The WRANGLER

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The sun rises over a convoy of 377th Transportation Company heavy equipment transports bound for Tillil, Iraq, Dec. 2. The 377th is based out of Mannheim, Germany. ***Photo by Sgt. Joshua Salmons***

No such thing as an ordinary run

Myriad challenges, hazards while on Iraq roads keep 377th drivers on their toes

By Sgt. Joshua Salmons
4th Sustainment Brigade

Gunfire from nearby guard towers crackled just above the idling engines of Heavy Equipment Transports (HETs) waiting in the early Dec. 2 morning.

"Somebody's lighting something up!" cheered one of the gun-truck escort personnel, newly arrived to theater, as he passed by a group of 377th Transportation Company Soldiers.

Ten HETs from the Mannheim, Germany-based unit loaded with M109 Paladins and support vehicles sat in the 377th's motor pool, waiting for the route south to Tillil, Iraq, to get the green light.

During the lull, some Soldiers climbed into their cabs for some sleep while others stayed outside to socialize.

The firing nearby had abated, but the tension remained. Just days away from the end of their deployment, the 377th Soldiers wanted nothing more than a few more quiet missions.

"They can have all the IEDs they want," said Sgt. Jonathan Robertson, HET driver, referring to their new escorts. "Two more weeks and I'm out."

After racking up nearly 16,000

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operational miles in theater, 377th Soldiers are no strangers to threats from IEDs and insurgent ambushes. Some even look forward to traveling, despite the hazards.

"Time goes by so much faster on the road," said Sgt. Dennis Beese, HET driver. "As much as I hate being on the road, I hate not being on the road."

Two hours after the original start-point time, the route south was okayed and the order went out to leave.

The million-plus pounds of metal lined up and rolled out from the camp, turning toward the eight-hour trip south.

Thankfully the drivers had nothing to fight but sleep, dosing up on plenty of caffeinated drinks through the night, safely arriving at Tillil Airfield well into morning.

Although ahead of schedule, the Soldiers moved to quickly off-load their cargo in order to begin the trip north again.

The four platoons of the 377th go out on missions like this almost daily, said Staff Sergeant Warren Garrison, section sergeant. "We'll go all the way up to Mosul to down here in Tillil. We'll haul whatever they ask."

While HETs were designed to move the Abrams Main Battle Tank, the extensive payload capacity of the "King of Trucks" allows it to haul nearly anything that can fit on the trailer, from concrete barriers to fire engines to up-armored Mercedes cars, said Beese.

Sgt. Jonathan Robertson backs up an Army 5-ton truck onto a Heavy Equipment Transport while receiving instructions from Sgt. Jamie Spencer at Tillil Airfield, Iraq. Robertson is a truck driver and Spencer is a food service specialist with the 377th Transportation Company. ***Photo by Sgt. Joshua Salmons***

Having the unit based in Camp Taji helps because of its central location in theater.

"Now if we could only spend some time there," said Beese.

"We eat, breathe, sleep and live out of these trucks," said Spc. Joel Mincey, HET driver. The rear bench folds out two serve as makeshift bunks for the driver and truck commander, allowing the HET crew to grab bits of sleep when they can.

Arriving at camps throughout Iraq at all hours of the day and night, truck drivers have little time for routines and set schedules, often having to chose between eating, sleeping or something like a call home.

"All we eat is junk food," said Mincey, his truck cab littered with a half-dozen cans of soda and open bags of chips and candy from the trip south.

Snacks from 24-hour PXs provide the only convenient source of food for a group that might come in at 2:00 a.m. and have to leave three hours later.

With their initial cargo delivered, the 377th hit the road again, on to another location to move more equipment, stocked up on fresh soda and chips.

"We run [missions] constantly," said Mincey. "It never lets up all year.

"Two weeks can't come fast enough."

The WRANGLER

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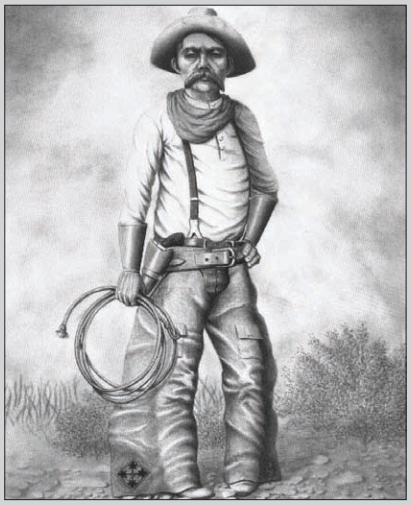
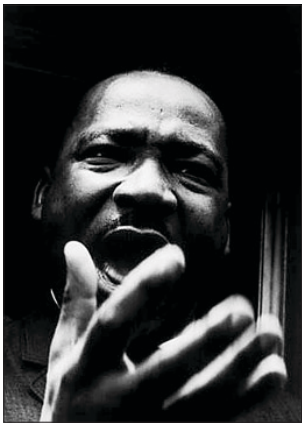
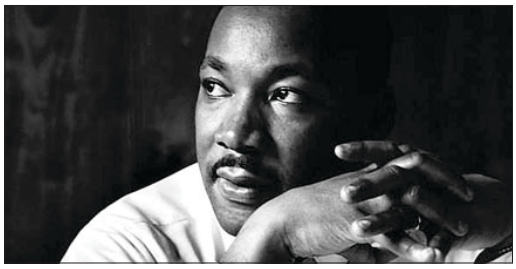




Martin Luther King Jr. Day
January 16, 2006

So let freedom ring. From the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire, let freedom ring. From the mighty mountains of New York, let freedom ring. From the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania, let freedom ring. But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. And when this happens, when we let it ring, we will speed that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

Free at last, free at last
Thank God Almighty,
we're free at last.



Photos by Flip Schulke | Corbis Corporation

A Chaplain's Prayer

False religion often a tool used to oppress

"The slave auctioneer's bell and the church-going bell chime in with each other, and the bitter cries of the heart-broken slave are drowned in the religious shouts of his pious master," wrote abolitionist Frederick Douglass about the relationship between slavery and slave-holding religion.

Religion was fraudulently used in the name of God to oppress, separate families, enslave, dehumanize, and kill African Americans. Douglass' fellow abolitionist and woman's suffrage leader, Sojourner Truth equally spoke against this worst kind of evil by declaring, "religion without humanity is poor human stuff."

In our Nation's history, slavery was justified and women were denied many basic rights in the name of religion.

Sadly, religious beliefs are sometimes the cause of oppression, cruel inhumanity, and blatant disregard for human life. The Scriptures remind us however, that such religion is false.

True religion is based upon love and service toward others. The apostle Paul defined this kind of love: Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. (I Corinthians 13:4-7, New Living Translation).

Capt. Loren Hutsell
Brigade Operations Chaplain

Last week I was appalled by the heartlessness, cruelty, and atrocities committed in the name of religion. Throughout the world, those misguided by religion protested at military funerals honoring our fallen comrades, carried out suicide and reckless bombings of innocent civilians, commented that an ailing Prime Minister's health was God's punishment, and beheaded (while his family was forced to watch) a high school principal who was educating girls. All of this is false religion.

As a nation, we are fortunate to have had leaders like Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth who bravely confronted the oppressors of their day. They challenged false belief systems by speaking the truth. They paved a road for the rest of us to follow.

Sojourner Truth's testimony provides inspiration and purpose in fighting against oppression: "I am above 80 years old; it is about time for me to be going. I have been 40 years a slave and 40 years free, and would be here 40 years more to have equal rights for all. I suppose I am kept here because something remains for me to do, I suppose I am yet to help to break the chain."

Clear as mud

A 1011th Quartermaster Company Soldier made his way through the mud Jan. 12 at the Consolidated Shipping and Receiving Point (CRSP) on Liberty Base Complex, Iraq. The rainy season often produces large amounts of mud, making movement and operations more difficult.
Photo by Sgt. Joshua Salmons

Field service Soldiers earn combat nod

Brigade commander gives Combat Action Badges for 2004 operations in north Iraq

1st Lt. Melissa Pratt
590th Field Service Company

Col. Gustave Perna, 4th Sustainment Brigade commander, awards a Combat Action Badge to Sgt. 1st Class Ernest Jacobs in a Dec. 12 ceremony on Logistical Base Seitz. Jacobs is assigned to the Force Protection Section of the 590th Field Service Company, 18th Corps Support Battalion. ***Photo by 1st Lt. Melissa Pratt***

LOGISTICAL BASE SEITZ, Iraq – Soldiers from the 590th Field Service Company (FSC) recently received the Combat Action Badge in a ceremony at the 189th Corps Support Battalion headquarters for encountering the enemy during their last deployment to Iraq.

Col. Gustave Perna, 4th Sustainment Brigade Commander presented the awards.

The Army Chief of Staff approved the creation of the combat action badge in May 2005; however awards can be retroactive back to action beginning Sept. 18, 2001.

The 590th FSC was deployed in the northern region of Iraq from January 2004 to January 2005 where Soldiers provided gun-truck escorts on combat logistical patrols.

During these convoys, the Soldiers were involved in several enemy engagements involving small-arms fire, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), mortars and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG).

Fortunately, only a handful of the Soldiers sustained minor injuries, said Staff Sgt. Warren Jones, the force protection NCOIC with the 590th.

Upon redeployment, the unit submitted the paperwork for the recently approved Combat Action Badge. All twenty Soldiers submitted for the award were approved.

Soldiers received the badges in two separate ceremonies.

The first awards ceremony, for thirteen of the unit's Soldiers, was held on Nov. 2, 2005 at the Fort Drum Rapid Deployment Facility, where the unit prepared to deploy to Iraq once again. Maj. Robert Feldman, Rear-Detachment Commander, presented the awards.

The badge served as getting the recognition deserved, said one Soldier.

"I think it is a good step forward," said Staff Sgt. Jerome Reed. "We now have something that shows we do come in contact with the enemy. We are not just sitting on the FOB."

The current mission of the 590th FSC is to provide laundry, shower, and clothing renovation support to several camps in the central region of Iraq. The unit also provides part of the camp's force protection and guard force.

The Retention Issue

Troops choosing to re-up now may get big bonus

With the Selective Re-enlistment Bonus Program, for the next 90 days Soldiers may receive up to $22,500 tax free in one lump sum for re-enlisting.

The period runs from Jan. 6 to April 30. This increases the bonus cap by $7,500.

Military Occupational Skills (MOS) are immaterial for deployed Soldiers—It does not matter what your job is. You must meet re-enlistment and selective re-enlistment bonus eligibility.

Soldiers must have an ETS date between now and Sept. 30, 2007.

This is a great deal for Soldiers.

Under the previous deployment message, Soldiers are only able to receive up to $15,000.

Sgt. 1st Class Gary Avins
Brigade Career Counselor

But, for the next 90 days the bonus is up to $22,500 tax free lump sum deposited into your bank account within 60 days after re-enlisting.

For example, Soldiers in the grade of E-4 with a contractual Expiration Term of Service (ETS) between Oct. 1 and Sept. 30, 2007 are entitled to a 1.5A multiplier and their bonus is capped at $10,000. Their new multiplier is 3.0A with a new bonus cap of $17,500.

If you have any questions regarding re-enlistment, please contact me at (318)834-1176 or come to Bldg. 28 on Camp Taji.

A room with a view

A UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter cruises over north Baghdad as the sun sets Jan. 13. The Blackhawk is one of the 4th Infantry Division Aviation Brigade helicopters of the "Ironhorse Express" that carries personnel to camps and forward operating bases throughout the Baghdad region.
Photo by Sgt. Joshua Salmons

Personal Finance Planning

TSP limits lifted, now far easier for Soldiers to save

Thrift Savings Plan Features for Uniformed Services

With the average life expectancy 30 years longer today than it was 100 years ago, saving adequate funds to live comfortably through a long retirement has become more challenging.

Use some of your deployment entitlements to invest in your future.

Regardless of your age, certain strategies can raise the odds that you'll reach your retirement goal:

- Learn to live below your income
- Consider tax-advantage savings through plans such as the military's Thrift Savings Plan and/or a Roth Individual Retirement Account (IRA)
- Review your asset allocation annually and make adjustments as needed
- Do not borrow against your retirement

What is the Thrift Savings Plan?

The Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) is a Federal Government-sponsored retirement savings and investment plan [http://www.tsp.gov/uniserv/features/def_ch1-IRS-code.html]. Congress established the TSP in the Federal Employees' Retirement System Act of 1986.

The purpose of the TSP is to provide retirement income.

On October 30, 2000, the Floyd D. Spence National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law 106-398) was signed into law. One provision of the law extended participation in the TSP, which was originally only for Federal civilian employees, to members of the uniformed services.

Master Sgt. Robin Krieger
Brigade Finance NCOIC

Thrift Savings Plan Changes

Effective this month, civilian and military employees are no longer subject to a percentage limit on the amount they may contribute to a regular Thrift Savings Plan Account.

They may contribute the full amount allowed by the Internal Revenue Service Annual Elective deferral limit, which is $15,000 for 2006.

Open seasons were eliminated July 1, 2005, so you may start, change, stop or resume their TSP contributions at any time.

TSP offers investors the chance for lower taxes each year they contribute while not having to pay taxes on earnings until they reach retirement.

There are five individual TSP funds to choose from. For more information visit their web site at http://www.tsp.gov/rates/fundsheets.html.

On the Net: More information on TSP: http://www.tsp.gov/uniserv/features/chapter01.html#top#top

Iraqi medical officers take tips from brigade personnel

Future doctors visit 4th Sustainment medics to learn American techniques to give them better tools to care for patients

Iraqi army doctor, 1st Lt. Muhaned (center) from the Annumanya Base Support Clinic, observes as Capt. Dawn Orta checks Spc. Matthew Williams' nose for sinus problems in the 4th Sustainment Brigade's Troop Medical Clinic Jan. 10. Williams is a gun truck driver in Battery C, 1st Battalion, 377th Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Sustainment Brigade, and Orta is a physician's assistant in Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Special Troops Battalion, 4th Sustainment Brigade.
Photo by Spc. Creighton Holub

By Spc. Creighton Holub
Combat Aviation Brigade, 4ID

Four Iraqi army medical officers toured the 4th Sustainment Brigade's Troop Medical Clinic and observed American medical personnel providing care for their troops Jan. 10.

The training was part of the Iraqi army's medical Officer Basic Course at the Iraqi Army Service and Support Institute to demonstrate how the U.S. Army's medical system works. For instance, the U.S. personnel showed the Iraqis how computers are used to track patients' medical records and to ensure proper care is provided to the Soldiers.

"This is essentially an orientation to the way that we provide care," Maj. Mark Higdon said. Higdon is the brigade surgeon for the Wrangler Brigade. "Medicine here is the same as medicine back in the states. The same principles are followed. We wanted to give them an opportunity to work side-by-side with us.

The Iraqi medical practitioners are qualified for their respective level of training. The Wrangler TMC hosted the United States' equivalent of a registered nurse, two family medicine doctors and an anesthesiologist.

"They've finished medical school and they've finished their residencies," Higdon said about the Iraqi Army medical personnel. "They're learning the system of how we deliver health care. We have several innovations, many of which have to do with airway devices and homeostatic agents (agents to stop bleeding) that many of these Iraqi physicians may have never seen."

These innovations are in every American Soldier's Improved First Aid Kit: a one-handed tourniquet, a better first-aid bandage and tape compared to only one smaller first-aid bandage. More Soldiers are trained as Combat Life Savers, who bridge the gap in training from basic first aid to a combat medic.

"Good techniques and modern techniques are better than the old techniques," 2nd Lt. Anwer, a registered nurse with the Iraqi army, said about the brigade's medical personnel. "I hope that I will get to use these techniques in my clinic in the future. I'll take every bit of information from them to give better treatment."

The training puts the Iraqi army doctors ahead of their civilian peers, however relatively few military doctors are in their army. There are about 80 doctors in the Iraqi army according to 1st Lt. Khaldun, from the Annumanya Base Support Clinic.

Soldiers whose sessions with the American practitioners observed by the Iraqi physicians took a positive experience away from their short time with the Iraqis.

"It's showing that it's coming together a lot faster overall," said Spc. James C. Pfeifer, food supply specialist, Battery C, 2nd Battalion, 44th Field Artillery Regiment. "It's showing to be a good thing. I'm very impressed by the way that they conducted themselves and hearing about their schooling."

> I hope that I will get to use these techniques in my clinic in the future. I'll take every bit of information from them to give better treatment.
>
> ***2nd Lt. Anwer***
> Registered Nurse, Iraqi Army

Some Medical Advice

What's all the fuss about bird flu?

Many recent news stories have focused on the potential for the "bird flu" to cause a pandemic (or world-wide outbreak) among humans. Bird flu (or avian influenza) is a virus that occurs naturally in birds.

Wild birds carry the viruses in their intestines, but usually don't get sick from them. Domesticated birds such as chickens, ducks, and turkeys are also susceptible to the virus.

Infected birds shed the virus in their saliva, nasal secretions (yes, birds can have a runny nose), and feces.

Susceptible birds can become infected if they contact infected secretions or excretions (or the surfaces that have become contaminated).

Two main forms of the virus exist among birds and only one is lethal.

The deadly form of the virus will kill 90-100% of infected birds within 48 hours; it is very infectious to other birds.

The milder form of the flu usually goes undetected or causes only minor symptoms (such as decreased egg production).

The reason for all the recent media attention is the fact that researchers have found the deadly version of the bird flu in humans.

Worldwide since 2004, there have been 140 cases of the lethal form of the bird flu in humans (usually in children or young adults); approximately 50% of those cases resulted in death.

This does not represent a large mortality risk for humans (for comparison, in the U.S. an average of 83 people die each year from lightning strikes).

Maj. Mark Higdon
Brigade Surgeon

Fortunately, the bird flu does not spread from human to human as it does in birds. Confirmed human cases have all resulted from contact with infected poultry of from surfaces contaminated with excretion from infected birds.

Bird flu has been reported in the following countries: Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Russia, and recently Turkey; it has not been reported in Iraq.

Most of the countries listed above depend on domesticated birds for a substantial portion of their diet and do not have strict food inspections such as in the U.S.

Concern exists currently that the virus could mutate and begin to spread from person to person.

If human to human transmission were to occur, the bird flu could spread rapidly and infect many individuals.

Our current flu vaccine does not protect against the bird flu, however, many studies are underway to develop a vaccine (testing began on a prototype-vaccine in April 2005).

Prevention is the best medicine concerning the bird flu. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that all foreign travelers wash their hands regularly and avoid eating under cooked poultry – no problem here at Camp Taji.

An anti-viral medication called Tami Flu is used currently to treat human cases of the bird flu with good success.

Although the bird flu does present a small risk to humans, when standing under a tree, you are still more likely to die from a lightning strike than from being hit with an infected bird dropping.

A Few Legal Pointers

Special tax rules apply to Soldiers serving overseas

Yes, it is that time of year again: tax season. Although Christmas and New Year's is over, there is something we can still celebrate and be thankful for – an extension to file our income taxes.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has given service members serving in a combat zone an extension to file their taxes. Service members can file their taxes 180 days after the last day the service member was in a combat zone or the last day of any continuous qualified hospitalization for injury from service in the combat zone. In addition to the 180 days, the deadline can be further extended by the number of days the service member was in a combat zone during the tax filing season (1 Jan. to 15 April).

For example, Soldiers of the 4th Sustainment Brigade that deployed in the fall of 2005 and will redeploy in the fall of 2006 will have 180 days plus an additional 105 days (January 1st to April 15th) to file their 2005 income taxes when they return from Iraq. The 105 days are an additional extension because the service member was in a combat zone during the 2005 tax filing season (1 January – 15 April 2006).

Capt. Eric Lee
Judge Advocate

Spouses of deployed service members are also entitled to this extension if they are filing jointly.

SEE **TAXES** • Page 9

Pfc. James Everson checks the battery terminals on a heavy equipment transport during a technical inspection Dec. 14 on Camp Taji. Everson is a vehicle mechanic assigned to the 189th Combat Support Battalion. ***Photo by Sgt. Joshua Salmons***

Pause in operations a chance to perform extra maintenance

By Sgt. Joshua Salmons
4th Sustainment Brigade

During the Iraq elections, American convoys were kept to a minimum, giving many units a week-long stand down of normal operations.

Units like the newly-arrived 189th Combat Support Battalion are using the lull to catch up on vehicle maintenance.

"We're taking this opportunity with this downtime…to do a thorough check of our fleet," said Chief Warrant Officer James Savage, the 189th battalion maintenance officer.

"A lot of these vehicles are on the road so much and so often, they don't get a chance to get the proper attention that they should."

All nine companies of the battalion coordinated to stage lanes and personnel to check the 850 vehicles used in convoy operations over a three-day period, Savage said.

Starting with a technical inspection, small problems are identified to be fixed along the process, while additional checks are conducted to identify possible, more serious issues.

Once a vehicle progresses to the final stages of the lane, a motor sergeant inspects the paperwork and identified problems to ensure they were fixed, or if a work order had been placed.

"We do this stuff every time they go out on mission…but we don't get this extensive with it," said Sgt. Patrick Young, vehicle mechanic, commenting on the quality assurance quality control process.

"[Drivers] go through PMCS everyday, but with [mechanics] going through this ourselves, this gives us a chance to do a technical inspection that we haven't been able to do since we took over."

"A lot of times these vehicles are in one day and they go right back out," said Savage.

"The real benefit from this is…when we send this stuff back out that it is fully mission capable."

TAXES FROM Page 8

If a service member does not want to wait until redeployment to file taxes, a family member, friend, or a tax professional can prepare and file taxes on the service member's behalf using a power of attorney. If a service member gave a general or special power of attorney to someone to file their 2005 taxes, that power of attorney will be accepted by the IRS if it specifically enumerates a power to file income taxes. If the service member did not give anyone a power of attorney, the service member can fill out IRS Form 2848.

This form and the instructions can be downloaded from the IRS website, http://www.irs.gov and is not required to be notarized. However, the person filing taxes on behalf of the service member must provide a copy of the power of attorney or form 2848 to the IRS along with the tax return.

If you need a power of attorney or assistance filling out form 2848, see the Brigade legal office for assistance.

Service members who want to take advantage of this filing extension should notify the IRS via e-mail at combatzone@irs.gov.

Service members should provide their name, spouse's name, stateside address, date of birth and date of deployment to the combat zone. Do NOT include any social security numbers in an e-mail. The taxpayer, spouse, authorized agent, or representative can send this e-mail notification to the IRS.

Whether you take advantage of this extension or have someone else file your taxes for you, make sure you file a complete and accurate tax return.

If your return is incomplete or inaccurate, you will be required to file an amended return, and if you owe the IRS money, you will be assessed interest from the date the return was due to the IRS.

Furthermore, for service members and their families back at their home station, be sure to visit the on-post tax center for additional information and free tax assistance.

Sgt. Dwayne White fastens chains to an M1A2 Abrams loaded on a Heavy Equipment Transport Dec. 18 on Camp Taji, Iraq. White and other personnel from the Fort Eustis-based 155th Cargo Transfer Company took part in HET training that included loading and unloading an Abrams.
Photo by Sgt. Joshua Salmons

Cargo specialists tackle 'King of Trucks'

155th personnel learn how to handle the biggest vehicle on the roads of Iraq

By Sgt. Joshua Salmons
4th Sustainment Brigade

Personnel from the 155th Cargo Transfer Company finished a two-week training session on the heavy equipment transport (HET) Dec. 20 given by 4th Sustainment Brigade driving instructors.

"It goes with the American saying: the bigger, the better," said Sgt. Kevin Cox, master driver with HHC, Special Troops Battalion, 4th Sustainment Brigade, in describing the sheer size of the vehicle.

While the 155th personnel had experience with a wide variety of Army vehicle sizes, none had dealt much with the "king of trucks," the nickname for the 90,000 pound behemoth.

"Before this, the biggest thing I'd driven was a Humvee," said Spc. Joshua Pollock, a cargo specialist with the 155th.

Those from the 155th trained in HET operation will assist with the company's recovery mission.

The HET can haul every Army tracked and wheeled vehicle, the heaviest of which is the M1 Abrams main battle tank. Part of the HET training involved loading and unloading a disabled M1 tank, relying only on the HET's winches to pull it aboard.

"There are so many things that could go wrong with [loading a disabled tank]," said Sgt. 1st Class Gustavo Soto, 4th Sustainment Brigade personal security detail NCOIC, also a HET driving instructor.

"We're here to teach these guys how to do this by the book so they are ready for anything out there."

"If they can handle [an M1 tank] they can handle anything out there," said Cox.

Careful coordination between the HET crew is required during an operation like loading a disabled M1. The vehicle's two winches are each rated for 55,000 pounds and can quickly be damaged by the 68-ton tank if not synchronized.

Other areas of training included proper PMCS, how to change any of the vehicle's 40 tires, turning and backing up with the 51-foot trailer.