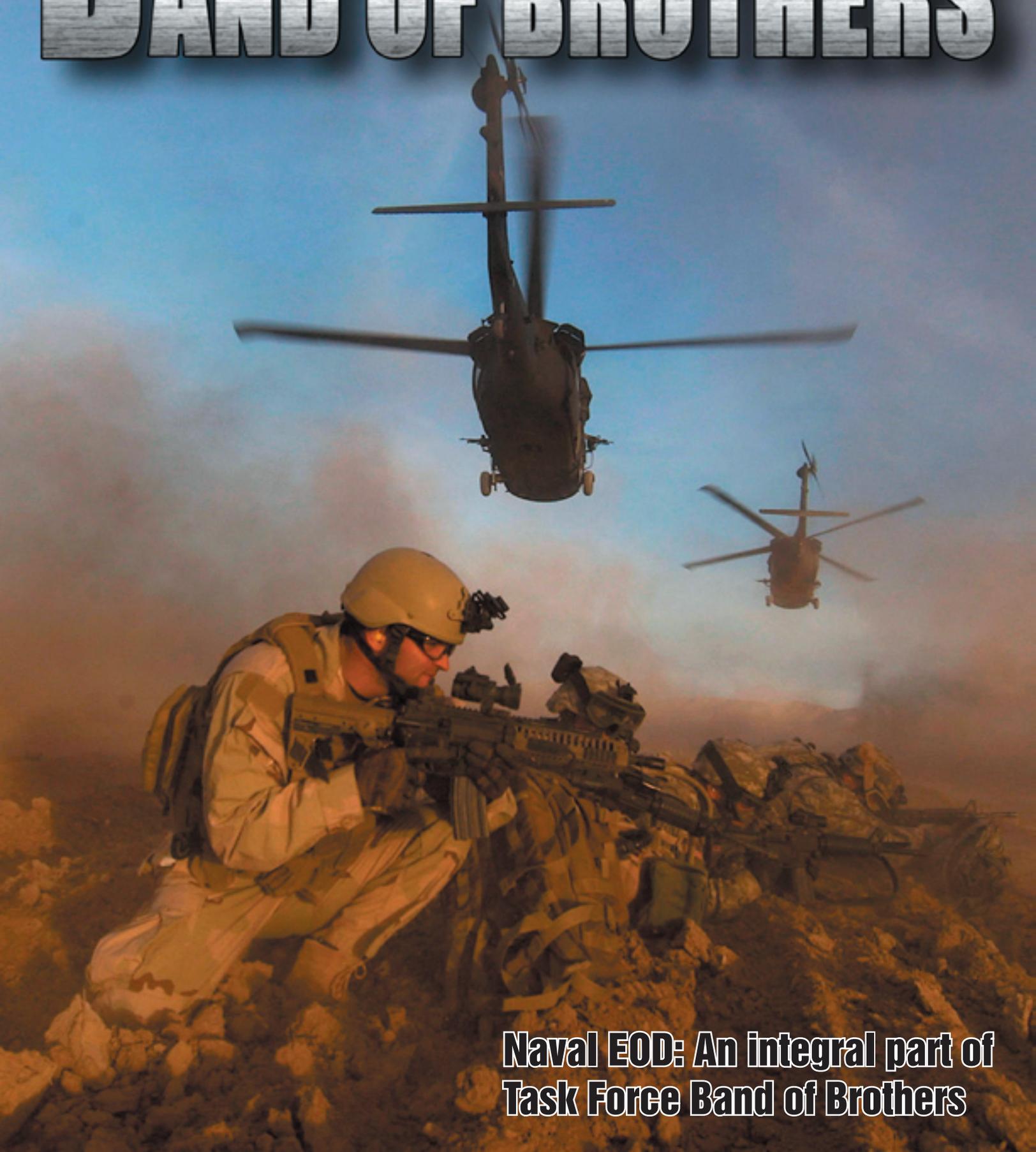
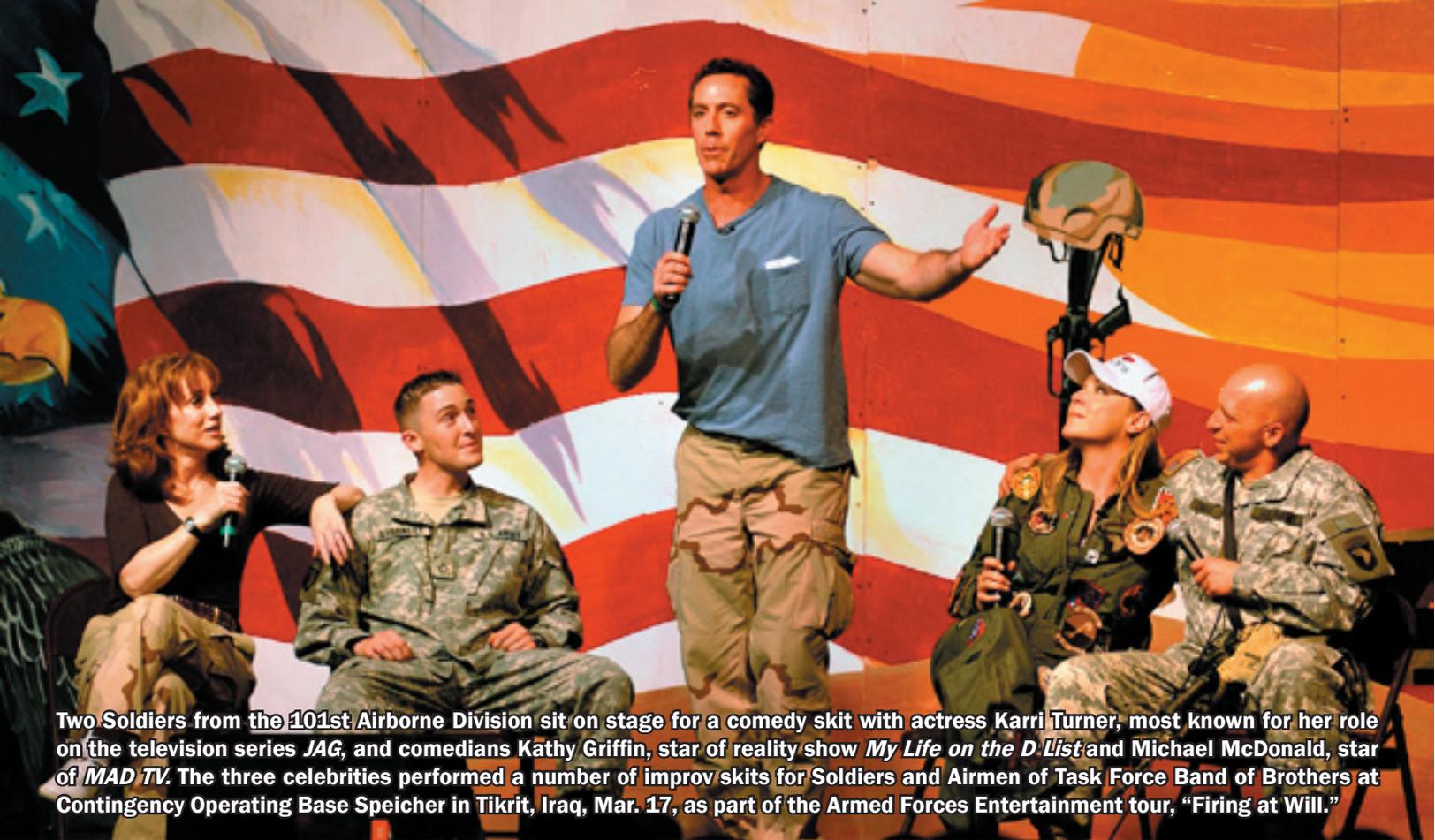


# BAND OF BROTHERS

March 2006 ♦ Vol. 1, Issue 5



**Naval EOD: An integral part of  
Task Force Band of Brothers**



Two Soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division sit on stage for a comedy skit with actress Karri Turner, most known for her role on the television series *JAG*, and comedians Kathy Griffin, star of reality show *My Life on the D-List* and Michael McDonald, star of *MAD TV*. The three celebrities performed a number of improv skits for Soldiers and Airmen of Task Force Band of Brothers at Contingency Operating Base Speicher in Tikrit, Iraq, Mar. 17, as part of the Armed Forces Entertainment tour, "Firing at Will."

photo by Staff Sgt. Russell Lee Klika

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## On the cover...

U.S. Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal technician Petty Officer 2nd Class Scott Harstead and Soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division dismount a UH-60 Blackhawk from the 101st Airborne Division during an Air Assault in the Ninevah Province, Iraq, Mar. 12.

photo by  
Staff Sgt. Aaron Allmon





Moslem culture. The ISF with whom you are working stepped up and firmly took control of the situation in our area of operations in the face of our mutual adversaries. Iraqi Soldiers and police demonstrated that they can not only flawlessly plan for and execute known events like elections, but also be the masters of unforeseen events designed by our enemies to inflame and unsettle. You all should be very proud of their fortitude. As we continue to support Iraqis as they rebuild after these vicious attacks, we must all remain vigilant and ready to overcome obstacles in our path to mission success.

The upcoming months have more restructuring in store for our troops and the Iraqi Army who will continue to occupy forward operating bases throughout our area of operations while we consolidate our units. Just as many of you did during unit transformations, the American Soldier, regardless of MOS, has shown the amazing ability to move through changes and maximize mission accomplishment. Whether moving from one forward operating base to another, or working with multiple brigade combat teams, your combined efforts are directly or indirectly increasing the competence and confidence of Iraqi security forces as they begin the process of assuming battle space.

You have built a deep base of experience from training and your initial operations. Now is the time to use every bit of the expertise and awareness you have built up to positively focus on our

key tasks of training ISF and building relationships with local your military and community counterparts. You have already made a difference in the lives of so many people in this country and will help them to continue to make great progress. Our efforts today will echo forever in the future of Iraq.

Air Assault!

# BAND OF BROTHERS SIX SENDS

Greetings from Tikrit,

Soldiers of Task Force Band of Brothers are showing the world everyday what a committed and trained force can accomplish in the important mission of helping our Iraqi counterparts defend their country against cowardly tactics employed by those trying to hide amongst the peaceful citizens of Iraq. Everyday we are here training and supporting the Iraqi Security Forces helps bring them closer to the secure environment that will allow democracy to flourish.

Soldiers have demonstrated a great amount of flexibility and willingness to adapt to changes marked by recent violence against a sacred symbol of Iraqi and

## BAND OF BROTHERS

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**T**ask Force Band of Brothers, Last month the Gold Mosque in Samarra was attacked by a group of terrorists who blew the name sake gold dome to pieces. An attack on such an ancient, revered mosque just goes to show how desperate the enemies of the Iraqi people have become.

The media world-wide jumped on the fact that this cowardly event would immediately embroil Iraq in a savage civil war; a civil war that the enemies of peace and prosperity in Iraq desperately want. Of course the Iraqi Security Forces stopped any of that mayhem from taking hold and destroying Iraq.

The people of Iraq also saw through this scheme and stood fast against civil war, openly supporting their Security Forces. Was there violence? Of course there was violence, but not in the magnitude to tear the country of Iraq apart.

The people of Iraq have spoken through ballots and now with a quantifiable message that they will not let their country be torn by civil war.

You members of Task Force Band of Brothers are a di-

rect reflection of why the Iraqi Security Forces and the people of Iraq stood together during this volatile time. Your daily training, partnering and mentoring with the Iraqi Security Forces have empowered and allowed our Iraqi allies to pass another major hurdle towards self governing and peace. Your continued goodwill toward the Iraqi people has also shown another side to our operations here.

We are not here to solely focus on killing and capturing terrorists, but to help the Iraqis jump start their economy, public services and quality of life; to move them along into the 21st century. We do all this while continuing to respect their culture and religious beliefs.

The month of March brings much of our Task Force beyond or close to the six-month mark in country. This is a very important milestone in our deployment. Each and every one of you, to include your individual unit, is at the peak of efficiency. You know your battle rhythm, you know the lay of the land where you operate, you know the culture, you know your Iraqi allies, and you know your terrorist enemy.

Nothing can stop us from having the positive effects needed to be successful tactically, operationally and strategically. We owe that to ourselves and the people back home.

**Standards:** I suggest each and every one of you take the time to review our MND –North uniform policy. Let's not get sloppy as time goes on. One important point is the fact that ballistic eye wear is the eye wear of choice on and off the FOB. Wearing a \$200.00 pair of designer sunglasses on the FOB may look good, but it is NOT the standard. The issued pair of ballistic UV protected eye wear IS the standard. That is just one example of the many basic standards that I expect all leaders to enforce and all Soldiers to adhere to.

**Marksmanship:** When was the last time you did some quantifiable shooting with maximum feedback on a static range? The next gunfight is not the time to realize your zero is off or your reflexive firing skills are rusty.

I am amazed at times when I hear an AAR that reveals an enemy got away from us. I have yet to meet anyone who can outrun a 5.56, 7.62 or .50 cal. round. Yes, I do expect each and every one of you to be able to switch on your muscle memory learned during reflexive fire drills and double tap a terrorist in the face at 100 meters.

I also expect each and every one of you to be able to immediately switch off high intensity and go back to a civil conversation with an Iraqi friend. No one ever said soldiering would be easy.....HooooAhhhhhhh.

Continue to do great things. I am proud of each and every one of you. God bless each and every one of you, our Task Force and God bless America. Air Assault!

**Command Sgt. Maj. Frank Grippe  
Division Command Sergeant Major**

# Hope in the midst of disaster

**Staff Sgt. Jesse Riggin**  
3rd Brigade Combat Team  
101st Airborne Division Public Affairs

**SAMARRA, Iraq** -- Samarra lies approximately 175 kilometers north of Baghdad. It was once the heart of Mesopotamia and the capital of the Muslim world. Since the days of the Saddam Hussein regime, Samarra has been a city torn by tribal conflicts and government corruption.

The city holds two of the most renowned Muslim monuments in the world -- the Al-Askariyah Mosque and the mosque's spiral minaret, both of which have been attacked by terrorists.

Most recently, the mosque's golden dome was destroyed by an attack in the early morning hours of Feb. 22. The explosion in the mosque echoed through the streets, and was heard by Soldiers working nearly 10 kilometers away on Forward Operating Base Brassfield-Mora. The message it sent reached Muslims throughout Iraq.

The mosque dates back nearly twelve hundred years. It held the tombs of the tenth and eleventh Shi'a Imams, and was the birth place of the twelfth. Imams are clerical leaders in the Muslim faith.

The mosque is Shi'a in origin, but it is trea-

sured by both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims worldwide. It was not an attack on Sunni or Shi'a. It was an attack on Iraq and the Muslim world, according to the governor of Salah ad Din Province, Hamad Hamood Shekti. He spoke to journalists Feb. 23, calling the people of Iraq to rise above the attack and unite as one.

"For all of Iraq and all of Salah ad Din, you witnessed the devastation of the holy place," Hamad said. "Be wise and patient. Do not be led by the ones who want to separate our country."

The bombing has caused civil unrest in Samarra and many parts of the country. Demonstrators took to the streets. The majority of these demonstrations were peaceful, but some led to violence and bloodshed.

Bringing the country and the security forces together is a monumental task and an essential element in subduing the turmoil Iraq is facing.

"The future is rebuilding our country without discrimination between Arabic, Kurds and Turkmen -- a country that will not discriminate between Shi'a and Sunni," Hamad said.

There are many aspects to fighting the insurgency. One way is for U.S. forces to partner with citizens and the Iraqi Security Forces. Getting them to take ownership of their neighborhoods and of the security in these areas is the key to peace in Iraq, according to

Maj. John Calahan, 3rd

Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, executive officer.

The Rakkasans of Company B, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, experienced the mosque bombing first hand. They have been working with a group of Iraqi Commandos in the city since December.

The Rakkasans and the Commandos share a goal to create a secure environment and help the Iraqi police and Iraqi Army develop a foundation to base future security plans.

"We want to put an Iraqi face on security," Calahan said. "We want them to have faith in their security forces and work with the local government."

The question remains: what will it take to secure a peaceful future in Iraq? There is no simple answer. Iraq is facing complex problems, with roots running back thousands of years. The bombing of the Al-Askariyah Mosque has complicated matters even more. Despite talk of civil war in the western media, there is hope that the event will bring the country closer and strengthen their convictions to peace and stability.

"The sons of Salah ad Din have been through many hard times, and it has made us stronger," Hamad said. "Be stronger than the attackers and keep your eyes on the future of our country, so our children may live in peace." ■



photo by Spc. Dennis Stokis

Locals in Samarra, Iraq, walk toward the Al-Askariyah Mosque months before it was destroyed by a terrorist attack Feb. 22.

# Bastogne Soldiers *cache in their tips*

**Spc. Barbara Ospina**  
1st Brigade Combat Team  
101st Airborne Division

**KIRKUK, Iraq** -- Flying on a hunch, Bastogne Soldiers of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, dismounted from a UH-60 Blackhawk Helicopter in the heart of muddy farm land to search for a suspected weapons cache near Hawijah, Iraq, Mar. 1.

Within minutes of hitting the ground, Soldiers from Company D, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, spotted the smoke grenade that Sol-

diers from 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, had dropped while patrolling the area from the sky to mark a desolate area where a suspicious white bag was unusually placed in the field.

While Kiowas circled the air providing security for the Soldiers, they spotted another object about 400 meters from the initial site. Two teams of Bastogne Soldiers separated to each site.

With one team traveling south to investigate the newly-discovered object, the other team began to dig through the clay underneath the white bag.

The object spotted from above was an aerial defense weapon trailer that seated two people. The trailer was sticking half way out of the ground inside a ravine, as though recent rains had washed away the dirt that was hiding it. Ammunition was found in the loose dirt surrounding the trailer.

Within an hour, the other team of Soldiers had unearthed two sub-machine guns, an AK-47, and a large stash of ammunition for the weapons.

This was the second big find for Bastogne Soldiers that week.

The Soldiers of 1st BCT worked with Soldiers from the 2nd Iraqi Army





Brigade, capturing four known insurgents and unearthing a network of weapons caches during a combined operation west of Kirkuk, Feb. 20.

The operation began with an Iraqi-led cordon and search of a village known to be a safe haven for insurgent and terrorist cells responsible for attacks on oil pipelines and coalition convoys in the area.

With U.S. ground forces providing security outside the village and U.S. aircraft providing aerial support, the Iraqi Soldiers moved into the village, capturing four insurgents.

While the search was taking place on the ground, one of the pilots circling overhead noticed a large, shiny object on the ground outside the town, which turned out to be a sheet of tin covering a weapons cache. Further investigations of the area revealed 15 caches containing a variety of weapons systems. ■



photos by Spc. Barbara Ospina

**(Opposite)** Soldiers from 2nd Platoon, Company D, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, uncover an aerial defense weapon trailer from a ravine near Hawijah, Iraq. **(Top left)** Soldiers pull the trailer out as a OH-58 Kiowa Helicopter circles above pulling security. **(Top right)** Rifles, machine guns, and rocket propelled grenade launchers sit ready to be inventoried after being unearthed in the network of weapons caches discovered near Kirkuk, Iraq. **(Below)** Soldiers inventory various munitions.



## Cache roll up:

- 1 complete surface to air missile system
- 450 mortar rounds
- 12 rockets
- 11 complete mortar systems
- 31 rocket propelled grenade launchers
- 70 rocket propelled grenades
- 30 grenades
- 14 machine guns
- 16 sniper rifles
- More than 190 fuses
- Tens of thousands of rounds of small arms ammunition
- Multiple weapons parts, including scopes
- 75 pounds of propellant
- Timers and parts used in making improvised explosive devices (IEDs)
- 1 gas mask

# Combat support hospital saves Iraqi Soldier's life

**Sgt. 1st Class David Benamati**  
138th Mobile Public  
Affairs Detachment

**MOSUL, Iraq** -- Just weeks after having his heart lifted out of his chest by a U.S. Army surgeon, Iraqi Army Sgt. Taha Salm Hamed is sitting up in bed at the intensive care ward of the 47th Combat Support Hospital on Logistic Support Area Diamondback in Mosul, Iraq.

Insurgents shot Taha directly in the chest as he was leaving a restaurant in Mosul where he was picking up lunch for his men back at the checkpoint they operated.

"Luckily, the bullet just missed his heart and only damaged a portion of his lung," said Col. Philip Corcoran, the cardio thoracic surgeon at the hospital.

Taha was first brought to an Iraqi hospital, but because of a lack of proper medical supplies and facilities to handle his case, he was stabilized and then transported to the 47th CSH. Corcoran was in charge of the team of surgeons who operated on Taha.

"During the operation, we lifted his heart out of the chest cavity to inspect it and to ensure there was no damage to the back of his heart," Corcoran said.

Taha's injuries have not deterred him in his struggle to free his country of insurgents -- his resolve is even stronger now than before. The injury has also prompted him to quit smoking.

Taha and the Iraqi Army are not alone in the struggle to free Iraq from terrorism. The Iraqi police are also actively engaged in the day-to-day fight for security of the country.

Iraqi police Lt. Col. Shehitha Hamed was brought to the 47th CSH after he suffered abdominal wounds in a fire fight with insurgents.

The Iraqi police were clearing a building known to house insurgents, when Shehitha heard his men struggling through a fire fight over the radio. He went to lend his support. Shehitha entered the building and, after being shot in the abdomen, returned fire, killing one insurgent and injuring two others.

Both men say they will continue to fight terrorism in Mosul and throughout Iraq, despite their injuries.

As far as their treatment by the staff and doctors of the 47th CSH, the Soldier and the police officer say it is the best treatment in Iraq and that they owe their lives to the doctors and staff.



photo by Sgt. 1st Class David Benamati

**Colonel Philip Corcoran, cardio-vascular surgeon at the 47th Combat Support Hospital on Logistical Support Area Diamondback in Mosul, checks on Iraqi Army Sgt. Taha Salm Hamed, who was shot in the chest by insurgents. Corcoran operated on Taha after the shooting**

According to Maj. William Uptergrove, patient administrator for the 47th CSH, most Iraqi hospitals are ill equipped to handle critical care patients.

Uptergrove and some of the staff from the 47th CSH periodically visit local Iraqi hospitals to assess their patient care capabilities. Once Taha and Shehitha are well enough, they will be transported to an Iraqi hospital to finish treatment for their wounds. ■



# Aviation Soldiers keep perimeter safe

**Sgt. Ryan Matson**  
101st Combat Aviation Brigade  
Public Affairs Office

**TIKRIT, Iraq** -- Just as a policeman might patrol a city street in a neighborhood, Company A, 96th Aviation Support Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade Soldiers perform patrols that may last for more than 24 hours, through the desert.

The company, which consists of support jobs such as truck drivers, scouts, supply and fuelers, was tasked in early December to patrol the area immediately outside of Contingency Operating Base Speicher in Tikrit for suspicious or potentially dangerous activity.

Company A splits the patrol with Company E, 5th Battalion, 101st CAB, which is also made up of Soldiers with support jobs.

"We took the mission over from 1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, who had been doing the mission since August," said 1st Lt. Sam Hartman, Co. A, 96th ASB. "We received MOUT (Military Operations in Urban Terrain) training in Kuwait and then mission-specific training during the relief-in-place."

The Soldiers said that only one thing remains constant about the patrol -- variety.

"Every day is something different -- you never know what you'll find," said Sgt. 1st Class Tim Carswell, a truck driver from Morganton, N.C. "We had absolutely no clue we'd be doing anything like this when we came over here, but I definitely like it."

One such day took place when Carswell and his partner on patrol, Staff Sgt. Daniel Smalls, also a truck driver, received a call on the radio to try to find the area where a mortar was believed to have just impacted.

After checking out the place where

they thought the impact might have occurred, they found no signs of a mortar explosion. But Smalls did spot something else instead. He found some objects that looked a lot like tennis ball containers sticking out of the sand. The objects turned out to be 120mm rocket fuses.

"We kind of evacuated the area real quick and got in touch with the explosive ordnance disposal team," Carswell said.

Once the Explosives Ordnance Disposal team arrived, they found much more than expected.

"We originally thought it was half a dozen, that's all that were uncovered, and it turned out to be 279," Carswell added.

Smalls said finding weapons is not an uncommon occurrence. The patrol has uncovered anti-aircraft rounds and other weapons, which could have been used to harm Coalition Forces.

"Ninety percent of the time when we respond to a call to look for something else, that's when we'll find them," he said. "When we go out and intentionally look for them, we never find them."

Carswell and Smalls, who have both acted as patrol commanders, said the mission varies from day to day based on intelligence released in a daily meeting. Some days they patrol the COB perimeter, while others, they may monitor a supply route.

Smalls said in the past they also have run convoys out from Logistical Support Area Anaconda to FOB McKenzie, both bases in the Balad area.

"That was pretty hair-raising stuff," he said. "We got hit by a couple IEDs and got in a couple fire fights there. Then we went from that to this patrol and then started doing convoy security. It was challenging at first learning the different tactics, techniques and procedures that were involved in the job titles, but we all adapted." ■



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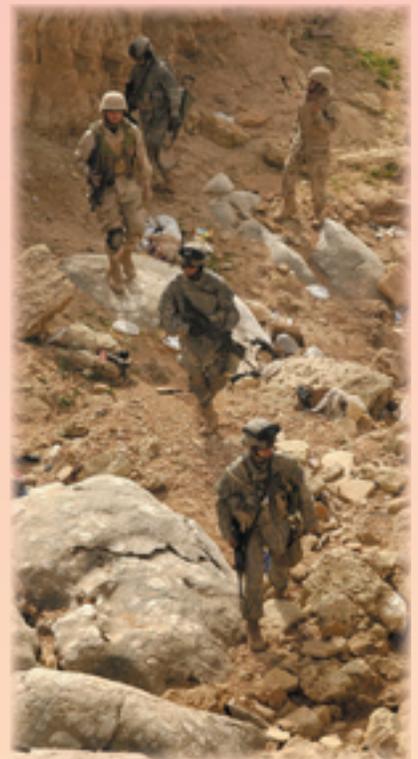


photo by Staff Sgt. Aaron Allmon



photo by Sgt. Zach Mott



photo by Staff Sgt. Jesse C. Riggins

(Top) Soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, conduct a combat patrol in the city of Tall Afar. (Center) An infantryman from Company B, 1st Battalion, 8th Armor Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, pulls security from a roof for a sheik council meeting in Balad. (Bottom) Soldiers from Company D, 1st Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division, practice traditional British-style marching during a basic training course held at Forward Operating Base Wilson.

# Fire away!



photos by Sgt. Dennis Gravelle

**(Top)** Members of Battery C, 11th Field Artillery Regiment send a 155mm artillery round skyward as they fire their M-198 Howitzer during a point-fire calibration exercise at Forward Operating Base Courage Mar. 6. The howitzer weapon system can fire up to four rounds per minute. **(Center)** Another round is fired into the skies above Mosul, Iraq. **(Right)** A Soldier reloads a round during the exercise.



photo by Pfc. Cassandra Groce

An aviation crew member from 57th Medical Company prepares to drop a bag of candy to the children of Muqadadiyah, Iraq, from a UH-60 Blackhawk during a recent mission.

## Dropping the ball

### Pfc. Cassandra Groce

133rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

**MUQADADIYAH, Iraq** -- Aviation Soldiers are "dropping the ball" for Iraqi children in Muqadadiyah, Iraq, to ease minds of the locals near Forward Operating Base Normandy.

Soldiers in the 57th Medical Company from Fort Bragg, N.C., have been dropping soccer balls, candy and school supplies from their helicopters as a means of showing the community they are there with good intentions.

The helicopters the medical company use randomly shoot out harmless flares, and flight crews were concerned the flares were startling the locals and could be perceived as an attack.

"It shows that we, the aviation community, understand that low flying, which we have to do, startles a lot of the livestock around here," said Staff Sgt. Joseph Lemons, a crew member of the 57th Medical Company. "It shows we are concerned with the infrastructure and the morale of the community."

Not only has the effort shown the friendliness of the medical company's helicopters, but also aids disadvantaged children and families.

The crew has dropped their gifts to the people below five times throughout the month of February.

"We are giving them a piece of the western culture that they don't always get," Lemons said. ■

# Detention facility goes above and beyond

## Spc. Barbara Ospina

1st Brigade Combat Team  
101st Airborne Division

**KIRKUK, Iraq** -- Soldiers and leaders of the Forward Operating Base Warrior detention facility are well aware of their guidelines and regulations when it comes to their detainees, but have taken extra consideration and are going above and beyond when it comes to the detainee's religious practices.

As a result of coordination between Chap. (Capt.) Todd Claypool, the 1st Special Troops Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team chaplain, and Chap. (Capt.) Emad Khasram Salih, 2nd Iraqi Army Brigade, prayer visits in the base detention facilities has become a regular occurrence.

"I am proud to do it," Salih said. "Whether it's Soldiers or civilians, they need to pray and it's my job to help the people."

Salih's prayers are of great value to the detainees, because he holds the title of an Imam. An Imam is a prayer leader of a mosque.

A prayer session with an Imam is not the only gesture the Soldiers running the facility have made to help the detainees practice their religion to their cultural standards.

"We always have Korans and prayer rugs available for them," said 1st Lt. Erika Frederick, the 1st BCT Military Police platoon leader. "We want them to be able to practice their religion freely."

According to Frederick, the detainees are not permitted to wear a watch, which means they have no concept of when their prayer times are. Guards at the facility have posted prayer times, and the facility guards make rounds to let the detainees know when the time arrives.

Within the cities, during the three prayer times, the Imam of the town will play a prayer over a speaker system for all to hear during their prayers.

"We are coordinating with Chaplain Salih to get a tape of the prayers so we can play it for them," Frederick said. "Religion is important, so we try to facilitate it even more than required." ■



photo by Spc. Barbara Ospina

Detainees at the Bastogne Internment Facility on Forward Operating Base Warrior in Kirkuk hold copies of the Koran. An Imam from the Iraqi Army comes onto the FOB to lead the detainees in worship.

# *Soldier writes about everyday women's history in Iraq*

**Spc. Jeanine Kinville**

101st Airborne Division  
Public Affairs Office

**TIKRIT, Iraq** -- There are many books written about Soldiers regarded as heroes and warriors who helped make an impact on the Army's history, but Chief Warrant Officer Melissa Farmer couldn't find any about Soldiers like her.

"Of all the books I saw in Clothing Sales back at Fort Campbell, Ky., there was nothing highlighting women in the military," said Farmer, a human resources technician assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 501st Special Troops Battalion, 101st Airborne Division, at Contingency Operating Base Speicher in Iraq. "I wanted to create a book about women who serve every day to show they are also true heroes. They are troops who give day in and day out to help the Army move along."

Her book will consist of 156 biographies from a female Soldier in each military occupational specialty, which

will include enlisted personnel, warrant officers and commissioned officers. Their individual experiences help reflect what the Army has taught them about being leaders, their personal growth, and a new sense of direction in their lives.

"I have interviewed active and retired Soldiers from different posts and units since before deploying here in September 2005," Farmer said. "Some of the subjects I had admired, a few had demonstrated great leadership, and some had unique jobs I never knew about."

She hopes the book will be embraced by an audience of young women to help them identify with each Soldier and learn they can also accomplish their goals while wearing a uniform.

"I have discovered while doing the



**FARMER**

interviews that the Army makes a positive difference to everyone who serves," Farmer said. "The book will explain what these women have accomplished in the military and how retired Soldiers have transitioned successfully to civilian life."

Formerly a personnel management noncommissioned officer, the Chicago, Ill., native has served 12 years in the military and twice during her career with the

101st. Her goal is to complete the untitled book in the fall of 2007 and have it published soon after.

"Women have always played an integral part in the military since the Women's Army Corps was created," she said. "This will help show that one woman can and has made a difference to something bigger than ourselves as Soldiers and heroes." ■



photo by Spc. William Jones

(Above) Staff Sgt. Tracy Birkman repairs an engine on humvee in a motorpool that she helps supervise. Birkman is deployed with the 101st Airborne Division at Forward Operating Base Remagen near Tikrit, Iraq. (Right) Major Colleen Shiraishi, the officer-in-charge of the Ambulatory Care Center, 47th Combat Support Hospital, checks the heart beat of Spc. Christy Dandy. Shiraishi has been in the military for over a decade and previously served in the U.S. Navy.



photo by Spc. Cassandra Groce

A UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter is shown in the process of landing in a desert environment. The helicopter's main rotor blades are blurred, indicating motion. The tail rotor is also visible. The ground is sandy and flat, with some sparse green vegetation in the distance. Several soldiers in camouflage uniforms and helmets are lying prone on the ground in the foreground and middle ground, some holding rifles. The sky is clear and blue.

# OPERATION LANCER ADVANCE

Iraqi Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 3rd Iraqi Army Division, and U.S. Soldiers from Troop F, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, air assault into the landing zone from a UH-60 Blackhawk during Operation Lancer Advance, a mission to stop insurgent activity near the Syrian border, south west of Tall Afar.

photo by Staff Sgt. Aaron Allmon

# PROJECT RECREATION:

## State of Illinois takes 542nd Medical Company under wing



photos by Sgt. Ryan Matson

(Above) Specialist Ryan Young, a Soldier who works in the 542nd Medical Company motorpool, enjoys a game of catch on Forward Operating Base Speicher in Tikrit, Iraq, with balls and gloves donated by people from Illinois as part of Project Recreation. (Right) The donated basketball hoops were put to use on an old concrete pad Soldiers discovered under the sand.



### Sgt. Ryan Matson

101st Combat Aviation Brigade  
Public Affairs Office

**TIKRIT, Iraq** -- Though they are separated by thousands of miles and have never met, Erik Smith, a concerned citizen out of Rolling Meadows, Ill., has changed the life of Sgt. 1st Class Darryl Leonard and all the Soldiers in 542nd Medical Company, deployed to Forward Operating Base Speicher, near Tikrit, Iraq.

Smith and his sister, Heidi Milner, have taken it upon themselves to “adopt” the 542nd Medical Company through a program they started with Leonard called “Project Recreation.”

The program has provided the Soldiers from the company with recreation outlets during their long deployment to Iraq, where they work providing helicopter medical evacuations to wounded Soldiers throughout northern Iraq.

“When we arrived here, there was no Morale, Welfare and Recreation facility,” Leonard said in a building full of recreation and personal hygiene items. He was surrounded by a dart board, a hand-crafted ping pong table, television, microwave, library, video collection, and shelves of board games and hygiene items. “This facility was a building that had nothing in it.”

All of the items around Leonard were donated by people in Illinois through Project Recreation.

“Because of these items, the morale of the Soldiers has increased significantly,” Leonard said. “They are more enthused, and you can see the difference in how they perform everyday.”

Project Recreation was born Christmas Day through a simple Christmas card, and correspondence between Leonard and Smith. Smith had participated in something called Project Santa, a massive Christmas project in which Americans sent thousands of Christmas stockings to troops deployed to the Middle East. Leonard decided to pick up a stocking on Christmas morning, and in it found a Christmas card from Smith.

"I got his name and his e-mail address off his Christmas card," Leonard said. "I took it upon myself to e-mail him back, thanking him for the Christmas card."

The two continued corresponding and Smith asked what more he could do. Together, they came up with the idea of Project Recreation, a project which would provide recreation opportunities to Soldiers from the company year-round. Since, aside from a weight set, there weren't any recreation items in the company area, Leonard compiled a list of items the Soldiers could use.

Smith took the list to his local newspaper, the Peru News Tribune, and the project was underway. Soon, Leonard started receiving box upon box of donated recreation items. Leonard, the company motor pool sergeant, said he started making use of the donations when he and his Soldiers weren't busy maintaining the company's vehicles.

One day, he uncovered some concrete underneath an old building by the motorpool. Leonard and his Soldiers shoveled away all the sand on top and found the pad was big enough to become a basketball court. The only problem was they had no hoops. Soon after Smith's article reached the paper, the company had three sets of rims, nets and backboards. Leonard and his Soldiers installed all three on the pad and a basketball court grew out of the desert sand.

"Once the article hit the paper and it went to the town, it became very big," Leonard said.

In fact, he said it spread throughout the state of Illinois. Schools, churches and citizens sent both care packages and recreation items. Senator Gary Dahl and his wife Debbie even donated \$500 to the project.

Leonard and his Soldiers said they have made use of all donated items. He appointed Staff Sgt. James White to run the MWR building -- a small wooden building located just off the flight line. It's close enough to allow flight medics and pilots on stand-by to relax in between calls. The Soldiers built shelves to hold all the donated books, making a small library in the center. They did the same for a VCR and donated VHS tapes, creating a video library. A microwave was donated and placed in the center for Soldiers to heat up meals and snacks between calls.

The donations didn't end there.

"Some of the items they have sent include numerous baseball gloves, balls and bats, a karaoke machine, karaoke CDs, rackets, softballs, whiffle balls, and they're even sending a foosball table," Leonard said. "They've also sent food and many, many board games."

Besides the basketball and volleyball courts, Leonard and his Soldiers also constructed a horseshoe pit and he said plans are in the works to build a softball field this spring to



make use of the donated gloves bats and balls.

All of the things Leonard and his Soldiers build are used by Soldiers in his company, but as Leonard pointed out, "MWR is open to everybody," meaning anyone deployed to FOB Speicher, military or civilian, can make use of the facilities.

"It's better to give than to receive, so our goal is to make it a better place for the next unit that comes along," Leonard said. "When we built this stuff, we just went off of talent, the talent that these Soldiers were blessed to have growing up."

Leonard has created a Web site to track the progress of all the things that have developed as a result of Project Recreation, and said that he and the company Soldiers stay in constant communication with many of the people in Illinois who have supported them.

"I would like to say that we appreciate everything that the people of Illinois have done for us," he said. "We appreciate the output and support that you have given us, and now this is here for the Soldiers"

Smith said he thinks finding Leonard and starting the project was no mistake.

"I am driven by the fact that I think everything in life happens for a reason," Smith said in one of his e-mails to Leonard. "A great example of that is how one of the Christmas stockings that I sent found its way to you." ■



(Left) Specialist Joshua Kodya (left) and Spc. Ryan Young (right) toss horseshoes at the pit they built. (Above) Sergeant 1st Class Darryl Leonard, a former drill sergeant and the Soldier in 542nd Medical Company who spearheaded Project Recreation, stands amidst boxes of games, books, sporting goods and other recreation supplies donated to the company from people in Illinois.



# Albanian Army units work with

Story and photos by Spc. L.C. Campbell  
138th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



An Albanian Kommando Soldier guards Logistical Support Area Diamondback from a tower. The Kommandos, 1st Battalion, control the battle space east of LSA Diamondback as well as guard towers on the north end of the installation.



**M**osul, Iraq -- Albanian Army units are helping Coalition Forces fight terrorism in Iraq from a small contingency headquartered on Logistical Support Area Diamondback.

The Kommandos, 1st Battalion, 6th Albanian Contingent, control the battle space east of LSA Diamondback as well as guard towers on the north end of the installation.

"We have 120 Soldiers here, but in my country all the people support our guys, and my people like freedom," said Besnik Sokoli, commander, 6th Albanian Contingent. "In my country, we were not struck by terrorism, but the government and people support Albanian Soldiers fighting terrorism."

Kommando units have been supporting Coalition Forces in Operation Iraqi Freedom since the beginning of 2003. They serve on six-month rotations.

"Our prime minister was here two months ago and he said Albania will be in Iraq

the same amount of time as the U.S. Forces," Sokoli said. "The Soldiers are proud to fight terrorism here and to fight the global war on terrorism."

In 2004, Sgt. Elton Abazllari, now the company advisor, was deployed to Iraq, working with U.S. Special Forces. He was wounded in his right leg by an Improvised Explosive Device. He said he has seen much improvement in the situation in Mosul.

"Now-a-days, things are changing for the better," Sokoli said. "Three years ago, it was the worst situation, and now it's better because the local government is taking control and responsibility and fighting terrorism, and the coalition is supporting them."

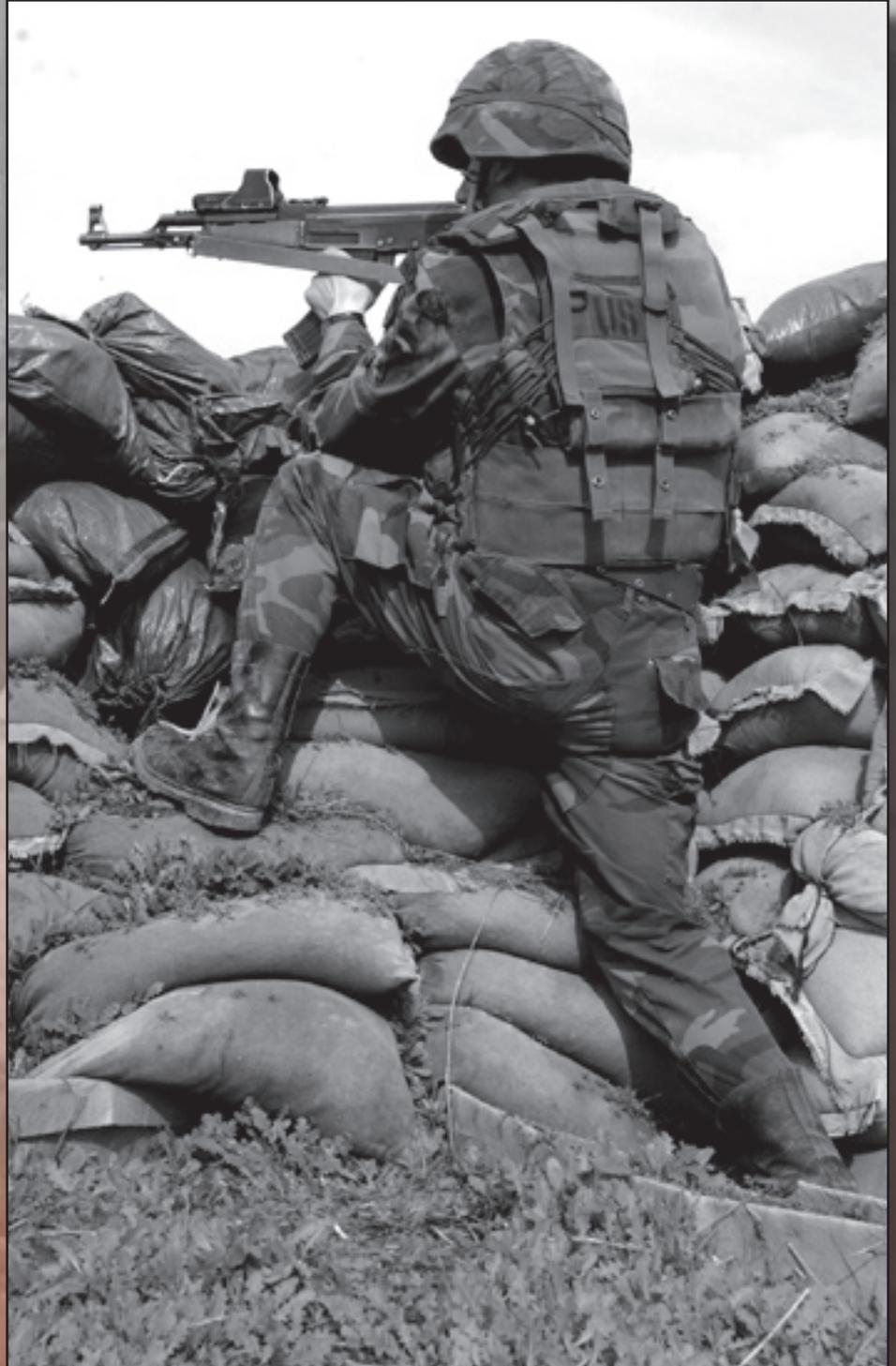
Sokoli's Kommandos will be leaving Iraq in mid-April to be replaced by the Kommandos 2nd Battalion.

"I think now terrorism is the worst sickness and all democratic countries need to put together all their forces to fight the terrorists," Sokoli said. ■

# Coalition Forces in war on terrorism



Soldiers in the Albanian Army 1st Battalion display defensive tactics at a gate on LSA Diamondback. The Soldiers serve as the quick reaction force in the case security is breached at the gate. The Kommandos have been working with U.S. forces in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom since 2003.



# BOB ON THE FOB by SGT Albert J. Merrifield

Say this: "I know we've always done it this way, but I think we should do it my way from now on..."

You know, I think that I've got a great way to do this from now on...



## Good idea fairy n. (gŭd ī-dē'-ə fār'-ē)

1. Mischievous and highly dangerous sprite; known for planting the seeds of faulty ideas within the brains of those around it. Good idea fairies feed upon the frustration and confusion created by the implementation and use of those ideas it suggests. Found most often around TOCs and other areas with high concentrations of fobbits or tocroaches. The feeble-minded, inexperienced, and easily confused are most often targeted by the good idea fairy. Causes the brains of those affected to become addled, unable to tell good idea from bad, and utterly incapable of hearing actual good advice.

*Got a phrase for BOB on the FOB? Email it to [bobonthefob@gmail.com](mailto:bobonthefob@gmail.com), and if your suggestion is used, you'll receive credit in the strip!*



# HUTCH'S TOP 10

## Top 10 things to tell if your FOB is too garrison

by Spc. Joshua Hutcheson

10. You get pulled over by an MP and are given a ticket because you were going 30 MPH instead of KPH.
9. You spend more time doing clean sweeps of the sidewalk than sweeps of insurgents' houses.
8. You are annoyed because they ran out of rib eyes at the PX and only have T-bone steaks left.
7. There is a copious amount of seemingly arbitrarily placed speed bumps on the roads.
6. You misplaced your weapon a few weeks ago and nobody has even noticed yet.
5. You've been in Iraq for six months and have still never seen an MRE.
4. In other FOBs, they huddle under bunkers to avoid mortar attacks. At your FOB, people suntan on top of the bunkers.
3. Your unit does a motivational road march. And all it does is motivate you to go back to bed for the rest of the day.
2. People are organizing Desperate Housewives night on Sundays.
1. Without there being any visual or actual change, your FOB has suddenly transformed into a Contingency Operating Base.

## A glimpse of IRAQ



photo by Sgt. Zach Mott



photo by Staff Sgt. Aaron Allmon

(Left) A local Iraqi girl stands with her family along the Syrian border. (Above) Staff Sgt. Marion Flint, a squad leader from Company B, 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, uses his weapon sight to search an open field while on a patrol in an area near Balad, Iraq.

# FARP guys keep helicopters in fight

**Sgt. Ryan Matson**

101st Combat Aviation Brigade  
Public Affairs Office

**KIRKUK, Iraq** -- One of the most important parts of aviation missions in Iraq, which is often overlooked, is the role of the Soldiers who refuel and arm helicopters at the Forward Armament and Refueling Point.

As any 92F, or fueler, will tell you, "The aircraft isn't going anywhere without gas."

At Sabre FARP, pilots tell the armament specialists what ammunition they need for the upcoming mission, and the armament team quickly and carefully loads that ammunition.

"The goal is to get the aircraft in and out within three minutes," said 1st Lt. Tony Pankuk, the officer in charge of 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment's Sabre FARP on Forward Operating Base Warrior near Kirkuk, Iraq. "We act like every aircraft coming in is in the middle of a fire fight, regardless of the situation."

Soldiers are on hand in the building along the FARP and run out to meet incoming helicopters with the fuel, rockets and .50 caliber ammunition in tow.

Pankuk's FARP is a busy place. He said that the Soldiers at the FARP refuel between 25 and 40 aircraft, mostly



photos by Sgt. Ryan Matson

**Soldiers refuel and arm an awaiting OH-58 Kiowa helicopter at the 2nd Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment Sabre Forward Arming and Refueling Point on Forward Operating Base Warrior by Kirkuk, Iraq. Specialist Chris Howell, an armament specialist with the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade watches as Soldiers refuel and arm a Kiowa.**

the squadron's OH-58D Kiowa helicopters, each day. They have already pumped more than 750,000 gallons of fuel since arriving in Iraq in September.

Sergeant Joshua Moeller, 96th Aviation Support Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, is one of the 15Js, or OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopter armament repairmen, who works at the FARP. He said a 15J will work both at a FARP, as well as on a flight line.

"Our job is two-fold. We work both on the Forward Armament Refueling Point (FARP) as well as on the flight lines. On the FARP, we hot refuel, and re-arm aircraft, so that they can get in and out of the fight, turn around get their fuel, get their armament, go back out and do the job," Moeller said. "On the flight line, we also do all the repairs that have to do with anything electrical and avionics, all the armament subsystems, to make sure they function properly at all times."

Moeller said he enjoys working on the FARP, because responding quickly to refuel aircraft is a rush.

"I like the FARP the most, because you're there under the turning rotor blades, it's intense -- you get an adrenaline rush," Moeller said. "You're running back and forth to make sure the fuel gets in and the armament and the aircraft get back into the fight. It's definitely the most exciting part of the job."

Moeller, from Corona, Calif., works with three other 15Js on his shift -- Spc. Philip Miller of Tooele, Utah; Spc. Chris Howell of Palm Bay, Fla.; and Spc. Chad Nguyen of Traveler's Rest, S.C.

While it may not appear to be the most glamorous job in the world, Moeller said he knows the job of the fuelers and armament Soldiers is extremely important.

"I love my job because you can see the benefits as to what's happening on the battlefield firsthand," he said. "Even though I may not be flying in the air with the aircraft, I'm affecting the mission. I can still see the affect we're having on the battlefield." ■

# Turning the wrench...

## Mechanics help make patrols a success

### Sgt. Zach Mott

3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team  
4th Infantry Division Public Affairs

**BALAD, Iraq** -- Soldiers can't complete a mission with broken vehicles.

For the mechanics of Troop B, 2nd Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, ensuring a vehicle is mission capable is the priority.

"I'm really proud of these guys," said Staff Sgt. Edward Vanover, maintenance team chief for Troop B. "I haven't had a vehicle down for more than 24 hours. Out of 87 vehicles, that's pretty good."

Vanover and his team of 10 mechanics ensure that everything from humvees and Bradleys, to generators and everything in between meets all the needed operating specifications.

"If it's not [meeting specifications] then I assign the mechanics to each job to ensure that vehicle gets up and running and ready for a combat patrol," he said.

The vehicles in Iraq travel across beaten roads, over rough terrain, and through a sandy, dusty environment.

The mechanics of Troop B ensure those vehicles are able to meet the daily challenges of Iraq.

"These vehicles they take a beating," Vanover said. "There's natural wear-and-tear, operator error, things like that. We've got to get it back up and ready for the next patrol."

With so many vehicles in his charge, Vanover said he relies on the experience of combat-tour mechanics to know what to have on-hand.

"They gave me the insight as to what were a lot of the issues last time, as far as [what] always broke on vehicles or [what] didn't work and [what] did," he said. "We took all that perspective and tried to order and stock up on a lot of things that were a problem in the past."

When it comes time to plan a mission -- whether it's a raid on a village or a routine route clearing mission -- leaders need to know they can count on the vehicles to make the trip.

"They're an integral part, they're not just support," said 1st Lt. Ronald

Magtanong, executive officer, Troop B. "We view it as a combat operation in-and-of-itself, because without them, these guys (the scouts) can't go out on the road and do combat patrols."

In the few months the troop has been in Iraq, Vanover said his team takes advice from the patrols and uses their mechanic skills to help the patrols become more effective.

"We do a lot of fabricating," he said. "Patrols come in and say, 'Hey, this

vehicle is working, this equipment is working, but it could work a lot better if...'" For instance, we've taken a tracked vehicle's spotlights and hooked them up to the humvees, fabricated them, and wired them in."

Vanover is quick to point out the credit for keeping the troop up and running goes to his team of mechanics.

"I give a lot of credit to these guys, I just sit back and direct, these guys make it happen," he said. ■



photo by Sgt. Zach Mott

**Staff Sgt. Jeremiah Johnson, shop foreman, Troop B, 2nd Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, repairs part of the engine of a humvee prior to the vehicle leaving Logistical Support Area Anaconda. Johnson and the other mechanics of Troop B are responsible for more than 80 vehicles.**

# Soldier's best friend

## Bastogne Soldiers have four-legged support

**Spc. Barbara Ospina**  
1st Brigade Combat Team  
101st Airborne Division

**KIRKUK, Iraq** -- He wears a modified ballistic vest, a Screaming Eagle combat patch, and a combat action badge, but he is not like the average Soldier.

Zeko, an explosive detection dog, brings new meaning to the phrase "man's best friend."

"He's got a good rapport with the Soldiers," said Staff Sgt. David

Silberman, Zeko's kennel master and partner for nearly two and a half years. The two are stationed at Forward Operating Base McHenry with the 327th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division.

"Our missions are really broad, we support everything," Silberman said. "Every day we are learning something different for us to do."

When it comes to his job, Zeko may be at the top of his game, but Silberman says he trains on a regular basis, just like Soldiers.

Silberman said it takes on average two and a half years to get an explosive-trained dog certified, but it does not end there. Each dog must also go through an annual certification, and get a minimum of 95 percent success rate on explosive detection or the dog is decertified.

"[Certified] explosive dogs are trained in nine different explosive odors," Silberman said.

"He's got to find every single one -- he can't miss them."

Although Zeko is currently tested at 98.7 percent, and trained in desert warfare, Silberman takes it upon himself to keep Zeko up to the task with daily exercise.

Using a newly-built training course, Zeko practices many different obstacles.

He starts with a doggie confidence course -- a small jump, followed by stairs and tunnels.

The real workout starts when shouts echo through the air, followed by Zeko's yelping. Silberman holds Zeko tightly, while a volunteer Soldier, wearing a protective sleeve, runs. Then, at the right moment, Silberman releases the now vicious dog. Zeko sprints after the Soldier, leaps into the air, and locks his jaw on the Soldier's protected arm. Attempts to shake him off fail as Zeko just bites harder. Then, with a single command from his handler, Zeko releases the Soldier's padded arm and returns to Silberman. A few seconds later, Zeko is rewarded with playful hugs and praises.

It isn't all work and no play for Zeko though. His kisses may be sloppy, and he has doggy breath, but Zeko has become well-known and loved among the Soldiers at FOB McHenry. ■



photos by Spc. Barbara Ospina

**(Left) Zeko, an explosive detection Canine supporting Bastogne Soldiers of 327th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, shows off his ballistic goggles. (Above) Zeko runs down a set of stairs during his daily routine on the newly-built training course at Forward Operating Base McHenry, Iraq.**

It's a full house at...

# Screaming Eagle Poker



## Spc. Jeanine Kinville

101st Airborne Division  
Public Affairs Office

**TIKRIT, Iraq** -- You might not expect much to do on a Sunday night in Iraq, but that is when things really start to heat up here in the desert.

Soldiers come from all over Contingency Operating Base Speicher in Tikrit, Iraq, to get in on the hottest weekly event -- Screaming Eagle Poker.

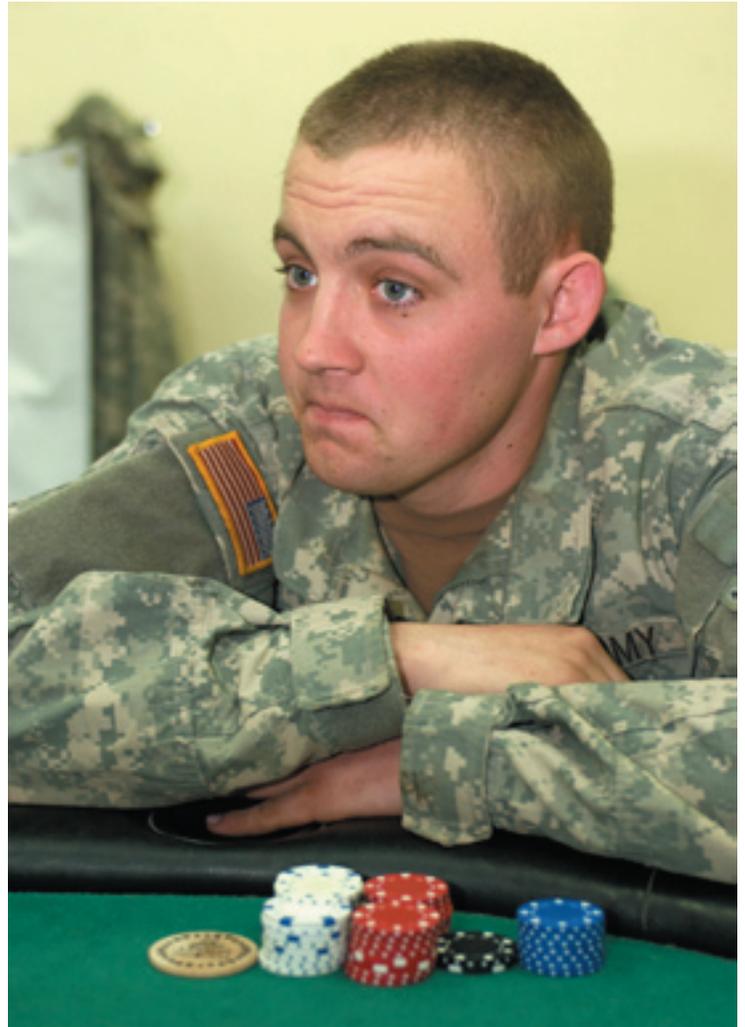
"We are the one of the largest free poker leagues in the world, and definitely in Iraq," said Sgt. Felix Gutierrez, president of the SEP association and a noncommissioned officer assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 501st Special Troops Battalion, 101st Airborne Division motor pool. "Soldiers are a part of something unique and keep making poker history with such large turnouts."

Currently midway through their second tournament, SEP keeps drawing out bigger crowds of regulars and new players who don't know a flop from a river.

"Soldiers have been coming out to play at higher numbers every Sunday," Gutierrez said. "Just last week we had 88 civilians and Soldiers attend, not including the curious onlookers and friends who come to cheer on players. I didn't expect this many people would ever attend. One night, we had people playing on the pool tables because we had run out of room, but we adjusted to welcome a bigger turnout of players."

What began as a small group of Soldiers playing occasional poker at the main Morale, Welfare and Recreation center has turned into a sponsored event that operates like a professional No Limit Texas Hold'em poker tournament and runs smooth like clockwork.

"With the help of a few players, we formed the association and began promoting the event with flyers, a Web site and word of mouth," Gutierrez said. "All of our information is posted from our Web site, from player rankings and scores,



photos by Spc. Jeanine Kinville

**(Left) Soldiers watch as the last two players in a game of No Limit Texas Hold'em up the ante during Screaming Eagle Poker night at the Morale, Welfare and Recreation center on Contingency Operating Base Speicher. (Above) Private 1st Class Eric Marrazo maintains his poker face during a game.**

to the house rules."

Poker Players Alliance, Bluff Magazine, and the Wounded Warrior Project are just a few groups affiliated with the association and show their support for the Soldiers enjoying poker while under stress in a combat zone.

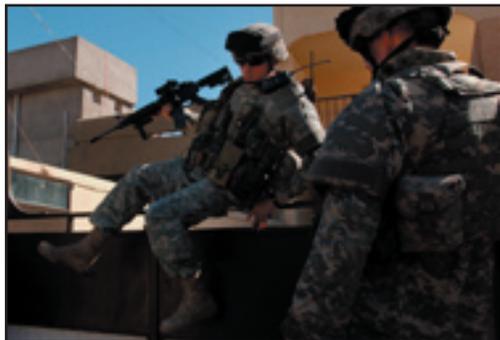
"This is an extremely big morale booster that I have to look forward to every week," said Pfc. Erik Marrazo, a mechanic assigned to HHC, 555th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade. "Last week was only the second time I came, but I had a lot of fun so I plan on coming every Sunday." ■

For more information on Screaming Eagle Poker night, visit the Web site: [www.screamingeaglepoker.com](http://www.screamingeaglepoker.com)

# Through the Lens

photos by Staff Sgt. Russell Lee Klika  
133rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment







# TASK FORCE BAND of BROTHERS IN MEMORIAM

*Once firmly grounded upon this earth,  
these Screaming Eagles now soar in brighter skies.*

## February 22

1st Battalion, 327th Infantry  
Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team

**Staff Sgt. Gregson G. Gourley, 38**  
Salt Lake City, Utah

**Sgt. Rickey E. Jones, 21**  
Kokomo, Ind.

**Pfc. Christopher L. Marion, 20**  
Pineville, Mo.

**Pfc. Allan A. Morr, 21**  
Shiawassee County, Mich.

1st Battalion, 8th Infantry   
Regiment, 3rd Heavy Brigade  
Combat Team

**Staff Sgt. Curtis T. Howard, 32**  
Ann Arbor, Mich.

**Sgt. Gordon F. Misner II, 23**  
Sparks, Nev.

**Spc. Thomas J. Wilwerth, 21**  
Mastic, N.Y.

## February 26

**Spc. Joshua M. Pearce, 21**  
2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment,  
172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team  
Guymon, Okla.

## March 7

**Pfc. Ricky Salas, Jr., 22**  
2nd Battalion, 37th Armored Regiment,  
1st Brigade Combat Team  
Roswell, N.M.

## March 16

Headquarters, Headquarters Company  
501st Special Troops Battalion

**Sgt. Amanda N. Pinson, 21**  
Saint Louis, Mo.

**Spc. Carlos M. Gonzalez, 22**  
Middletown, N.Y.

**Spc. Nyle Yates, III, 22**  
3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment,  
3rd Brigade Combat Team Eagle, Mich.

*(These are the names that have been released as of Mar. 18)*