

The Heart Beat

2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division
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February 15, 2006



TALONS IN THE FIYAHS:

1-502nd "STRIKES"
in South Baghdad

What it is like
on the hard
front



Free Mail

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Think Responsibility – Make a Difference

Many of the Iraqis we face are torn by sectarian and ethnic differences and are lacking any real sense of a common identity. For years their fragile society has lived under pervasive, politically motivated brutality that has damaged any sense of commonality and has drained many of the Iraqis of much of their humanity.

The Reckoning

I recently read a passage about how we can think about our lives. It is worth sharing.

*We can think that as individuals we count for nothing
– this pessimism leads to weakness and despair.*

We can think we are all-important

*–this egotism prevents cooperation with others for
ends which are greater than ourselves.*

We can think our life as having meaning and purpose

*– this is leads to responsibility – to our sense of
duty to make a difference.*

As Black Heart Soldiers, our responsibility, at this point in our rich history, is to make a difference – a real difference for the good citizens of South Baghdad, who, by our own witness are torn, confused, tired and yet anxious and hopeful to restore order, dignity, and humanity in the ruins of a former police state that never gave these Iraqis any opportunity to know freedom.

Iraqis are not able to restore order on their own – with our teamwork, we are making a huge difference for something greater than ourselves – this something is” Freedom.”

God Bless each of you and your families.

STRIKE!

TODD J. EBEL

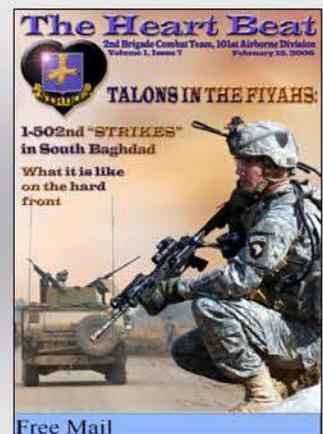
COL, IN

Commanding

Cover Photo:

Photos by Spc. Karl Johnson, 363rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment.

Staff Sgt. Reed Mathis, C Company, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, communicates over the radio while pulling security in south Baghdad. (Background photo) A mounted patrol secures the roads of Mahmudiyah.



THE TALONS IN THE FIYAHS: 1-502nd "STRIKES" in South Baghdad

What it is like on the hard front

Story and photos by
Spc. Karl Johnson
363rd MPAD

Far away from the local post exchange, internet cafes or the smell of a familiar fast food restaurant are the "Strike Soldiers" of Company B, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, based out of forward operating base Yusufiyah. Where making the best of what you have is just part of the job.

When these "Strike Soldiers" first arrived at FOB Yusufiyah nearly 5 months ago, they found little more than a large hanger separated into bays. In that period they've worked on their own time to improve their home away from home to create something they could call their own.

"Right now we're trying to build rooms for everybody so that we can have some personal space and a chance at some privacy," said Spc. Daniel Sparks, an infantryman serving at Yusufiyah. "Already though, this place is a lot better off than when we first got here."

Improvement projects like the new rooms, along with the ongoing security missions these Soldiers take part in truly show the character that goes into the Soldiers serving out here.

"There's a very demanding mission pace out here, so we do everything we can to stay motivated," said Sgt. John Diem, an infantryman in B, 1-502 Inf. Reg. "When we talk



Staff Sgt. Anthony Cox assists 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment Soldiers with the construction of a new traffic control point south of Baghdad.

to the people here they tend to be positive and optimistic and we pick up on that."

For many of these Soldiers keeping motivated and staying busy is what helps to pass the time. And staying busy is the one thing these Soldiers never have to worry about.

"We work three days a week at the traffic control points, followed by three days working out of the FOB, said Private First Class Steven Green, an infantryman in B, 1-502 Inf. Reg. "And then every third month you spend a month out at JS bridge. You never really get a day off."

For these Soldiers, spending several nights away from the FOB and looking forward to the next hot meal or shower is just part of their mission. They work some of the most demanding schedules in the Army in one of the most dangerous areas.

According to several of the "Strike Soldiers", the working environment is tough, but manning the TCP's is essential to maintaining security in the area. They use them to limit the flow of insurgents, and to reduce the number of improvised explosive devices around Yusufiyah.

Securing their area is a never ending job. One that demands that nothing be taken for granted. That includes taking care of yourself and looking out for the Soldier next to you. Because sometimes the Soldier next to you can be the most important thing you have.

"We really watch out and stick up for each other out here," said Sparks. "We're a close knit group and that helps us to get through some of the tough times here."

It's a very challenging mission, said Diem. But I think the guys out here know they've made a real contribution.

It's those contributions and the sacrifices made by every one of these "Strike Soldiers" that truly separates them from the rest.

Far away from the comforts that many Soldiers now take for granted, these Soldiers are earning their keep, every day, for everybody.



Two Soldiers secure the road ways while their platoon assists the Iraqi Soldiers in the set up of a traffic control point

Getting down and dirty: Soldiers in the mud

CAMP STRIKER, Iraq— Iraq is not the place most people would think of as getting nasty weather. The common perception of Iraq is a hot, arid place where water is scarce.

The recent precipitation over our area has left Camp Striker... soggy. As a child you were probably told by your parents not to walk in the mud. Many years and a deployment later, you will find that staying out of the mud is virtually impossible.

Finding a dry mud-free place to walk after a rain on camp is challenging, as the ground is mostly hardened sand. Gravel has been poured out onto the ground by the truckload, mostly to provide traction for walking.

The mud here at best can be described as strange. It is thick and gooey, but not very wet and it dries quickly. A boot submerged in Iraqi mud will dry in a matter of hours, versus the day or so it would take a boot submerged in domestic mud to dry.

The grimy conditions make road travel more difficult, as tires slip and slide in the mud. Vehicle recovery teams note an increase in calls to retrieve vehicles that become immobilized due to bad conditions.

"If it rains, our recovery missions increase a lot because

of the road conditions," said Warrant Officer Byron Wheatley, the allied trades' technician for Bravo 526th Vehicle Recovery Team. "On a bad weather day, we can see upward to three to five calls a day."

There are other drawbacks to the mud situation. Keeping the insides of the tents and buildings clean can become a bit of a problem.

"With the volume of traffic we have, it's very challenging to maintain the TOC," said Sgt. 1st Class Robert Moss of the effort involved in keeping the Strike Brigade headquarters clean.

As we continue through the rain season, we can expect to have the mud around for quite some time.



(Left) a view of the MWR recreation area after two days of rainfall. Not only do the Soldiers endure the clay-like mud but lakes of rainwater built up through out the camp.

More than just another guard duty

Story and photos

1st Lt. Lauren Koban, 526th BSB

Soldiers of B Company, 526 Brigade Support Battalion, a field maintenance company, are not only keeping busy by providing maintenance support to 2nd Brigade Combat Team, but are also tasked to provide fixed site security for the Civil Military Operations Center at the Radwaniyah Palace Compound. Since arriving at Camp Striker, soldiers are tasked daily to provide guard in a tower over watching the CMOC area and guard the gate at the CMOC where Iraqi patrons enter.

The CMOC provides free medical care for Iraqi nationals. The medical care is provided by Navy personnel. The CMOC also has a claims office that reimburses nationals when their property is damaged or destroyed as a result of combat related operations. The CMOC clinic is open to Local Nationals three days a week and the claims office

is open six days a week.

Because of the services provided by the CMOC, 526th BSB soldiers guarding the CMOC have the unique opportunity to interact with local nationals on a daily basis. The soldiers are responsible for searching the Iraqis who come to the CMOC.

"It's a good chance for our soldiers to understand the culture of Iraqi men and women," said SFC Anthony Reese of Dothan, Alabama and in Bravo Company, 526 BSB.

Each day 526th BSB soldiers depart Camp Striker to take the shift out at the CMOC. Once the new shift gets their in-brief, they are divided by the Sergeant of the Guard to take their posts. Some soldiers go out to the main gate with an interpreter in order to search patrons for entrance into the CMOC while other

soldiers take post in a guard tower that oversees the CMOC area.

There is always a female stationed at the gate to conduct searches on female patrons. Because of the small number of females within B Company, 526th BSB, other companies within 526th BSB have

Continued on Pg. 8 See Guard



(From left to right) Spc. Daniel Vicena, Pvt. James Zettle and Sgt. Nicoli-Turner Warfield prepare to move out to their guard shift at CMOC.



Mass Casualty Exercise: Always training, always ready

Story and photos by
Spc. George Welcome

CAMP STRIKER, Iraq—There is an old Army adage that says, “If it ain’t raining, we ain’t training.”

In the spirit of being able to adapt to any circumstance, the medics of C Company, 526th Forward Support Battalion conducted a mass casualty evacuation exercise or MASCAL on a cold, rainy afternoon at Camp Striker.

The exercise was intended to simulate what would happen if Soldiers were injured during an enemy attack on the camp. The exercise was elaborate and everyone from the brigade operations center to the Camp Striker Fire Department played a role.

“At 13:50 the TOC was notified that a rocket struck a tent, burning it and damaging the one next to it,” said Maj. Craig Bukowski, 2nd Brigade medical operations officer. “This all takes place in the vicinity of PAD 3 and there are casualties.”

Although it appeared chaotic at first, the event unfolded just the way they would in an actual emergency.

Soldiers from the Quick Reaction Team arrived on the scene at the same time the Striker-BIAP Fire Department arrived. The QRT searched for casualties, assessed their condition and helped to evacuate them, then called for medical help. Simultaneously, the firefighters quelled the tent fires and assisted with the evacuation effort.

After all the victims had been moved to safety the Charlie Medics arrived, ready to provide treatment to the wounded troops. It is the effort of the first responder that often determines whether or not the injured person will survive.

“You do what you can do on the ground,” said Maj. Kevin King, Strike Brigade Surgeon. “There’s nothing an aid station can do to stabilize a patient that can’t be done by a medic on the ground.”

As indicated by its name, the MASCAL exercise stressed the importance of treating the patients, and getting them ready to be airlifted to the Combat Support Hospital.

“Use everything you have been taught with the tourniquets, the airway maneuvers, the Hesperan and get them on a helicopter,” King told the medics. “Flight time from our LZ to the combat support hospital is about six minutes.”

After the litter team had loaded and secured the last casualty into the patient area of an ambulance, its rear doors were shut and the ambulance was given a tap, the sign it could depart for the troop medical clinic. Fortunately, all of the mock casualties were saved thanks to the treatment given to them by the medics.

The exercise went a long way in producing a realistic scenario, and in building on the extensive skills the medical and rescue personnel have. It was also a good indicator on how well all the units will work together if a similar situation arises.



(Left) The Litter team helps to load a wounded Soldier into an ambulance during the MASCAL exercise at Camp Striker on Feb 3. (Right) A Soldier from the Quick Reaction Team locates and evaluates a casualty. The QRT locates and helps extract victims from dangerous situations, such as a tent fire as was the case in the MASCAL exercise held on Camp Striker.



Faces of



(Left) A 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment Soldier takes aim during a cordon and search in Mahmudiyah. (Photo by Spc. Karl Johnson)

(Right) A "STRIKE" Soldier offers up some toys for the local national children during a civil affairs mission. (Photo by Spc. Karl Johnson)



A 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, Soldier climbs over an abandoned vehicle blocking an alley way in south Baghdad. (Photo by Spc. Karl Johnson)

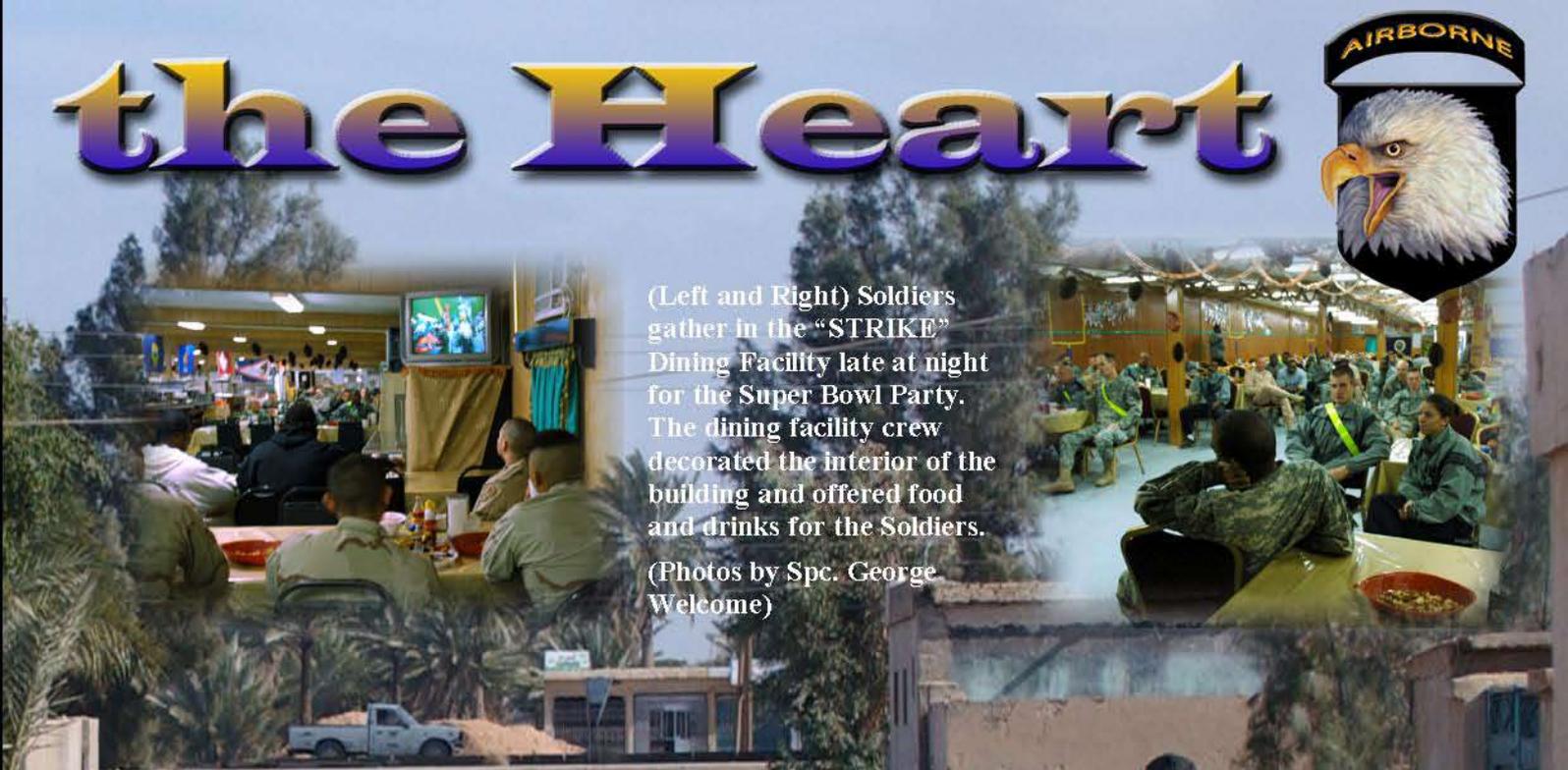


(Left) A 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, Soldier pulls security while his platoon secures a building in Baghdad. (Photo by Spc. Karl Johnson)



Maj. Jim Sisemore, M1T 2, helps transfer lumber for the construction of a new traffic control point south of Baghdad. (Photo by Spc. Karl Johnson)

the Heart

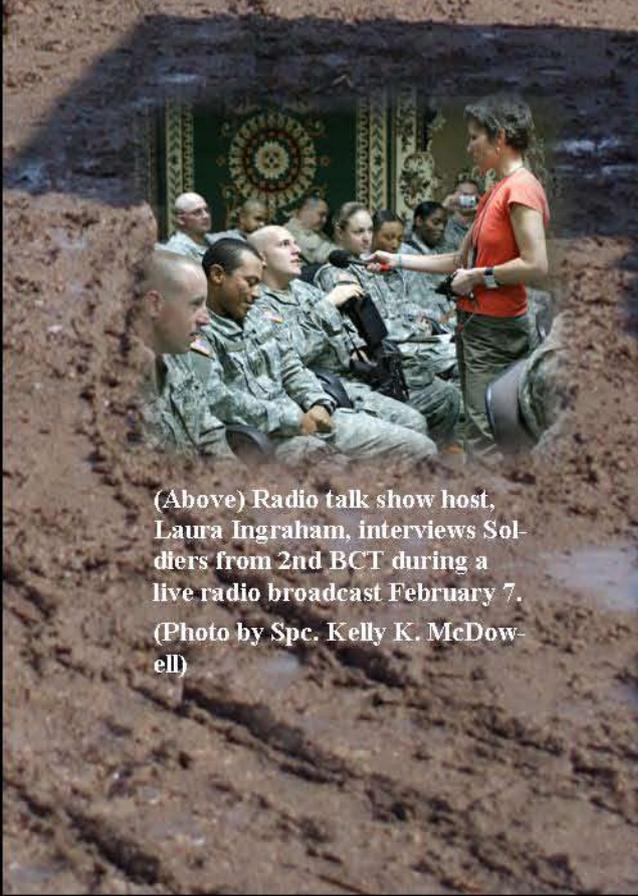


(Left and Right) Soldiers gather in the "STRIKE" Dining Facility late at night for the Super Bowl Party. The dining facility crew decorated the interior of the building and offered food and drinks for the Soldiers.

(Photos by Spc. George Welcome)



(Right) Spc. Noel Alvarado of Alpha Battery, 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment receives a box full of school supplies and toys from Connecticut Congressman Christopher Shays at Sather Air Base on Feb 5. Shays along with other Congressional delegates presented supplies to Alvarado on behalf of the Connecticut school children who collected the items, to be distributed to Iraqi children. (Photo by Spc. George Welcome)



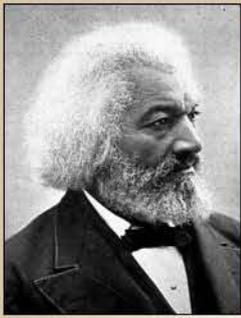
(Above) Radio talk show host, Laura Ingraham, interviews Soldiers from 2nd BCT during a live radio broadcast February 7.

(Photo by Spc. Kelly K. McDowell)



2nd Lt. Andrew Martin, C Company, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, poses for a quick photo with a local national's baby. The Soldiers of the Civil Affairs team visit the villages in the south Baghdad area handing out toys, clothes and school supplies to help the Iraqi children.

(Photo by Spc. Karl Johnson)



Frederick Douglass was one of the foremost leaders of the abolitionist movement, which fought to end slavery within the United States in the decades prior to the Civil War. Douglass served as an adviser to President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War.

Black History Month

Black History Month is observed every February as a time to recognize the achievements and accomplishments of African-Americans and their contributions to helping make America the great country it is today.

The observance began back in 1926 as "Negro History Week" when Dr. Carter G. Woodson established it as a way of recognizing the significance of black history, which at the time was largely ignored. The month of February was chosen for the observance based on the two men who had the greatest impact on the course of Black History during Civil War America, Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, both of whom were born in February.

"The idea behind it is to promote knowledge of Black History and experiences. It is also to disseminate the information on the positive contributions to society African-Americans have made," said Sgt. 1st Class Dave Dulen, brigade equal opportunity representative.

It is important to note, that Black History is something that can be shared by all Americans, because Black History is American History.

"We should all make that step to learn about each other's background and history," said Dulen. "You would be amazed by the fact that we are all more alike than we are different."

"REGULARS" ASSUME CONTROL OF AL-RASHID



BAGHDAD—On February 1, Task Force Regulars officially assumed control of the northern and eastern sectors of Al-Rashid in a continuing mission of assisting the local citizens.

"The transition between the 3rd Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment and the 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment was a shining success," said Sgt. Major Noe Salinas. "Our Soldiers are now familiar with Al-Rashid Qada and eager to assist the Iraqi Security Forces in establishing a safe and secure environment."

The partnership with the 3rd Battalion, 4th Brigade of the Iraqi Army 6th Division is complete. The two units are focused on eliminating the threat posed by the insurgents currently operating in Al-Rashid.

The units are conducting combined patrols throughout our area of operations. In the short time we have operated in this area of operation, the Soldiers have detained a number of insurgents and seized several weapons' caches. These combined efforts will ensure Al-Rashid is prosperous in the future.

Task Force Regulars has occupied its permanent headquarters on Forward Operating Base Falcon. With this new location, the commander Lt. Col. Craig Osborne, supported by the battle staff will be able to take advantage of all the digital systems in the fight against the insurgents. The "Regulars" have fielded and trained its Soldiers on new equipment which will greatly enhance their effectiveness in Al-Rashid.

Did you know:

Our 2nd BCT commander, Col. Todd Ebel, began his military career with this unit, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment.

GUARD *(Continued from Pg. 4)*

been providing additional females to help guard the gate.

"Villagers and townspeople are greatly appreciative of the services that are provided," said Sgt. Nicoli Turner-Warfield of Canton, Ohio and a member of Charlie Company, 526th BSB.

Many children are brought in for medical aid. When they leave, they usually have a bag full of clothes and toys given to them inside the medical facility. Some soldiers even had toys and clothing sent from home for the children that come to the CMOC and also for the children who play outside the gate.

"Working at the CMOC is good because it breaks up the monotony of the deployment and is a nice change of pace," said Specialist Donn Pattermann of Hayward, Wisconsin, Bravo Company 526 BSB.

Working at the CMOC also offers soldiers another view of Iraq. The Local Nationals seem thankful and appreciative when they leave the clinic shown through hand gestures and their traditional verbal customs and courtesies, said Sgt. Turner-Warfield.

Although providing fixed site security was not an anticipated tasking prior to deployment, Bravo Company soldiers have enjoyed their time working at the CMOC and interacting with Iraqi citizens.



Sgt. Jonathan Erwin, B Company, 526th BSB, stands guard at the CMOC.

E COMPANY "KILLER" SAPPERS: 1-22 LEAD IRAQIS IN TRAINING

by 1LT Nate Rawlings

From a distance, the foot patrol appears no different from the hundreds of patrols conducted daily in Southern Baghdad. Soldiers walk slowly in a sharp formation, rifles at the ready, heads on a swivel, prepared to react to any sign of danger.

It is not until the soldiers move closer that an observer realizes that the troops comprising the formation are not American.

First, there is the uniform—the brown and tan chocolate chip pattern worn by U.S. troops in the first Gulf War, embroidered with colorful patches and Arabic names. The weapons they carry are the AK-47, not the familiar M4.

For the soldiers of 2nd Company, 4th Battalion, 6th Iraqi Army Division, patrols are one part of a variety of operations undertaken to help secure areas of Southern Baghdad. As part of the increased focus on preparing the Iraqi Army to operate independently of U.S. and Coalition assistance, the Strike Brigade is utilizing the distinct combination of talents and expertise found in the combat engineers of E Company, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, now attached to 1st Squadron, 75th Cavalry Regiment “Widowmakers”.

“What we’re seeing here is a military organization that is essentially well prepared in terms of basic soldiering skills,” said Capt. Joshua Bohannon, E Company Executive Officer. “Where our focus will lie is in honing the specific skill sets that are crucial to infantry combat and overseeing the implementation of more advanced tactics that will be successful in this theater.”

The task of training and operating alongside of the Iraqi Army soldiers rests upon a group of combat engineers who hail from the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Hood Texas.

Known as Sappers, the soldiers of E Company possess a broad area of expertise, and are fully capable of successfully executing mounted and dismounted infantry tactics along with their extensive knowledge of explosives, demolitions and maneuver warfare. In addition to working to help secure main roads in area of operation Widowmaker, the Sappers of E Company are supporting the Strike Mission by working to help the Iraqi soldiers execute their missions with increased confidence and proficiency.

During the process of assessing 2nd Company’s readiness and areas in need of improvement, E Company’s sappers encountered a variety of challenges, the largest of which was the language barrier.

“It’s hard to communicate what you want them to learn, even with a translator,” said Spc. Jason Wells, an E Company Sapper. “Sometimes you just have to use hand signals, but more often than not, we just act out what we want them to see. Sometimes it looks pretty funny, like tactical comedy



Platoon Sergeants meeting their new Iraq Army counterparts (From left to right two Iraqi Army soldiers SFC Sutton and SFC Williams)

hour.”

Though the process has been slow at times, the Sappers are capitalizing on the Iraqi soldiers’ solid base knowledge and eagerness to improve their craft.

“They’re getting better all the time, and showing a lot of progress,” said Sapper Robert Stevenson. “They bring a lot of energy to everything we do, and they’re focused on playing a larger roll in the missions.”

The Sappers have also felt that their mission is one where it is difficult to quantify the level of success. “We can gauge how well we’re doing on number

of troops trained and in how many areas they’re proficient, but we have to focus also on the unknown factor,” said 1st Lt. Gregory Elko, an E Company platoon leader. “We have to think about, will they be able to execute these maneuvers and these skills under fire and when the stakes are extremely high, so we’re trying to make the training and the subsequent operations tough, realistic, and pertinent to what’s going on in the AO.”

Through strong exertion, the Sappers of E Company have been able to help the Iraqi troops improve; however, it is not a mission that effort alone can accomplish. “It’s definitely a think outside the box type of mission,” Bohannon said. “On one hand we have to focus on the basic blocking and tackling of infantry operations, but we can’t ignore the fact that we’re here to help them develop their overall ability to conduct full spectrum operations.”

Though the mission is a difficult one to execute, the importance is not lost on the E Company sappers. “The preparation of the Iraqi Army is paramount to our overall success here in Iraq,” said Bohannon. “Ensuring that these soldiers are ready to take the fight is our final ticket home.”

Fallen "STRIKE" Soldier Awarded the Silver Star

Story by
Spc. George Welcome



CAMP STRIKER, Iraq— Webster's New World College Dictionary defines a hero as, "a man admired for courage, nobility, or exploits." By definition alone, virtually anyone can be made a hero and in our society people such as

athletes, movie stars and others of notoriety are often said to be such.

In the case of Staff Sgt. Jerry M. Durbin, of Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment the label hero is so justly applied, yet may not be enough to describe his actions on the afternoon of January 25.

While leading Soldiers from 1st Squad, 1st Platoon on a dismounted route clearance mission, Durbin and his men came upon what they suspected to be an improvised explosive device. After several attempts, the men were unable to find the location of the bomb. Durbin then moved ahead of his men to search thick brush on the roadside. As he was searching the brush, Durbin found the IED initiator device. Although he was in the greatest danger, his first reaction was to warn the Soldiers around him to move away. The bomb detonated, killing Durbin instantly and would have killed the other men as well if not for his courage and selflessness.

For his actions on that day, Durbin has been posthumously awarded the Silver Star.

A service was held to honor the memory of the "Strike Force" Soldier who had lived his life by the seven Army values and whose death exemplified how important those values are.

"Staff Sgt. Durbin was a phenomenal non-commissioned officer who gave more to his Soldiers and this unit than can ever be expressed in words," said Capt. Andre Rivier, commander of Bravo Company, 2-502. "Nothing captures the spirit of the man more than the last few moments of his life, leading from the front, protecting his Soldiers. Staff Sgt. Durbin's last words and actions were to save his men at the cost of his own life. He fell the way he lived; selflessly, bravely, always putting others before himself."

Two reoccurring themes throughout the memorial were Durbin's selflessness and his sense of humor.

"No matter what I say, I can never fully explain how amazing this man was," said Spc. Matthew Ness, one of Durbin's team leaders. "He had a great sense of humor and he used that as a device to bring us together," Ness said. "He managed to enjoy every day and as they say,

The Silver Star — "For Gallantry in Action"

The Silver Star is awarded



to a person, serving in the

U.S. military, who is



cited for gallantry in

action in military

operations involving

conflict with an enemy

force. It is also awarded to

a person displaying gallantry

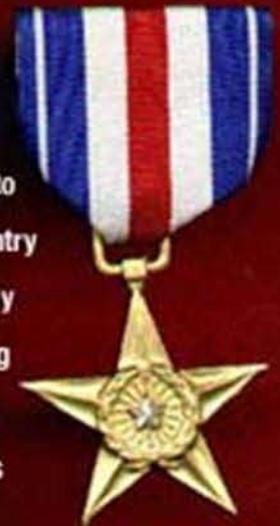
while serving with friendly

forces against an opposing

armed force, in a conflict

in which the United States

is not a belligerent party.



happiness is contagious."

Durbin was remembered by his platoon sergeant not only for being a great Soldier, but as being someone concerned for the welfare of others.

"1st squad, 1st platoon were his boys," said Sgt. 1st Class Jerry Hunter. "He was constantly thinking about how to best protect and train his squad. During his final moments, his primary concern was for the Soldiers around him."

The world is a better place because of Staff Sgt. Jerry Durbin and the countless other men and women who selflessly lay down their lives in hopes that the ideals of peace, freedom and equality can become reality for everyone. Durbin's act on that day goes far beyond ordinary heroism; his was an act of love. Only one who truly cared for and was concerned with the needs of others could perform such a noble deed.

Although it will be hard, the men of Bravo Company will find a way to continue their mission to bring peace and freedom to the people of the Southwestern Baghdad area, they will do this because they know it is what Durbin would have wanted.

Staff Sgt. Jerry Michael Durbin is survived by his wife Janelle and their three children Hayley, Alyssa and Austin. He also leaves his parents Jerry Sr. and Teresa Durbin.

Fallen Eagles Never Forgotten



*SPC Anthony Owens
February 1, 2006*



*1LT Garrison Avery
February 1, 2006*



*PFC Caesar Viglienzzone
February 1, 2006*



*SPC Sergio Mercedes
February 5 2006*



*SPC Marlon Bustamonte
February 1 2006*

"What do ye more than others?" Matthew 5:47b

2ND BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM, 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION (AASTTT)



OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, JANUARY 2006