



THUNDER EAGLE MAGAZINE

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Staying Thunder:

Unique ceremonies keep Thunder Brigade troops coming back for more....years

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SGT Kendrick Baker/159th CAB, HHC

159th Combat Aviation Brigade Units:

HHC BDE



7-17 CAV



4-101 AVN



3-101 AVN



7-101 AVN



C 1-58 ATC



50th MED



563rd ASB



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Cover: Colonel Jeffrey Colt, 159th Combat Aviation Brigade Commander, re-enlists a Soldier from 4th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, as 302 re-enlistees from the deployment are gathered around a large painting of Old Abe at Logistical Support Area Anaconda, Iraq in April. (Doheny)

Support Battalion Colors Uncased

Sixty-two years later the 'Keep Them Fighting' battalion uncases colors after its first combat action

By Staff Sgt. Kevin Doheny
159th CAB PAO



The 563rd Aviation Support Battalion finally has what has been missing from their formation since the unit redesignated from 9th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment (Support) – their colors.

During a ceremony held at Logistical Support Area Anaconda, Iraq, June 6, the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Lorelei Coplen and her Command Sergeant Major, CSM Carolyn Johnson, uncased the battalion's colors which have been cased for the last 38 years.

It was 62 years ago when the 563rd Quartermaster Service Battalion was



Major Gary Soldato, (above) Executive Officer for the 563rd Aviation Support Battalion, stands at the position of parade rest as Lt. Col. Lorelei Coplen, (below), 563rd ASB Commander, speaks at the battalion's Colors Uncasing Ceremony at Logistical Support Area Anaconda, Iraq, June 6.



divided into its separate companies and headquartered in several locations in preparation for the support of the military actions that would be known as Operation Overlord.

That was the name of the military action for the massive invasion of Normandy, initiated on June 6, 1944.

The 563rd battalion and its companies supported the military operations of a variety of American and Allied

divisions, earning campaign credit from Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace, to include the Battle of the Bulge, and Central Europe.

Coplen spoke to her troops and the Soldiers in attendance about what it means to uncase her battalion's colors on a day that 62 years ago the Soldiers of the "Keep Them Fighting" battalion made history.

"Sixty-two years ago today, these colors first saw military action," said Coplen. "It is likely that members of this battalion stood shoulder to shoulder on the cramped rocking decks of the landing crafts, navigating around the mines and the damaged hulls of other vessels."

She went on to add that the members of the battalion hit the beaches just shortly after the initial invading forces and immediately established the long, difficult logistics support of the a rapidly-moving and geographically-spread combat action.

"Somewhere in this time, the battalion members adopted a motto that we use today, 'Keep Them Fighting'," she

said. "We also know that these were the units and Soldiers charged with establishing the field hospitals and the morgues, and there were many combat losses on this day, June 6, and the day after until victory in Europe was assured."

It had been almost two years since any colors for this distinguished unit had flown above the headquarters of the "Fighting Battalion" which directly supports the 159th Combat Aviation Brigade.

Coplen spoke of how her battalion, although one of the newest in the Army, has accomplished so much from transformation to deploying.

"Together we climbed a short, steep path, moving from activation ceremony to deployment within a year," she said. "This ceremony marks another important step in our unit's maturity, as we assume the lineage and history of this unit even while we are making history ourselves."

Coplen concluded by saying this combat tour is coming to an end, and the colors will soon be shown proudly at the battalion headquarters building; her Soldiers will be adding a new piece of history to an already rich tradition. She said this new addition symbolizes the difficulties her Soldiers will have gone through during their rendezvous with destiny.

"Sometime in the not distant future, we will case these colors for the trip back home. When we uncase them proudly again, it will be to display them in our headquarters at Fort Campbell," she added. "Not long after that, we will be adding a new streamer to join the others. This will be a new streamer to represent a new generation of 'Keep Them Fighting' Soldiers; warriors in defense of our nation in the Global War on Terrorism.



Catfish Air is one of the most universally known names in Iraq because it is vital transportation tool in a combat zone. Catfish Air is theater-wide Space Available system established by the 185th Aviation Brigade two rotations ago to facilitate movement throughout Iraq. The 185th was a National Guard Brigade from Mississippi, thus explaining the affection for Catfish.

It's also an operation the Thunder Brigade has worked hard to improve since they arrived in Iraq in the Fall of 2005. In just six months the Brigade had already equaled the number of passengers moved by the previous unit.

The operation, which allows Soldiers and authorized civilian personnel to travel to different locations via the brigade's helicopters, has been an important focal point of the brigade effort. The 159th Combat Aviation Brigade has been providing this unique service for Coalition troops and civilians operating within the borders of Iraq.

The brigade is providing a life-saving, time-effective measure, which in turn has kept thousands of personnel off dangerous roads, helping to reduce the number of ground convoys.

With the efforts of planners, aircraft crew members and many civilians, these personnel are able to maneuver across the battlefield without having to endure the possible dangers which could be waiting for them on the roads from forward operating base to forward operating base.

The brigade's UH-60 Black Hawk and CH-47 Chinook helicopters have become a viable way to ensure personnel

and cargo arrive to their destination without the threat of improvised explosive devices which have claimed the lives of many Coalition troops and civilian lives over the past three years.

Over the past seven months the brigade has successfully managed to move more than 170,000 passengers and thousands of pounds of cargo to locations such as Baghdad, Mosul, Ar Ramadi, Tikrit, and others.

"Since we are the aviation brigade supporting the Multi-National Corps-Iraq, we support the entire Iraqi battlespace," said Maj. Eric McEldowney, current operations officer for the brigade. "The number of passengers, specifically, is significant because those are personnel who weren't exposed to the IED threat."

The operation of moving passengers via Catfish Air begins by submitting an air mission request or, in most cases, Space A coordination. Using this type of travel requires coordination between MNC-I and Catfish Air personnel, which is run by Sgt. 1st Class Bruce Melendez, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 159th CAB, and his team.

"Catfish Air is a brilliant use of space available," said Col. Jeffrey Colt, 159th CAB commander. "I remember hearing when a monthly passenger haul exceeded 3,000 Space A passengers and that was a huge stride in force protection, now, we're doing over 8,000. This can only be accomplished with the hard work of many Soldiers, air crews and our civilian partners."

Many people line up daily at the different Catfish Air

locations in Iraq to get from location to location. After Thunder Brigade aircraft are tasked with daily missions, Space A passengers have the opportunity to request any remaining seats and are then manifested on a particular flight.

“Our goal is to fill every helicopter everyday,” said McEldowney. “Since the date of our transfer of authority, we have moved over 70,000 Space A passengers alone, and are on target to break 100,000 with that operation.”

The purpose of Army Aviation is to support the ground commanders, and according to Colt, this is how he ultimately measures the success of his brigade’s operations in Iraq. He said there is, and has always been, a remarkable trust between the ground force and Army Aviation.

He said the ground commanders know his air crews will do whatever they can to come to their aid, provide air support, evacuate the wounded, carry their Soldiers to or from a fight, and bring the replenishments needed for sustainment.

“We understand that these operations require a physical presence,” Colt said. “Since the ground force often provides this, we as air elements are visible, but the ground force, whether combat arms, civil affairs or logisticians are making a huge impact here and we hope that what we do facilitates them accomplishing their tasks and missions as safely and efficiently as possible.”

Due to the large number of personnel the brigade transports from location to location, many man hours are required of the pilots and crew chiefs. Since the pilots are flying so much, more maintenance needs to be done and more logistical efforts are needed than an average aircraft. According to Colt, the brigade and its Soldiers are currently operating at four times a normal training pace, at its best. He said he is proud of the efforts of his brigade and says this experience is invaluable.

“In many cases, these are some of the toughest environmental and weather conditions to fly in and our crews have, and are adapting to the changes almost every day. We are already building the next generation of great Army pilots and crew chiefs,” Colt said. “This takes a complete team effort beginning and ending with outstanding maintenance. Our POL Soldiers have pumped over two million gallons of JP8 fuel to keep the aircraft going and our flight operation Soldiers are doing an outstanding job tracking each flight and maintaining an incredible amount of flight data.”

Since most operations start and end with the Soldier, the brigade says they are contributing to the successes in Iraq in any way they can.

“All of our Soldiers bring their ‘A-game’ to the fight everyday,” said McEldowney. “We don’t have an ebb and flow, it’s everything we’ve got, everyday.”



Coalition troops load onto a UH-60 Blackhawk from Company A, 4th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment at Camp Victory, Iraq.

AROUND THUNDER BRIGADE:



In-flight Re-enlistment: Col. Jeffrey Colt, 159th Combat Aviation Brigade Commander, re-enlist Staff Sgt. Ulises Mateo (left), Company D, 7th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, during a flight to Baghdad. Colt also re-enlisted 9 other Soldiers during the flight.



Changing command: Col. Jeffrey Colt, 159th CAB Commander, accepts the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 159th CAB, from the outgoing commander, Capt. John Peters June 22 at Logistical Support Area Anaconda.



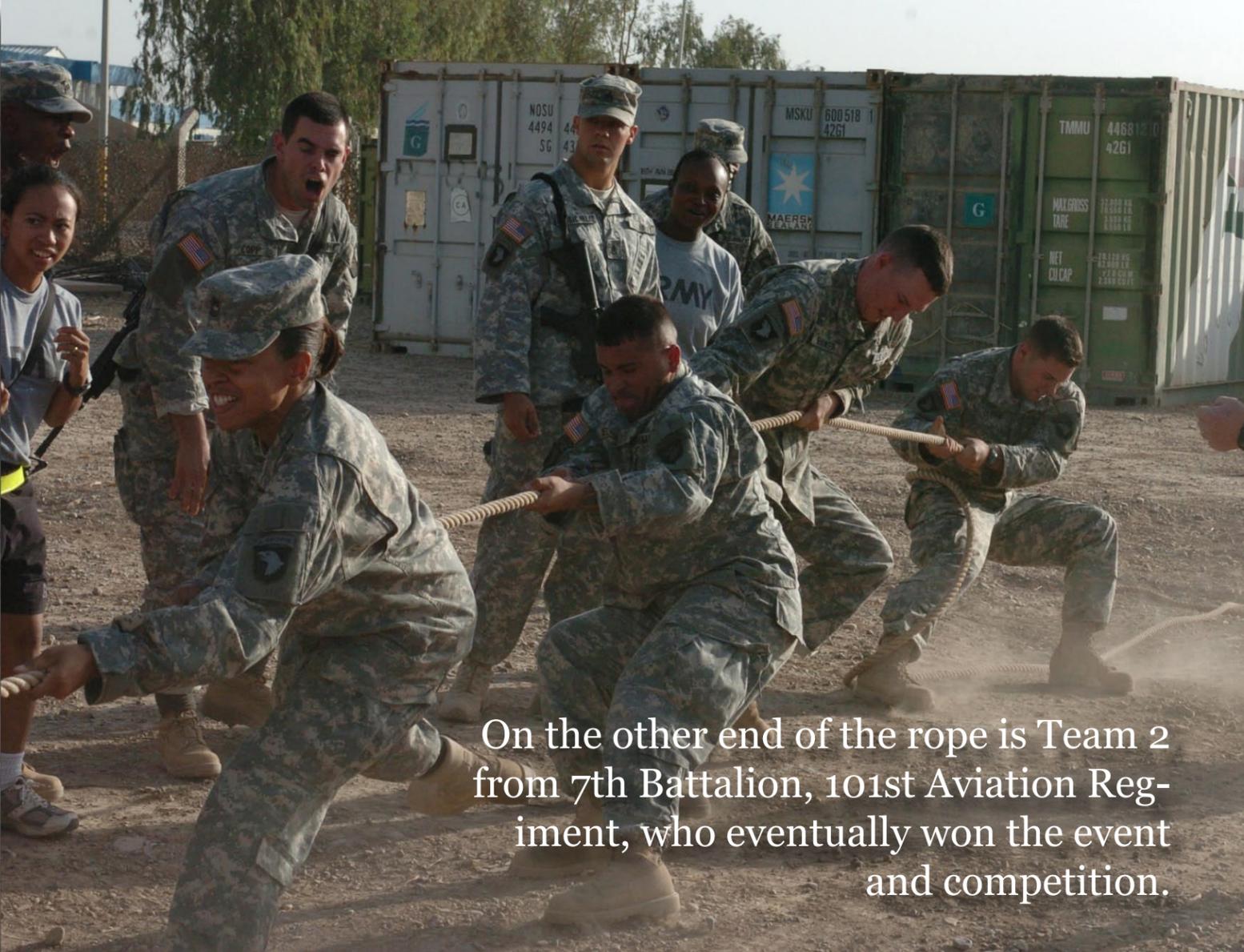
LSAA FARP: A refueler from the 159th Combat Aviation Brigade fills up a UH-60 Black Hawk from Company C, 4th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, at the forward armament and refueling point at Logistical Support Area Anaconda, Iraq. The FARP personnel have pumped more than one million gallons.



Blackwidow Black Hawk: A UH-60 Black Hawk from Company C, 4th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, flies over an open area just outside of Baghdad June 14. The crew flew for over 8 hours in temperatures more than 115 degrees.



Supporters of 1st Battalion, 58th Aviation Regiment (ATS) team, do their best to encourage the team on during the “winner take all” Tug of War event during the Press On Competition.



On the other end of the rope is Team 2 from 7th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, who eventually won the event and competition.

COMPETITION HELPS PASS THE TIME IN IRAQ

Six teams competed for the right to be called the best. Only one was left standing at the end....literally

BY SSG KEVIN DOHENY/159th CAB PAO

IN MOST SPORTS they call it overtime. If you were a team in the first ever Press On Competition you called it Tug-of-War, a team versus team event that only left one team standing, literally.

That one team was 7th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment's Team 2. They pulled out a victory in the 'winner take all' Tug-of-War battle against 1st Battalion, 58th Aviation Regiment (ATS).

Six teams of four left all the monotony that comes along with a deployment behind as they showed off their physical fitness levels during the competition June 17-18 at Logistical Support Area Anaconda, Iraq.

The competition consisted of an Army Physical Fitness Test, graded on the 27-31 year-old scale and with an added chin-up event, a Humvee push, an individual Soldier common task test, and a six-mile road march. In case of

a tie at the end of the road march, the top two teams would have to compete in a tug-of-war to determine the winner.

The teams had to be filled with at least one junior-level Soldier, one junior non-commissioned officer, one senior non-commissioned officer and one officer. On every team one of the team members also had to be a female.

Chief Warrant Officer David Copp, 7th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, attempts one last sit-up during the Army Physical Fitness Test portion of the Press On Competition at Logistical Support Area Anaconda, Iraq June 17.

“I thought the event was a good time for Soldiers,” said Maj. Thomas Smedley, who competed for 4th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, which placed third. “It was a great format to show off their current level of physical fitness and their knowledge of the details of soldiering.”

“I love the spirit of competition, there is nothing else like it,” said 1st Lt. Gregory Brower, 7th Bn., 101st Avn. Regt. Team 2. “Testing your limits against the limits of others and encouraging teammates to do their best and fulfill the potential they may not even know they possess is personally rewarding. There is closeness between members of a team when everyone is working toward a common goal you would be challenged to do find elsewhere.”

The idea for the competition was brainstormed by Sgt. 1st Class Willie Austin, 4th Bn., 101st Avn. Regt. Austin said he competed in an event similar to this one in a previous unit. He said his intentions were to have a way for Soldiers to come together and help raise morale, as well as break up the monotony of being in Iraq.

“The event was intended to be a way for the entire brigade to come together and compete,” said Austin. “Competition between units always brings esprit de corps.”

Austin added he hoped when the brigade returns to Fort Campbell that the competition could be an annual event. He said he is hopeful for the addition of a trophy which the winning battalion can keep in their headquarters with the right to defend the title a year later.

Austin, with the help of several NCOs from the brigade, put together a few events which were more physically demanding than others. One such event was the Humvee pull. The competitors had to push a M998 HMMWV 200 yards to the finish line. The competitors had to push each one of the two vehicles, with their score being averaged out in the end.

“Pushing the Humvee after already conducting a PT Test will destroy your legs,” said Brower. “Pushing that second vehicle after we had already given our all on the first vehicle was more of a mental challenge than anything else. My legs were ‘Jell-O’ when it was all said and done.”

“It may have been the most physically taxing thing I had ever done. It was like doing 100 squats,” said Smedley. “When we had to do a second heat on the ‘poor rolling’ truck, it almost exhausted me.”

The competitors and leaders of the brigade were very pleased with the result of the competition and the overall outcome for the brigade as a whole.

“This competition was a great event for all the participants and Soldiers alike,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Craig Rinde, brigade command sergeant major. It’s always great to watch teams work together. Sport competitions are always great for morale and we always love to see a winner.”

“It was great for the NCOs of the brigade come together and put on the competition,” Smedley said. “It was pretty cool to see what 1st Bn., 58th Avn. Regt., was able to do by bringing in Soldiers from all over the country and do so well. The females from each team also proved again that they have what it takes to excel on the field of competition.”





STAY THUNDER!

The Thunder Brigade Retention Team exceeded their goal of 362 re-enlistments, but that hasn't stopped them from making the occasion special for Soldiers
BY SSG KEVIN DOHENY/159TH CAB PAO

The hard work of a few Non-commissioned officers has made the experience of re-enlistment for Thunder Brigade Soldiers memorable.

The battalion re-enlistment NCOs for the 159th Combat Aviation Brigade planned and executed special events such as re-enlisting in a UH-60 Black Hawk during a flight to Baghdad, gathering 302 of the brigade's re-enlistees around a large painting of Old Abe, and by video teleconference.

Overall, since the Soldiers of the brigade stepped foot in the desert in October, close to 5.5 million tax-free dollars have been given to the re-enlistees.

Even with the large amounts of money the Soldiers are receiving, the re-enlistment personnel say they feel it was important to ensure the re-enlistee is given a special occasion for continuing on with their service in the Army.

"Re-enlistment is a big step," said Master Sgt. Darian Rucks, 159th CAB Career Counselor. "The ceremony is the pinnacle of the re-enlistment, the reaffirming of what the Soldier stands for and believes in. The brigade retention team attempts to make each ceremony as 'special' as they can to each Soldier."

With more than 400 Soldiers re-enlisted during the current deployment, the brigade retention team worked with their commanders, first sergeants and command sergeants major to make a few of the individual re-enlistments a very special occasion.

The 101st re-enlistee of the deployment had the 101st Airborne Division Commander, Maj. Gen. Thomas Turner re-enlist him. The 259th re-enlistee had the 159th CAB Commander, Col. Jeffrey Colt re-enlist him. Other general officers who have re-enlisted Soldiers in the brigade are Vice Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Richard Cody, and 101st Airborne Division Assistant Division Commanders for Support and Operations, Brig. Gen. Rickey Rife and Brig. Gen. Michael Oates.

Not only did the retention team work to bring in general officers, but they planned events around the special occasions.

In March, two Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, re-enlisted at the Cross Sabers monument located in Baghdad.

Also, a handful of Soldiers from the brigade were re-enlisted by the brigade commander while in-flight



At the Cross Sabers' memorial in Baghdad April 7, Lt. Col. Tony Fish, 4th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment Commander, re-enlists one of his Soldiers, Sgt. Jerome Wilson, Headquarters and Headquarters Company.

to Baghdad. Once the re-enlistment was over, Colt brought the group of re-enlistees to eat lunch in the Green Zone, located in Baghdad, and let them relax in the courtyard outside of the embassy for the day.

There was even a video teleconference re-enlistment where a mother, who happens to be a major in the Air Force and stationed in Arizona, re-enlisted her son over the VTC.

“When my son asked my to re-enlist him, I was honored,” said Maj. Patricia Brubaker, whose son is in the 563rd Aviation Support Battalion. “As a mother it was extra special. The logistics of the whole thing was the biggest hurdle, but the modern communication and technology made it possible.”

Also in March, Rucks and his team had their biggest challenge. They had to gather 302 of the previous re-enlistees together so they could line up around the brigade’s large painting of Old Abe, while the 303rd re-enlistee was sworn in by Colt. The event was significant because it was a chance for the retention team to see first-hand all the work they had done.

“The 303rd re-enlistment was my favorite re-enlistment since arriving here in the area of responsibility,” he said. “It enabled me to actually see what the brigade retention team accomplished in such a short period of time.”

Over the past eight months the re-enlist team has work diligently to meet their goal of 362 re-enlistments during this rotation. He said the goal was obtainable because of the hard work of the battalion representatives. He also adds that the mission comes first, but making sure the Soldier gets what is desired is important.

“A mission is a mission, however, coupled with my mission is the ability to allow a Soldier to move to a new location, receive training, and or a selective re-enlistment bonus,” said Rucks. “Our goal is to get the option the individual Soldier desires while still meeting the manning requirements of our Army.”

“You need to know the qualities that the U.S. military needs to sustain its ‘world’s greatest military’ status,” said Brubaker. “Whether at home station or at deployed locations, each re-enlistment should be valued, treated as special and not taken for granted.”



(Top Right) Major Patricia Brubaker, U.S. Air Force, re-enlists her son via video tele-conference. Her son is in 563rd Aviation Support Battalion. (Middle) Master Sgt. Darian Rucks, 159th Combat Aviation Brigade Career Counselor, hands Gen. Richard Cody, Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, an oath of re-enlistment to sign. (Bottom Right) Cody re-enlists Soldiers from the Thunder Brigade during a visit to Logistical Support Area Anaconda, Iraq. (Far Right) A formation of 302 of the previous re-enlistees gather around a large painting of Old Abe as the 303rd re-enlistee gets sworn in by Col. Jeffrey Colt, 159th CAB Commander.