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate Airman Javier Capella

Navy Information Systems Technician 2nd Class Jonathan Connelly disassembles a brake from an F-14 Tomcat aircraft as part of maintenance aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt. The Roosevelt is under way in the Persian Gulf on a regularly scheduled deployment conducting maritime security operations.

THIS WEEK IN IRAQ

To learn more about Iraqi and Coalition successes, log on to: ***www.mnf-iraq.com*** and click on the logo to download this week's issue.

PERSPECTIVES

MLKs words still ring true

Sgt. 1st Class Bruce A. Williams
101st Sustainment Brigade,
Equal Opportunity Advisor

Many consider Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to be one of the greatest figures of the 20th century, certainly one of the greatest orators not just in African-American, but all American history.

Like other heroic figures, Dr. King was uniquely prepared to meet the challenges of his time, and equally willing, even eager, to answer the call to leadership. As the preeminent champion of civil rights and nonviolent social change, Dr. King dominated the social landscape during the 1950s and 1960s, as Americans came to terms with centuries of discrimination and disenfranchisement.

Some older Americans remember Dr. King and the tumultuous events that swirled about him well. Some were even touched directly by his eloquent words and courageous deeds.

Yet many younger Americans know of him only through a sound bite of famous oratory and have no substantive knowledge of who he was and how he led America through a revolution for justice.

I was one of these younger Americans who only knew of a speech performed in front of thousands of people in Washington, D.C. I was moved by an excerpt of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech that I was taught in school as a young man.

Later, after being educated on the meaning of segregation and being introduced to the many tragedies African-Americans faced in the South, I was brought to tears when I actually watched and listened to his entire call for equity of all Americans.

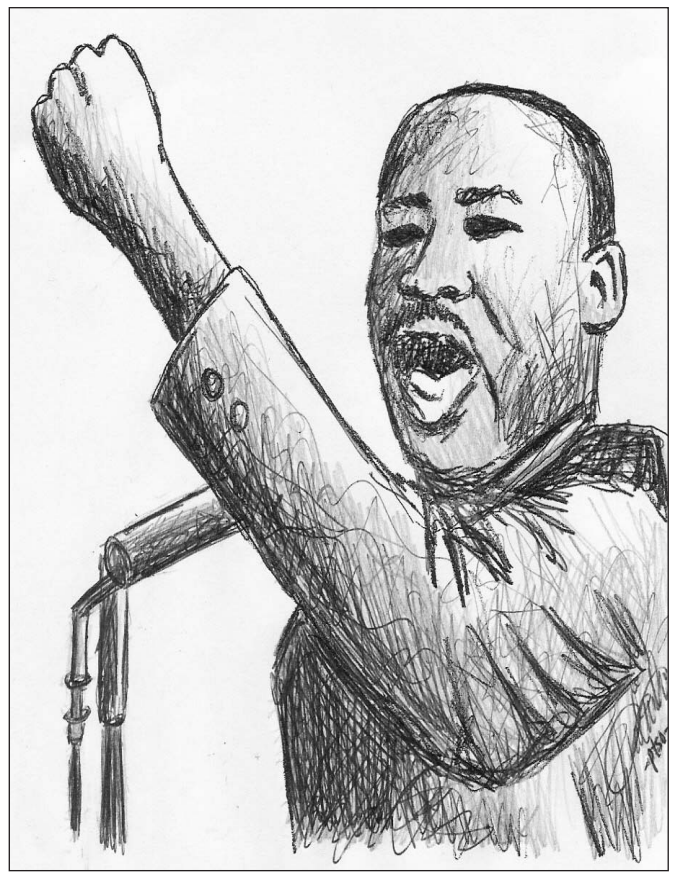
As we continue to venture into the New Year, it is good to reflect on what distinguished Dr. King from others, and why he is worthy of our remembrance. Dr. King was driven by the simple desire to see all Americans enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

While some other African-American leaders espoused separation and violence, Dr. King envisioned a united America created through nonviolent social change. His philosophy of nonviolence flowed logically from his upbringing in the African-American church and his preparation for the ministry.

Over the course of 14 grueling years, he molded the tactic of nonviolent, direct action from an admirable theory into a powerful force for concrete social change.

Through it all, he motivated others through his mastery of the spoken word and his willingness to suffer on behalf of others.

His commitment to civil and human rights eventually cost him his life. Dr. King's legacy is now enshrined in a national holiday. It is observed every third Monday in January, and will endure in the 21st century and beyond.



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Scimitar Pulse

What is your favorite sports movie?

"'Remember the Titans.' It's just a great story."

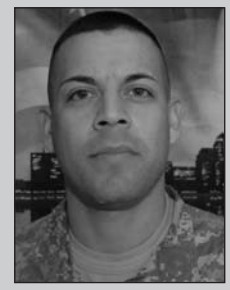
Capt. Mike Fisher
Company A, 501st STB
101st Airborne
Ann Arbor, Mich.

"'The Longest Yard,' because the humor is great and Chris Rock is exceptionally funny."

Pfc. Anne Macadams
HHC 501st STB,
101st Airborne
Riding Va.

"'Friday Night Lights' because it relates to high school football. I loved playing high school football."

Spc. Nicolas Paxton
HHC 501st STB
101st Airborne
Columbus, Oh.



"'The Program,' because it puts the student athlete in prospective and what most of them are thinking."

Staff Sgt. Raul Terrones
HHC 501st STB, 101st Airborne
Lonpoc, Calif.

"'Remember the Titans,' because in an era when a black male was set up to fail, he was able to bring unity to the town and the people."

Capt. Lamont Bryant
Joint Area Support Group
Chicago, Ill.

Thanks to the 133rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment for their work on the Pulse.

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Wisconsin native works alongside Iraqi troopers

Story and photo by Sgt. Stephen M. DeBoard
2nd Marine Division

AL TAMAL — The last time Cpl. Matt D. McGee was deployed to Iraq he was responsible for finding and destroying the enemy and maintaining his personal weapon and light-armored vehicle.

This time the 21-year-old scout team leader with Company A, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division, has those responsibilities, but he is also responsible for mentoring Iraqi troops.

It's not as simple as it may sound. There is a significant language barrier, though Iraqi and American warriors are slowly learning enough of each other's language to communicate. Still, most communication is done through hand-and-arm signals or an interpreter.

In addition, an American commander would define a "professional soldier" differently than an Iraqi.

"At first, I was a little hesitant about them stacking up on the same house I was, but I'm really impressed with this group. They're starting to do the right things automatically now, and they are technically proficient."

Cpl. Matt D. McGee

But to this Baldwin, Wis., -native and 2002 graduate of Baldwin-Woodville High School, that is changing.

"We work with the Iraqis about once every two weeks," he said.

One day, McGee and fellow Marines from 3rd Platoon and Iraqi Army Soldiers were rolling through Al Tamal, a small community of shepherds. The patrol, a security sweep, is in the area because of reports of heavy insurgent and criminal activities, such as smuggling.

McGee and his team ride over the desert between each house, dismounting to approach each objective and clear the structures there.

Entering a house is extremely dangerous, especially when the Iraqi Soldiers going into the same house through another door don't speak your language. But McGee isn't concerned.

"At first, I was a little hesitant about them stacking up on the same house I was, but I'm really impressed with this group," he said. "They're starting to do the right things automatically now, and they are technically proficient."

Once he leaves Iraq, McGee is confident the Iraqi Soldiers will be well-equipped to continue taking the fight to the enemy.

"They have lots of intensity, they're organized, intelligent and seem honest," he said.

Cpl. Matt D. McGee, right, a scout team leader, 1st Marine Division, directs his Marines during house-clearing operations.

Lance Cpl. Jose D. Hernandez leads his team through a demonstration of a proper four-man stack for a platoon of Iraqi Soldiers.

Marine teaches Iraqi Soldiers 'tricks of the trade' in warfare

Story and photo by Sgt. Stephen M. DeBoard
2nd Marine Division

AL ANBAR PROVINCE — Any drill instructor can tell you that making warriors out of young men and women fresh from the civilian world is challenging, but ultimately a rewarding task.

The long hours, the high expectations and the cost of failure all weigh heavily before the ultimate day of graduation.

Marines from Company D, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., can perhaps understand a little more clearly exactly what kind of challenge it is to train men in such a way.

They were tasked with training a unit of Iraqi Soldiers in urban fighting techniques here to bolster the Iraqis' confidence in their abilities and allow them to take an ever-increasing role in combating terrorists. Specifically, their task was to perform rehearsals for a raid on a gas station squatting beside a stretch of highway known for improvised explosive device emplacement and other insurgent activity.

This responsibility gives Marines like Lance Cpl. Jose D. Hernandez, a 21-year-old Los Angeles native and scout team leader with 3rd Platoon, Company D, a chance to both work with foreign military, as well as show them the "tricks of the trade" in urban warfare.

"We're trying to get them some hands-on experience with our techniques so they're comfortable with them," said Hernandez.

It was a cool, windy day along the stretch of road, straddled on either side by flat desert. Only a cluster of pale yellow buildings, severely damaged in an attack of indeterminate origin, poked out of the surface of the ground. It was there Hernandez and his fellow Marines would be working with the Iraqis.

"This is our combat prep and rehearsals. You can't go just off what you rehearse, but you want to know what the guys to your left and right are going to be doing," Hernandez said.

The Marines use the "teach by example" method. They demonstrate the proper way of patrolling, closing ground once contact has been made, then flooding the house with violence of action and communication with each other. Then they have the Iraqis perform, squad by squad, an assault on the same building.

"We're showing them how to communicate and have control in (military operations in urban terrain)," said Hernandez. "That includes how to set up cordons and the right way to do room clearing."

Hernandez said he has seen a lot of improvement in the Iraqi soldiers since the first time his unit worked with them.

"This is my second time training the Iraqis, and they're starting to take it seriously. They like to learn," he said.

A lot of little things have improved, according to Hernandez.

"They didn't used to pay attention to little things, like having a cover man when they were searching people," he explained.

Hernandez holds out hope this kind of training shows exactly what kind of future Iraq has. Instead of doing all the heavy lifting, the Americans are stepping back and letting the Iraqis take the lead.

"Now they're getting to do things for their own country," Hernandez said.

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Enlisted Veterans bring knowledge to Officer Corps

Story by Sgt. 1st Class John Holmes
Reserve Officer Training Corps
Siena College

LOUDONVILLE, N.Y.— Thousands of Central Command veterans are trading in their Desert Combat Uniforms for Battle Dress Uniforms and civies.

Cadets Jason Couture and Joshua Crimmins are two such veterans who are making the transition from enlisted to officer.

A Vermont native, Couture served as a 96R (ground surveillance radar operator) first with the 10th Mountain Division in Afghanistan, and then 82nd Airborne Division in Iraq.

While deployed, he came to see "how the command climate affected units, good and bad" and decided to take advantage of the Army Green to Gold program's Early ETS and become an officer.

He's serving as a cadet platoon sergeant and pursuing a degree in mechanical engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

When he graduates next year, he's hoping to branch Military Intelligence and return to Active Duty.

Crimmins, a Reservist from Hudson, N.Y., served in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom 1, attached to a Civil Affairs unit outside of Nasariya. While there, he worked with Special Forces troops to train Iraqi militias. This weekend he pinned on his branch insignia, Military Intelligence.

As an officer, Crimmins feels that he would "definitely be able to make more of a difference." He said that he's already seen how to the other cadets would turn to the veterans seeking advice, and it has prepared him well for his role as a cadet company commander.

Lt. Col. Mike Papadopoulos, the Siena ROTC Battalion commander, is always looking for veterans for his program. "OIF veterans are superb role models and mentors for other cadets in the ROTC program and emerge as leaders on their respective campuses.

"Upon commissioning, they provide a wealth of knowledge and experience to the officer corps and platoons they lead."

The Army's Green to Gold program is a way for enlisted soldiers to use their experience and gain a commission while going to school to obtain a degree.

There's a few ways to participate in Green to Gold.

Active duty soldiers with two years of college are eligible to attend school as a normal PCS.

Soldiers who are near the end of enlistment can apply to school and attempt to receive a scholarship for two to four years.

Other soldiers who have completed a certain amount of their enlistment can apply for an early out to complete a bachelor's or graduate degree.

If you are awarded a scholarship, it will cover the cost of tuition at most private and public schools. There is additional money for living expenses and fees, and you can use your GI bill.

Acceptance depends on a number of factors, including good grades, a GT score of 110 or better, and no older than 32 upon graduation, and superior Soldier skills.

Screamin' Eagles send heat downrange

Mortar men from 101st Airborne Division, set up a mortar tube during a mortar live-fire exercise.

Story and photo by Spc. Barbara Ospina
1st Brigade Combat Team,
101st Airborne Division

Shortly after the sun broke through the morning sky, indirect fire infantrymen and fire support specialists from 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, started setting up outside Forward Operating Base Warrior for valuable training and a lot of noise.

More than 100 white phosphorus, illumination and high explosive rounds meant plenty of ordnance to launch downrange; filling the day, and much of the night, with explosions.

"Training exercises allow us to remain proficient at indirect firing, and forward observer skills," said Sgt. 1st Class Jeremy Barton, the battalion fire support noncommissioned officer.

Back at Fort Campbell, Ky., the unit's garrison home, the "No Slack" battalion conducted similar training exercises at least once every quarter. According to Sgt. 1st Class Jason Sager, the mortar platoon leader, they are trying to keep that pace while deployed.

In preparation, the Soldiers spent the week prior to the live-fire exercise conducting misfire rehearsals and gun preparation.

"They did well in rehearsals," Sager said. "They were prepared today."

U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Lance Cheung

Staff Sgt. Bonnie McKinley, a respiratory therapist, checks the respiration of an Iraqi Soldier, injured by an improvised explosive device.

Airman saves career with yoga

Story by Staff Sgt. Kevin Nichols
U.S. Central Command Air Forces News Team

BALAD AIR BASE — Staff Sgt. Bonnie McKinley has a picture she carries around of another time in her life. Unlike the photos others carry when they deploy, hers serves as a reminder of the life she used to lead.

The picture shows McKinley at 5-foot-4-inches and 25 years old when she weighed 215 pounds, putting her at risk of a heart attack or stroke and placing her Air Force career in jeopardy.

When the Air Force mandated she increase her exercise routine, she decided to try yoga because it had always interested her.

"I fell in love with it from the beginning," said McKinley, a respiratory therapist at the Air Force Theater Hospital.

Now 75 pounds lighter, she helps patients in the intensive care unit breathe a little easier.

McKinley loved yoga so much she stuck with it and received a teaching license. Now, in a little room outside the AFTH used for viewing movies, she teaches medics and others here who are willing to give yoga a try.

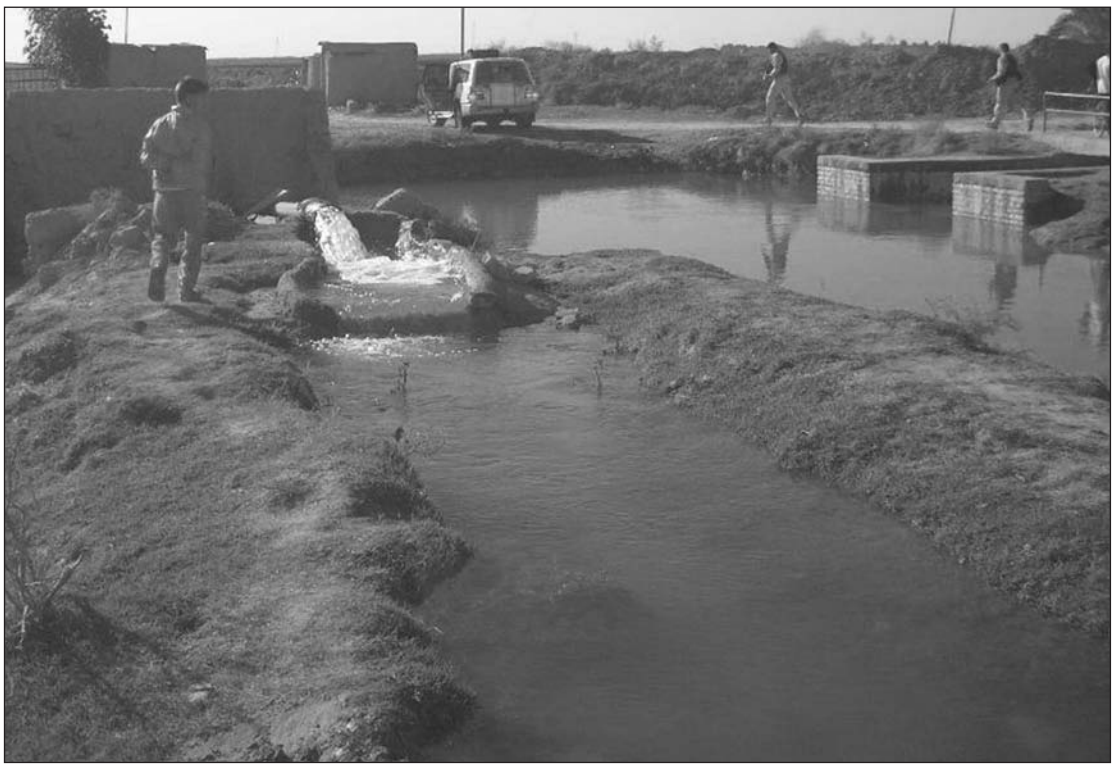
"[Before the room was here] we'd get together and talk about exercising — how difficult it was to get to sometimes after work," said McKinley who is deployed from Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas.

She sent out an e-mail to see if anyone was interested in learning yoga and got a great response.

Her "fat picture," as she calls it, has become a centerpiece in her life now. It is a constant reminder of what she has lost and what she has gained.

"Have you seen my fat picture?" she asks co-workers. "I never want to be that unhealthy again."

Not only has she lost the weight, but she has kept it off and used her experience to help others become more fit.



A boy watches the water flowing from the canal near the water treatment unit.

Aqua-palooza

Al Basheer celebrates new projects

Story and photos by Suzanne M. Fournier

AL BASHEER — Water is now flowing to more than 200 families living in small communities from Al Basheer to Imman Akare in Wassit Province, southeast of Baghdad.

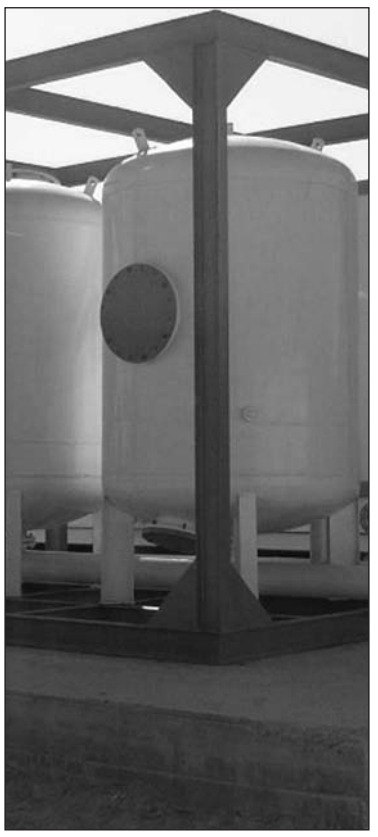
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built a water pipe system to bring water to families that have never had running water in their villages, much less in their homes.

The $172,000 water network project was the first step toward improving drinking water in these villages. A water treatment plant is now under construction.

By a canal along the Tigris River, the plant will filter the incoming water, store it, then send it through the 4.3 miles of piping recently installed. The treatment facility, set to be complete in March, will cost $250,000.

Families in Al Basheer region live in traditional mud brick houses with thatched, reed, mud roofs and make their living by raising rice, vegetables and dates. The water pipeline network and water treatment unit brings a higher quality of life to residents of Wassit Province, but, more importantly, clean water will bring a healthier lifestyle and reduce the spread of waterborne diseases, one of the major health problems throughout Iraq.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has five similar water treatment projects in the Wassit Province. There are also 72 school construction or renovation projects, electricity substations and distribution systems, health care facilities and other security construction projects. These projects are designed to build a foundation, that will enable the Iraqi people to create healthy, safe lives for themselves and their families.



Water storage and treatment units installed in Al Basheer will bring clean water to more than 200 homes.

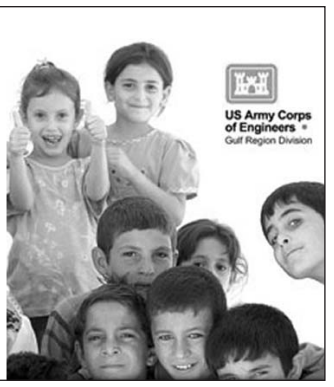
"This Week in Iraq"

a weekly review of how the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is rebuilding Iraq, and improving the quality of life for the next generation.

Saturday & Sunday

@ 8:45 a.m., 1:45 p.m., 5:45 p.m. and 9:45 p.m.

***Freedom Radio* 107.7 FM**



Khalalzid views improvements

Story by Norris Jones

BAGHDAD — Regardless of politics, Iraq deserves the best medical care possible, said U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad during a recent visit to Alwaiya Children's Hospital in Baghdad.

"Our goal is to get Iraq to stand on its own, take care of itself, Iraqis looking after Iraqis," he said. "We're proud and pleased as Americans to be able to help in any way we can."

Work is underway to renovate Alwaiya Children's Hospital, which sees 300 children daily. The $2.9 million project is upgrading and modernizing the 217-bed facility. Upgrades include a new water purification system, new air conditioning and heating system, medical waste incinerator, oxygen plant and central vacuum system, nurse call system, intercom paging system, data communications network, new toilets, showers and sinks. Additionally, workers will install a new exhaust system to remove unhealthy air and odors, a new generator system for emergency power, new lighting, and new surface treatments, and perform structural repair.

Khalilzad said, about 70 percent of the construction is complete. Three Baghdad medical schools use Alwaiya Children's Hospital for internships.

Alwaiya is part of a broader effort to help Iraq.

"The U.S. is renovating some 19 hospitals across Iraq, and building a new one in Basrah." In addition, 142 primary health care centers are being constructed.

He said that in addition to the reconstruction efforts, the U.S. would be contributing more than $70 million in medical equipment and medicine across Iraq.

He said Iraq has a long way to go; especially considering what little was invested in the last decade. Under Saddam Hussein, Iraq had high rates of infant and child mortality. One of every four children under age five was chronically malnourished. One in eight died before their fifth birthday. Khalilzad said that in 2002, Saddam's government spent just $16 million for health care for the entire country.

"Children are important to the future of this country. For Iraq to be successful, it needs to be able to take care of its citizens."

Ammar Al-Saffar, Deputy Minister of Health, joined Dr. Khalilzad on the visit and said one of their goals was cutting Iraq's infant mortality rate in half. In 2005, 3.62 million children were immunized against measles, mumps, and rubella and 4.5 million against polio. Alwaiya Children's Hospital Administrator, Dr. Tariff Rahman, said it would be great when the hospital's reconstruction is finished. He said he was also pleased to hear Khalilzad's announcement about the authorization for additional equipment and medicine.

USACE secures Iraqi academy

Story by Claude D. McKinney

ZAKHO — In northern Iraq there is a school under reconstruction that may have a greater impact on the future of Iraq than any other reconstruction effort.

The school is the Zakho Military Academy.

As important as oil, electricity, water, health care and primary education are to Iraq's future, educating those already identified to be the future leaders of Iraq will provide direction in the same manner as a rudder steers a large ship. Zakho Military Academy is one of Iraq's two national military officer academies and is equivalent to the U.S. Army's Military Academy at West Point.

Upgrading the force protection on the academy was a priority. These upgrades included the design and construction of nine guard towers around the perimeter of the ZMA compound, installation of lighting on the perimeter wall, and the renovation of two compound entrances.

The lighting will provide protection and security to the Iraqi Army cadre and cadets who live on campus. The guard towers will serve both as training opportunities for the cadets to learn first hand the nuances of guard duty and as operational guard posts for the facility.

The designers of the new entrances aim to inspire awe, determination, and commitment to entering cadets in the same manner as entering the gates of the U.S. Acadamies have been symbolic for those destined to become U.S. military leaders.

Other force protection projects included a new munitions storage facility and upgrades to the armory. The armory includes rooms for weapons issue, weapons maintenance and cleaning, and weapons racks and lockers.

A new gym has its own heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems.

"We are nearing completion of this project. And it is gratifying to know that my efforts here may be the means to growing a strong leadership base for the future of Iraq," said Joshua Adekanbi, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gulf Region North project engineer.

U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Lance Cheung

Capt. Richard Pike, 732nd Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron Gun Truck Detachment commander, addresses his unit after the unit reached the 4-million-mile mark.

U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Lance Cheung

Staff Sgt. Viktor Hancock, 732nd gunner, celebrates the completion of the convoy security mission that achieved the unit's 4-million-mile mark.

Four million miles

732nd reaches landmark

Story by Staff Sgt. Kevin Nicholas
U.S. Central Command Air Forces News Team

BALAD AIR BASE — The 732nd Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron reached a milestone Saturday when they completed their 4-million-mile convoy mark.

After Lt. Col. John Waggoner's Airmen returned from the milestone convoy, the 732nd commander, screamed out to his troops, "How many miles?"

"Four-million," his troops yelled back.

"This culminates two years of convoys, doing stuff that you've had to stand up from scratch," Waggoner said. "The Army asked us to come in and help out. We were able to do it. Just don't forget, you've been an important part of history."

That history started with their first convoy two years ago. The 732nd Airmen, which uses their Army predecessor's unit designator of 2632, have taken to calling themselves Detachment 2632. They have kept supplies going on some of the world's most dangerous highways since June 2004.

Unit members realize the importance and danger of their mission.

"Staff Sergeant Peters will not be forgotten — HOOAH!" Waggoner cried out to the convoy team. "Airman Anderson will not be forgotten — HOOAH!"

Staff Sgt. Dustin Peters and Airman 1st Class Carl Anderson were gunners from another unit sent to Balad to help with the convoy runs. They were both killed when their convoys were hit by roadside bombs.

"I have some Airmen who were here with (Peters and Anderson) up to the events that ended in their tragic death," said Capt. Richard Pike, Det. 2632 commander.

Pike reflected on how Peters and Anderson might feel about the 4-million mile accomplishment.

"I believe they'd be extremely proud; not just in what the Airmen have done but what the Airmen have provided for the nation and the people of Iraq," said Pike. "We started with an honorable goal and we've met that goal."

> ***"Just don't forget, you've been an important part of history."***
>
> Lt. Col. John Waggoner

Airmen packed in under their shelter on a cold and rainy day to welcome the four-million mile convoy home. Handshakes were exchanged and smiles were on their faces.

Despite the overcast weather, spirits were bright as the convoy represents more to them than just the miles they've racked up.

For Senior Airman Candi Laury, a gunner for the convoy detachment, it's all about teamwork.

"It's our pride and joy, because we take everything to heart, especially with our job," she said "We're like family."

Pike looks toward the future as the Air Force gets ready to turn over convoy duties back to the Army this month.

"Hopefully our efforts will not be forgotten as we leave out of here and the country of Iraq continues to build toward a strong democracy," Pike said.

IRAQI POLICE FORCE CE

Iraq's Minister of Interior thanks po

Story by Maj. Anna Friederich
2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division

BAGHDAD — More than 500 Iraqi Police celebrated the 84th anniversary of the creation of the Police Force at the Baghdad Police College parade grounds on Jan. 9.

The Iraqi Police Force started in 1920 and was officially instituted in 1921 by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior after the newly-formed government was established.

"I am so happy for this day," said Haydir, an Iraqi Police officer. "I am proud to be a part of a group that is helping make Iraq a stronger and better place."

After the Iraqi National Anthem, Iraq's Minister of Interior Baqir Jabr Al-Zoubaidi gave a speech to the officers thanking them for their service to their country. He also thanked the police officers for their effort to establish a force the people trust and respect rather than fear, a characteristic he said was found in the MOI during past regimes.

Selected officers then performed a series of demonstrations highlighting the tasks of the police force, followed by a pass in review of all the police groups.

Al-Zubaidithen presented honor graduates from the police college and family members of recently killed officers a gift of appreciation from the MOI.

Officers recited the Ministry of Interior (Police Officer's) Oath.

The event concluded with a ribbon cutting and unveiling of the Police Martyrs Monument. The monument is meant to be a tribute to police officers who have given their lives while serving on the force.

U.S. Army photo by Spc. Teddy Wade

An Iraqi Police officer salutes as they march during the graduation of a new group of Iraqi Police at the Iraqi police academy in Baghdad.

U.S. Army photo byWilliam Servinski II

An Iraqi Public Order Brigade Soldier gives the thumbs up as he celebrates a new group of Iraqi Policemen graduating from the Police Academy in the Muthana Zayuna District - Baghdad on Jan. 9. The Iraqi Army and Police were there to witness and celebrate another graduating class that will join them in their work to make Iraq a safer place.

ELEBRATES 84TH YEAR

olice force for hard-work, dedication

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

Iraqi policemen stand in front of their up-armored vehicles and wait for a ceremony, celebrating the Iraqi police force, Jan. 9.

Courtesy photo

Iraqi Police officers march as a unit during the ceremony's pass in review during a formal ceremony celebrating at the Hillah Police Compound.

Courtesy photo

An Iraqi K-9 unit subdues a mock terrorist during a demonstration of the team's capabilities.An Iraqi K-9 unit subdues a mock terrorist during a demonstration of the team's capabilities Jan. 9.

U.S. Army photo by Spc. Teddy Wade

Iraqi Public Order Brigade Soldier shows his support as he heads to the Parade grounds to celebrate a new group of Iraqi Policemen graduating from the Police Academy in the Muthana Zayuna District - Baghdad on Jan. 9.

Combat engineers with Battalion Landing Team,1st Battalion, 2nd Marines, walk up the bank of the Euphrates River carrying artillery shells found in a terrorist cache near Hit.

A display of the ordnance, ammunition, and weapons found during Operation Hedgehog.

Hedgehog unearths caches

Flames and smoke erupt as explosive ordnance disposal technicians blow up some of the terrorist arms, ordnance, and ammunition unearthed by combat engineers during Operation Hedgehog.

Marine operation discovers weapons, bombs in graves

Story by Gunnery Sgt. Keith A. Milks
Photos by Sgt. Richard D. Stephens
22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit

HIT — For four long, backbreaking days, Marine combat engineers and infantrymen unearthed cache after cache of terrorist ordnance and weaponry in and around Hit during Operation Hedgehog.

Marines from the Combat Engineer Platoon, Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines, kicked off the operation with a search of long-suspected hide sites throughout Hit and soon began unearthing treasure troves of insurgent arms.

"This was our biggest find to date," said 1st Lt. Antonio Agnone, the combat engineer platoon leader for the unit. "We've uncovered numerous, and significant caches the insurgents have hidden in Hit in places where they thought they would have easy access to them."

Agnone and his Marines unearthed nearly 500 rockets and artillery and mortar rounds, along with about 100 tank rounds and substantial quantities of rocket propellant, fuzes, and blasting caps. Such supplies are the components terrorists commonly use to make improvised explosive devices, two of which were also found. A stockpile of assault rifles and ammunition.was also discovered

According to Agnone, what amazed many of his Marines was the lengths the terrorists would go to hide the caches, going so far as to defile a local cemetery.

Acting on a tip, the Marines carefully searched the cemetery and found caches in grave spots adorned with both head and foot markers.

"We went over the area very carefully with mine detectors," said Agnone, a native of Columbus, Ohio. "That led us to the sites. We were very careful and didn't disturb any civilian graves in the process."

Shouldering the bulk of the effort were the individual combat engineers like those led by squad leader Cpl. Jeffrey R. Wass, an Erie, N.Y., native who deployed with most of the platoon to Afghanistan in 2004.

"Corporal Wass and all the Marines did a superb job," said Agnone. "They were really excited about the finds because engineering is such a broad field and by doing this we've had a direct impact on insurgent operations."

The Marines aren't planning to rest on their laurels.

"We're pushing ahead to do more of the same," said Agnone.

"We'll continue looking for more hide sites and suspected caches to deny these weapons to the insurgents."

Band of brothers reunite in Iraq

Story by Spc. Karl Johnson
363 Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers: For he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother," wrote William Shakespeare in Henry V.

Shakespeare described the lifelong bond formed between Soldiers who stand together in battle. He called that bond brotherhood.

In Iraq today, brothers quite literally serve together. Often kept apart by their different missions, they find themselves separated by their in common profession – as Soldiers.

The transfer of command from the 3rd Infantry Division to the 4th Infantry Division brought with it the happy reunion of some brothers. Three sets of brothers who got together again in Iraq are the Hurons, the Martells and the Pooles.

"My brother and I are so close that we can be apart for many years, and when we get back together, it is like we were never gone," said Lt. Col. Mark A. Huron, 4th Inf. Div. inspector general.

Growing up in close quarters, often times sharing the same space, brothers can develop bonds that neither years nor separation can break.

Those bonds are as unique and individual.

"We grew up in the same room," he said. "We attended the same college and took the same classes."

When Huron joined the Army more than 20 years ago, that closeness was put the test. Following right behind him though was his younger brother, Lt. Col. Gilbert G. Huron, 3rd Infantry Division comptroller.

"I've been in for 19 years, and he has been in for 20 and a half and unfortunately, this is the first time in 19 years that we've been stationed in the same place," said Gilbert. "It's been nice spending this time with him and getting the opportunity to talk about the good old days."

"We are really fortunate to be able to share our love of Soldiers, the Army and our Country. It makes my commitment that much more special knowing my brother is doing the same thing I am."

Capt. John Poole

For the Martell brothers, serving in the same place, even for a short while, has been a positive experience.

"The transition was a lot easier because he was here," said 1st Sgt. Osvaldo Martell, 4th Infantry Division Troops Company first sergeant.

His older brother, Master Sgt. Angel Martell, 4th Infantry Division personnel sergeant major, said the brothers often envisioned themselves as G.I. Joes when they were children.

"This Christmas and New Year's was the one of the greatest we've had in years," said Osvaldo.

Not all brothers have been kept apart by their careers in the Army. Capt. Daniel Poole, the supply officer for 8th Battalion, 10th Calvary Squadron, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, and his older brother, Capt. John Poole, commander for the DTC, 4th Infantry Division, said they have been fortunate during their careers.

"Because of the Army, I've seen my brother more than if I had not been in," said Daniel. "We really try to look out for each other."

"We are really fortunate to be able to share our love of Soldiers, the Army and our Country", said John.

"It makes my commitment that much more special knowing my brother is doing the same thing I am."

Regardless of how often these Soldier brothers have gotten to see each other, they all agree that is it hard for them to watch each other go. It's with a heavy heart that these brothers say goodbye.

"In a lot of ways, he's still just my little brother," said Mark Huron. "When he leaves, I'll be very disappointed."

Polish Soldiers present donated plows to Iraqi farmers in the Diwaniyah Province.

Helping farmers till soil

Story and photo by Lt. Cmdr. Bartosz Zajda
Multi-National Division - Central South

AD DIWANIYAH — A new growing season is about to begin in the Diwaniyah Province and Polish Soldiers from Multi-National Division - Central South are helping Iraqi farmers get a jump on it.

Agriculture plays an important role in Iraq's economy. Many Iraqis make a living cultivating the arable lands of the Euphrates and Tigris river valleys.

Polish Soldiers donated more than 150 tons of seed, farming equipment and irrigation pumps to the Agriculture Association, which supports 3,500 families in the Diwaniyah Province.

An Iraqi farmer tries out one of the new donated tractors.

Robots lead way to safer roads

Story and photo by Pfc. Mark B. Matthews
27th Public Affairs Detachment

Technology has come a long way in the past decade. Although it may be a few years before Johnny 5, the robot from the movie "Short Circuit,"can be found on the shelves of electronic stores, robots are used on a daily basis in medical research and automobile manufacturing.

Service members now see them in Iraq as vital tools in force protection.

A robot rolls down a road during testing.

Employees of the U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command build and maintain a variety of robots used to detect, disarm and dispose of improvised explosive devices on Iraqi roads.

"We provide the ground support for the robotics community in theater, particularly the IED task force," said Paul Varian, a Missile Command logistics assistance representative. "All of their logistics, training, supply and repairs come out of this facility."

The robots are very useful and have a wide variety of tools to help service members efficiently and safely dispose of dangerous materials.

"The biggest benefit these robots give is that they can be the eyes, ears and in the case of one robot even the nose, forward of the Soldier," said Varian. "The robots are able to get out there and be in harm's way so the service member doesn't have to."

The robots have a very dangerous job and not all come back in one piece, but according to the people who work on the robots that is a good thing.

"We have had a fair number of robots that have been either damaged or destroyed as result of them doing there job," Varian said. "So if a robot is damaged or destroyed that means a service member is not and that is always a good thing."

The service members that actually use the robots in the field seem to enjoy having the robots do the dirty work.

"These robots are very effective," said Tech. Sgt. Brian Schilhabel, team leader 447th Explosive Ordinance Disposal. "It just makes it a lot easier and safer so that we are not actually out there doing the hands stuff. We are using a robot."

Although the robots are very small they are built to take a licking and keep on ticking.

"These robots are pretty tough. Some of these robots will take a significant beating throughout the day," Varian said. "Several of them have taken on some pretty serious explosions. They come back, we put a new camera and arm on them and we send them right back out."

As the roads in Iraq continue to improve, the robots, employees of AMCOM and the service members tasked in operating the robots will continue to do their job and bring about safer roads for the Iraqi people.

Comeback girl rejoins unit

Story and photo by
Spc. Lee Elder
133d Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

BAQUABAH — After being badly wounded in a suicide bomb blast, a young military police Soldier said there was never any question if she would rejoin her fellow Soldiers, just when.

Sergeant Kareena Lechner, who serves with Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, was among six Soldiers injured Aug. 23rd when an Iraqi with a fake I.D. entered the dining facility at the Provincial Joint Communication Center in Baquahah and blew himself up. Besides taking his own life and destroying the facility, two other U.S. personnel were killed.

Sgt. Kareena Lechner

"I remember a bright light and the noise," Lechner recalled. "I pretty well remember all of it very vividly."

The blast destroyed both of Lechner's eardrums, left her with cuts and bruises and shrapnel wounds in both legs. She was evacuated to nearby Forward Operating Base Warhorse and later to Logistical Support Area Anaconda.

Lechner was hospitalized for two weeks. When time came for her release, she was told she was being transferred.

"I told them I wanted to come back here," Lechner said. "I insisted on it. I talked to my battalion commander and they let me come back here."

Two other NCOs that were injured were not able to return.

"We were the three NCOs for the guard," Lechner explained. "For our Soldiers, that was their leadership. I owed it to them to join them here."

While Lechner has recovered physically and bears no visible scars from the incident, she is reminded of it daily. She has to walk past the demolished site where the facility once stood to get to work. Now, all that remains is the outline of a building on the ground and a few piles of rubble.

"It was hard at first," Lechner said. "I just do not want to let things like that bother me."

Good chow boosts morale

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

SAMARRA —The chow hall at Forward Operating Base Brassfield-Mora, which operated by Soldiers, is getting a face lift now that the Rakkasans are in town.

Sixteen Soldiers from Foxtrot Company, 626th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, are employed at the Brassfield Dining Facility. Six to eight of those Soldiers, a "Forward Field Feeding Team," are cooking at Patrol Base Olson.

Since the Rakkasans have taken over the chow hall, the Soldiers at the surrounding patrol bases have seen major improvements in their lifestyle. Prior to the Rakkasan's arrival, these Soldiers got hot chow only four times a week. Now they get it twice a day.

The DFAC at Brassfield pushes rations and produce to Olson, where the cooks prepare it. The hot chow is then picked up by all the surrounding patrol bases for their Soldiers.

"We try to offer the best food we can, a little taste of home," said Staff Sgt. Jason D. Young, the Senior Food Service Sergeant at Brassfield. "The better the food, the better Soldiers will perform on their mission."

> ***"The better the food, the better the Soldiers will perform on the mission."***
>
> Staff Sgt. Jason D. Young

The food coming into Brassfield is now fresher as well. The Rakkasans kept the food contract from the prior unit, but have changed where the food is coming from.

"Before, when produce showed up, it was unusable," said Young.

Meals, which typically take around two and a half hours to prepare, will also see a reduction in preparation time. The electrical system in the chow hall is being rewired to better accommodate the cooking facility.

Not only are conditions improving, but the taste of the food is as well.""It's times like these I love being a Rakkasan," said one Soldier on his comment card. "Thank you DFAC guys!"

CHAPLAIN'S TALK

Faith Works!

By Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Guy Glad
MNF-I Strategic Operations

Chaplain Glad

Have you ever wondered why we do what we do?

A corollary question might be, "Am I making a difference?"

Discouragement is a normal human emotion that elicits questions like these and at a time like this, it is good to take a step back and look at the big picture.

For me personally, the answer to these questions boils down to the nature and quality of my Christian faith. The Bible is very clear about the nature and quality of faith. In the book of James in the New Testament we find a succinct discussion of this issue. We read these words.

"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?"

Can such faith save him?

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do. You see, a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead" (James 2:14-18, 24, 26, New International Version).

And so we do what we do because we care and want to help those who have special needs. Some have labeled this "Humanitarian Assistance", a noble mission that we are able to execute often throughout Iraq. This is what we see when we focus on the big picture.

True, a nation of 25 million people with special needs can seem like an impossible mission but if we see that number as individuals who cross our paths every day, then the Humanitarian Assistance mission becomes realistic and within reach.

Historically, America has encouraged those with special needs, and has adopted Humanitarian Assistance as a critical national mission. Inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty are these insightful words:

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore; Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me; I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

This is the big picture and the answer to the question of why we do what we do. I encourage you to look at the big picture and ask how you can exercise a living faith by helping that individual in need that God brings across your path today. God bless!

NEWS IN BRIEF

Young girl's tip saves lives

BAGHDAD — A young girl phoned in a tip of a possible roadside bomb to Coalition Forces today, potentially saving innocent lives.

The girl reported seeing a white bag in a hole on a road in southeast Baghdad. When Coalition Forces investigated, they found a man hiding in the grass by the road, as well as four masked men in a car. A man carrying an AK-47 and talking on a cell phone was observed walking over to two suspected trigger men who were in the prone position. Attack aviation engaged the terrorists preventing them from carrying out the attack.

Explosive Ordinance Disposal was called to disable the roadside bomb.

4th ID assumes responsibility

BAGHDAD — As the 3rd Infantry Division begins its transition back to its home base of Fort Stewart, Ga., and the 4th Infantry Division assumes the reigns as Multi-National Division-Baghdad, Maj. Gen. J.D. Thurman, the commanding general of the 4th along with Command Sgt. Maj. Ronald Riling, thanked the Marne Division for their service and addressed the Soldiers of Task Force Baghdad.

Both of the Ironhorse Division's senior leaders stated they felt the Soldiers and leaders of the Marne Division performed brilliantly during their tour of duty and called on the Ironhorse Team to carry on the mission of helping secure and aid the nation of Iraq as it continues its strides toward democracy.

"I think the 3rd Infantry Division has done a remarkable job under tough circumstances and tough conditions," said Thurman. "They've done a tremendous job, and my heart goes out to those great men and women who had to pay the ultimate sacrifice over here in defense of freedom and liberty. I salute them."

Riling echoed his sentiments and said he wanted to give special thanks to the Marne team, both its leaders and Soldiers, for helping set up the Ironhorse Division for success through the smooth transition of responsibility.

"To the Soldiers of the 3rd Infantry Division, I'd like to say thanks for what you've done. The Marne Division has done a superb job while they were over here. They've done really well – and we're proud of them. They're real heroes. We're very sorry for all your losses, and we will keep you in our prayers."

The Marne division was here during perhaps one of the most historic periods in the nation's recent history in which, for the first time, the people of the nation freely elected the members of their government.

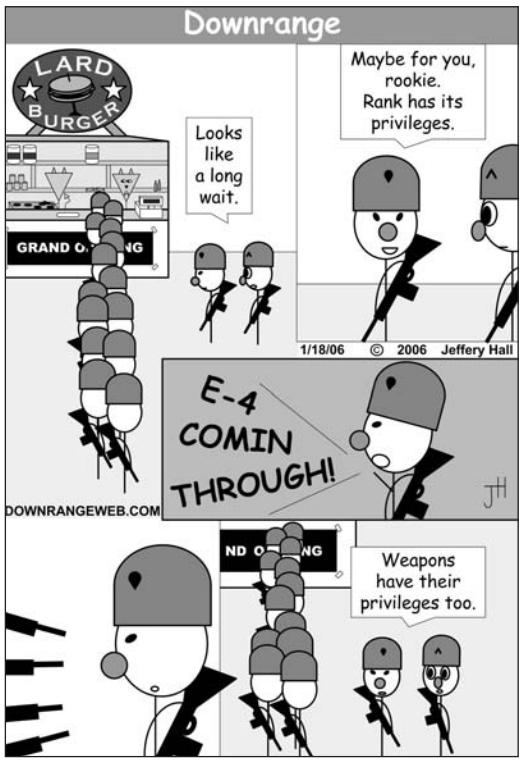
"We're here at the period of time where the elected government by the people, for the people, goes into office and they start exercising their democracy," Thurman said.

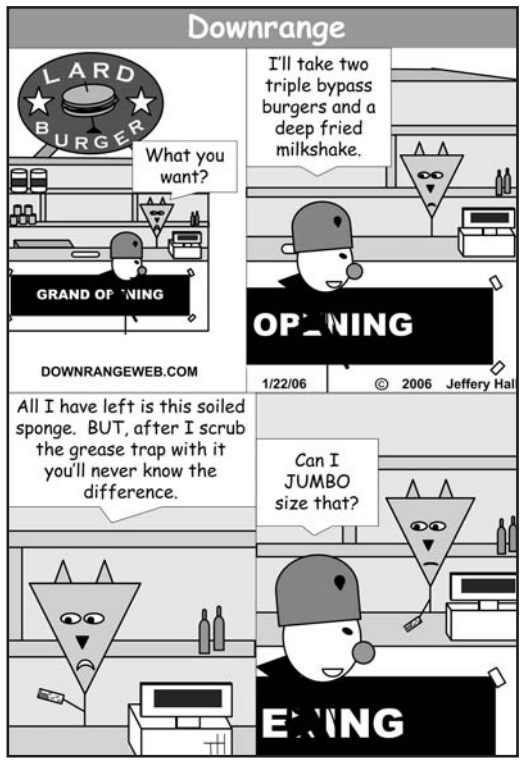
Nothing is easy in forming a new government and a democratic process, he added.

"We've got to be patient," said Thurman. "We've got to be committed. We've got to respect the Iraqis, and we have to work with the people. We want them to win this war against the insurgency and win their fight for democracy."

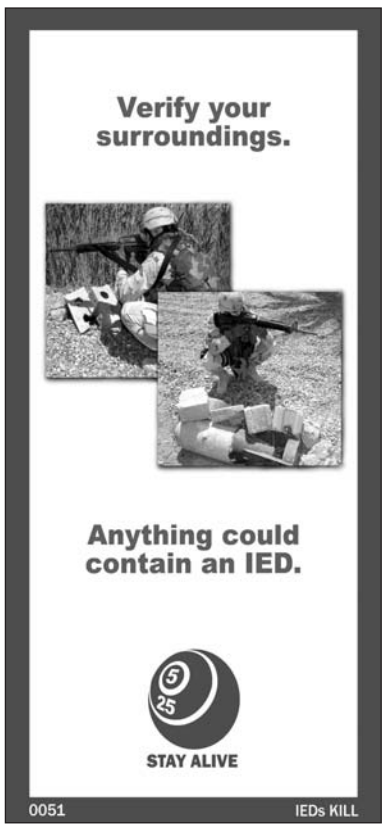
Although 40 percent of the division's Soldiers previously served in the theater of operations, Riling said many things have changed since the division last stepped foot in Iraq, citing the emergence of the Iraqi Security Forces, Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police.

Scimitar Slapstick





Art by Maj. James D. Crabtree



Fightin' Words

1	14	15	16	■	10	18	■
2				17	■	11	19
3					25	■	
4				■	12	20	
■	5		■	■	13		■
24	■	6	22	21			
7	23	■	9			■	■
■	8						■

ACROSS

1. Homer's favorite drink
2. B.A, Hanibal, Face, and Murdock
3. Busta or Nursery _____
4. Scientific term for meteors,comets close to Earth.
5. Abbreviation for railroad
6. Continent home to Paris
7. Needed to go to bar, or Fruedian concept
8. Who every man wants to be, Hugh _____
9. Opposite of rooster
10. Another name for prosecutor
11. Pitching legend Young
12. Inventory Technology Management
13. Distinct pattern, method, abbreviation

DOWN

1. Don't leave the ____ doors open
14. Volitile chemical compound
15. Poo's depressed friend
16. Missouri football team
17. Word used to refer to self
18. Alternating current
19. Childish expression for 'tastes good'
20. Affectionate term for First Sergeant
21. Stimpy's pal
22. VHF's counterpart
23. Used in a pinch in baseball
24. Tom Selleck's TV job
25. Jazz singer Nina _____

Fightin' Words solution from Jan. 13, 2005

D	I	■	O	S	S	■	■
U	R	I	N	A	L	■	W
C	A	K	E	S	■	B	A
T	■	E	T	■	C	O	T
T	B	■	I	D	I	O	T
A	■	N	M	■	A	B	S
P	O	W	E	R	■	■	■
E	G	O	■	P	U	G	S

[Counter Radio-controlled IED Electronic Warfare]

CREW

Treat Us Right
We'll Help Save Your Life

Thunder Brigade Soldiers learn basics of saving lives on the battlefield

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin Doheny
159th Combat Aviation Battalion,
101st Airborne Division

LSA ANACONDA — In one chapter of 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 in harm's way and injured Soldiers may not have immediate access to a medic such as Roe while conducting certain missions.

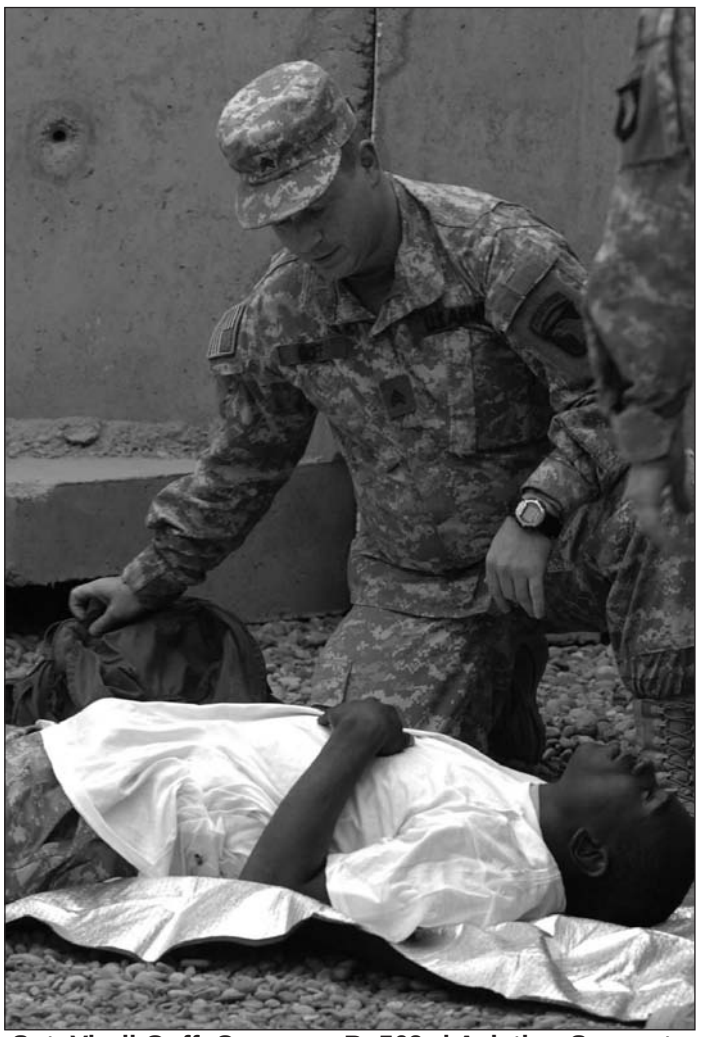
In an effort to ensure the ultimate level of survivability in combat, Soldiers are now being trained as combat lifesavers in the Eagle First Responder Course. These Soldiers are taught basic, lifesaving measures to ensure the Soldiers next to them stay alive.

The EFRC has been recently modified to fit 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 to stop the bleeding.

Soldiers attending the EFRC are taught to effectively stabilize a casualty for transport, said 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."



Sgt. Virgil Goff, Company B, 563rd Aviation Support Battalion assess a simulted 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.

Brooks said exsanguination, or bleeding out, is the leading cause of 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 said that there is rarely a medic on location when an incident happens, so it is important Soldiers know how to respond when needed to.

"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.

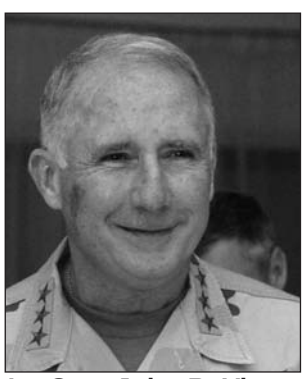
"The new course is an excellent effort to teach our Soldiers to take care of each other on the battlefield. It puts the emphases back on the basics where it should be, as this is the key to casualty survival," she said. "It also teaches the Soldiers to think on their feet, by explaining that the steps 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."

Vines comments on success of 2005, challenges for 2006

Story and photo by
Senior Airman Chris Powell
Multi-National Corps - Iraq

As the last hours of 2005 ticked away, Lt. Gen. John R. Vines, the Multi-National Corps-Iraq Commanding General, spoke of the events of the year 2005 to servicemembers at the Al Faw Palace.

The general touched on topics ranging from the Iraqi national election in January to the constitutional referendum in October and the recent trial of Saddam Hussein. He stressed it was servicemen and women who have made the operations in Iraq a success thus far, and it's their duty to give an honest assessment of the current situation to citizens back home.



Lt. Gen. John R. Vines

"The men and women at the point of the spear have done everything we could possibly ask of them," he said.

As the threat to Coalition Forces evolved during the tenure of the Corps, the Corps changed its tactics to meet current and emerging threats. "Our services have made an astonishing change to the force structure in terms of equipment and technology to address the [improvised explosive device] threat. In 2003, there were only about 240 [up-armored] vehicles world-wide. Now we have over 18,000 in theater."

The general also recognized the coalition's ability to sustain 13,000 logistical convoys, transporting millions of gallons of fuel all while traveling great distances over terrible terrain and also the abilities of the medical specialties operating within theater.

"Coalition Forces as well as our Iraqi counterparts have had the best medical care possible. The result is that we have the lowest died-of-wounds ratio in history," the general said.

But by fighting to do all these things, Coalition Forces paid a heavy price, he said.

"Over 2,000 caskets have been loaded onto aircraft headed home. Many of the casualties have been borne by our Coalition members," the general said. "There are many other sacrifices by family members, spouses, children and other loved ones. Ultimately, it's not about anything other than young men and women who have the courage and commitment to execute their nation's will."

Although attacks aren't as high as previous years, the general said we still face an everyday danger. "The number of incidents is going down. However, we cannot become complacent. When we see 50 attacks per day instead of 70, it still means 50 times that there were attacks against the Coaliton, ISF or Iraqi civilians," he said.

> ***"The men and women at the point of the spear have done everything we could possibly ask of them. I am proud of you and what you have done for your nation."***
>
> Lt. Gen. John R. Vines

The general acknowledged the ever-growing sacrifices made by the Iraqi Security Forces. "There has been an enormous sacrifice among the ISF," he said. "They continue to take a greater role in the security of Iraq, and these forces are also taking an increasing percentage of the casualties."

Currently, eighty percent of operations include the Iraqi Security Forces, and they have shown they are capable, the general said.

"It's good to have all these things happening -112 battalions in the field, borders re-established, [Al-Qaida in Iraq] in disarray and three national elections and referendums," the general said. "There is no absolute guarantee it will succeed, because that depends on the type of government that will arise. It cannot be about sects or clans, but about Iraqis. Only a government for all Iraqis can succeed.

He concluded by saying, "I tell you this because I believe you owe your fellow citizens an honest appraisal - your own opinion. That's mine. I am proud of you and what you have done for your nation."

U.S. Army photo by 1st Lt. Bridget Deuter

Two girls from the Iraqi village of Bil Hazim smile as Soldiers from the 96th Aviation Support Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade hand supplies, candy and recreation items to people from the village.

Soldiers meet school kids, local community leaders

Story by Sgt. Ryan Matson
101st Combat Aviation Brigade,
101st Airborne Division

BIL HAZIM — School was out, but that didn't stop members of the 96th Aviation Support Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, 101st Airborne Division from reaching out to the Iraqi people near the village of Bil Hazim.

Bil Hazim is just a few miles from Forward Operating Base Speicher, where much of the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade is deployed. The 96th ASB had visited the Hemrin School in October, delivering supplies to the school children and assessing the school's needs.

On Jan. 10, a convoy of Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Company and Company A, headed back to the school with boxes of school and health supplies. The convoy was also carrying a truck loaded with tar paper and cement adhesive to fix the schools leaky roof.

"We were just going to get rid of the tar paper, but we decided the school could use it," said Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Herndon, 96th ASB command sergeant major.

"The main difference between the missions of this type that we're doing now and those of two or three years ago when I was here before is that this time we're trying to give the local people the resources to do things for themselves. Our goal is to point them in the right direction and let them take care of themselves."

Though the school was observing Ied, a Muslim holiday, the mission was anything but a waste. Local villagers flocked to the school, where Soldiers distributed bags of candy, food, clothing, toys, and the crowd favorite – soccer balls to children and adults. During this time, Capt. John Burnett, Company A, 96th Aviation Support Battalion, met the assistant to the town sheik, Sheik Ali.

> ***"Our mission is to continue to build friendships while we reside here and continue to empower the Iraqis."***
>
> Capt. John Burnett

"It was a productive day," Burnett said. "We made some contacts within the village and they'd like to get together to talk about some things. Now we can help the school and the village around it as well."

Among the issues the villagers raised in the brief meeting Jan. 10 was the fact that the school has no running water, an issue Burnett said he would discuss with the sheik at the upcoming meeting.

He also said he would like to speak with the sheik to identify some Iraqi men who might be able to use the tar paper and cement to patch the school roof, with or without the assistance of U.S. Soldiers.

"Our mission is to continue to build friendships while we reside here and continue to empower the Iraqis," Burnett said.

U.S. Army photo bySgt. Ryan Matson

An Iraqi child from the village of Bil Hazim walks away after receiving some treats from Soldiers of the 96th Aviation Support Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade.

Corpsman makes house calls in Iraq

Alaska native chooses medicine over nuclear physics

Story and photos by
Sgt. Stephen M. DeBoard
2nd Marine Division

AL TAMAL — Seaman Bryan W. Stocks a hospital corpsman for Company A, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, had a tough choice when he enlisted into the Navy: nuclear physics or medicine.

They are two equally demanding and difficult jobs suitable for trustworthy and intelligent of enlistees.

Ultimately Stocks' decision was a question of what he imagined doing for the rest of his life.

"When I first went to the recruiter's office, I signed up for nuclear technology," said Stocks, a career that meant spending significant amounts of time at sea in a submarine, keeping the nuclear-powered war vessels underway.

"But that came with a six-year enlistment, and I never really liked calculus and trigonometry in high school anyway," said the 20-year-old.

Instead of backing out of the contract completely, he said he took an offer from the Navy light years away from working in the bellies of some of the most powerful machines on the earth.

"I chose to be a (hospital corpsman) instead. I got a two-year active duty contract for volunteering to be a fleet corpsman," said the Kenai, Alaska, native. The agreement also calls for two years as a reservist and four years in the Individual Ready Reserve.

The decision to spend his time in the Navy as a "doc" in the Fleet Marine Force led him here to Al Tamal, a small community of shepherds in the flat, expressionless desert of western Iraq.

This dusty, windswept village sprouts out of nowhere. It's more than an hour away from the nearest city. That makes it a perfect place for terrorists and smugglers to use as a base of operations.

Company A and Stocks were brought here to disrupt these operations He accompanies the Marines everywhere they go, medical bag and trauma shears strapped to him, ready to react to any injury.

"As a corpsman, I'm required to do everything a scout does, including clearing houses," Stocks said.

Securing an objective brought Stocks into a room crowded with Iraqi women and children, a family whose father was arrested for suspected terrorism. Stocks discovered, through a translator, that two of the children had been coughing a lot and one of them has a sore throat.

"Let me have a look here," he said, kneeling. He reached into his medical bag and pulled out his stethoscope to listen to the breathing of an Iraqi girl.

Seeing the nervousness in her face, Stocks put the earpieces from the device into her ears and tapped lightly on the drum to show her what it was and how it worked. Listening to the tapping, the girl turned her big brown eyes to Stocks and smiled tentatively.

"Breathe in," he said, making a rising motion with his hand. "OK, breathe out."

Examination of the girl complete, Stocks repeated the process with the boy who was also complaining of a sore throat. After listening to his lungs and peering into his throat with a flashlight, Stocks said, "It sounds like they've got an upper respiratory infection, and this one has a nasty sore throat. It looks like he's developing some sores back there."

"Doc" Stocks encouraged the mother to keep the children indoors and have them drink plenty of fluids.

"Two kids with an upper respiratory infection and a sore throat. There's just not a whole lot I could do for them," said Stocks. "They just need some (decongestant), rest and plenty of water."

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>
> Seaman Bryan W. Stocks

Once the medical treatment was complete and the house secured, Stocks and the Marines moved back to their vehicles ready to move on to the next objective.

In the next house, a woman approached them and said one of her family members had just given birth and was not feeling well.

"She had actually given birth about three days ago, but when I first walked in I thought the kid had (just been born)," he said, laughing. "When I examined the new mother, her blood pressure was very low since she had lost a lot of blood, so I started an IV on her to get her blood volume up."

The family was grateful for the treatment.

"They brought out some bread, chai and yogurt," said Stocks. "The yogurt kind of tasted like sour cream, but I tried it anyway."

The gratitude and hospitality didn't stop there.

"They actually wanted to slaughter a lamb for us, but we had to tell them we didn't have time; that we had to go."

Stocks said the opportunity to treat civilians who might have little or no access to trained medical assistance is invaluable. He plans to submit an application to the U.S. Naval Academy this year to pursue a career in medicine.

"I'm getting a lot of hands-on experience that a lot of guys won't have going in to medical school," he said.

His experiences have also been a confirmation of what he calls his "calling" to medicine.

"This is so emotionally gratifying. It really proves that I love what I do," he said.

Seaman Bryan W. Stocks, a platoon corpsman, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, investigates an Iraqi child's complaint of a sore throat during a security sweep in Al Tamal.