



Vol. 2 Num. 2 2007

# Essays

875TH ENGINEER BATTALION

## Hart of Alpha Co.

**National Guard 2005 Soldier of the Year brings skills to mission**

- ◆ *Arkansas Adjutant General visits the 875th*
- ◆ *Brig. Gen. Silva rides along with the 131st 4th Platoon*
- ◆ *NPR gets first hand account of route clearance*



“Let us try”

# *Essayons*

**Vol. 2; Num. 2, 2007**

**875th Engineer Battalion**

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**On the cover:** An 875th Buffalo belonging to the 131st Engineer Company's 4th Platoon shows its teeth before heading outside the wire on a route clearance patrol. The heavily armored Buffalo is one of the battalion's main tools for finding and clearing IEDs from a main supply route in central Iraq. Brig. Gen. Michael Silva, 411th Engineer Brigade commander joined the Buffalo crew this day as an observer. See story on page 8. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Chris A. Durney.

**Above:** A young Iraqi girl shows her appreciation to members of the 875th at the Civilian Military Operations Clinic on the Victory Base Complex near Baghdad. Battalion Soldiers often take donated food, clothes, personal needs and candy to the clinic, and enjoy interacting with some of the local populace. U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Chris A. Durney.

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*Questions, comments or submissions to the Essayons should be directed to Staff Sgt. Chris A. Durney at christopher.durney@us.army.mil. All submissions will be cleared of OPSEC violations and edited to Associated Press standards. Photos and stories from home are welcome and encouraged. Please look for issues of the newsletter to be published about every three weeks.*

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# 131st Engineer Co.

Here we are, another newsletter closer to coming home. There has not been a lot of change since the last newsletter. Everyone in the 131 is making a great reputation for themselves out on the roads. I have heard a lot of compliments from many different units thanking us for our hard work and doing what we can to keep them safe. Things like that make this job even more worthwhile. I would like to congratulate Spc. Steven Ward and Spc. Chris Phillips on their promotion to Sergeant. These two soldiers have worked very hard to join the Non Commissioned Officer ranks and I look forward to seeing them continue climbing the ladder of success. I want to thank everyone for their continued support to us here.

Capt. Jacob Roy

# Alpha Co.

Well, we're now well into 2007, the year we come home. It's exciting to realize that we've come this far, and have learned so much. The incredible men of Alpha Company are able to perform their difficult and dangerous mission day in and day out with precision and vigilance. It makes me proud to get up every day and serve with them. You, too, should all be proud of your Soldiers.

Despite the long hours and constant battle rhythm, spirits remain high. I think a lot of that can be attributed to the support we all get from our friends and families back home.

Essayons!!!

Capt. David Moore

# HHC

Wow, another month down! That is always a good thing. Right now it is easier to keep track of how many months we have been gone, than to look ahead how many we have left! We truly feel the same as our families back home, but we also know the importance behind our mission. That helps us carry on. To see how much our Country is supporting us is overwhelming, but when we call home and hear the support our loved ones give us really does lighten the load we bare over here.

The Company is starting to truly feel more like a family. We are starting to know each other better than we expected, and sometimes better than we wanted. We are learning how to set each other up for success, and enjoying each others company. I am sure some of the bonds that are made over here will be life long bonds.

Headquarters has the responsibility for supporting the Battalion. Though the line companies are outside the wire doing amazing things; they wouldn't be able to perform the way they do if it wasn't for all the hard work day in and day out that the Headquarters troops perform. We have come a long ways from being green when we hit the sand, to taking things to a higher level.

Capt. Joshua Simmons



*Spc. Gary Humphrey, Alpha Company, works on the hydraulic arm of a Buffalo at LSA Anaconda.*

**See Charlie Co. Page 14**

# The **Hart** of Alpha Company

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Chris A. Durney

It's early morning at Logistics Support Area Anaconda as Sgt. Patrick Christopher Hart silently begins preparing for the day's long route clearance patrol. For a while, he works alone out in the dusty motor pool, checking vehicles, cleaning windshields and organizing mission supplies.

After about a half hour of quietude, the other members of 2nd Platoon, Alpha Company of the 875th Engineer Battalion, begin showing up, bringing with them a friendly patter familiar to troops serving together in combat zones. Hart's face breaks into a contagiously wide grin as his teammates call to him and join in the preparations.

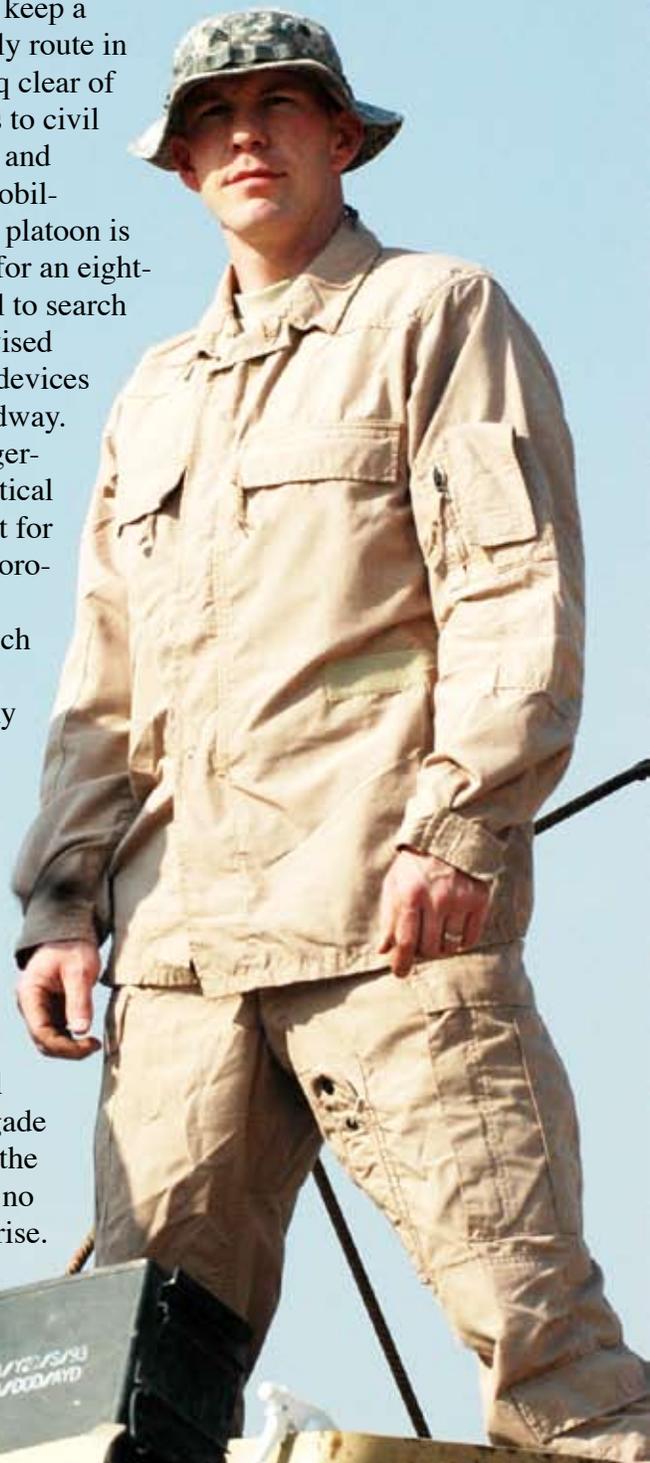
That Hart starts early, or is so dedicated to his mission, is no surprise to those who know the tall, affable, 31-year-old Soldier from Paragould. It's a standard part of his personality, and what helped earn him the title of Arkansas National Guard Soldier of the Year in 2005, 5th Army East Soldier of the Year, 2005, and National Guard Bureau Soldier of the Year, 2005.

Hart, who has been with the 875th throughout his nine-year career, knows what it means to set the example. "I'm always trying to set the standard, all of the time," says Hart. "As a team leader I have subordinates under me and I have to set the example. I'm responsible for the good things they do, as well as the bad."

The 875th deployed to Iraq in late September 2006, and is one third of the way through a yearlong

*Sgt. Patrick Christopher Hart, 2nd Platoon, Alpha Company was chosen 2005 Arkansas National Guard Soldier of the Year, and 411th Engineer Brigade Soldier of the Quarter.*

mission to keep a main supply route in central Iraq clear of hindrances to civil commerce and military mobility. Hart's platoon is preparing for an eight-hour patrol to search for improvised explosive devices on the roadway. It is a dangerous but critical assignment for the Jonesboro-based battalion, which is attached to the Army Reserve 411th Engineer Brigade for the deployment. Hart has just been announced as the Brigade Soldier of the Quarter to no one's surprise.



“I’m usually a truck commander; on a mission I command a vehicle,” says Hart as he clambers up into an armored gun truck called a RG-31. “Sometimes I man the gun, which is a break from the leadership responsibilities.”

For Hart, responsibility seems to be second nature. In addition to being responsible for a team, he is a dedicated husband, and a father to six children who wait for him to come back home to Paragould. He has been married to Rebecca Michelle for over three years. Chandler, Braden, Wyatt, Sawyer, Alexi and Bailey are Michelle’s children from a previous marriage.



“We definitely have a special kind of love,” says Hart about his pretty wife. “She supports me 100 per cent, and I think that’s what makes it so easy for me.”

“I know that the home life is tough, though,” continues Hart. “I think the deployment is harder on the families because they take on more responsibilities. As Soldiers, we know where we’re going and what we’re stepping into. But the Family Readiness Group back home is, of course, a good thing, and they help one another cope.” According to Hart, Michelle is the 875th FRG historian.

At one point in the pre-patrol preparations, Hart sees a fellow Soldier struggling to mount a large automatic weapon on a vehicle turret. His long legs bound almost effortlessly up the hood of the humvee as he moves to lend a hand. Before long, the pair have the gun mounted and ready for action.

“I believe that the Soldier of the Year competitions helped me out a lot,” says Hart.

“There was a great amount of study and



preparation work I had to do. While the competition was going on I didn’t really see how it was benefiting me, but by the end I realized that all the work and time you put into it is worth it.

“Now when I do something, I know that to do it right takes a lot of work, and that in the end it’s going to be worth it. Maybe that’s part of getting older,” explains Hart. “Generally, I try to get out to the motor pool two hours before the mission starts, getting everything ready, which makes for a pretty long day.”

Hart says this as if long days and serious dedication are just a part of every-day life, a common theme in the 875th these days. Once the vehicles are all ready for the mission, Hart and his fellow Soldiers gather for a briefing and a final check of everyone’s battle gear. As he dons his body armor, gloves and helmet Hart’s eyes continue to scan over his vehicle, looking for any thing that needs last minute attention. The friendly patter among the men dies down as they mount their armored vehicles and head out from the Alpha Company compound.

From his position in the front right seat of the vehicle, Hart keeps a steady gaze, looking every bit like a Soldier of the Year.

*Above: Hart makes sure his vehicle is ready for a long patrol. Above left: Hart gives Spc. Levi Crawford a hand mounting his .50 Cal. automatic weapon.*



# ROUTE CLEARANCE PATROL GETS A LITTLE POWER!

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Chris A. Durney

**A**n 875th Engineer Battalion route clearance patrol got some star power during one recent mission. Brigade star power to be precise.

Brig. Gen. Michael Silva, commander of the 411th Engineer Brigade, witnessed first hand the “protect” aspect of the brigade’s “plan, build and protect” mission February 1 as he rode along with a 4th Platoon, 131st Engineer Company route clearance patrol. The 131 is a unit of the Vermont Army National Guard that is attached to the Arkansas Army National Guard’s 875th.

As of February 1, Soldiers of the 875th have conducted over 800 patrols, covering over 100,000 kilometers and clearing over 300 improvised explosive devices. On the evening patrol, Silva helped the battalion add one more find to its impressive success record.

“The 131st did an excellent route clearance mission last night,” said Silva the next day. “These are professional Soldiers dedicated to the mission and willing to put their lives on the line. It was a real proud pleasure of mine to serve with them, and go on that trip.”

Silva flew down earlier in the day from Logistics Support Area Anaconda, near Balad, where the 411th is headquartered, to Camp Striker, near Baghdad, where the 131st is stationed. Silva often visits 411th units to keep a pulse on the critical role the brigade is playing in Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Army reserve brigade deployed to Iraq in August 2006, and normally calls New Windsor, N.Y. home.

Convoy commander Staff Sgt. Robert Ruell welcomed the general at the battalion motor pool on Camp Striker, and quickly integrated him into the patrol team. Patrol members usually begin preparing for their missions a couple of hours in advance, making sure that all of the vehicles are in good working

order, and that the big defensive weapons are properly mounted and ready to go.

For this mission Silva was assigned as an observer in the convoy’s Buffalo. Even so, he couldn’t resist checking out the .50 caliber gun mounted in the turret of one of the platoons armored RG-31 vehicles.

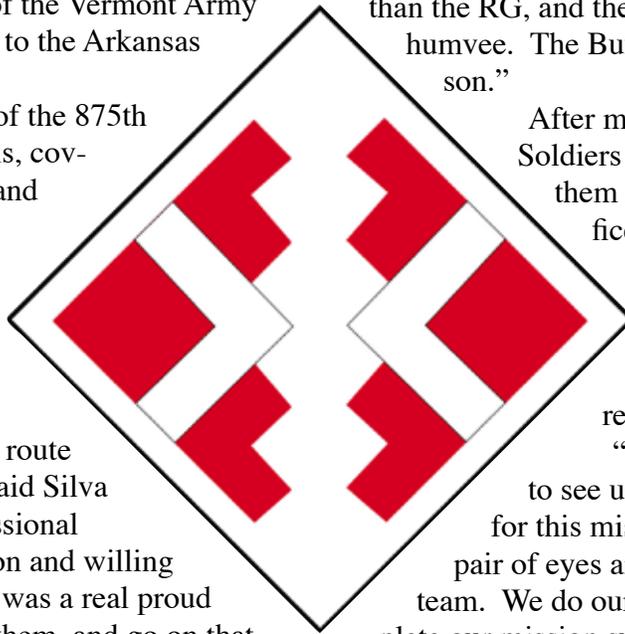
“It’s not the first route clearance mission I’ve been on,” explained Silva. “The Buffalo is a lot roomier than the RG, and the RG is somewhat better than a humvee. The Buffalo is the Cadillac in comparison.”

After meeting and getting to know the Soldiers of 4th platoon, Silva joined them in the nearby maintenance office building for a mission briefing. Ruell went over all of the details of the mission, and made sure every one knew their assignments, and was ready to go.

“We’re glad the general is here to see us at work,” said Ruell, “but for this mission, he’s just another critical pair of eyes and an important member of the team. We do our best to stay sharp and complete our mission successfully and safely.”

Following the briefing, everyone struggled into their protective gear, including nearly 50 pounds of body armor, a helmet, earplugs, gloves and eye protection. Silva and his fellow Soldiers mounted their vehicles looking something akin to ancient Samurai, and settled in for the long overnight patrol. At the prescribed time, the convoy formed up and rumbled out of the motor pool, on its way “outside the wire.”

The next afternoon Silva stopped by the battalion headquarters to thank the 131st and boast on the 4th platoon. “The trail RG found one IED that was very cleverly placed,” he explained. “It was very difficult to see. I’m not sure I would have seen it, but the great Soldiers of the 131st spotted it and were able to save lives.”





*Left: Brig. Gen. Silva meets members of the 131st's 4th Platoon at the battalion motor pool on Camp Striker, Iraq prior to riding along on a route clearance mission February 1. Below left: Brig. Gen. Silva checks out a M-240B machine gun mounted on a RG-31 belonging to the 131st Engineer Company. Below: Brig. Gen. Silva, second from left, stands with members of the 131st's 4th Platoon prior to a night route clearance mission. Behind them is a RG-31 and the Buffalo he rode in during the mission.*



*Above: Convoy commander Staff Sgt. Robert Ruell briefs members of the 131st's 4th Platoon and Brig. Gen. Michael Silva, 411th Engineer Brigade commander, prior to a night route clearance patrol near Baghdad, Iraq. Right: Brig. Gen. Silva looks akin to a Samurai warrior as he takes his place in a Buffalo belonging to the 131st.*

# Arkansas TAG and CSM visit 875th, meet and greet with deployed troops

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Chris A. Durney

**M**aj. Gen. Ronald S. Chastain, the adjutant general of Arkansas, was enthusiastically welcomed to Camp Striker, Iraq, today by members of the 875th Engineer Battalion, which deployed in September.

Chastain, and the state Command Sgt. Maj. Deborah Collins, are on a command visit to Arkansas National Guard troops serving in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. They toured the battalion's Alpha and Charlie companies Wednesday, January 31, which are located at Logistics Support Area Anaconda near Balad.

After being briefed by Lt. Col. Patricia Anslow, the battalion commander, and the battalion staff, Chastain and Collins met with Soldiers from Headquarters, Headquarters Company and the 131st Engineer Company, shaking hands and passing out leader's coins. They then departed for a lunch date with members of the Arkansas Army National Guard's 142nd Fires Brigade who are stationed at another nearby forward operating base.

"You've got a dangerous mission here," said Chastain to the assembled staff, "and I'm really proud of you all. I just congratulate all of you on a job well done, you're all representing us really well, and I appreciate it."

Approximately 400 Arkansas Soldiers are deployed with the 875th, which is one third of the way through a yearlong deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Approximately another 100 Soldiers from Indiana and Vermont Army National Guard units are attached to the 875th during this mobilization.



**Previous page:** Maj. Gen. Ronald Chastain, the adjutant general of Arkansas. **Right:** Maj. Gen. Chastain meets with battalion staff after arriving at the headquarters at Camp Striker. **Below left:** State Command Sgt. Maj. Deborah Collins talks with battalion Command Sgt. Maj. Billy Ward and Headquarters, Headquarters Company 1st Sgt. Michael Sims. **Below right:** Maj. Gen. Chastain gets a close up view of the inside of an up armored humvee at the HHC support platoon. **Bottom:** Battalion maintenance officer Chief Warrant Officer Kenneth Baker, center, gives Maj. Gen. Chastain a tour of the motor pool at Camp Striker.



# Reporter gets first hand look at 875th mission

National Public Radio's John McChesney traveled all of the way from California to get a first hand look at how well the 875th is performing its critical route clearance mission in Iraq.

The veteran newsman spent an entire day with an Alpha Company platoon, including nearly eight hours on patrol in a Buffalo, recording sounds and interviewing Soldiers.

McChesney's report aired on NPR's "Morning Edition" program January 26, and was broadcast through the network's 3,800 affiliates nationwide. The program recording, and a written account by McChesney, can be found at NPR's web site: [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org). Type "875th" in the search box near the top of the page. On the next page, click the story title: "Looking for Trouble: A Search for IEDs in Iraq."



*Top right: National Public Radio veteran reporter John McChesney knows how it feels to wear nearly 50 pounds of body armor as he gets ready to head out on patrol with Alpha Company's 3rd Platoon. Above: Brig. Gen. Michael Silva, 411th Engineer Brigade commander, is interviewed by NPR's John McChesney at the brigade headquarters on Logistics Support Area Anaconda. Right: McChesney, center, stands with Alpha Company's Staff Sgt. Kurtis Holloway and 2nd Lt. Paul Burns, 3rd Platoon commander, following a successful route clearance patrol.*





# FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Hunter Shumard, SPC	01	C Co.	Jeremiah MacDonald, SPC	14	C Co.
Christopher Fitzsimmons, SPC	01	C Co.	Justin Norrid, SPC	14	HHC
Hutch Garrett, SPC	01	C Co.	Patricia Anslow, LTC	16	HHC
Christopher Sullivan, SPC	01	A Co.	Kevin Robert, SPC	16	A Co.
Jeremy Fregeau, SPC	02	131st	Joseph Johnston, SPC	17	A Co.
Donald Meredith, PFC	02	HHC	Shane Markum, PFC	17	C Co.
Terry Lambert, SGT	02	HHC	Peter Thompson, PFC	17	131st
Lisa Hess, SGT	03	HHC	Marcus Gragg, SPC	18	131st
Lucas Jennings, SSG	04	C Co.	Richard Navarro, PV2	19	131st
Christopher Davenport, SPC	04	HHC	Patrick Geren, SGT	19	A Co.
Nathan Hogue, SPC	06	HHC	Bobby Farmer, SSG	19	131st
Eric Jaeger, SGT	07	HHC	Robert Norwood, SGT	19	A Co.
Michael Potter, SPC	08	C Co.	Joshua Spence, SPC	20	C Co.
Gary Humphrey, SPC	09	A Co.	Albert Jaspe, SPC	21	131st
John Jones, SPC	09	HHC	Mark White, 1LT	21	HHC
Ryan Jones, PFC	10	C Co.	Charles Goza, SGT	22	HHC
Adam Williamson, SPC	11	A Co.	Edward Alsup, SGT	23	C Co.
Jeffery Ward, SPC	11	C Co.	Robert Severs, SGT	24	131st
Jerry Blount, PFC	11	C Co.	Mathew Garland, SPC	24	A Co.
Michael Goldinger, SGT	12	C Co.	Dale Kilby, SPC	24	131st
Lorne Kelley, CPT	12	HHC	Cheryl Thome, SPC	25	131st
Kovar Petersen, CPT	12	HHC	Troy Revis, SPC	27	131st
Robbie Layton, SPC	13	131st	James Bridges, SGT	27	C Co.
Jeffrey Brown, SPC	13	HHC	Gregory Sutton, SPC	27	HHC

*A minor sand storm engulfs the 875th Engineer Battalion headquarters building on Camp Striker, Jan. 29, 2007  
U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Chris A. Durney*



## From the Chaplain

By Chaplain (Capt.) Mark Golaway

**T**he fifth of the seven Army Values is Honor. The Apostle Paul, when writing to the church in Rome, instructed them, “Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.” (Romans 13:7, NIV)

To pay honor is to make a showing of merited respect. It is to acknowledge a job well done. It is to esteem those who merit praise for the tasks they accomplish and the attitude they display in doing those things.

Such a debt of honor is owed to the men and women of the 875th Engineer Battalion. Your soldiers are daily making a name for themselves with both the local nationals and their coalition military counterparts. Your soldiers have earned the respect of those they work with as well as those they seek to help. Their actions have brought honor on themselves, the 875th, and you, the friends and family that support and stand with us.

Daily, I watch these soldiers step up to their assigned tasks. Daily, they faithfully discharge the duties of their posts. Daily, they face and overcome the fears and concerns associated with war and separation from home and hearth. Daily, they find ways to display their joy of life and camaraderie with their fellow soldiers. Daily, they rejoice in finishing the job and being one day closer to home.

The real measure and scope of the success of their mission may never be known. Every day, these valiant men and women clear the roads they have been assigned, freeing traffic to move safely. They are providing security not only for coalition force movement, but also for the local Iraqi travelers. It is safe to say hundreds of lives have been saved due to their efforts.

Each soldier plays a vital part in the success of this mission. Every soldier impacts the efforts of the whole unit. It doesn't matter whether your soldier is driving a patrol vehicle, repairing broken equipment,

managing the mounds of paperwork in various offices, or standing guard, each member of this unit has performed in a manner worthy of honor.

I am blessed to serve with them and to see first hand the incredible job they are doing. It is fitting to give them honor. You have much to be proud of as their support and strength. It is right for us to pause here in the midst of the mission and say, “Well done, good and faithful soldiers.” The 875th has shown itself Ready and Willing and they deserve to have you know.

Blessings.

## Charlie Co.

### Company Corner from page 5

Just want to drop everyone a line to say hello and we miss you all. The missions are rolling along and we're already talking about how we are going to pack everything up and come home. It is hard to believe that we've been on active duty for seven months. Time goes by pretty quick over here because we are always going to the movies, gym, PX and the pool. The Jacuzzi's are on order and we're all excited about the new bar.

Now that we got all the bull out of the way, everyone is doing fine. As a commander I have the best guys that you can ask for. They stay vigilant and perform at the top of their game. The hardest thing for us is worrying about all of you at home. I want to thank you for all that you have done and continue to do in order to comfort us on all issues concerning you. I have said it before and it still holds true that you are the true warriors. You pick up the load while we are gone.

It is great to talk to the guys when they get back off their leave and listen to all the stories of back home. We all miss it. Everyone says it is the fastest 15 days of their lives.

Keep up the hard work. The concern that I have is that of communication. If you're having trouble PLEASE bring it to the attention of the family support group. Use each other to vent and work through the hard times. I also ask you to continue to remember us in prayer as we pray for you all often. Don't be pulled in to the rumor mill, and I hope you all have been enjoying the snow. Put some in the freezer for us.

WE LOVE AND MISS YOU ALL

Capt. Timothy Norman

# Look who's four oh!

Lt. Col. Patricia Anslow, 875th Engineer Battalion commander, is the star at a surprise 40th birthday party thrown by the battalion staff February 8 at the headquarters Morale Welfare and Recreation room on Camp Striker. Anslow was actually born February 16, but was surprised by the party early because she was about to go on Rest and Recreation leave.

Festivities included a homemade cake sent by her family in New York, gag gifts from the staff and a special multi-media presentation featuring photos from her past.

*Clockwise below: The cake from home; blowing out the candle; Master Sgt. Brown presents a gift from the Logistics section.*





## Arkansas Adjutant General pins Purple Heart on 875th Alpha Company Soldier

**S**pc. Justin Haynes of Beebe, Ark., was pinned with a Purple Heart by Maj. Gen. Ronald S. Chastain, the adjutant general of Arkansas, at an emotional bed-side ceremony January 30.

Haynes is a member of the 875th Engineer Battalion's A Company, 2nd Platoon, and was honored with the award for wounds received in combat on January 29. Chastain was conducting a command visit with the deployed Arkansas Guardsmen when he was offered the privilege of presenting the award to Haynes.

Brig. Gen. Michael Silva, commander of the

411th Engineer Brigade, to which the 875th is attached, also participated in the brief ceremony, and thanked Haynes for his service.

The state Command Sgt. Maj. of the Arkansas National Guard, Deborah Collins, presented Haynes with a special coin and spoke with him for a few minutes after the pinning. Haynes seemed to be in good spirits and gave everyone a thumbs-up as he was carried back to his hospital room. According to hospital reports, his wounds are not life threatening.



*Above: Maj. Gen. Ronald Chastain, the adjutant general of Arkansas pins a Purple Heart medal on Spc. Justin Haynes of Beebe, Ark. Brig. Gen. Michael Silva, commander of the 411th Engineer Brigade also participated in the bed-side ceremony. Left: Command Sgt. Maj. Deborah Collins, the command sergeant major of the Arkansas National Guard, talks with Spc. Justin Haynes following a bed-side Purple Heart ceremony at Logistics Support Area Anaconda in Iraq. (U.S. Army photos by Sgt. 1st Class Gregory Murray, 411th Engineer Brigade.)*

## Four advance in rank, 131st names new NCOs

Four 875th Engineer Battalion Soldiers have pinned on new rank, including two who are joining the ranks of the Noncommissioned Officer Corps.

Headquarters, Headquarters Company promoted Aaron W. Norman from Sergeant to Staff Sergeant, while Michael B. Tollette was made a Specialist.

The 131st Engineer Company welcomed two new NCOs to the ranks with the advancement of Steven R. Ward and Christopher D. Phillips to Sergeant.



*Michael Tollette is pinned a Specialist by HHC 1st Sgt. Michael Sims and Capt. Joshua Simmons, HHC commander February 2 at the Support Platoon offices.*



*HHC Support Platoon leader Sgt. 1st Class Neil Hall, Jr., slaps Staff Sgt. rank onto Aaron Norman as the battalion commander and HHC commander watch.*

## Battalion welcomes new troops Feb. 2



*Command Sgt. Maj. Billy Ward addresses the 875th's newest troops at a ceremony at the battalion headquarters on Camp Striker February 2.*

The 875th welcomed ten new Soldiers to the ranks at a ceremony February 2 at the battalion's headquarters on Camp Striker.

The Arkansas troops are late augmentees to the deployed 875th, and have been split between the 131st Engineer Company and Alpha Company.



*Pvt. James Aytchan of West Memphis is one of the 875th's newest combat engineers. Eleven new troops were welcomed February 2.*