The Heart Beat

2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division
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COUNTER FIRE BATTERY PLATOON KEEPING PRESSURE ON THE INSURGENCY

FREE MAIL

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"Victory Comes One Step at a Time"

... little by little, we will drive out the terrorists and insurgents, we will be unable to destroy all of them at once.

Maintaining our focus on the big picture and how we, the STRIKE Brigade Combat Team, fits in it is essential. Our tasks are directly related to improving the security situation in South Baghdad by disrupting, and where we can, destroying the insurgent and terrorist framework that threatens stability in our area. We are doing this better than anyone before us – all of us know this.

Understanding why we do this is important. Allow me to help explain. Our combat and non-lethal operations are aimed at preventing the escalation of a communal civil war between Shiites and Sunnis. In this communal civil war, Sunnis and Shiites are fighting for their self interest – they mutually fear each other –they are seeking to guarantee their survival. While in greater Iraq there is only a small percentage of "anti-occupation violence," in South Baghdad it clearly doesn't feel this way. This is because in the Sunni dominated communities of South Baghdad, a small percentage of tribes support foreign fighters with brutal agendas and ideas. These terrorists seek to destroy the very fabric that makes us, and will make the majority of Iraqis, champions of democracy – the notion of freedom and self determination, manifest in a legitimate and functioning democratic government. In short, we're here and we're fighting to help their new government form and get stronger. In the end, Iraq and the Middle East will become more tolerant of western ideas, and by design, the world will be safer and more secure.

While many are impatient, history tells us that our efforts need time. We're not only changing governmental processes, we're working to shape ideas and people's thoughts to not only accept their freedom but act upon it with courage and a long term vision for a better Iraq. Our task is indeed not easy; it takes our patience and too often our blood. We are opposed by those who only care for themselves and despise all those not just like them. But ours is an opportunity – this door is opened for us so we can make a difference.

For a great door for effectual work is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.

--1 Cor. 16:9

We must make good of every opportunity we are exposed to while in Iraq – we must continue to do all in our power to make a difference and to guarantee the freedom of the Iraqi people. Let us not let this opportunity pass us by, let history show how our cause is just and our efforts are justified and good. Let us do this one step at a time; slowly, but surely, we will see victory.

THANKS FOR WHAT YOU DO, AND YOUR SACRIFICE. THANKS TO THOSE OF YOU THAT HAVE REENLISTED. IT IS CLEAR YOU SELFESSLY SERVE A GREATER GOOD –YOU ARE THE WARRIORS THAT KEEP PERSONAL AND OUR NATION'S FUTURE SECURE.

FINALLY, PROTECT THE FORCE -- THIS IS A BATTLE THAT TAKES TIME -- EACH OF US NEEDS TO SLOW DOWN, STAY ALERT, WEAR PROPER EQUIPMENT, USE CREW, TRUST OUR INSTINCTS AND UPHOLD THE VERY DETAILED STANDARDS THAT SET US APART AND MAKES THE BEST AND KEEPS US MORE SAFE.

STRIKE!

Todd J Ebel

Colonel, Infantry

Commanding

COUNTER BATTERY PLATOON KEEPING PRESSURE ON THE INSURGENCY

Story and Photos by
Spc. Kelly K. McDowell

For 18 hours a day the Soldiers work through the heat, wind and rain waiting patiently for the two words that are music to a Field Artillery man's ears to be called over the radio. The platoon works throughout the day performing daily maintenance, reorganizing the ammunition bunker and completing daily tasks that range from guard duty to picking up mail as they wait, ready to react.

It is relatively quiet in the operations center. The sound of tapping on computer keys softly fills the air in the tent, but the silence is broken with those two words repeated over and over.

"Counter fire, counter fire, counter fire."

Suddenly the dance begins. The door to the operations center flies open as a Soldier yells out to the gunners, "counter fire!"

The Soldiers drop their tools grab their helmets and move in an organized furry to their positions. Measurements, degrees and azimuths are called from the radio operator and the Soldiers lift the Howitzer and rotate it to its ordered position.

In less than three minutes the rounds are ready to fire and the anticipation fogs the air as they await the final command to fire.

This is a normal day for the Soldiers of the Counter Battery Platoon of 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment. The platoon, stationed at Forward Operating Base Mahmahdiyah, supports the 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, and more recently, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment.

"Some days are pretty boring," said Sgt. Kevin Hoople, gunner for 1st Platoon, 1-320th FA. "We stand on call 24 hours-a-day 7 days-a-week. As soon as we get a counter fire, the adrenalin starts pumping, we hit the gun and we will have rounds out within three minutes."

In the past seven months, the Counter Battery Platoon has fired more than 101 missions to help deter terrorists. The platoon is the most utilized counter battery asset in the Baghdad area. Some days the Soldiers have conducted up to five missions in an 18 hour period and fired as late, or as early, as 3 a.m.

"This is one of the hottest spots in Iraq right now," he said. "Most of the artillery units are in Mosul, Striker and really big crowded cities and you can't be shooting counter fires into a city due to collateral damage. There are a lot more open spaces out here and more opportunity for the mortar guys to shoot and a lot more opportunities for us to shoot."

These dedicated, well trained Soldiers work tirelessly through 18 hour shifts and, even on their time off, stand ready to answer the call 24 hours-a-day. Through out their shifts they never know what to expect and when to expect the action, because of this they have to be on their toes.

"When we first started this mission, I wasn't really sure how it was going to go," said Hoople who works in one of three sections with in the platoon. "We were told we weren't going to be doing a lot here. So far, it has turned out we actually have been doing a whole lot. We managed to shoot almost more rounds than our

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(Above) Sgt. Kevin Hoople (Left) and Spc. Leland Marshall, Counter Fire Platoon, 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery, stand ready at their platoons Howitzer for the command to fire after a counter fire was called April 25. (Left) After receiving the call for a counter fire mission, April 25, in Mahmahdiyah, Iraq, Sgt. Timothy Olsen lifts the rear of the Howitzer and moves it quickly to acquire the appropriate range of the fire.

"Strike" Officers Accepted in ACS Progam

Story and Photos by
Spc. Kelly K. McDowell

As a way to increase retention of Army officers with the potential to be great leaders, the Army offered a program for the fiscal year of 2006 that will help the continuing education of such junior officers.

The Army's Advanced Civil School program offers junior and mid-grade captains the opportunity to attend a graduate school in multiple fields including Advanced Civil schooling in Homeland Security, Engineering and Business Administration.

1st Lt. (P) Christopher Burton

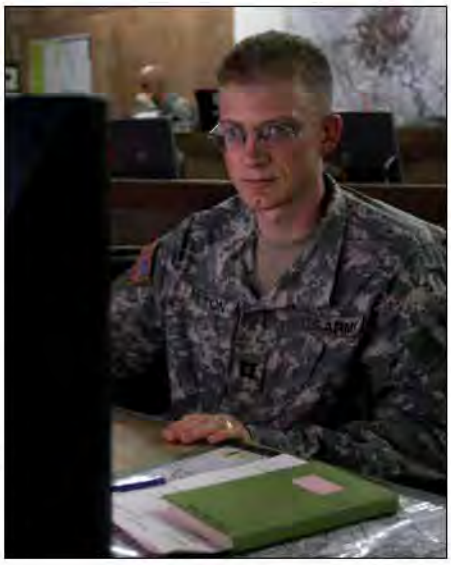
Recently, the list of 101st Airborne Division officers selected for this opportunity was released with 54 names. "Strike" Soldiers from 2nd Brigade Combat Team dominated the list with 11 officers chosen for the ACS program.

"I think it is a great reflection of the potential that the "Strike" BCT brings to the fight," said ACS selectee 1st Lt. (promotable) Christopher Burton, 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery. "It shows how the leaders are abreast with current issues and we are always ready to take it to the next level to ensure the Army leaders and Soldiers grow to meet future challenges."

Eligible officers are able to apply for the ACS program in two ways, either an application with various paperwork from the university or by being recommended by a unit commander. There are also only a few slots for each year that an officer was commissioned.

"Many high caliber officers applied for a slot in the ACS program," said ACS selected Capt. Thomas Melton, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd BCT. Melton was commissioned in the year of 2000 and there were only three slots available for that year. "I was a little surprised that I was chosen."

The Army is ever changing and the future leaders will be required to be more educated, said Burton, a native of Bismarck, Ak., who plans on studying Homeland Security.



Capt. Thomas Melton

"I hope that the program makes me a better leader," he said. "A better leader for the Soldiers I will affect in the Army."

The selected officers will be able to attend graduate school, chosen from an approved list, on or after their seventh year of commissioned service with an agreement to extend their service to the Army.

"This is something I wanted to do personally," said Melton, from Shreveport, La., who is considering studying engineering. "This is a chance to take a deep breath after a few deployments and, thanks to the ACS program, further my education and career."

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MiTT Warriors Work to Secure Iraq's Future

Story by
Spc. Kelly K. McDowell
Photos by
Spc. Karl Johnson, 363rd MPAD

Since the arrival of 2nd Brigade Combat Team in southern Baghdad, specialized teams of multiple military occupational specialties have played a key role in the stabilization and training of the Iraqi army soldiers.

The military transition teams are interdisciplinary units drawn from all areas of the brigade. The MiTT elements focus on training the Iraqi army for independent combat operations and improving local infrastructure and community relations.

One of the more important efforts by the MiTT elements is the improvement of Iraqi army facilities. Often there is little in the way of useable buildings or utilities such as water and electricity. As a result, these improvements to infrastructure are sometimes taken from the ground up.

In collaboration with the soldiers and officers of the new Iraqi army, U.S. Army combat engineers have taken the lead in rebuilding, or in many cases, building from scratch, the force protection measures, barracks, warehouses, offices and training facilities a modern army requires to operate successfully and independently.

Though these projects and efforts from the MiTT elements are essential in the development of the new Iraqi army, the tasks come with their own challenges the Strike Soldiers have to face daily and overcome to complete their mission.

"Completing an [entry control point] with my Iraqi engineer counterpart has been challenging," said 1st Lt. Charles Buntin, contracting officer for the 2nd BCT MiTT, who recently completed the construction of a new ECP for the 4th Battalion, 6th Iraqi army headquarters. "Under Saddam's reign as the president of Iraq, the officers rarely conducted physical labor and were often treated as royalty. It has been difficult teaching my counterparts that you need to be on the ground with your soldiers and do the work along side them because you are short manned or they just might need an extra hand."

> *"Being on the MiTT is one of the most satisfying jobs I've held while serving in the 101st."*

Buntin said a lieutenant's job does not stop at making the plan, an officer needs to be there with his soldiers until the mission is complete.

With such cultural differences, each 2nd BCT Soldier has had to adapt and change his methods in order to train and mold the new Iraqi army. The MiTT elements have to work through translators to overcome many obstacles while working on different projects.

"The main difficulty is the language barrier between the civilian contractors and me," Buntin said. "The interpreters that the teams use are very competent. It makes the job easier when I can use a term that may be specific to our language and the translator doesn't need me to explain what I mean."

For example, he said the Iraqi army calls front end loaders and excavators a shovel. These are two different pieces of

Continued on Pg. 11 see MiTT

(Above) Staff Sgt. Anthony Cox, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, MiTT 2, prepares to take a team of Iraqis on a foot patrol in west Mamudiyah. Iraqi forces now participate in joint and independent patrols in Mamudiyah. (Left) Staff Sgt. Anthony Cox, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, MiTT 2, works with an Iraqi Soldier in west Mamudiyah, Iraq to build a new traffic control point. It is hoped that the new TCP will reduce the flow of insurgents in the area.

Newly Renovated School Reopens Doors to Local Children

Story and photos by

Spc. Kelly K. McDowell

Since 1958 a small building has stood in a village south of Baghdad, Iraq, as the cornerstone of education for the young children of the Al Rasheed district.

As the years have passed the Al-Widha Primary Co-educational School has fallen victim to the weather, suffered years of neglect, overcrowding and a shortage of school supplies coupled with dilapidated desks and classrooms. The school was also utilized as a polling site during the December Iraqi National Elections, which is what lead the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, to its doors.

When the Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, began patrols during the elections in the Al-Rasheed district, they visited the local area facilities that were slated to be polling sites and found the Al-Wadhi school was in much need of renovations in order to offer a proper environment for the children to learn.

"Basically we came and cleaned the school up so the children did not have to go to school in a trash dump," said 2nd Lt. Johnathan Carney, Fire Support Officer, Company D, 1-502nd IN. "We just kind of made it a little nicer for the children."

On April 25, the efforts of 1-502nd IN, local contractors and the city counsel chief came full circle as a ribbon cutting ceremony was held celebrating the completion of the renovations.

"The ceremony represents a new start for the school," Carney said. "It is just to show that we are here for the Iraqi people and we are here to help them. It is good both for the Iraqi Army who helped with the renovations and the town of Al Rasheed."

For two months the Soldiers, contractor, Iraqi Army soldiers and city council worked tirelessly after classes were let out in the afternoon to provide everything from new windows, removing trash and debris, improving the sewage system and painting and repairing the building.

"It looks good right now," Carney said. "There are still some things I would like to get done. It is leaps and bounds from what it was."

Future plans for the school include new desks, blackboards and air-conditioning units. No school is complete with out proper learning materials and the Soldiers are planning on providing the children with notebooks, pens, pencils and even an expansion of the building to help with the overcrowding in the classrooms.

"The school looks really good since the school yard has been cleaned," said a teacher at the school. She has been a teacher for 24 years and spent a majority of her career at the Al-Widha School and currently teaches one of the girls classes. "I look forward to the expansion of the school, more rooms for the classes."

(Top) The newly remodeled Al-Widha School. (Bottom Left) Capt. Louis Kangas, Company D commander, 1-502nd IN and Al Rasheed City Council chief cut the ribbon during a ceremony held April 26. (Below) A "Strike" Soldier waves good bye to the students.

FACES OF THE HEART

Country musician, Charlie Daniels, visits Soldiers from 2-101st Brigade Troops Battalion before returning to Camp Liberty to play a concert for the Soldiers.

Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, surprises a wounded Soldier, Sgt. Adam Moore, from Company D, 1-22nd IN, while undergoing care in Iraq. Rumsfeld pinned the Soldier with a Purple Heart during the visit.

Pvt. Abbigale Niblet, HHC, 2nd BCT, poses for a photo with an Iraqi friend on Camp Striker.

Sgt. Joy Kroemer, HHC 2nd BCT, enjoys a visit with some Iraqi girls during a school ribbon cutting ceremony in Al Rasheed.

Sgt. Steven Seidenstien and Spc. Michael Smith, Men of Action, take note of low flying aircraft near the 2BCT Tactical Operations Center.

Chaplain (Capt.) Scot McCosh offers Catholic Soldiers in Yusufiyah communion during an Easter celebration.

Company B, 1-502nd, Soldiers Rise Above and Continue to "Strike"

Story by

Spc. George Welcome

Photos courtesy of 1-502nd IN

YUSUFIYAH, Iraq—By nature deployments are not easy. Soldiers spend many months away from family and friends, often separated by thousands of miles. Then add the grind of around the clock operations.

Now, compound these things with non-stop patrols, continual contact with a guileful enemy, the total loss of personal effects and the tragic losses of several fellow Soldiers.

These are some of the hardships the Soldiers of Company B, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment have had to endure during the first six months of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

To call Yusufiyah a dangerous place would be a bit of an understatement. It is arguably the most active spot in the Baghdad region. Everyday insurgents launch attacks against coalition forces using all the usual tools; small arms, mortars, rocket propelled grenades and improvised explosive devices.

The Bravo Soldiers have fought with an uncommon resolve to bring the area under control. The fight has not been easy, but it is one they are determined to win.

"The area is more secured, more controlled now than it was when we arrived," said 1st Lt. Justin Habash, executive officer, Company B, 1-502nd Infantry Regiment. "We've established TCPs and maintained a constant presence throughout our sector in order to secure the routes we use frequently and also to establish relationships with the local nationals."

To establish control in the area, the Soldiers first had to venture into areas that had previously gone unchecked.

"The first one was securing Route Sportster, the biggest route we use daily for travel across our area of operations. We find IEDs on it, but they are small, not the devastating type. We travel the route pretty freely. The second thing would be the presence we've created on the Jufr al Sukr Bridge on the Euphrates River. We do month long rotations for platoons down there, they conduct patrols on a daily basis and run TCPs in that area."

'The third thing would be the presence in the town of Mulla Fayyed, which is in our area. Most of our TCPs are centered in this population center. It's the central area of our AO that we conduct operations. The fourth thing is establishing a presence in areas where there has been no coalition forces."

While the Soldiers have been able to successfully accomplish many objectives, they by no means went unopposed, not only have they had to suffer the losses of comrades throughout the deployment, in February, the Soldiers lost all their possessions in a fire which claimed their living area.

Despite all these tragedies, the men have managed to stay focused and motivated to continue the mission.

"There's nothing else you can do but be motivated," said Sgt. Nathan Loper, training room noncommissioned officer. "Guys keep on pushing on. Intestinal fortitude. Every Soldier in this company is

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"Strike" Soldiers Raise Spirits During Easter Season

Story by
Chaplain (Capt.) Scott McCosh

As the sun rose over Camp Striker, Strike soldiers gathered to raise their spirits in an Easter Sunrise service, Sunday, April 23rd, 2006.

The gentle beauty of the bright rays piercing through the clouds served as a reminder to all of God's presence even in this place. While holidays can be difficult to celebrate when separated from families and friends, Strike Soldiers found that they were indeed able to celebrate as they joined with their military and faith families to mark out this special day. Opportunities for worship and fun abounded.

The Strike Religious Support Team, which consists of six chaplains and assistants, sought to provide worship opportunities which made the holidays, true Holy days. Good Friday services, a Passover Seder, the showing of ***The Passion of the Christ*** and eight Easter services in all, were offered to Soldiers at Camp Striker, allowing them to express their faith in a variety of ways. Services were also held at F.O.B Mahmudiyah North and Easter messages and donated care packages were brought to several remote patrol bases.

Spc. Patricia Hamilton and Spc. Brandon Green, (pictured above right) of the 526th Brigade Support Battalion, brought the Easter message to life in their interpretive dance as part of the Contemporary Protestant service. These Soldiers spent numerous hours, of their personal time, choreographing and rehearsing movements that lifted song lyrics to life. For many in attendance it was their first experience with interpretive dance, but the smiles on their faces and the spontaneous applause offered revealed the joy that it brought to their Easter experience.

Dance though, wasn't the only artistic expression that lifted Strike spirits. A cappella singing, by Fijian security contractors filled the chapel during the Traditional Protestant service. The tight harmony of these island voices brought an international flavor to the Easter celebration. Joy filled singing was heard at all of the services, with the Pentecostal Choir bringing the days' celebration to a close.

Of course, the day was not only filled with the sacred sounds of services, but also the sounds of thumping rabbits feet as the Easter Bunny paid a visit, leaving chocolate eggs in the dining facility and smiles on the faces of your hardened warriors. We hope that he paid you a visit too!

While the chaos of combat continues to stir, so do the spiritual lives of Strike Soldiers. While the Holy Seasons of Easter and Passover have come and gone, the spirits of Strike Soldiers continue to be raised.

About Hamilton and Green

The Easter Service for the Contemporary Christian Service, lovingly referred to as "The Way Station," had a very special opportunity to experience their faith through the art of Liturgical Dance.

SPC Patricia Hamilton is from Mayfield, Ky., and has been performing Liturgical Dance for five years. She credits Sandi Armstong, a former high school teacher, for her energy and enthusiasm in expressing her faith through dance. Hamilton works for Company A, 526 Brigade Support Battalion supporting Strike Brigade's Ammunitions Holding Area, Quick and Ready Force and as a Transportation Operator during OIF V-06. This marks her second deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

SPC Brandon Green, also with Company A, is from Houston (Copperfield), Tx., and consented to working with SPC Hamilton on the dance routines for Easter this year.

"It was something new that I had never done before and I thought it would be fun," Green said. He said that the experience increased his faith by giving him greater confidence in his own expression of faith.

1-502ND IN *(Continued from Pg. 8)*

American Soldier should be for how hard they work and the great job they do. They also stay motivated by great leadership from "Top", the commander and all the way down to the most junior team leader."

"It's changed our way of thinking; we had a place to live an actual solid roof over our head, a place to call home," said Staff Sgt. Leslie Fuller. "But after the fire everybody lost a lot of personal stuff, things that they can't get back; Soldiers lost medals, they've lost journals that they started since the day they left Fort Campbell, lost. Everything that ever happened to this company is gone."

Under these circumstances, most men would find it impossible to recover. However, the Soldiers of Bravo Company did what they do best; they persevered and found a way to let the experience bring them together.

"It's drawn us all close together, because we know everybody's lost everything," said Fuller. "It's drawn us close together because we don't have anybody else out here but us. It's one of the worst sectors in the brigade, we only have us and that's it."

The thought that their shared adversity had brought them closer together was also expressed by another Bravo Company Soldier.

"We've seen a lot, more than anybody should see," said Private 1st Class Ryan Davis. "I think what motivates us and keeps us going is each other. We've lost everything else; except for each other so all the morale is coming from every person.

The daily actions of these men go beyond the call of duty.

"A tender warrior," said Fuller describing the typical Bravo Company Soldier. "We're warriors. We're infantrymen, we go out, we fight We will give you peace and we will fight for the peace, don't provoke us to go further than bringing peace, don't make us cross the line.

When their time here is finished, there will be no doubt that the men of Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, and 502nd Infantry Regiment have changed the face of the Yusufiyah area and made it safer for all its inhabitants.

"The Bravo Company Soldier has got something that most people just don't have," said Davis. "These guys just have so much heart, so much willpower. I have seen them do things that you wouldn't think people would be able to do."

MiTT *(Continued from Pg. 5)*

equipment that mean two different things and the translators help explain to the local nationals what equipment is needed.

Language barriers and cultural differences aside, Strike Soldiers have forged a strong relationship with their Iraqi counterparts as well as the local nationals in the surrounding communities.

"Being on the MiTT is one of the most satisfying jobs I've held while serving in the 101st," said 1st Lt. Mark Conrad, 2nd BCT MiTT. "I get to interact with Iraqis, both civilians and military, on a daily basis and am observing great progress in both sectors."

The progress the MiTT elements have made with in the community have ranged from Iraqi army combat tactics to community service projects that bring the Iraqi soldiers closer to the people in their area.

"The schools that have been renovated have made the Iraqi army look good because we ensure they get their due credit," Buntin said. "The people of Mahmudiyah trust the Iraqi army more and more as these community service projects continue."

COUNTER FIRE *(Continued from Pg. 3)*

entire battalion did in the beginning of the war."

He said since 1st Platoon arrived in Mahmahdiyah mortar attacks have decreased by 50 percent due to the counter fires and area denial missions. The terrorists are not getting enough time to launch multiple rounds and are not as accurate due to the pressure the Counter Battery Platoon puts on its targets.

"I believe we have been making a difference through area denials," said Staff Sgt. Jonathan Brown, platoon sergeant, 1st Platoon, 1-320th FA. "There are a couple of areas out there that are heavy in insurgent activity. We have shot some area denials into that area and the activity ceases for a while, it slows (the terrorists) down and makes (terrorists) stop and think about attacking coalition forces because we know where they are."

Area denial missions target known insurgent mortar sites, Brown said. Through pattern analysis there are points of origin that attacks have in common and a mission will be executed into that area through the use of observers.

"What that is doing is limiting the terrorist's advancement into that area," he said. "Our platoon shoots rounds into that area to let the terrorists know we know where they are. It lets the terrorists know we are here and we are able to reach that area. It disrupts their movement."

The soldiers are doing great, Brown said. Everyday the platoon "tweaks" something, the Soldiers take a look at their counter fire drills, they rehearse and after every mission the Howitzer Section conducts an after-action review to see if there is anything that can be done to make their time faster and their drill more efficient.

"I think our platoon has done excellent," Hoople said. "We are basically the only artillery out here shooting. This mission has been a god-send for these guys, this is the real dream of field artillery, you get the real effect of field artillery getting to shoot anywhere at anytime. This is what artillery is all about."

BROTHERS IN ARMS REUNITED

Story by
1st Lt. Jason Shuff
1-502nd IN

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq — In Iraq, Soldiers in a platoon, squad or team often build relationships with one another that tie them together like brothers. They become a tight-knit group sharing the characteristics of a family -- learning from each other's experiences, arguing over who is the best football player, enjoying a game of Madden Football on a PlayStation and depending on each other when times get tough.

Even with this support from brothers-in-arms, it is always a lift in morale when Soldiers can reunite with real family in Iraq.

Specialist Brandon Bird, with the fire support team assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team at Camp Striker, Iraq, had not seen his brother, Staff Sgt. William Clark, since Clark redeployed from Iraq in 2004.

Clark is a medic with the 62nd Engineer Battalion under the 4th Infantry Division at Camp Liberty. When he redeployed two years ago, his parents and younger brother met him at Fort Hood, Texas, and spent a few days with him.

In the summer of 2004, Bird enlisted and reported to basic training at Fort Sill, Okla. Bird said one of his reasons to enlist was brother's advice: "women love a man in uniform."

Since then, the two brothers have only communicated by telephone and e-mail. In February, however, Bird received an e-mail from Clark saying he was at Camp Liberty, which is no more than a 10-minute bus ride from Camp Striker. Bird quickly replied and scheduled a time they could reunite when each other's operation tempo permitted. "I never thought I would meet up with my brother in Iraq," Bird said. "I was anticipating having another year apart."

After being apart for nearly two years, the brothers finally had free time and scheduled a long-awaited reunion April 8 at the Burger King on Camp Liberty. Both had a good laugh and said they are looking forward to getting together again.

"I really enjoyed the time I got to spend with my brother," Clark said, with a smile. "We got to joke and talk about old times."

Their parents, who live in Marble Falls, Texas, told their sons they couldn't be happier that they reunited while serving their country in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"No arsenal, no weapon in the arsenals of the world, is so formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women,"

-Ronald Reagan