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Crossed Sabers

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"Telling the MND-Baghdad Story"

Monday, March 19, 2007



(Photo by Sgt. Holly Jensen, 7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

A Little Ambassador

Spc. Brian Helms, a native of Satellite Beach, Fla., and an infantryman with Company B, 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, shares a smile with an Iraqi child while on a break from providing security for a patrol. His unit performed security sweeps of the Shaab neighborhood in Baghdad Feb. 16.



(Photo by Pfc. Nathaniel Smith, 4th BCT, 1st Inf. Div. Public Affairs)

Col. Ricky D. Gibbs, left, commander of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Inf. Div., and Command Sgt. Maj. Jim Champagne, the brigade command sergeant major, unfurl the unit's colors during the Transfer of Authority ceremony, at Forward Operating Base Camp Falcon, Iraq March 8.

Dragons Take Over

By Pfc. Nathaniel Smith
4th BCT, 1st Inf. Div. Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FALCON, Iraq -- The 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division officially took over for the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division in a transfer of authority ceremony here March 8.

Col. Ricky Gibbs, the commander of the 4th BCT "Dragons," hailed his Soldiers' preparation for their mission.

"You have trained hard the past 18 months standing up this great brigade," Gibbs said. "You are well-trained, well-led and combat ready."

"I ask you to never lose sight of your principle objectives: protect the peace-loving people of Iraq and destroy the thugs and criminals who terrorize this country."

Cpl. Ed Herring, a team leader from 1st

Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 4th BCT, said Multi-National Division-Baghdad troops are fighting for a good cause.

"I'm a true believer that if you can help someone you really should go out of your way to do it," he said. "I believe the United States has the capability to do that, to help these people have a better life for themselves."

Part of that better life, Herring said, is the freedom of democracy and safety within their neighborhoods. With that thought in mind, the Greeley, Colo., native said the unit has been preparing for everything.

"Anything they can throw at us, we want to be able to have it already in the back of our minds exactly how we're going to respond to those problems," he said.

The Dragons have been in Iraq since mid-February. The unit activated from Fort Riley in January 2006.

MND-B Commander Pleased with Initial Operation in Sadr City

By Master Sgt. Dave Larsen
1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq -- A combined force of Iraqi police, national police and Multi-National Division -- Baghdad troops completed a second day of security operations in the eastern Baghdad Sadr City district March 5.

Members of the 82nd Airborne Division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team and the 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division conducted security operations with their Iraqi counterparts and report-

ed no hostile contact for a second day in an area known to be a stronghold of Muqtada Al Sadr, the extremist leader of rogue elements known for extrajudicial killings and attacks. Some residents seemed genuinely pleased to see the troops arrive, as small children were seen smiling and waving to coalition forces.

"It's a promising first start," said Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Fil Jr., commanding general of MND-B. "We sense there is an opportunity opening here that we want to immediately take advantage of while working with the Iraqi security forces and the people of Sadr City."

The citizens of Sadr City appear to wel-

come the respite from recent violence over the last few months. The killings have fallen off from more than 200 in December and January to less than 20 during the past 30 days as the new security plan for the Iraqi capital is carried out by newly arrived troops.

"Although much too early to tell," Fil noted, "we sense that the people of the city are ready for a change."

At the conclusion of the security operations a Joint Security Station will be established in the District Police Station for Sadr City. This security station will allow a 24-hour presence in the district and facilitate coordination between all

security forces. Fil said the key to future success is the newly-established Baghdad Operational Command, and the close coordination and cooperation that have been established.

"The Baghdad Operational Command became fully operational on the first of this month and they are off to a great start," the general said. "Lt. Gen. Abud is directing and controlling Iraqi security forces throughout Baghdad. We are coordinating between our commands in a way that is having an immediate effect on the streets. Feedback from the Iraqis has been positive and we feel at this time we are on the right track."

Battle Buddies: Soldier, Boy Share Special Bond

By Sgt. Mike Pryor
2nd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – As a sergeant major with years of experience in the Army, Sgt. Maj. Manuel Daponte is used to people being a little intimidated when they approach him. But Mutada Ali, 4, son of Iraqi national police commander Brig. Gen. Ali Ibrahim Daboun, isn't intimidated by much.

"I was sitting in the general's office when Mutada came in. He came right up to me and climbed into my lap," Daponte recalled. "That was the beginning of the friendship."

Since that day, Mutada and Daponte, of Westport, Mass., the senior enlisted U.S. advisor to the 8th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division, have been pretty much inseparable.

As the senior non-commissioned officer in charge of four 11-man U.S. training teams responsible for advising more than 2,700 Iraqi Army and police personnel, Daponte works closely with Gen Ali, who commands the 8th Brigade of the 2nd Iraqi National Police Division.

Wherever Gen. Ali goes, so does Mutada.

"He's always stuck with me. He doesn't want to stay home," the general explained with a laugh.

When Ali heads out to watch his forces train or conduct operations, Daponte acts as Mutada's battle buddy, watching out for him and keeping him out of trouble.

Mutada even accompanied his father during recent clearing operations in the notorious militia stronghold of Sadr City. Daponte was right beside him for much of



(Photo by Sgt. Mike Pryor, 2nd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div. Public Affairs)

Westport, Mass., native Sgt. Maj. Manuel Daponte, the senior enlisted U.S. advisor to the 8th Iraqi National Police Brigade, gives a battlefield "promotion" to Mutada Ali, 4, the son of brigade commander, Iraqi Brig. Gen. Ali Ibrahim Daboun, by giving him his sergeant major rank on the streets of Baghdad's Sadr City district March 5.

the time, helping the boy collect U.S. unit patches from Soldiers and making sure he picked up his candy bar wrappers.

It's an odd sight to see an American ser-

geant major "babysitting" a mischievous Iraqi boy in the middle of a war zone, but Daponte said the time he spends with Mutada reminds him of what he is fighting for.

"I love kids," he said. "I have two daughters of my own, and to have someone like this come along and remind us that the world is a simpler place outside of war, is a great thing."

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Spur of the Moment

(Photos by Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

"What do you do with your free time now that it's spring time?"



Lt. Col. Joseph Keeler
Company C, 130th Engineer Battalion currently attached to the 1st Cavalry Division

"I would like to spend more time with Soldiers and see how they are doing, and try to finish a book I'm writing."

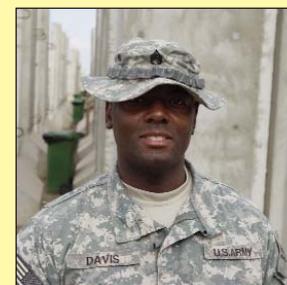


Pfc. Sean Connell
Headquarters Company, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division

"I plan on fishing, 'cause I'm a huge fisherman."



Staff Sgt. Scott Lowther
Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division



"I'm going to go out and exercise more now that the weather is nicer outside."

Staff Sgt. William Davis
Headquarters Company, Division Special Troops Bn, 1st Cav. Div.

"It would be nice to get a bike and ride around just to see everything that's on the camp."

Spc. Chris Bishop
Company C, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment
1st Brigade Combat Team



"I plan on doing college classes online with my free time."

Baghdad News Briefs



(Photo by Sgt. Marcus Butler, 4th BCT (Abn.), 25th Inf. Div. Public Affairs)
Lt. Gen. Qais, commander of Babil Province police, answers questions from media embers following Kalsu Conference III with Iraqi security force and coalition leaders at Forward Operating Base Kalsu Feb. 24

Iraqi, U.S. Leaders Discuss Security Plan

KALSU, Iraq – Iraqi and American security leaders representing the Iraqi police, Iraqi Army, provincial military transition teams, the Multi-National Division - Baghdad and other units operating in northern Babil and Karbala gathered here Feb. 24 to coordinate and plan operations that will allow the transition of security responsibility to provincial Iraqi control.

“Iraqi security forces have demonstrated the skill to enforce security in their respective provinces,” said Col. Michael Garrett, commander, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division and a Cleveland native. “They already provide most of the security in the provinces.”



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Angela McKinzie, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div. (LI) Public Affairs)

Sp. Dustin Hoptry, a forward observer with the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) and native of Lucas, Ohio, provides security for the re-opening of a mosque in Yusufiyah, Iraq Feb. 23.

Mosque Opens for First Time Since Attack

YUFUFUYAH, Iraq – Iraqis celebrated the re-opening of a Yusufiyah mosque as Soldiers from the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry), the 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division and the Iraqi Police secured the area for the event Feb. 23.

The mosque had been closed since it was attacked by terrorists last October. Since then, the Iraqis have been working diligently to reopen the mosque.

“This is a good day for the people of Iraq,” said 1st Lt. Ali Kudair, an Iraqi police officer. “There are a lot of mosques opening in the area and it shows that we are progressing as a nation.”

Although the Yusufiyah area is primarily Shia there has been tension with neighboring Sunnis. The opening signifies the unity of the sects.

“Both tribes are welcome to the mosque,” Kudair explained. “This opening shows that we can get along since we are brothers.”



(Photo by Sgt. Mike Pryor, 2nd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div.)

An Iraqi national policeman and paratroopers from 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, begin security operations in support of the creation of a new Joint Security Station in Sadr City March 4.

Sadr City's Joint Security Station Newly Established

**By Sgt. Mike Pryor
 2nd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div. Public Affairs**

BAGHDAD – Faded graffiti on the rooftop of the Al Jezaer Police Station in Sadr City is one of the only reminders that three years ago, coalition forces occupied the building and stood poised to take the entire area by force.

Now they are back. But this time, the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, of the 82nd Airborne Division from Fort Bragg, N.C. come at the invitation of the mayor and other key leaders of the densely-packed Shiite district, and with the full backing of the Iraqi government. They come in partnership with the Iraqi Army and Iraqi police.

This time, they have come to stay.

Coalition and Iraqi forces moved into the area early March 4 to begin establishing a Joint Security Station - a kind of shared command post - inside the Al Jezaer Police Station in the southeast of the city. The JSS will be the coalition's first permanent base within the boundaries of Sadr City.

“The JSS is going to enable coalition and Iraqi forces to establish a presence in the city,” said Lt. Col. Avanauls Smiley, commander of the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division. Smiley's Stryker battalion is supporting the operation, providing some of the security while the JSS is being built.

The concept of a JSS in Sadr City would have seemed unlikely in August of 2004. At that time, followers of anti-U.S. cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr – whose father the city is named for - occupied and looted several police stations and government buildings in the district. U.S. forces retook the area in fierce street battles, but eventu-

ally pulled back. Over the next two years, coalition and Iraqi forces conducted numerous operations in Sadr City, but chose never to establish a permanent foothold.

Then, last month, came the unveiling of a new security plan for Baghdad. The plan, called operation Fardh al-Qanoon, has placed thousands of additional Iraqi and U.S. troops on the streets to provide a 24-hour-a-day security presence in the city.

Although none of the new troops are based in Sadr City yet, the success of their operations has had a ripple effect on the neighborhood. Key leaders in the community are showing a new willingness to cooperate with the government and coalition forces.

The Sadr City Joint Security Station will be a test of this new spirit.

The JSS will house representatives from the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 8th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division; the 3rd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 10th Iraqi Army Division; the Tharwa District Iraqi Police Headquarters; the U.S. Army's 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment; and various U.S. police and military training teams according to Maj. Trey Rutherford, the operations officer for 2-325th AIR.

At the JSS, the combined forces will be able to coordinate and control their operations together.

“They are going to be sharing information so they can go out and secure the population,” said Smiley.

A vanguard of paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne arrived at the JSS March 4, quickly reinforcing the security around the building with roadblocks and gun positions. For the next several weeks, engineers and contractors will follow – reinforcing the structure, running power lines, and installing communications systems. When that work is complete, Sadr City's first JSS will be operational.

Boys 'Down Under' Ready to Rotate Home

By Spc. Alexis Harrison
2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE UNION III, Iraq – While thousands of Soldiers are slated to arrive to Iraq due to the security push the announced by the president, one small group of troops from the "land down under" have been quietly answering their own call to duty all the while.

Infantry and cavalrymen from the Australian Army's Security Detachment 10 have been operating out of Baghdad's International Zone for almost six months now, acting as security for their ambassador and diplomats. During their six months in Iraq, they've learned what it's like to be a versatile force and how to get the job done while having a little fun. They said it's not the job they expected, but they are trained and ready for anything.

"Our job is to watch the ambassador and our diplomatic

mission while he travels around Baghdad," said Lance Cpl. Guy Lalor, a Brisbane native and crew commander for the security team. "It's different to what ... you think of when you think of joining Cav and Army. It's a completely different role."

Anytime the ambassador has to travel, he's escorted by the combined arms team. Although it's not what they thought a rotation into the notorious capital city would be like, they've almost completed their six-month tour.

Detachment commander, Maj. Terrence Cook, said that it's been a good rotation overall. They've learned a lot from their experiences and they've come away virtually unharmed.

Lt. Scott Klima, a troop leader from Darwin, said that the threat they face is about the same as any other coalition force.

Roadside bombs have been the biggest threat while traveling around the city; however, they've also helped the troops make friends with American units. Klima said that a

strong professional and friendly relationship has spurred from the Australians calling upon American explosive ordnance disposal teams.

"We've built up a good relationship with all the guys we've worked with," said Klima.

The Australian Army has always held good relations with the U.S. Army, ever since they fought side by side in World War I. They've not only fought together, but often they trained together in Australia and America.

They're no strangers to being out in the "bush." They've trained with some of the most elite units in the world like the U.S. Army Rangers and the British Special Forces.

While in Iraq, the side-by-side training hasn't stopped. Many of the medics with the detachment regularly go to the Combat Support Hospital in the IZ to work and train with their coalition counterparts. Cook said that it's even more commendable since they do it on their free time.

Cook said that although the unit is well trained, disciplined and battle-proven, it's still just a little different than most other Australian units.

The small unit is composed of both infantry and cavalry troops from the 3rd Battalion (Parachute), Royal Australian Regiment, 2nd Cavalry Regiment and the 2/14th Light Horse of the Queensland Mounted Infantry.

The mixed unit of little more than 100 troops isn't much different from their American counterparts living right across the base. Both have important roles to fulfill for themselves and their countries, and both the Australians and members of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division have a strong history of war fighting and honor.

The Australian Army has played a vital role in every major conflict starting from its creation in the battlefields of South Africa, where it was born, up to the war on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan today.

Recently, the detachment celebrated the Australian Army's 106th birthday with a celebration in their mess hall.

"We know how to have fun and be relaxed," said Cook. "But when the mission starts, the guys are as focused as anybody."

Joining the Australian Army is basically the same as joining the American. Soldiers are bound to a four-year contract, and afterward, they can reenlist for as long as they like.

"People say they join the Army to see the world, and that's still the case today," said Lalor.

The "Diggers" have always been willing to travel to serve their country. They've been to Africa, both World Wars, Korea, Malaya, Borneo, Vietnam and the Middle East.

Cook said that as long as the war on terror is ongoing, they'll be here doing their part.



(Photo by Spc. Alexis Harrison, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

A group of Australian Soldiers get ready to go out on mission from Forward Operating Base Union III March 1. The "Diggers" escort the Australian ambassador and diplomats while they travel in the International Zone and the streets of Baghdad.

Honoring Our Fallen Heroes

Sgt. Matthew Apuan, Co. D, 1-5 CAV, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div.
Sgt. Jeremy Barnett, HHT, 3-8 CAV, 3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. (MND-N)
Spc. Matthew Bowe, Troop B, 1-89 CAV, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.
Pfc. Brian Browning, Co. B, 4-31 IN, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.
Sgt. Jonathan Cadavero, HHC, 2nd BSTB, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.
Cpl. Leeroy Camacho, Co. B, 1-12 CAB, 3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. (MND-N)
Spc. Adare Cleveland, Troop B, 1-89 CAV, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.
Staff Sgt. Pedro Colon, Troop B, 2-8 CAV, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div.
Pfc. Branden Cummings, Co. A, 1-12 CAB, 3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. (MND-N)
Sgt. Shawn Dunkin, Troop B, 1-89 CAV, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.
Sgt. Richard Ford, Co. D, 2-235 IN, 2nd BCT, 82rd Abn. Div.
Pvt.(2) Mark Graham, HHC, 2-5 CAV, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div.
Spc. Blake Harris, HHC, 1-12 CAB, 3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. (MND-N)
Cpl. Lorne Henry Jr., Co. A, 2nd BSTB, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.
Sgt. Russell Kurtz, Co. B, 3-509th, 4th BCT, 25th Inf. Div.
Staff Sgt. Paul Latourney, HHC, 2-5 CAV, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div.
Spc. Ronnie Madore Jr., FSC E., 215th BSB, 3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. (MND-N)
Spc. Chad Marsh, Co. C, 1-26 IN, 2nd BCT, 1st Inf. Div.

Pvt.(2) Barry Mayo, Battery B, 2-82 FA, 3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. (MND-N)
Cpl. Montrel McArn, Troop D, 2-8 CAV, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div.
Sgt. 1st Class Allen Mosteiro, Co. B, 1-7 CAV, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div.
Sgt. Ashly Moyer, 630th MP Co., 759th MP Bn., 89th MP Brigade
Sgt. Brandon Parr, 630th MP Co., 759th MP Bn., 89th MP Brigade
Pfc. Justin Paton, Co. B, 2-8 CAV, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div.
Sgt. Michael Peek, 630th MP Co., 759th MP Bn., 89th MP Brigade
Spc. Shawn Rankinen, Co. D, 2-5 CAV, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div.
Spc. Michael Rivera, HHC, 2-5 CAV, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div.
Sgt. John Rode, FSC E, 215th BSB, 3rd BCT, 1CD (MND-N)
Spc. Luis Rodriguezcontrera, HHC, 2-5 CAV, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div.
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Spc. Ryan Russell, D. HHC, 1-12 CAB, 3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. (MND-N)
Sgt. Carl Seigart, FSC E, 215th BSB 3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. (MND-N)
Staff Sgt. Alan Shaw, Co. B, 1-12 CAB, 3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. (MND-N)
Staff Sgt. Karl Soto-pinedo, Co. A, 1-18 IN, 2nd BCT, 1st Inf. Div.
Sgt. Richard Soukenka, Co. A, 2d BSTB, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.
Sgt. Robert Thrasher, Co. D, 2-12 CAV, 4th BCT, 1st Cav. Div.

Combat Engineers Build Up Baghdad Bases

By 1st Lt. Kevin Thomas
510th Sapper Company, 20th Eng. Bn.

BAGHDAD—As Soldiers stand up security stations and patrol bases across the Iraqi capital the need for operational buildings increases. This is where the 510th Sapper Company, 20th Engineer Battalion, of Fort Hood, Texas, comes into play.

The unit repairs damaged Iraqi infrastructure, and performs construction in support of U.S. forces, improving the quality of life on remote bases for U.S. and Iraqi Army Soldiers.

After being in country less than a week, Soldiers in 3rd Platoon, 510th Sapper Company were tasked to take on their first project to complete a 4,000 square foot battalion tactical operations center and the building of a 4,200 square foot company tactical operation center for Task Force 4-31 Infantry, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division out of Fort Drum, New York.

The completion of the battalion and company TOCs allowed each staff section and company operations to move out of the 20-foot shipping containers and give them a larger work area with all the amenities that they need to have a successful operations center.

Upon arrival at Patrol Base Yusufiyah, southwest of Baghdad, on Thanksgiving Day, 3rd Platoon anxiously unpacked their tools, hung up the blue prints, and embarked



(U.S. Army photo)

Soldiers from 510th Sapper Company, 20th Engineer Battalion, of Fort Hood, Texas, lift part of a building frame for building in Iraq.

on what would be day one of a forty-five day construction project.

The brunt of the responsibilities, however, fell upon the team leaders, most of whom had carpentry jobs prior to joining the military. They were given a task based upon their experience, and assumed control of four to

seven Soldiers.

“This project was a great opportunity to allow junior enlisted to further develop necessary leadership skills,” said Sgt. Rick Greene, team leader with 3rd Platoon. “Throughout the project, we gave some of our junior enlisted, who had prior carpentry

experience before coming into the military, an assigned task and they took charge of it and completed the job with exceptional results.”

Within two weeks, the battalion operation center was complete and ready to hand over to Task Force 4-31 Infantry, and 3rd Platoon continued to work steadily to finish the company building.

Three crews started framing the interior and exterior walls as one crew came behind them and nailed them into place. After the framing of the walls was complete, the arduous task of installing the rafters soon came upon them.

One week later, the rafters were erected and put on top of the frame in order to install the roof and ceiling. From sun up to sun down the crews worked to complete the ceiling and started installing electrical fixtures and air conditioners. Another team worked simultaneously to install the insulation, walls, outlets and light switches. As each team finished their assigned section, they all contributed to the finishing touches of installing trim and building entrance ramps to the door.

“By doing these types of missions you can tell the difference that you are making for the units that operate out of these smaller patrol bases,” said Pfc. Glenn Taylor, a Soldier with 3rd Platoon. “I had no prior construction experience coming into this project, but I was excited to take on this task and see what I could make of it.”

Liberty Tax Center Visit Can Lead to Cold, Hard Cash

By Sgt. Nicole Kojetin
1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq - Many people cringe when they think of filing their taxes, intimidated by the daunting row of numbers and ultimately end up paying more money in order to get their hard-earned cash back from the government.

The Camp Liberty Tax Center is there to help with these tax-time anxieties. The tax center opened Feb. 1 and in the first 28 days of operation, the team helped Soldiers obtain \$476,097 in refunds.

“We have had over two hundred customers,” said Capt. Robert Michaels, the tax center officer in charge and the tax officer for the Multi-National Division - Baghdad. “As of February 28, we have been able to prepare 218 federal tax returns and 114 state returns.”

The trailer for the center has computers set up for Soldiers to do their taxes with the help of the experts and Michaels said many of the troops are surprised how simple it is.

“Many Soldiers have remarked that they didn’t realize that it was this easy,” said the Athens, Pa. native. “I’ve heard several state that they can’t believe they actually paid people to file their previous taxes for them. If a Soldier has a relatively simple return, the entire process of filing both the state and federal return can take less than twenty minutes.”

They are essentially doing their own paperwork.

“It’s an awesome experience to see Soldiers come in and learn how to file their taxes,” Michaels said. “The truth is, the Soldiers are doing their own taxes. We are just there to help.”

Taking the time to stop by the center pays off - literally.

“These guys are great,” said Spc. Donald Leisure, 1st Battalion, 89th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division. “The entire process was real-



(Photo by Sgt. Nicole Kojetin, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Spc. Donald Leisure, 1st Battalion, 89th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division asks Capt. Robert Michaels the Camp Liberty Tax Center officer in charge from Athens, Pa., a question about his tax return. Leisure is going to be receiving more than \$6,000 back this year.

ly easy. Just come in, sit down and they will give you money.”

Leisure is going to be receiving more than \$6,000 back this year and was thrilled with the news.

“I don’t know why anyone would want to wait,” he said. “If you know you are going to get a refund, come in. This made my day.”

Michaels agrees with that sentiment. Why wait?

“First and foremost, tax refunds are, for the most part, our money,” he said. “It’s nice to have the option of waiting to file, but many of us don’t want to wait to get our refunds.”

He encourages everyone to come in, but reminds them to bring the essentials; W-2 form, identification, family and bank account information.

“The most common problem we encounter is incorrect Social Security numbers or dates of birth for spouses and children,” Michaels said. “If the numbers aren’t correct, the program will not send the return to the IRS. So the Soldier will get an error message by email. It’s a pretty quick fix though. The most important thing for Soldiers to bring with them are the Social Security numbers and dates of birth of everyone they plan on listing on their tax return. This is the case even if you are married and filing separately from your spouse.”

Another issue is Soldiers with foreign spouses. If the Soldier is married to someone who does not have a Social Security number, they need to have an individual taxpayer identification number.

“We have the application which Soldiers need to submit, and it will take about 30 days to get the number,” Michaels said. “The ‘ITIN’ as it is called, will allow the Soldier to claim the spouse as his or her dependent. It can mean several thousand dollars difference in refunds.”

The center, located in a trailer next to the Legal Services Center, is planned to be open seven days a week through April, and more centers will be popping up periodically at forward operating bases across Baghdad.

“A number of FOBs have asked us to come to them and provide a similar service for a few days,” Michaels said. “So we will be making the rounds this month, but the Camp Liberty Center will be open the entire time.”

The center is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, but Michaels said for troops that cannot make the regular hours with prior notification.

Call 453-4568 for more information.”

Iraqi Army Medics Train with U.S. Help

By Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp
1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- The sounds of explosions fill the air and bullets whiz past the heads of Iraqi Army medics as they perform life-saving medical procedures on their wounded brothers-in-arms on a battlefield.

Bearing stretchers, these combat medics carry their wounded countrymen to awaiting field ambulances. In some instances they must provide security, engaging enemy fighters as they wait for military aircraft to evacuate their more seriously wounded comrades to military medical facilities.

These were the types of scenarios Iraqi Army Soldiers from the 9th Iraqi Army Division (Mechanized) faced during a tactical combat casualty care course instructed by Soldiers from Medical Company C, 115th Brigade Support Battalion March 1 on Camp Taji, Iraq.

For three weeks, Soldiers from the company have been teaching Iraqi Army medics and a few Iraqi transportation troops in classes designed to prepare them for treating wounded troops in the combat environment. The students in the course included Iraqi troops from the 2nd and 3rd Brigade of the 9th IA Div. (Mech.) and the division's logistics battalion.

"This serves as some refresher training for some of them, and for others this is all new," said Tallassee, Ala. native Staff Sgt. Lisa Woods, a platoon sergeant for the medical company and noncommissioned officer-in-charge of Taji's Muleskinner clinic.

"It's very rewarding to see what they're putting into it," added Woods. "They get totally engaged in it and they really want to



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Iraqi Soldiers with the 9th Iraqi Army Division (Mechanized) treat a simulated casualty, who has an amputated leg during a tactical combat casualty care course March 1 on Camp Taji, Iraq.

learn."

The training was a team effort. The Soldiers worked with an Iraqi Army platoon leader, an Iraqi Army pharmacist and an Iraqi environmental officer. Military transition team medical advisors were also on hand to observe the training.

During morning lectures, Iraqi Army soldiers did hands on instruction in preventing bleeding, preventing shock, learning how to give intravenous fluids, managing trauma, splinting fractures and many other life-sav-

ing techniques.

Speakers blared battle sounds of gunfire and explosions while the Iraqi troops going through the lanes rushed to the aid of their comrades who donned rubber appliances – representing various injuries.

Simulated wounds ranged from fractures to amputations and head injuries to abdominal wounds.

"We'll be depending upon these guys when they go outside the wire, so it's very important for them to not be too surprised by

the types of things they'll see and encounter when they're in (the actual combat environment)," said Sgt. Haider Al Salami, an Iraqi Army combat medic serving in the 9th IA Div., who holds a degree in nursing and aided in the training.

Although U.S. Soldiers served as the main instructors for the course, they said they wanted to do things the Iraqi way.

"We're not trying to change their household," Woods said. "But rather to add to the things they've already had. We're not telling them 'you need to do it this way' or the American way, but we're doing it their way."

"We've taken their past experiences and continue building on them and they're more receptive to this way of training," added Woods.

Due to an obvious language barrier, there were many obstacles instructors had to overcome during 8-hour training days.

"It has been extremely challenging, and we used a lot of help from our interpreters, many of them have seen people die on missions, so they know the importance of being able to stress emphasis on medical things in the class room," Woods said.

Those who aided in the training said they were impressed with how the Iraqi troops performed.

"I have confidence that when we go out as a MiTT outside the wire, they can save each other or one of us if necessary," said Capt. Michael Whiddon, a medical operations MiTT advisor and a native of Purvis, Miss.

It was another way for them to build bonds. "We work together as brothers," said Al Salami. "The Iraqi soldiers used to ask each other 'what sect are you, what religion?' Now we've got just one sect—we are one family."

Red Lion Soldiers Work Streets of Husayniyah to Catch Terrorists

By Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp
1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

HUSAYNIYAH, Iraq – Soldiers from the 1st "Red Lion" Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment oftentimes move under the cover of darkness, searching for insurgents and helping to keep the streets within their area of operations safe for the citizens living there.

Recently, in accordance with the newly-adopted Baghdad Security Plan, the battalion has been beefing up its efforts here by working with Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army Soldiers from the 5th Special Troops Company, attached to the 2nd Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Division (Mechanized) to conduct more cordon and searches, set up traffic control points and take part in raids to capture known members of terrorist cells.

Staff Sgt. Derek White, a field artillery section chief for Battery A, said he feels more than glad to do his role in the plan which has been designed to stop kidnappers, murderers and those responsible for improvised explosive device attacks against innocent Iraqi civilians, Iraqi security forces and coalition forces.

"It's good when we can go out and capture insurgents and keep them off the streets," said White, a native of Easton, Maine who is serving his second tour in Iraq. "I can see good things coming from what we do and we'll do anything we can to help make this country secure."

White said he hopes his Soldiers see the value in their role – making the area here a safe, secure and stable environment for the people of Husayniyah, so they won't have to live



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

1st Lt. Christopher Darling, executive officer for Battery A, 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment and a Phoenix native, provides security Feb. 24 on the streets of Husayniyah, Iraq during a raid.

their lives in fear.

"When we catch people they see the effort they put forth as actually meaning something," said White. "Every time they go out, the bottom line is, even if we don't catch someone, it's always a good experience for them as it's going to help their careers by making them much more flexible Soldiers. They can see that through the security they're providing, they're helping to improve the quality of life for Iraqis."

Throughout their time working in Husayniyah, the Soldiers have gotten to know many of the Iraqi citizens who they've been helping.

"Many of the Iraqi people want to be helped and I do like

helping them," said Spc. Michael Benvenuto, a field artillery man with Battery A and a native of Riverside, Calif. "They can be giving—if you help them, they'll help you. They'll always do what they can."

New Orleans native Sgt. Gary Thomas said working on the streets here has been a meaningful experience for him.

"Going out on missions to get rid of insurgents is always exciting," said Thomas. "I always tell Soldiers to look at the brighter picture, that there are always people giving us leads (to find insurgents), and for them to remember that not everybody out here is bad."

Battery A's Sgt. Joshua Lambert, who is spending his second tour in Iraq, said the difference between what he's doing now and what he did his last deployment are like night and day.

"Taji—where we're based—has a slightly different culture than where I was last time in Mosul," said Lambert, who hails from Akron, Ohio. "It seems my primary mission here is helping the people whereas the last time we were working more on trying to get the country stabilized. Now the focus is more about working with Iraqis to help with their transition."

During a recent successful raid, Red Lion Soldiers worked with their Iraqi counterparts Feb. 24 to help capture five suspected terrorists and hauled in a weapons cache that included four AK-47 rifles along with 10 loaded magazines, 50 AK-47 rounds, 30 PKC rifle rounds, desert battle-dress uniforms, identification cards and a sniper bi-pod.

"Missions like that really help morale," said Lambert. "It's a great feeling to know you're actually accomplishing something."

Tribal Sheiks, City Council Members Re-open School

By Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp
1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

INTASAR, Iraq – Tribal sheiks, city council members, the Iraqi Army, Iraqi police and Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers are helping the people here to get their lives back to a sense of normalcy nearly five months after sectarian violence rocked the small community.

One of the signs that stability is returning in the village happened March 5 as Intasar sheiks, council members and Soldiers from Battery C, 1st “Red Lion” Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment joined together to re-open the Intasar elementary school here.

The school which had been damaged by looters during the sectarian clashes was closed for several months until clean up crews could be hired to clean away debris.

“We helped to provide money to clean the school through the commander’s emergency relief fund and the Iraqi government also provided money for the effort,” said Capt. Evan Gotkin, commander, Battery C, 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment and a native of Long Island, N.Y. “The school has been the focus of the town and their way of saying let’s get life back to normal.”

For their first day of school, Iraqi boys and girls took their first yearly test. Once the students had been tested, they joined in a ribbon cutting ceremony as tribal sheiks and city council members officially re-opened the school.

Battery C Soldiers then handed out back packs—filled with school supplies, soccer balls and t-shirts to the children. They also constructed a large swing set for the school’s courtyard that the Army donated especially for the kids.

“I love doing things like this, it makes us feel like we’re making a difference and it’s great to see all the excited children,” said Spc. William Sproule, a medic for Battery C who hails from Omak, Wash. “It really makes you appreciate what we often take for granted in the states—it could be something



(Photos by Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Sgt. Derek Smith, a team leader for Battery C, 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment, of 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division and a native of Phoenix, Ariz., hands out back packs, filled with school supplies, to Iraqi children in Intasar, Iraq March 4 during the re-opening of the Intasar elementary school. The school was shut down nearly five months ago due to sectarian violence, however, Shia and Sunni sheiks, the Intasar city council, Iraqi security forces and U.S. Army Soldiers have joined together to help end the violence in the village

as simple as school supplies or a soccer ball. You know that this day will be something they’ll always remember.”

“It’s very important that they’re back in school since they are the future of Iraq,” said Sgt. 1st Class Sheldon Fant, a platoon sergeant and native of Anderson, S.C. “It’s a good experience for our Soldiers to interact with the Iraqi people.”

Nearly 300 students came back to school, with the headmaster expecting only

150 students returning—which is a positive sign after all the violence people in the town have faced, according to Gotkin.

As the children attended classes, Intasar tribal sheiks and city council members held an impromptu meeting at the school to discuss issues the town is facing to include security and reconstruction within the village.

Nearly 1,200 families had left the village when sectarian violence broke out five months ago and more than 70 homes were burned.

The movement towards normalcy and an end to violence has been something the citizens of Intasar wanted since they were the ones who initiated it on their own, Gotkin said.

“The Sunni and Shia sheiks got together, and it was phenomenal,” said Gotkin. “They basically said, ‘Enough is enough, we are not sects, we are Muslims—one Iraqi people.’ This sparked other nearby towns to hold similar meetings with their own sheiks having a reconciliation, so it is spreading.

“Their support of the peace process is a visible demonstration of hope,” added Gotkin. “We’ll use some of our money and the Iraqi government will use some of their money to help the people here rebuild. They are also trying to entice people to come back and live in peace again.”

Some of the things being considered are the issues of refugees returning to the town, the building of new mosques and funding for a new Iraqi Police station.

As of now, the village is under 24-hour

Iraqi police and Iraqi Army protection and Soldiers have increased patrols and cordon and searches in the town.

“The Iraqis still want us here and to see us helping them with security,” said Gotkin. “Tip cards passed out all over town are causing the tip line at the (Joint Security Station) to ring off the hook.”

“The U.S. presence has been very good for the people and the people are thankful for the help of the U.S. Soldiers,” said Jabar Hussein, one of Intasar’s tribal sheiks. “With the efforts of the Iraqi security forces and U.S. Soldiers, we can make something good for the people.”

Soldiers who have experienced first hand what the people in Intasar are attempting to do, said it has been amazing to witness.

“I think it’s definitely good that the Shias and Sunnis have decided to end the violence here so they can live together—this is definitely a model for the rest of the country to follow and it’s good for us to promote that,” said 1st Lt. Justin Cowne, a platoon leader for the battery and a native of Jasper, Ga. “We’re not here to run their country, we’re just here to help them and we hope we can help for the long term.”

As the Soldiers worked at the school and the city council met with tribal sheiks, the smell of fresh baked bread emanated from a newly opened bakery a few buildings down from the school, another sign, said Gotkin, that normalcy is slowly returning to the village.



Tribal sheiks watch as a city council member cuts the ribbon on the Intasar elementary school in Intasar, Iraq March 4 signifying the re-opening.

Karkh Business Owners Working Together

By Sgt. 1st Class Kap Kim
2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – Throughout communities within the United States, business owners gather to form a tightly wound network to strengthen their local economy.

For the past year or so, the Karkh business owners have tried to form their own network in hopes of achieving the same aims.

When Baghdad's Karkh district business owners met at the District Advisory Council Hall March 3 to elect their representatives, they decided they needed more time, to not only figure out who would best represent them, but also needed more time to hash out their newly-formed organization's bylaws.

Maj. James H. Adams, the 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, executive officer, of Alexandria, La., said coalition forces, who serve as advisors, couldn't be prouder of the delay.

"This is governance in action," Adams said proudly. "This shows so much functionality. They made a decision and went with it. This showed courage and functionality to make a decision."

Capt. Jason Lewis, the 2nd Brigade Combat Team's Civil Affairs officer, who calls Portland, Ore., home, agreed that the elections should take more time.

He said the officers should be those business owners who have done well despite the war.

"They are natural leaders," said Lewis. "They have the power or 'wasta,' a local term used for people with pull. They can survive the war and drive around in a Mercedes. They are the people you want running Baghdad."

According to Adams, the DAC, which



(Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kap Kim, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Capt. Jason Lewis, 2nd Brigade Combat Team's civil affairs officer from Portland, Ore., speaks to a few local business owners after a meeting in Baghdad's Karkh district March 3.

provides legitimacy to the, would-be chamber of commerce, would work together with the organization to enforce standards on other business leaders.

The thought is that the business owners would, according to the bylaws, agree to hire contractors from within their own community who could do the work, do it right, and in a timely manner, thereby promoting a stronger economy for Karkh district of the Iraqi capital.

"We want to put your family, your neighbors, your friends to work ... the DAC

has recognized that, and we know that's the way to proceed," said Maj. Chip Daniels, the infrastructure coordination element chief from Palmyra, Pa., to the DAC members and business owners.

In other districts of Baghdad, such as Al Doura, the chamber of commerce has flourished. It's opened more than 170 different shops and numerous markets by using the same principles, according to Lewis.

"We want [Karkh] to learn from the lessons in Doura because it's been successful there," he said. "Businessmen will listen to

other businessmen."

For coalition forces, who usually take a back seat to the big decisions made by the DAC, they know that the future of Baghdad, both it economic and security stability, largely depends on the "yea's" and "nea's" in forums like the chamber of commerce.

"The bottom line is the jobs," said Lewis. "I think the insurgency is caused by people not having jobs."

He added that it's not about hiring people to do senseless work, or the "band-aid" method, but rather jobs with viable skills and trades that would ultimately help increase the local market.

"Karkh is right on the cusps of economic surge," said Adams. "This district is going to be a shining star for the rest of Baghdad; it'll be the model for the rest of Baghdad."

The question of how long it would take for Karkh to have a fully-functional chamber of commerce may be answered by U.S. history.

Adams draws back to the length of time it took the founding fathers to agree on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

"I think it's more conditions-based than time-based," he said. "You have to first build a functional council before you move on. You can work a timeline, but you have to be willing to deviate from the timeline due to members leaving and other events."

How this works out is something most of the DAC and Karkh residents are interested in seeing.

Many of them, according to Adams, eagerly await the decisions so they can just live in peace and have a nice place to raise their children.

"I see this as so monumental," he said. "One-hundred years from now, they can look back – yeah, there were some growing pains, but it was something that worked."

Troops, Locals Celebrate Reopening of Market in Al Haider

By Spc. Alexis Harrison
2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – A few months ago the Al Doura District was considered by many to be one of the most dangerous places in all of Iraq. Sectarian violence had taken over the streets, and the people of the community fled to find safety anywhere they could.

One of the markets in the Al Hadher neighborhood had been virtually destroyed by the violence that swept through the area. That was until Multi-National Division – Baghdad and Iraqi security forces began to focus efforts in the district to stop the bloodshed.

Recently, a new life has been brought back into the area and the marketplace. The troops from 1st Battalion, 14th Cavalry Regiment, also known as Task Force 1-14th Cavalry, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, a civil affairs company and community leaders came together to celebrate the grand reopening of the marketplace Feb. 18. For the Soldiers and the community, it was a clear message of the ongoing improvements being made in the area by coalition forces and community leaders.

"I'd like to thank coalition forces and the local counsel in Al Hadher in their efforts to reopen this market," said District Advisory Counsel Chairman, Sabeeh Radhi Al Ka'abi. "The improvement of the security will help to rebuild Baghdad and



(Photo by Spc. Alexis Harrison, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

The chairman of the Al Rashid District Advisory Council, Sabeeh Radhi Al Ka'abi, is joined by Iraqi Brig. Gen. Gazwan, coalition forces and members of the Iraqi police to cut the ceremonial ribbon to celebrate the reopening of the market in Baghdad's Al Hadher neighborhood Feb. 18.

bring more opportunities to the people counting on the coalition."

Security wasn't always this good for the neighborhood. The market manager, Abu Haider, said this is an undeniable improvement of the way things used to be for his neighborhood and the market.

"The market had been empty because the security in the

area was very poor and civilians were being targeted by terrorists," Haider said. "Recently, coalition forces raided the area many times to help chase the terrorists away."

A man selling fruit in the market who wished not to be named said he and his family are grateful for what's being done for his neighborhood, and he hopes to continue to see those improvements continue.

"A few months ago, no one could come to the market because terrorists were running the city as they wanted. Now, everything has changed," he said. "The Iraqi security force and coalition forces are everywhere. People can come and go to the market as they please. We hope the ISF and coalition can keep the security they have now and improve even more of the city. The relation between the people and the ISF is good."

Capt. Eric Fedak from Company B, 414th Civil Affairs Battalion attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, said bringing the Iraqi national police into the project was just as important as the market revitalization itself.

"We've been trying to re-introduce the national police into the area," said the Ashville, N.C., native. "With events like this, hopefully, the people will be able to rely a lot more on the national police."

Along with the upgraded security and the promise of hope came a new power generator for the neighborhood. Fedak said that another generator is planned to be dropped off along with upgrades to the road barriers.



(U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Stacy L. Pearsall)

Iraqi Army to Stay in Baqubah

An Iraqi Soldier hands out soccer balls during a four-day operation in New Baqubah March 2.. Members of the U.S. Army, Military Transition Team, and Iraqi army, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 5th Division, conducted the operation to eliminate New Baqubah as an operating base for improvised explosive device building cells and key leaders of anti-Iraqi forces in Iraq. The soldiers have delivered numerous supplies, such as kerosene, rice, toys and school supplies to local families throughout the region, and will continue to assist the local population.

Local Media Increases Throughout Diyala

DIYALA, Iraq – The Independent Radio and Television Network in Diyala is now transmitting broadcasts throughout the province, as well as to Baghdad, Fallujah, Tikrit, Al Kut, Balad and other areas throughout Iraq after virtually no local media in the area.

The radio station broadcasts on 99.2 FM, while the television station broadcasts on UHF Channel 34.

These stations will broadcast a mixture of popular music and TV programming, news, information and educational programming, and religious discussion.

One of the premier new shows, “Common Ground,” will feature four Iraqi friends, two Sunni and two Shia, one of whom is a woman, talking about the world they share.

They will discuss common and different customs, all

within the context of living together in peace.

Additionally, the Balad Ruz and Khanaqin radio stations continue to transmit daily to their local populations, while an ongoing project is underway to restart the printing of the Al Parlaman newspaper.

“These changes represent positive steps toward ending the culture of fear and rumor that enables terrorists to intimidate the people,” said Col. David W. Sutherland, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division commander and senior U.S. Army officer in Diyala.

The availability of these networks is important, as the government of Diyala and the Iraqi Security Forces are able to inform their people of efforts and progress in the province.

According to Governor Ra’ad Hameed Al-Mula Jowad Al-Tanimi, the Provincial Governor, he will provide informa-

tion and perspective to his people through interviews and statements to these stations. Media that focuses on Diyala is critical to a transparent and representative government and security force.

In the past two weeks, Ra’ad has conducted three media engagements discussing his plans for security and support to the region.

“These stations are important because they allow the people to see their government at work. The Provincial Council will be able to show the people of this province their work on various issues such as the Provincial Budget and reconstruction projects,” adds Sutherland. “These stations represent a tremendous source of news and information for the people of Diyala, and a way to end unwarranted hysterics.”

Soldiers Give 'Life' to Iraqi Baby Boy

By Staff Sgt. Angela McKinzie
2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div. (LI) Public Affairs

YUSUFYIAH, Iraq — Soldiers recently received something they least expected — a baby.

Soldiers from the 210th Brigade Support Battalion "Providers" and the 4th Battalion 31st Infantry Regiment "Polar Bears," both units of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry), took care of a sick

Iraqi baby boy at the Patrol Base Yusufiyah aid station here.

"The baby's mother brought him to us because he was very sick," said Maj. Casey Geaney, a native of Portland, Ore., who serves as a battalion surgeon currently attached to the 4-31st.

Knowing that the baby, Sajad, was very ill and that the Iraqi medical system did not have the capabilities to care for the infant, Geaney decided Sajad would become an in-patient.

"Usually this is not an in-patient facility," Geaney

explained. "However, after discovering the child had an infection we did not want him to go home."

Sajad, who was seven months of age, was only the size of a two-month-old. He was believed to have suffered brain injury during his birth.

"Sajad was very dehydrated and sick when we first saw him," said Spc. Carrielynn Spillis, a 210th BSB medic and native of Toledo, Ohio, as she held him in her arms. "We have been feeding him through a tube because he was too weak to feed from a bottle."

Keeping Sajad was a huge responsibility for the team. He required around-the-clock attention, just as any infant.

"We would take turns watching him," Spills explained. "One medic would stay with him at the aid station during the night and others would watch him during the day."

Another medic shared her thoughts of caring for Sajad.

"It's tiring to take care of him," said Spc. Erin Byers, a medic with the 210th BSB and native of Guysmills, Penn. "But it is a nice change of pace. I am used to dealing with Soldiers, but Sajad allowed me to be compassionate — it is a different mindset."

After caring for Sajad for four days, Geaney decided he was well enough to return home. But before releasing the infant, Geaney and the medics taught Sajad's father how to care for him.

"They (the doctor and medics) did a nice job," said Nasseir Alaobed, Sajad's father, as he was learning to feed his son through a tube. "The Iraqi hospitals do not have this kind of care and I am glad I brought him in."

Sajad was returned to his parents fully hydrated and with more strength.

At one point, Spillis was mentioned that Sajad was actually feeding from a bottle.

Though the Soldiers were able to care for Sajad, the need for Iraqi children to see doctors in Iraq is immense.

"There are a lot of children with chronic problems and it is frustrating that we are seeing so many patients that need help," Geaney said. "But we do what we can do to help."

"Sajad has a better chance of survival," Geaney added with a smile.

Sajad's parents were sent home with lessons on how to care for him and infant formula that contained extra calories in order to help the infant gain weight.



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Angela McKinzie, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div. (LI) Public Affairs)

Spc. Carrielynn Spillis, a medic with the 210th Brigade Support Battalion "Providers," 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) and native of Toledo, Ohio, takes care of Sajad, a sick Iraqi infant, at the Patrol Base Yusufiyah aid station in Yusufiyah, Iraq Feb. 21.

Gunmen Can't Stop Medical Op

By Staff Sgt. Angela McKinzie
2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div. (LI) Public Affairs

AL TARAQ, Iraq — Terrorists commonly use scare tactics to disrupt the everyday lives of others; however, their tactics were unsuccessful during a recent medical operation.

Soldiers from the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment and the 210th Brigade Support Battalion, both units of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry), conducted a medical operation at the Ahmed Suhel School in Al Taraq, Iraq Feb. 22.

Although the school offered a comfortable atmosphere, terrorists tried to disrupt the day's activities with small arms fire and a rocket-propelled grenade attack.

But the medical operation continued and Iraqis still received care.

"If we shut this down then the terrorist would have won," said Capt. Shane Finn, the commander of Company C, 4-31st and native of Clinton, N.Y. "All they are trying to do is stop the operation — and they are not going to do that."

Local residents nationals were seen from everything from coughs to burns, but some cases could not be treated with basic medical care.

Seventy-five received treatment.

No one was injured during the terrorist attack.

"I am very happy that the Americans have helped me," said Kaid Hamed, an Iraqi teen, as he watched Williams bandage his wound. "They do a good job and they are my friends."

Soldiers taking part in the mission understand the importance of medical operations.

"We live in Al Taraq and have a small aid station here," said Pfc. Chadwick Williams, a native of Spokane, Wash., who serves as a medic with 4-31.

"Every day there are people who come to our aid station requesting medical care, but since I am not a doctor I cannot do too much for them. It is good to have medical operations because there are doctors on site to treat the Iraqis," he added.

The site selection for medical operations is also important.

"We chose to have the medical operation at the school so that we could get people comfortable with being at the school," said 1st Sgt. David Simpson, the senior noncommissioned officer with Co. C, 4-31st and a native of Des Moines, Iowa. "The school offers a friendlier atmosphere for these types of operations."

The unit is planning more medical operations in the area.



(By Staff Sgt. Angela McKinzie, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div. (LI) Public Affairs)

Pfc. Chadwick Williams, a medic with the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div. (LI), treats Kaid Hamed for a burn during a medical operation at the Ahmed Suhel School in Al Taraq, Iraq Feb. 22.

Iraqi Police Recovers From Attack

By Spc. Chris McCann
2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div. (LI) Public Affairs

CAMP STRIKER, Iraq — A savage attack on an Iraqi national police checkpoint on the Iraqi highway known as Route Tampa that left eight policemen dead and wounded several others on Feb. 23 left scars on buildings and Iraqis alike, but did not dim the Iraqi's spirit.

Soldiers of the 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment and the 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, both of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) and U.S. Marines of the 6272 National Police Transition Team reacted swiftly and assembled at the checkpoint Feb. 26 to help with the aftermath of the attack.

Two terrorists were killed in the skirmish with the 2nd Battalion, 72nd National Police Brigade. The attack damaged the building and guard shacks, leaving walls pocked with holes.

"The attackers had very good weapons," said Sgt. Nadam Na'if. "They wore ammunition under their clothes, so we couldn't see that they were so well-armed."

The assault was insulting considering that the police were trying to be receptive to the neighborhood.

"We had just gotten an order to be especially kind to civilians," said Sgt. Ali Jassim. "We said 'welcome,' and they started shooting."

"The soldiers that work here just want to care for their families," Na'if said. "We're not out here to hurt anyone. We took fire from everywhere, and there was nowhere to hide. The terrorists are polite to the American Soldiers that patrol, because they know they're out-gunned. But on us, they'll open fire. We want get this area under control and peaceful, we just need help."

To provide that help, the U.S. and Iraqi forces combined their efforts to make the post safer and more livable. While the checkpoint was functional even right after the attack, force protection and improvements like showers will make it safer and more comfortable for those who live there.

Several ideas were proposed by Lt. Col. Hassan, the battalion commander for 2/72 NPB, the Marines and the



Jouad Si'en (front left) and Haidar Chabawi (also left) help Husayn Kena'ani (center) and other Iraqi soldiers to lift a partially-built guard shack into position on the roof of Checkpoint 34 as Ahmed Abdul-Azal (far right) gets out of the way.

2nd BSTB engineers, and in the end, a mixture of the ideas was adopted.

Huge, steel-wire, fabric-lined cages filled with dirt and rocks and concrete barriers will surround the post and protect the national police inside from small-arms and even rocket-propelled grenade fire. Soldiers of the 2nd BSTB used an M88 Hercules tank recovery vehicle to move the heavy concrete walls into place as Marines finetuned the placement of the dangling slabs.

A shower trailer has been ordered for the police as well — many of whom now have to go to battalion headquarters in Baghdad just to shower. The kitchen, destroyed by a grenade, will be restored, and sleeping quarters improved.

"We're turning this into a combat outpost for housing a battalion of national police," said U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Gregory Kniell, a native of Baltimore and a radio-telephone operator who works with the transition team. "We're building an outer wall with concrete barriers. Hopefully, a safer post will help them in their mission."

The training provided by the transition team should help them recover as well. They are training them on weapons handling and firing.

"We're training them to be an organized unit," Kniell said. "They're getting better. They've got more to learn, but that's always the case with any unit — you can always improve."

Kniell said he enjoyed spending the day working with Soldiers and Iraqis.

"It's been a really interesting experience, working with the national police and the U.S. Army," he said.

1st Lt. Wessam Jassim, a platoon leader with the 2/72 NP, brought several of his soldiers to help with the improvements.

"It's great, I'm very glad," he said of the work being done. "I'm very happy that the Army and Marines support us so much. This will help; we'll be much safer here now."

The policemen seemed to enjoy having the American troops around, laughing and joking in pidgin Arabic and English as they built new guard shacks with re-used lumber and stacked sandbags.

Pfc. Chad Davidson, a medic with the 1/89 Cav and a native of Sacramento, Calif., spoke at length with some of the Iraqi men through an interpreter while he treated them for wounds received in the attack and illnesses.

"I really like helping the Iraqis and making friends, talking with them. Sometimes it's not even Soldier-to-soldier talk — just person-to-person," he said.

"It's a positive development that we as the U.S. can aid in supporting the Iraqis and helping them make their country their own, said U.S. Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Steve Wright, a native of Jacksonville, N.C., and a trainer. "The Army has been treating us very well, and they have more assets as far as the equipment. What we're doing here is a very positive thing."



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Angela McKinzie, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div. (LI) Public Affairs)

Pfc. Tiffany Batiste, a New Orleans native, prepares dinner for the Soldiers at the dining facility in Yusufiyah, Iraq Feb. 27.

Food Specialists Keep Soldiers Stomachs Full

By Staff Sgt. Angela McKinzie
2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div. (LI) Public Affairs

YUSUFIYAH, Iraq — On every forward operating base, the dining facility is the center of a Soldier's life. No matter what operational specialty or job they perform, there's only one place to sit down to a hot meal. Oftentimes overlooked by the troops as they pass through meals times are the people who put the food on the table — or on the serving line, at least.

Food service specialists from the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) work each day to prepare food for their fellow Soldiers at the base camp here, and while their job is not always glorious they enjoy what they are doing for their brothers and sisters in arms.

"Getting to cook for the Soldiers makes me feel like I am contributing," said Pfc. Tiffany Batiste, a food service specialist with 4-31st and a native of New Orleans. "I think it is great that I get to feed the Soldiers who just come off of missions and who are getting ready to go on missions."

Food service specialists like Batiste can spend up to 15 hours each day in the kitchen.

"While most Soldiers are asleep, we are busy cooking," said Pfc. Chris Reeves, a food service specialist from New Smyrna Beach, Fla. "We are awake each morning before dawn preparing breakfast for everyone."

These food service specialists do more than just cook. Their job is more complex since they do not have "kitchen police" to help them run the DFAC.

"We do it all — take out the trash, order the food, download food and clean all the dishes," Batiste said as she prepared dinner for the Soldiers.

The food service specialists make sure there are three hot meals every day and send two hot meals to locations near Yusufiyah where there are no DFACs.

"The food service specialists are doing a great job — they are hard working people," said 1st Lt. Joe Nussbaumer, a platoon leader and native of Dalton, Ga. "The food is delicious."

Nussbaumer was one of many Soldiers who ate at the DFAC before going on an air assault mission.

After one day of cooking, cleaning and ordering food is over, the food service specialists wake up to do it again, but they know they are doing something good for their fellow Soldiers.

"It makes me feel good to know that I am helping them," Reeves added.



(Photo by Spc. Chris McCann, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div. (LI) Public Affairs)

Ahmed Abdul-Azal (right), an Iraqi national policeman, pounds a new steel post into the ground for concertina wire around Checkpoint 34, an outpost on a major Iraqi highway known as Route Tampa, during reconstruction efforts Feb. 26 after the checkpoint was heavily damaged by an attack by terrorists two days before.



(U.S. Army photo)

A Zafaraniya resident works on reconstructing the district's youth center. The project started in January and is scheduled to be completed by April.

Zafaraniya Youth Center Undergoing Face Lift

By Spc. Courtney Marulli
2nd BCT, 2nd Inf. Div. Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE LOYALTY, Iraq – What had once been a promising sports fields at the Zafaraniya District Youth Center turned into little more than sewage lakes after years of neglect.

Getting the field and its adjacent building back into usable condition is one of many partnership projects Coalition and Iraqi Forces are currently undertaking.

Once the building is renovated and the fields drained of sewage, the goal will be to provide a safe haven for the children of Zafaraniya, said 1st Lt. Robyn M. Jacobs, a civil military operations officer for 2nd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery.

Upgrades will include painting, restoring electricity, rebuilding walls and floors, and draining the soccer field.

Prior to 2003, the youth center featured Baghdad's second-largest youth facility, said Jacobs, a native of Colorado Springs, Colo. She said the previous unit started the field restoration project and that 2-17th is now working to get the fields renovated, as well as adding new equipment.

She compared the youth center to a YMCA. It offered children sewing, drama, and theater classes, plus a weight room and sports facilities for soccer and volleyball.

Getting the building and field back to their former glories is where Jacobs and the rest of 2-17th come in.

"We went out there and realized the impact it could have in the community," Jacobs said. "It has the potential to employ a lot of people and get kids off the street."

Renovations started Jan. 19 and are projected to be completed by April 19. At least 80 Zafaraniya residents have been hired to help refurbish the center, according to Jacobs. Even the water and sewage construction is being done by locals.

"Maybe there will be less IEDs on the street because kids have something positive to focus on," Jacobs said.

The refurbished youth center can give youth hope for the future, Jacobs noted.

"Like anywhere, how you're raised and how you're influenced is who you become," she said.

Once the project is completed, Jacobs said the next step is to get equipment and supplies that will be needed to efficiently run the center.



(Photo by Maj. Jason Tomasetti, 2nd BCT, 2nd Infantry Division)

To Get Carried Away

Sgt. Tracey McCollin and Sgt. Rodrigo Raeder of 2nd Base Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, wait for the UH-60 helicopter to arrive in order to hook-up during sling load operations March 1 at Forward Operating Base Rustamiyah in eastern Baghdad.

Troop Brings Conjunto Music to Eastern Baghdad

By Spc. Courtney Marulli
2nd BCT, 2nd Inf. Div. Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE RUSTAMIYAH, Iraq – During deployments, many Soldiers turn to music as a way to pass the time and unwind after a long mission. Some sing, others compose music, while others play with whatever musical instrument they have to play.

The guitar is a popular instrument in deployment zones, but for one noncommissioned officer, his guitar got replaced with something more unusual; the accordion.

Sgt. 1st Class Ricardo A. Herrera, a battle NCO for Headquarters Troop, 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, is a self-taught musician of various talents, but his latest venture is playing the accordion to Conjunto music.

Herrera, of Nipomo, Calif., said as a Mexican-American, he was exposed to Hispanic music and culture growing up and his love for the sound stayed with him. He said he enjoys Tejano music, but it wasn't until his military career led him to Fort Hood, Texas, that he became interested in Conjunto music.

Conjunto means a group, or together, Herrera said, and that is where the accordion comes in. A Conjunto consists of an accordion player, a bass player, a drummer and a bajo sexto player.

The Conjunto style of music started in the 1800s when German settlers moved to northern Mexico and southern Texas areas.

"They brought polka music with them," he said.

The mixture of polka and traditional Mexican music fused into what is now known as Conjunto. Herrera said it sounds like a Hispanic polka with Spanish lyrics.

Herrera has been in the Army for 18 years and plans on retiring in San Antonio where he can enjoy the form

of music that he loves the most.

As a child, Herrera played the guitar and other instruments by teaching himself.

"I kind of have a good ear for music," he said. "I don't really read music. I hear it and can play."

As a teenager, Herrera played in a few bands, all of different genres. He said he had always played the guitar, bass guitar and drums, but when he became interested in Conjunto, he wanted to be the lead.

"I chose it because the accordion in this style of music is more or less the lead guitar," he said. "The drums and bass are not quite as complex, so it wasn't a challenge. I wanted to be lead guitar, so I picked up the accordion."

Before he deployed, Herrera said he got to play with Sierra Gold, a band out of Pueblo, Colo., that performs Conjunto music. His musical plans while in Iraq are to improve his skills.

Herrera, who usually practices an hour a day when possible, said he wasn't able to practice as much leading up to the deployment due to work and wanting to spend as much time as he could with his family.

"My goal is to be better than when I left," he said.

Herrera is quick to point out that his accordion is not like the one "Weird Al" Yankovic uses, which is a piano accordion.

"I use a button accordion," he said.

A button accordion varies from the piano accordion because it has several buttons instead of keys for notes.

There are 34 buttons, but 68 notes because, like the harmonica, the accordion makes one note as the air is leaving and another when air comes back in.

"The most challenging is finding the notes," Herrera said.

Herrera has been playing the accordion for six years. He said it takes a lot of practice to be able to play and not look at the buttons.

"I bought my first accordion at a second-hand store," he said. "It took me awhile to start learning."

Sacrifices Rewarded:**Soldiers Give Back to Abidone Community**

By Spc. L.B. Edgar,
7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Even the deaths of 17 first cousins at the hands of insurgents could not alter his steadfastness. The murder of his two brothers did not shake his resolve. Even the paralysis of another brother only strengthened his determination to improve the security of his people.

For Raad Rashed Abed Al Shibli, who is the sheik of Al Shibli of the Al Amri tribe, working with coalition forces has been a way of life since first contact. He supports coalition forces and the Iraqi government, even when it jeopardizes those closest to him.

“We’re cooperating and informing (the coalition forces and Iraqi Army) about bad people here,” Shibli said through an interpreter during a medical assistance mission in the village of Abidone inside the Bay Al Sabir High School of Baghdad’s Abu Ghraib district Feb. 17.

The mission to provide health care to the residents of Abidone was meant to reward people like Shibli for their sacrifices and trust in Iraqi security forces and the coalition.

With travel hampered by poor transportation security, many of the Abidone residents are unable to receive health care outside of the village. By bringing the clinic to the people, those in need were at the very least screened, Shibli said.

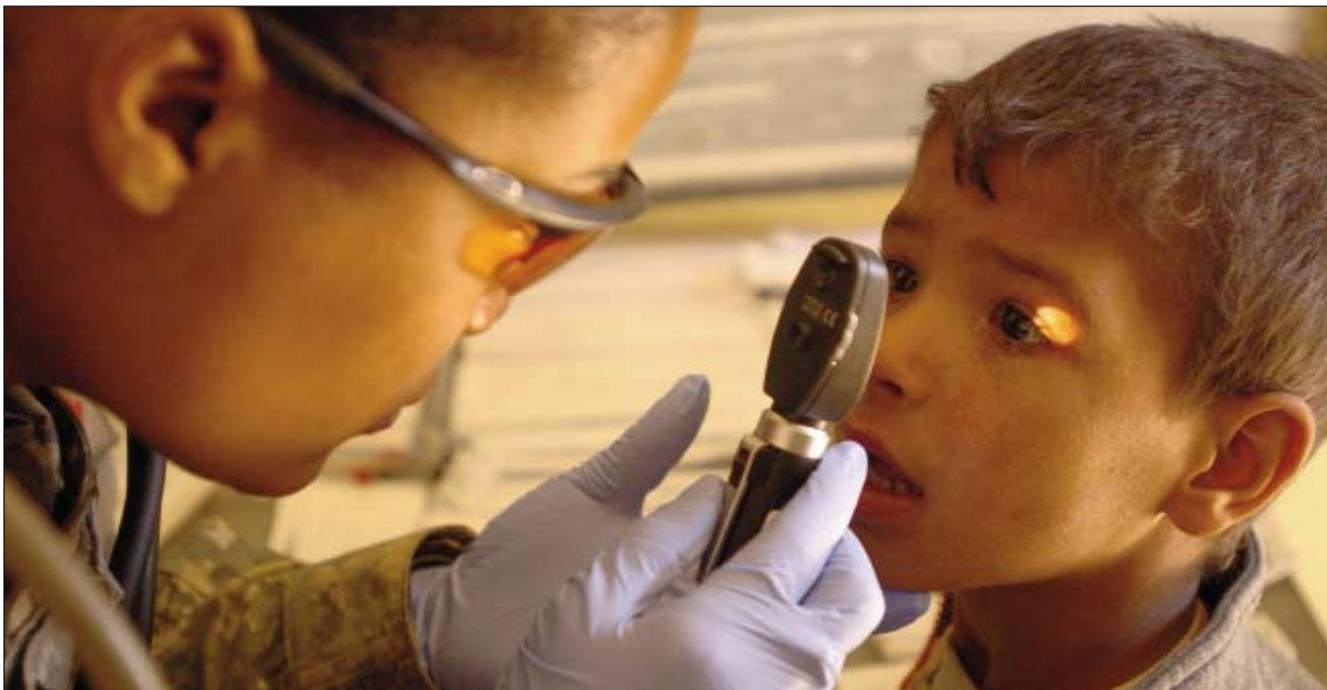
The check-ups were a thanks to the people from the coalition for past support, said Capt. Ryan Liebhaber, commander, Troop A, 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (LI).

“The local leadership is completely willing to work with the coalition. We’re trying to pay them back for the help they’ve given us as well as build rapport with the local nationals,” said the native of Centerville, Ohio.

Building a rapport with local nationals was not restricted to Soldiers. The rapport between the Iraqi Army and the Abidone community was also strengthened by the event, Shibli said.

“The other good thing is you guys (coalition forces) brought (the) Iraqi military with you because this will increase their reputation and (foster) a better relationship (between the Iraqi Army, tribes and sheiks),” Shibli explained. “We’re expecting the government to saddle up, put their differences aside and let the IA and everyone do their job right.”

Shibli, other local sheiks and Abidone leaders met with the platoon leader of the Iraqi Army unit responsible for the mission’s security, 2nd Lt. Muhammad Khalid Mohsin, with



(Photo by Spc. L.B. Edgar, 7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

Newbern, N.C., native Sgt. Shawn Mackey, a health care specialist with Company C, 299th Forward Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, assesses the health of a 6-year-old Iraqi boy during a medical assistance mission in the village of Abidone, in Baghdad’s Abu Ghraib district Feb. 17. The event was to thank the community for its continued support of coalition and Iraqi security forces by offering health and dental care to the village’s residents.

the quick reaction force of 2nd Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division.

Mohsin discussed the needs of the community and how the IA could help the people of Abidone. Cell phone numbers were exchanged in case of future emergencies, he said.

Building Iraqi confidence in their Army was part of the mission, said Capt. Warrick Craig, contract and project manager for 1st Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd BCT, 1st Inf. Div.

“What we’re trying to do is get them (IA) more interested in this community and in turn that will develop the local populace’s confidence in the IA,” said the native of Sparkman, Ark. “We just want to put an Iraqi face on it to show them that regardless of where we live at, we can all work together and that’s the future of Iraq.”

Seven health care providers and one dentist, screened and treated patients for health issues and remedied the conditions whenever possible. The medical staff was pulled from

across the Multi-National Division-Baghdad and provided medical assistance to more than 100 Iraqis, said Maj. Michael Philbin, 1-7th FA’s executive officer.

“I think it was a great success because we were able to integrate the Iraqi Army, who handed out toys for the kids, food and candy as well as other humanitarian-assistance items,” said the native of Fairport, N.Y. “It gives the people a chance to see they’re providing security and providing for them and that’s what really matters because some day we won’t be here doing this anymore. It will just be them.”

As expected, the people of Abidone reciprocated by proving intelligence to Soldiers and IA, just as Shibli has done for so long.

“Before we even started we had our first tip,” Philbin said. “Before the first patient was ever seen, one of the local nationals came up and gave us a tip about some (Anti-Iraqi forces).”

The tips just keep on coming from the Abidone village.



(Photo by Pfc. William Hatton, 7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

Staff Sgt. Gary Fink, an intelligence analyst with Company C, 101st Military Intelligence Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, gets the opportunity to be promoted by his mother, Linda Pegg, at Camp Liberty, Iraq March 1.

Family Brings Promotion Closer to Home

By Pfc. William Hatton
7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – With family and friends far away during a deployment, Soldiers typically bond together to get through the rough days. Although having family close would be nice, most troops can barely picture what it would be like to have their mom or sister in a combat zone with them.

For Staff Sgt. Gary Fink, an intelligence analyst with Company C, 101st Military Intelligence Battalion, 2nd “Dagger” Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, not only is his mother in country with him, she was also the one who promoted him from sergeant to staff sergeant, March 1.

“The only thing my mom has been able to come to was my graduation at Fort Jackson, so its great that she’s able to be here and be the one to pin me,” said

Fink, a native of Munford, Al.

Fink’s mother, Linda Pegg, works for Kellogg, Brown, and Root, a company contracted with the Army that provides Soldiers with various goods and services in Iraq, Fink said.

His mother works in a Morale, Welfare and Recreation tent at Camp Taji, Iraq, and her being so close, Fink has been able to keep in close contact during his deployment, he said. With his promotion coming up, it only seemed right to have his mother do it, because she was close.

Feelings and emotions were very high leading up to the ceremony, said Pegg, also a native of Munford, Al. “I was honored to be apart of it,” she added.

“I’m just very, very proud of my son,” Pegg said.

After hard work and beneficial help from leaders on Camp Taji and Camp Liberty, Fink was able to be promoted and spend quality time with his mom.



Spc. Kenrick Schlueter, a field artilleryman with Troop D, 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment and a native of Spring, Texas, searches drawers in a house Feb. 26 in Falahat, Iraq during a cordon and search operation.

Ironhorse Brigade With Iraqi Troops

By Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp
1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

FALAHAT, Iraq – As the morning begins, Soldiers from Troop D, 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, attached to the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, have not even had time to yawn and they're already getting their vehicles ready to go on a mission in search of insurgents.

This was the case as Troop D Soldiers readied themselves for a cordon and search mission recently here.

The day's operation involved the Troop D Soldiers linking up with Iraqi Army troops from the 2nd Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Division (Mechanized) to search four houses and a chicken coop for members of insurgent groups, weapons caches and other terrorist-related material and information.

Working with Iraqi Army troops to clean terrorist activity out of the neighborhoods of the village has been a worthwhile experience, said Troop D Soldiers.

"The majority of the IA soldiers are really good at what they do, and they continue to get better at their jobs," said Sgt. Juan Cajas, a forward observer and squad leader for Troop D, who hails from Queens, N.Y. "The more we help the Iraqis, the better their country will be for them. Eventually they'll be trained up and ready for the day we're not here."

During the operation, the Soldiers took time to talk to the villagers for information that may lead to the capture of insurgents.

Besides house searches, the Soldiers working with Iraqi troops also searched for weapons caches in a field which has been a known hiding place for caches in the past-- with a dog handler and his German shepherd and a canine unit on Camp Taji. Patrolling through a field



During a cordon and search operation, 1st Lt. Braden [Name obscured] for Troop D and a native of Ashford, Conn., pull security

ade Soldiers Work s in Cordon, Search

long distances for many hours at a stretch, the Soldiers said they always find ways to keep the job from getting too tiring.

“Our Soldiers are highly motivated and as long as we stay motivated we have no problems,” said Cajas who often finds himself patrolling the streets of the village or out looking for terrorists responsible for emplacing improvised explosives. “Cohesion keeps us going—we’re a team.”

But when things get serious, such as in the event they’re attacked, they’re ready for anything that comes their way, Cajas said.

“They’re the eyes watching each others back,” said Cajas of his Soldiers. “I’m from the old school of stay awake, stay alive so I teach my Soldiers to remember what we’ve trained on and what we’ve practiced.”

“The fact that I’ve been to Iraq before has helped me to teach my Soldiers what to do and what not to do,” added Cajas who is serving his second tour in Iraq.

Troop D Soldiers said they enjoy their missions and that they are having a meaningful experience—especially when it comes to working with the Iraqi people to get insurgents and weapons caches out of their neighborhoods.

“We can make a significant difference with what we’re doing here and I feel really good about it,” said Spc. Ryan Field, a forward observer with D Troop and a native of Ponca, Okla. “I feel great about helping the Iraqi people, it’s definitely a different world than back home in the U.S.”

Although the day’s mission did not yield any weapons caches or lead to the capture of any insurgents, anytime the Soldiers are out doing their part, they said, it’s a good mission.

“Anything we can do to help, while at the same time protecting and serving our own country, makes us feel proud to be a small part of something much larger,” added Field.



Iraqi Army Soldiers from the 2nd Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Division (Mechanized) and Soldiers from Troop D, 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment prepare to search a field for weapons caches Feb. 26 during a cordon and search operation in Falahat, Iraq.



(Photos by Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Hurley (left), executive officer, Troop D, 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment and a native of Coal Center, Pa., and Sgt. 1st Class Seth Dietz, platoon sergeant in the courtyard of a house in Falahat, Iraq Feb. 26.



(Photo by Spc. Nathan Hoskins, 1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

San Diego native Spc. Benjamin Davis (left) and Tucson, Ariz., native Spc. Adrian Heredia (right), both AH-64D Apache crew chiefs for Company A, 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, inspect the rotor head of an Apache.

'Pit Crew' for Aviators? This Isn't NASCAR – It's War

By Capt. Guyton Robinson
1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – The 1st Air Cavalry Brigade's, "Avengers" maintenance team helps the "Warrior Brigade" set the standard for aviation maintenance at the company level.

Soldiers of Company A, 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st ACB, 1st Cavalry Division, have led their brigade in Apache flight hours for an individual company every month of the deployment to date – largely because of their proactive maintenance program and pursuit of accomplishing major inspections and repairs at the unit level.

"We believe in [being proactive]; that's pretty much getting anything done that we're able to, so it won't bite us on the butt later on. It helps us keep these aircraft ready to go at any given time," said Houston native Sgt. Yadder Mejia, an AH-64D Apache crew chief for Co. A.

The mechanics take pride in the fact that they are referred to as pit crews by their supervisors. Their goal is to turn their aircraft around as quickly as possible to get it back into the air so that it can contribute to the overall mission.

"The first time I heard us compared to a NASCAR pit crew was by Lt. Col. [Christopher] Walach [1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment commander] because he sees how we work as a team. We each have our own roll and we know exactly what has to be done," said Mejia.

Still, there are some major differences between a pit crew at race car event and the "Avengers," said San Diego native Spc. Benjamin Davis an Apache crew chief for A Co.

"NASCAR pit crews work for the paycheck and T.V. – we work for something a lot larger than that. We work to get the aircraft up to save lives. It's not about the big paycheck ...," he said.

The maintenance team strives to return aircraft to fully mission capable status in as little time as possible by eliminating minor problems that can add up. As a result, Company

A was the first company in the 1st ACB to complete a 125-hour inspection – a scheduled, major maintenance event at the line-company level.

"What we try to do is we try to eliminate the small things when we do an inspection like getting everything coordinated and parts ready before we do the inspection. These are the small things that help us get aircraft fully mission capable a little more quickly," said Spc. Dustin Wybrant, a crew with Co. A.

The Avenger mechanics stick to common sense principles that help them to complete the inspection in less than five hours without any outside assistance from other companies.

"We have all our parts out ready, waiting for the aircraft. We don't try to run back and forth to the hangers, like other people might do, and waste time – that's common sense," said Wybrant, a native of Coweta, Okla.

When the aircraft rotors stop turning, the crew chiefs swarm the aircraft to begin all of the maintenance tasks required in the 125-hour inspection.

"Our drive is completing the task the right way in the least amount of time that it can be done; we want that bird back in the fight as soon as possible taking down the enemy," said Wybrant.

The "Avenger's" whole operation from start to finish is organized to prevent needless trips to various shops which slow down the overall speed of the task. The company has increased their performance on the 125-hour inspections from eight hours down to nearly half that time at four hours and 30 minutes.

While the team comes together to accomplish large maintenance tasks, their maintenance philosophy truly revolves around pride in taking care of the individual aircraft that is assigned to two mechanics.

"We all as individuals have our own birds and we try to take care of them and clean them as best as possible The last thing the pilot needs to worry about is dirt in the flight controls or a glare in the window," said Wybrant.

The Avenger mechanics look at their aircraft as a reflec-

tion of their unit.

The cockpits of Alpha Company are consistently sparkling and showroom clean because the individual mechanics take pride in making their aircraft battle ready for the pilots that fly missions daily to accomplish the mission in Iraq.

Individual successes are team successes in Alpha Company, and each time a pilot returns from a successful mission the mechanics know that they are as much a part of that mission as the pilots. The Avenger maintenance team is the driving force behind the Apaches that patrol the skies over Baghdad daily.

"A successful day is completing everything that is scheduled for us that day before leaving," said Mejia.

Although completing tasks are extremely important, the ultimate end goal of the Apache is what some of the Co. A crew chiefs find most important.

"To me, a successful day is when the birds go out there...and save our guys on the ground," said Wybrant.

The Avengers owe their success in the maintenance arena to their mentor, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Keith Yoakum, a maintenance test pilot and fellow Avenger who died in combat Feb. 2, protecting his wing men, said Wybrant.

Yoakum taught them the maintenance principles and outlook that are still the driving force behind their success.

"We try to carry on Mr. Yoakum's legacy by always pushing ourselves harder. He was a man that always wanted us to do better because he knew that we could," said Mejia.

"Mr. Yoakum was the hardest working person I've ever seen. When you have someone working harder than the lowest private out there on the flight line – as a CW4 – it tells you a lot about that person. We just try to work harder everyday because we know that's what he would want," said Waybrant.

The Co. A Soldiers intend to honor CW4 Yoakum's memory by achieving the company's mission of providing mission ready aircraft over the skies of Baghdad to support coalition operations throughout the unit's deployment.

“The key is more Girl Scout cookies ...”



(Photo by Spc. Nathan Hoskins, 1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Families of the Soldiers of the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade at Fort Hood, Texas were addressed by Traverse City, Mich., native Col. Dan Shanahan, commander of 1st ACB, 1st Cavalry Division from Camp Taji, Iraq, during a live town hall meeting via satellite Feb. 28. During the question and answer session, one family member asked if there was anything the Soldiers needed. “I think the key is Girl Scout cookies. That’s, frankly, what we need,” Shanahan quipped amidst much laughter.

Maintenance Troops Not in Flight, but in the Fight

By Chief Warrant Officer 4 Kenneth D. Auten
4th Bn., 227th Avn. Regt., 1st Air Cavalry Brigade

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Early in the morning, Dec. 2, bullets from automatic weapons struck the left of an AH-64D Apache from the 1st Cavalry Division as it was patrolling the skies over Baghdad.

The crew broke to the left as more rounds struck the aircraft causing warnings and cautions to begin appearing on the instrument panel. Yet, the pilots were able to fly the aircraft back to Camp Taji and land safely.

As soon as the aircraft was shut down, maintenance personnel from Company D, 4th Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cav. Div. sprung into action assessing the damage and formulating a plan of action to get the aircraft back into the fight.

“The biggest reason to [quickly] assess how much damage was taken when it was at battle ... is to get the bird back to being full mission capable,” said Wichita, Kan., native Staff Sgt. Jonathan Ramon, a technical inspector for the company.

Within minutes, the Co. D “Gunrunners” had a tractor and tow bar hooked up to the aircraft as it was getting its remaining armament downloaded by the armament platoon. Shortly thereafter, it was on its way to a hangar for further assessment of the damages to be repaired.

“We treat everything as a time sensitive matter, that way, even if it isn’t time sensitive, it’s still back up there flying,” said Saint Cloud, Fla., native Spc. Kevin Koch, an Apache mechanic for Co. D.

Maintenance troops from each platoon immediately went into action, assessing their particular task at hand to get the Apache back to supporting the mission.

“The reason why it’s so important to [fix things] right away is because there are unforeseen problems. If you don’t get on it right away, a five-minute job can turn into a two-



(Photo by Spc. Nathan J. Hoskins, 1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

These Soldiers of Company D, 4th Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division helped repair a damaged AH-64D Apache attack helicopter in only one week when it normally would have taken nearly a month.

hour job,” said Spc. Andrew Koplín, an aircraft structural repairer for the “Gunrunners.”

It was instantly realized that the damage to the airframe was extensive, including parts of the bulkhead – the skeleton of the aircraft – that would have to be manufactured from scratch. Also, with the help of the master electrician, armament personnel began assessing and repairing two wiring harnesses.

“Several of the bulkheads were damaged by the bullets,” said Koplín. “They actually blew through one side of the aircraft and continued into the tail.”

“With airframe and sheet-metal jobs, you have to improvise. You have to sit back and look at how you’re going to fix it first. You can’t just jump into it,” the Portland, Ore. native said.

The maintenance platoon began removing body panels

and getting them to the sheet metal shop for repair. They also began removing one of the engines – as it had received a round directly through the center of it – while the engine shop began building up a new one.

As work started, the company’s production control shop began looking for parts and wire that would be needed to complete repairs while the quality control shop’s technical inspectors began controlling every detail of the operation.

“Everybody from sheet-metal guys, armament guys, maintenance guys, technical inspectors ... everybody has to work together to come up with a plan. Everyone has to work together as a team for [the Apache] to become fully mission capable,” Ramon said.

On the same day the aircraft came in, the assessment was complete and work was in full swing with each shop setting up day and night shifts to keep working on the Apache while still maintaining their day-to-day operations.

The next day, they were splicing wires and working on sheet metal for the external panels, as the electricians continued fixing wires to make sure that the more than 50 severed wires were spliced back together correctly.

“If you cross the wrong wire ... something won’t work, [and] it could cause the aircraft to malfunction,” said Montgomery, Ala., native David Rich, an armament, electronics and avionics repairer.

The crews worked around the clock and pushed the airframe out to have checks done on it with the power running within six days.

On day seven, “Gunrunner” test pilots went out to test fly the aircraft to ensure its airworthiness and safety. The Apache was returned to the fight and has since logged more than 125 hours of flight time.

“While the pilot is out there fighting, protecting our guys on the ground ... it’s our job to give them a damn good aircraft with no faults so they can use that aircraft to the fullest capabilities to complete the mission,” Ramon said.

Artillery Troops Learn Urban Warfare Skills

By Pfc. Nathan Smith
4th BCT, 1st Inf. Div. Public Affairs

CAMP BUEHRING, Kuwait -- Less than a century ago,

the U.S. Army engaged in trench warfare. Soldiers have adapted to different forms of combat over the years, and the battle in Iraq is no exception. Today, the Army must adjust to the rigors of urban combat. Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion,

32nd Field Artillery Regiment not only had to train up on their Military Operations in Urban Terrain skills, but they also had to make the transition from functioning as artillery to infantry for their deployment to Iraq. To facilitate this transition, the Soldiers of Battery B, 2-32nd FA conducted close-quarters marksmanship training at the MOUT Range.

1st Lt. Jeff Christy, the platoon leader of second platoon, Battery B, said his Soldiers have accepted this challenge and are performing admirably.

"They're absolute sponges," Christy said. "Each time we train, a new dynamic is introduced into this training. They've really absorbed it, and they're doing a fantastic job."

Christy said the unit has made great progress from the beginning of their close-quarters marksmanship training in October to now. Sgt. 1st Class George Allen, the platoon sergeant of 2nd Platoon, Battery B, said the training is more intense than when the training began during the unit's rotation at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif.

"Here, we have subject matter experts who help assist not only myself and the platoon leader," Allen said, "as well as those lower enlisted to grasp what it's like to maneuver and engage on a target."

Allen said his troops are accepting their tasks enthusiastically.

"I can honestly say I wouldn't want to deploy with another group of Soldiers," he said. "The Soldiers of 2nd Platoon, Battery B, are very highly motivated, eager to train, and eager to learn."

"They're focused on the mission at hand," he added.



(Photo by Spc. Ben Washburn, 4th BCT, 1st Inf. Div. Public Affairs)

Sgt. Joshua Hess of Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, practices his skills on a Military Operations in Urban Terrain range at Camp Buehring, Kuwait.

Brothers Reunite in Kuwait

By Pfc. Nathaniel Smith
4th BCT, 1st ID Public Affairs

CAMP BUEHRING, Kuwait -- Most people go home for family reunions. For two Soldiers here, the meeting was little farther away.

Lt. Col. Michael Sanders, 44, and Master Sgt. William Sanders, 42, are not most people. The brothers, who hadn't seen each other in three-and-a-half years, reunited half a world away in a combat zone while both answered their nation's call to service.

The last time these brothers, and brothers-in-arms saw each other was at a high school graduation ceremony in Portland, Maine. This meeting between the two is quite different as one of the brothers, Master Sgt. Sanders, is preparing to go into Iraq.

Lt. Col. Sanders said that watching his brother

deploy to Iraq for the second time has made him appreciate what the spouses of service members go through watching their loved ones leave for war.

"I never realized how hard it was to see somebody deploy forward because you never think about it because you're always deploying forward," he said. "We train to do that. But we don't train to watch somebody deploy."

"If you'd asked me, I wouldn't have picked it this way."

Despite the circumstances and the austere surroundings, the Sanders brothers have been making the most of this reunion by enjoying the simple things together: drinking coffee, talking and playing checkers.

"I kicked his butt," Master Sgt. Sanders said.

While the two brothers have spent a lot of time apart, they have both been united through serving in the Big Red One. Lt. Col. Sanders served with the 1st Infantry Division during Desert Storm.

"It's interesting how the Army is a family, the 1st Infantry Division is a family and we end up serving in the same division at different times," Lt. Col. Sanders said. "That's a bond that's kind of hard to break."

The elder Sanders brother welcomed his younger sibling to the Army family by swearing him in at the beginning of his service. Today, the brothers say they each benefits from having a brother in the commissioned and noncommissioned officer ranks.

"I'll do something and he'll tell me, 'Bill, that was a bonehead move,'" Master Sgt. Sanders said. "The open candor that we have helps both of us out."

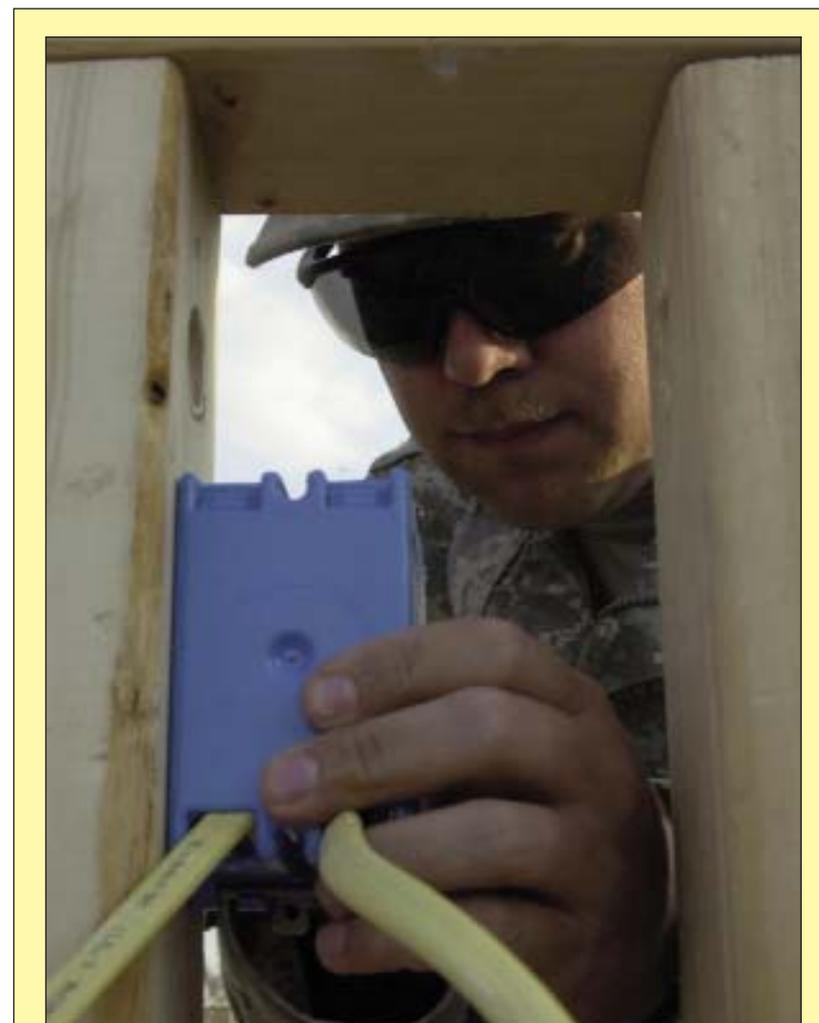
Lt. Col. Sanders is currently serving a 13-month assignment at the Security Assistance Office at the United States Embassy here, serving as an advisor to the Kuwaiti armed forces.

Master Sgt. Sanders is with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division serving as the intelligence noncommissioned officer in charge.



(Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Robert Timmons, 4th BCT Public Affairs)

Lt. Col. Michael Sanders (left), with the Security Assistance Office, at the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait City, poses with his brother Master Sgt. William Sanders, intelligence noncommissioned officer in charge for 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division outside a tent at Camp Buehring, Kuwait.



(Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Robert Timmons, 4th BCT, 1st Inf. Div. Public Affairs)

Plugging In

Spc. Floyd Cryderman, a military policeman with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division from Sault St. Marie, Mich., screws together wiring for the unit's new tactical operations center at Forward Operating Base Falcon in Baghdad Feb. 28.

Soldiers, Farmer's Union Distribute Fertilizer

By 1st Lt. Hayden Scardina
1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FALCON, Iraq – The Al Rashid Nahia Farmers Union and paratroopers from 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division worked together to sell 3,100 bags of a fertilizer to union members at a discounted price in the southern Baghdad Al Rashid district Feb. 27.

A civil affairs team, attached to 1-40th Cavalry, advised the council and arranged to provide security for the union distribution sites and council members as they move the union's profits from Al Rashid to a local bank.

The farmer's union is managed by an eight member council, representing the eight tribes in the local area. The farmer's union has 3,000 registered members.

Members are entitled to use one of the nine union tractors and purchase discounted seed, fertilizer, and plastic for greenhouses.

Recently, the farmer's union has assumed a greater role as membership and profits increase.

Three units from 1-40 Cavalry participated in the fertilizer distribution.

The squadron forward support company, Company D, 725th Brigade Support Battalion, provided a distribution platoon to transport the 3,100 uriyah fertilizer bags.

Troop B, 1-40th Cavalry provided security at the distribution and dealt with one incident at the event. They identified unexploded ordnance near the distribution site which was secured, while an explosive ordnance disposal team was called in to retrieve it.

A civil affairs team and the squadron executive officer, Maj. Tim Davis, a native of Norfolk, Va., oversaw the effort and meet with local tribal leaders.

"Supporting the local economy by working with the farmer's union is a fulfilling part of our job in this area," said



(U.S. Army photo)

Members of the Al Rashid Farmer's Union prepare fertilizer for sale to union members Feb. 27 in the southern Baghdad district.

Davis.

"The interaction between us, the local community, local tribal leaders and the Nahia government is what makes a positive impact here," added Capt. Ray Buenteo, civil affairs

team leader and Salem Keizer, Ore. native. "Supporting the farmer's union improves the local economy and fosters a sense of cooperation between U.S. forces and the local population which helps to create a safe and secure Iraq."

Hard Work Comes Naturally for Logistics Specialist

By Sgt. Marcus Butler
4th BCT (Abn.) 25th Inf. Div. Public Affairs

ISKANDARIYAH, Iraq - There are many people in the world that just go about their daily lives and do the job assigned to them without any questions or quarrels. They don't look for glory or praise; they are quiet professionals.

The folks with Company E, 725th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division say Spc. Tim J. Smith is like that. The Twain Harte, Calif., native is a logistics specialist with the unit.

Currently attached to the 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, Smith has taken on numerous tasks for his company such as heavy equipment operator, mail handler and handles the hand receipts for all of Company E's ammo supply.

Handling various jobs at one time is nothing new for Smith. In high school, Smith was on the soccer and basketball team, played in the band and sang in the choir. Smith also was a tutor for English and math, the salutatorian and vice president for his student class. Handling this work load in high school, it is not surprising that Smith is so well liked with in his company.

"Smith showed immense selfless service by completing each and every mission assigned to him no matter how much of his



(Photo by Sgt. Marcus Butler, 4th BCT (Abn.), 25th Inf. Div. Public Affairs)

Spc. Tim J. Smith, a native of Twain Harte, Calif., and a logistics specialist with Company E, 725th Brigade Support Battalion, picks up metal sheets with a for lift. Smith is attached to the 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment stationed in Iskandariyah, Iraq.

own personal time it engulfed," said 1st Sgt. Brian Morrison, Company E's senior non-commissioned officer. "He never said no to any task and has always had a can-do atti-

tude."

"Smith is the best Paratrooper that I have," said Sgt. Ian S. Dalton, Smith's squad leader. "He is a hard worker and is well liked

by everyone."

Despite all the praise Smith receives from his superiors and peers, he insists that it is nothing special and that his is just doing his job.

"I always set the standard high," said Smith. "It was never in me to complain about anything that I was tasked with. I just did the job."

Joining the Army straight out of his school, Smith has ambitions of making it a career.

"It was an excellent career choice for me but it is hard now since I am so family oriented," he said.

Smith, who has been in the Army for seven years, is now on his second deployment to Iraq.

"My wife Robbin has been through deployments with me before, so she knows what to expect," he said. "But that does not make things any easier for either of us."

Working 12-hour days and always being on-call could push someone to the edge of breaking down, but for Smith, it is a welcomed situation.

"It makes things go by so much faster here," he said.

"All I concern myself with is that when I put on this uniform, I am 100 percent Army. I put aside all other concerns and focus on what I need to do to accomplish the mission correctly and safely," he continued.



(Photos by Spc. L.B. Edgar, 7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

Chicago native Pfc. Christopher Garrett, a saw gunner with Company A, 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, provides security in Baghdad's Adhamiyah district Mar. 3. Iraqi Army soldiers and coalition forces targeted a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device cell and conducted presence patrols in the area.

Strykers Sweep through Adhamiyah with Iraqi Troops

By Spc. L.B. Edgar,
7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

BAGHDAD – The proper materials have to be acquired then transported. A skilled person has to put the device together before it can be installed inside an automobile and then armed.

Finally the vehicle's driver must successfully reach his target and detonate the vehicle-borne improvised explosive device.

In order to thwart recent car bomb attacks on markets throughout Baghdad, Iraqi security forces and troops from the Multi-National Division - Baghdad are sweeping through Iraq's capital to disrupt VBIED production cells as part of Operation Fardh Al Qanoon.

The Iraqi-conceived operation, commonly known as the Baghdad Security Plan, continued Mar. 3 and 4 as the Soldiers of Company A, 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, together with Iraqi Army troops conducted targeted raids and presence patrols in the Adhamiyah security district of Baghdad.

The goal was the cessation of car bomb attacks in Baghdad, said Sgt. Todd Selge, a fire team leader.

"How do you stop them? That's what

we've been focusing on these last couple of missions because it's the number one problem," since the implementation of the new security plan, the native of Burnsville, Minn., said.

U.S. and Iraqi troops searched the homes of many Adhamiyah residents. The searches were not only meant to clear the neighborhood of any threats, but also to familiarize the residents with ISF and coalition forces, said Sgt. Brian Mills, a team leader.

The search was also an opportunity for residents to share information. The searches essentially begged the question: "Is there anything we can do to get bad guys out of your neighborhoods?" said Mills, a native of Jackson, Tenn.

In addition, the search allowed residents to provide feedback, said Staff Sgt. David Plush, weapons squad leader.

"They had a good feeling about the IA. They liked the new security plan for Baghdad," said the Riverton, Wyo., native. "It also lets them know we care - we care about what's going on in their neighborhoods (and) we want to do what we can to help them out."

The implementation of the new security plan and the presence of coalition and Iraqi security forces on the streets has had a positive effect on the neighborhood of

Adhamiyah, said 1st Lt. Thomas Gaines, a platoon leader. He said insurgent activities are down.

"This is a fairly safe neighborhood since the Baghdad Security Plan started. All the insurgents have left the area and the people are less afraid to go out of their houses," said the Knoxville, Tenn., native.

Since the security improved, residents are more concerned with improving their quality of life, Gaines explained.

One of the concerns voiced by many of the residents of Adhamiyah was limited power. Electricity is a scarce commodity and the residents of Adhamiyah, like most of Baghdad, rely heavily on generators, Gaines said.

In neighborhoods like Adhamiyah, where fire fights are few and far between, combat arms Soldiers are increasingly interacting with residents, which is something new for many troops primarily trained to engage and destroy the enemy, Plush said.

"We've got to do this to get us home," said Plush, a veteran of 13 years. "Everything is not always about shooting the bad guys. We're trying to make Iraq a better place."

According to Selge, interacting with the local populace is what needs to happen.

"The more we're out there, the more we're talking to the people, the better the

intelligence we're going to get - more people are going to want to talk to us because they see us there," Selge explained. "If you treat them respectfully and talk to them long enough, a lot of times, you will get useful information."

Part of gaining useful information is convincing locals to risk the well-being of their family in order to secure their communities, said the veteran of two-and-a-half years.

To convince Iraqis to sacrifice, Selge said the BSP is headed in the right direction by taking Soldiers off of Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) and inserting them into local communities.

"A lot of our troops are sitting on the FOBs, not doing anything (outside the wire). Support is very important to us, but at the same time, we need more boots on the ground and more people interacting day to day," Selge said. "It just seems like a lot of the troops aren't necessarily out there as often as they should be, doing what they should be (doing)."

Though the amenities of FOBs will not always be accessible for Soldiers securing Baghdad from Joint Security Stations or Combat Outposts, Selge said the sacrifice will pay dividends in terms of improved security and the overall success of the new security plan.



(Photo by Pfc. Benjamin Gable, 7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

1st Lt. Jacob Czekanski, (second from right) a Silver Creek, N.Y., native with Company B, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, meets with an Iraqi leader and interpreter in Baghdad's Sadr City district March 5 before clearing houses and speaking with locals to understand the security situation in the area.

Security Mission in Sadr City a Step Forward in Baghdad Plan

By Pfc. Benjamin Gable
7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

BAGHDAD – The implementation of the new security plan for the Iraqi capital took another step as Iraqi and Multi-National Division – Baghdad forces entered the eastern district of Sadr City March 4.

Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division conducted security operations and spoke with locals to gather information while Iraqi Army troops searched and cleared houses in the section of Sadr City known as “Thawra 2.”

“I believe the Strykers were used because of their robust firepower and our experience in the area,” said 1st Lt. Jacob Czekanski, a Silver Creek, Mich. native serving with the Company B “Blackhawks,” 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment. “There is a definite psychological impact when we are on the ground.”

The overall objective was to clear and hold the areas while the new joint security station, or JSS, continues construction. The JSS will house coalition and Iraqi security forces and will persist in providing security for Thawra 2.

“This was the [Iraqi’s] mission, we were just there to give support and provide quality control for them,” said Czekanski.

The two-day mission began in the morning March 4 with a meeting of both U.S. and Iraqi commanders on the ground in Sadr City, where final plans were made. Coalition forces linked up with the Iraqi security forces and began the search.

“It’s important that the locals here see their own peo-

ple taking command,” said Spc. Kevin Flannery, an infantryman with Company B. “We are only here to give help, if needed.”

As Soldiers provided security, the Iraqi troops made their way through the area searching houses for weapons caches and intelligence.

They also questioned the tenants of the homes concerning insurgent activities. After each house was searched, the head of the house was asked to sign documentation stating nothing was broken or stolen from the premises by coalition forces.

While the Iraqi security forces were searching and clearing houses, U.S. Soldiers provided security and spoke with locals regarding the state of affairs on the ground. Soldiers spoke with locals, both young and old, in an attempt to better understand how the neighborhood is dealing with illegal activities.

After a quick and thorough search of Thawra 2, the first day ended as troops headed back to their base camps.

“This is a very motivated group and they are on track with operations in the city,” said Czekanski.

Day two picked up where the previous day left off.

Coalition forces were well received and, in some instances, were invited to enter the homes of some residents. A number of Soldiers conversed with residents over chai, a type of hot tea favored by Iraqis, and were praised for helping the Iraqis take control of the security situation.

The second day ended just as the first – as Iraqi and U.S. troops finished clearing their assigned sectors.

“The [Iraqi Army] is on the right track and we are moving in the right direction,” said Spc. Jacob Zamft, an infantryman with Company B



(Photo by Spc. Derron Dickinson, 28th Public Affairs Detachment)

Pfc. Manisha Holley is a woman searcher for Company A, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment. Volunteers, such as Holley, are essential for searching women and children on patrol in order to respect the culture of the region.

Women Troops Play Vital Role for Infantry

By Spc. Derron Dickinson
28th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGHDAD - While Army infantry Soldiers are trained for conducting aggressive operations against hostile targets, they aren't exactly known for their sensitive side, but with a small addition this is starting to change.

In a culture where contact with women is forbidden unless you are closely related, searching civilians can be a challenge. This is where the women Soldiers attached to the Company A, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment come in.

They played a vital role in recent operations in securing Baghdad by performing a task their male counterparts can't - searching women.

“It’s actually fun,” said Sgt. Theresa Johnson, a logistics supply specialist from Fort Lewis who volunteered as a female searcher. “It’s a lot more exciting than sitting at a desk all day. You actually get to get out and see the real Iraq.”

Amid all the controversy of talk of opening combat arms to women, side by side service doesn't seem to be much of an issue in this unit.

“They look after us like sisters,” Johnson said.

Fellow woman searcher and logistics supply specialist Pfc. Manisha Holley said she agreed with Johnson's assessment.

“They act like bodyguards when we step out,” Holley said.

Infantry Soldiers expressed appreciation for the new presence on patrols.

“Actually, they’re a big help to search the females, to make sure they’re not carrying any suicide vests or anything,” said Sgt. 1st Class William Gustwiller, a platoon sergeant with Co. A from Continental, Ohio. “When Holley came out with us on patrols, she was a big help. She helped the women and children relax. You’ve got all these big scary guys coming in, and then there’s her. It was a more relaxed atmosphere.”



(Photo by Sgt. Mike Pryor, 2nd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div. Public Affairs)

Pfc. Reid Woydziak, a paratrooper with B Battery, 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, collects an entourage of young children while escorting his platoon leader to a meeting of the Neighborhood Advisory Council in Adhamiyah, Baghdad Feb. 19.

Troops Build Foundation of Trust in Adhamiyah

By Sgt. Mike Pryor
2nd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – There is no such thing as fast food at Abu Muhanned’s house.

Lunch starts with a tray of chocolates, cigarettes, and conversation. A half hour later, tables are brought in and platters of food arrive.

“My wife was up all night cooking this,” Muhanned says proudly, as he spoons out huge plates of rice, chicken, and vegetables.

Muhanned, a jovial man in his fifties with a white mustache and a protruding belly, makes sure everyone gets their fill, and then some. When one guest waves off a third helping, Muhanned stuffs a banana in his pocket for later.

As the tables are being cleared, he summons a pitcher of sweet, steaming chai tea from the kitchen.

Only when the tea is finished is it finally time to get down to business. Casually, Muhanned tells his guests – all paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division – that he has information to give them about a violent kidnapping.

It is the kind of information often gained from raids or tactical questioning, not handed out over tea and chocolate. But in Baghdad’s Adhamiyah security district, paratroopers from the 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment are learning to fight a new kind of battle, where diplomacy and dialogue are as effective as force.

Based at Combat Outpost War Eagle in Rabi, the 2-319th “Black Falcons” are targeting insurgents, criminals, and violent militia groups with direct action, while simultaneously

trying to win over the population by building up the local infrastructure, economy and political institutions.

“Our traditional Soldier tasks, that’s our night job,” said 1st Lt. Josh Rowan, of College Station, Texas, a platoon leader with B Battery, 2-319 AFAR. “During the day, we have to be police officers and diplomats.”

It’s a balancing act that Rowan compared to “walking a tight rope on a piece of fishing wire,” but it’s one 2-319 paratroopers have had to quickly adapt to since arriving in Adhamiyah in early February. The battalion was part of the “surge” of forces pushed into the capital to implement the new Baghdad security plan.

The combined approach is one of the basic principles of counter-insurgency theory, said 1st Lt. Brook Carrier, the battalion’s civil military operations officer. Rowan’s long lunch at Muhanned’s house Feb. 19 was a typical example of how small-unit leaders in the 2-319th are applying the theory out in the streets and mulhallas, neighborhoods, of Adhamiyah.

Rather than appearing silently out of the dark, as they would on a combat operation, Rowan’s paratroopers arrived like celebrities hitting the red carpet. As soon as they dismounted their trucks, they were surrounded by an entourage of singing, clapping, and cheering children.

The boisterous crowd followed the paratroopers down winding roads until they reached Muhanned’s house. Muhanned is the chairman of the Rabi Neighborhood Advisory Council.

The local NACs are one of the political institutions the Black Falcons want to empower, and Muhanned, a Shiite married to a Sunni and a vocal critic of militia groups in the

area, is a man with a lot of influence.

“He’s kind of like the mayor of Rabi,” said Rowan.

The purpose of the lunch was to discuss plans for a new school, a clinic, and a bridge linking Rabi with a neighborhood across the Tigris River.

The projects serve an obvious humanitarian need. But they also have strategic importance, both for the Black Falcons and Muhanned.

The underlying goal of the projects for the Black Falcons is to help win the loyalty of the people to the Iraqi government and undermine the insurgency’s power base by supplying jobs. Muhanned has his own political agenda to serve, which would be furthered by bringing development to Rabi.

“Everyone sitting in there had a vested interest,” said Rowan.

But those motivations remained hidden under the surface during lunch. Instead, it was an hour of mostly polite chit chat and good food. Yet that hour laid the groundwork for making progress on a dizzying array of objectives.

“On the surface, the talking, the eating, the tea - all that may seem like a huge waste of time. But in order to get to that point where (an Iraqi) trusts you enough to give you information, you have to build a relationship,” said Rowan.

In the end, the success of the Black Falcons’ mission will depend as much on the strength of such relationships as it will on how many raids they conduct or rounds they fire.

“This is going to be the big factor in how Iraq is going to turn out in the next five years,” said Staff Sgt. Antonio Alverado, a squad leader with B Battery. “We have to make an impact.”

One Team:**“White Falcons” and Iraqi Police Keep the Peace**

By Sgt. Mike Pryor
2nd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – The two sergeants, one American, one Iraqi, walk side-by-side at the head of the patrol. As they pass an intersection, the American, Sgt. Chris Schupert of Amsterdam, Mo., stops to pull security. The Iraqi sergeant continues walking.

In a few moments, Schupert catches up with him. Pantomiming with his weapon, Schupert explains what to do when they cross danger areas like an intersection on patrol.

“We pull security here, and wait for the guy behind to come up,” Schupert said to the Iraqi. The Iraqi Sergeant nods in understanding.

At the next crossing the Iraqi Sergeant moves quickly across the road, pausing on the other side to provide cover until Schupert has crossed. After he’s relieved, he falls back into step with Schupert, who gives him a grin and a clap on the back.

Helping Iraqi security forces to make these kinds of small, but important improvements is one of the main objectives of combined U.S.-Iraqi patrols. Paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division’s 2nd “White Falcons” Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment and Iraqi police officers from the 2nd Battalion, 8th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division began conducting joint security patrols in Baghdad’s Adhamiyah security district last week.

“The intention is to start showing these guys how we do patrols, so they can start doing it on their own,” said Sgt. 1st Class Jorge Mazuela, a platoon sergeant and Miami native with Company B, 2-325th AIR.

The White Falcons, based out of Fort Bragg, N.C., have been operating in Adhamiyah since early February. They were part of the first wave of “surge” forces sent into Baghdad to improve the security situation in Iraq’s beleaguered capital. As the



(Photos by Sgt. Mike Pryor, 2nd BCT, 82nd Abn. Div. Public Affairs)

Sanford, Fla., native Sgt. John Reed, a squad leader with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, pauses with his Iraqi counterpart before moving out on a joint patrol through Baghdad’s Adhamiyah security district Feb. 28.

troops from Fort Bragg moved into sector, initial clearing operations were mainly done by U.S. forces. But a strong presence by Iraqi security forces is critical to holding areas now under control and sustaining the momentum provided by the surge.

Under the new security plan, called Operation Fardh Al-Qanoon, the streets of

Baghdad are being flooded with Iraqi Army troops, local Baghdad police officers and Iraqi national police. U.S. Forces are conducting combined operations with all three components, but the White Falcons have been conducting the majority of their joint patrols with the national policemen.

In the past, Iraqi national police units functioned like American S.W.A.T teams, said Staff Sgt. Phillip Cooper, from Oscoda, Mich., a squad leader with Co. B.

“On missions, they would pile into trucks, drive to their objectives, hit their targets, and head home. That all changed with the new security plan,” Cooper said. “Now, INP units are being told to patrol the streets on foot.”

To help with that transition, they are partnering with experts on dismounted urban operations like the White Falcons.

Pfc. Branigan Kerr, of Los Angeles, a rifleman with Co. B. said the tactics the White Falcons have been demonstrating include movement techniques, procedures to maintain 360-degree security, how to identify people who need to be searched, how to stop cars, and what to look for when checking a car for bombs, among other things.

“It works for us, and we’re pretty sure it will work for them,” Kerr said.

The White Falcons are also giving the INP pointers on how to plan and coordinate their own missions, said Mazuela.

“We want them to have an organized

plan that gets passed out to everyone in their element,” he said.

The atmosphere before the White Falcons’ patrol with police from the 2-8-2 INP was reminiscent of a first day at school. As the paratroopers were paired off with counterparts from the police, there were some awkward, getting-to-know you moments. But pretty soon the Iraqis and Americans were handling each others’ weapons, talking about their kids and cracking jokes with each other.

Once the squads had been integrated, the patrol moved out. The Iraqis were casual at first, some lighting cigarettes or sitting down to rest on halts. But after coaching by the paratroopers, they gradually adjusted their focus. Soon they were taking the lead, stepping out into the streets to halt traffic at road crossings and searching vehicles while the Americans held back.

“They’re catching on fast,” Schupert said when it was over.

Before they split up for the day, the paratroopers and police sat down and reviewed how the patrol had gone. They talked about what had gone right, and where there was room for improvement. Then the INP got into pick-ups and drove off, leaving the paratroopers alone.

Real progress would take time, Sgt 1st Class Mazuela said, and the White Falcons had to be prepared take the time to make it work.



Sgt. Christopher Schupert (right), of Amsterdam, Mo., a squad leader with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, shares some patrolling techniques with Sgt. Salaam, a squad leader with the 2nd Battalion, 8th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division, during a joint patrol in Baghdad’s Adhamiyah security district Feb. 28.



(Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Conner, 15th SB Public Affairs)

Sgt. Lawrence Jamme (Right), a multi channel systems operator and maintainer from Dallas introduces Gen. Benjamin Griffin, Commander, Army Material Command, to one of his Soldiers during a 24 Feb. visit to Taji, Iraq. Sgt. Jamme and his fellow troops briefed Gen. Griffin on communications equipment from the 15th Brigade Troops Battalion.

Army Material Command CG Visits

Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Conner
15th SB, Public Affairs

CAMP TAJI, Iraq –General Benjamin Griffin, Commander, Army Material Command, spoke with leaders and Soldiers of the 15th Sustainment Brigade during a 24 Feb. visit to the “WagonMaster” footprint at Taji, Iraq.

Providing the primary logistics and support for all units within Multi-National Division-Baghdad, Colonel Aundre Piggee, 15th SB Commander, explained the role the brigade plays, especially since the recent surge in combat units to his area of operations.

“Baghdad is the center of gravity,” said Piggee. “We support all forces operating in this battle space.”

In addition to units in the Baghdad area, the 15th SB maintains logistical over site and support to troops from Kalsu to the Jordanian border.

During a command brief, Gen Griffin voiced concern over the relationship a sustainment brigade needs to have with supported units. Namely, the ability to adapt and change to supply and support needs in a fluid combat environment.

“I think you’ve done a great job with that,” he said of the 15th SB.

Col. Piggee said that the linchpin to the success the “WagonMaster’s” have had comes from adherence to the fundamentals of leadership, standards, discipline and training.

“We’ve been able to meet every requirement,” he said. “We don’t expect any challenges.”



(Photo by Spc. Karly Cooper, 15th SB Public Affairs)

Sgt. Julie Oliver, an executive administrative assistant with the 15th Sustainment Brigade, and her husband, Spc. Joe Oliver, a driver for the brigade, serve together at Camp Taji, Iraq.

Couple Serving in Iraq

By Spc. Karly Cooper
15th Sustainment Brigade Public Affairs

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – When people think of Soldiers coming over to the combat zone, they often think of the family they leave behind. Spouses, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and especially children come to mind. It is very common now days to find spouses serving in combat with their better half.

This being the case with Sgt. Julie Oliver and her husband Spc. Joe Oliver, both with the 15th Sustainment Brigade.

Julie, a Cincinnati native, grew up with four sisters, all tomboys. They would go down the street and play with the neighbor boys who had five brothers, playing war. So naturally when she graduated high school, what better way to start a new chapter in her life than by serving in the Army.

“When it came time to do something after high school, the Army seemed like the best choice,” she said.

Her sister had been active Army for a year by the time that she enlisted and left for Basic Combat Training at Ft. Jackson, S.C. She went in on the Delayed Entry Program and left for training in August 2005. After AIT she was sent to Company B, 27th Main Support Battalion at Fort Hood, Texas.

“I started getting to know my husband two days before we deployed,” said Sgt. Oliver.

Her first deployment brought her to Camp Taji with her soon-to-be husband. They both worked in the motor pool as light-wheeled vehicle mechanics.

“The first date that my husband took me on was to a smoothie shop that used to be here. He picked me up in a humvee.”she said with a big smile.

They were married on April 12,, 2005, after they returned from deployment.

“I don’t know how I’d survive over here without him.” said Sgt. Oliver.

Spc. Oliver, a Texarkana, Texas native decided after school to join the Army. His father served in the Navy and grandfather served in the Army. He wanted a better job and to get out of the town that he grew up in. In July 2000, he left for Basic Combat Training at Fort Jackson, S.C. His first duty station was Fort Hood. Then he headed to Taji, Iraq.

“My first deployment was exciting, there was so much going on and it was all new,” said Spc. Oliver, who works as a brigade driver.

He went out on convoy missions driving heavy equipment transport vehicles. He got to know his future wife then, too.

“It’s fun having Julie here with me,” he said. “It definitely makes it (the deployment) more enjoyable.”

The couple said their families support their Army careers. Both said they are proud that they are serving over here together.

“I am, most definitely, making a career out of being in the Army,” said Spc. Oliver.

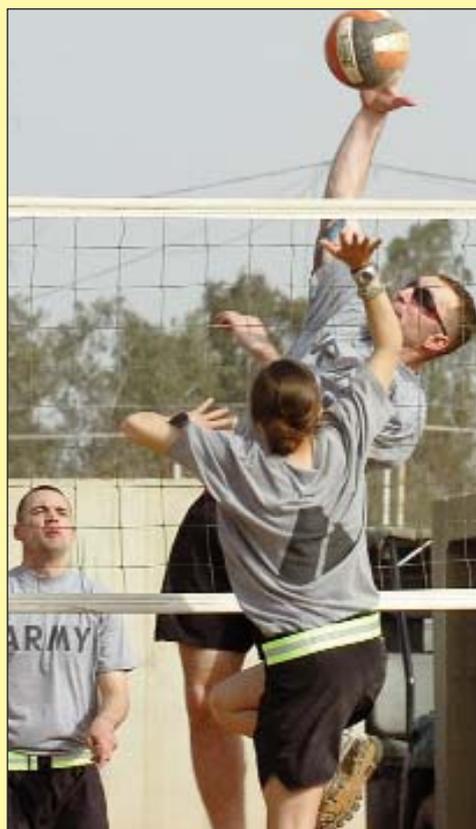
The couple plans on starting a family once they return home and settle back into Army life back at Fort Hood.



(Photo by Spc. Karly Cooper, 15th Sustainment Brigade Public Affairs)

Celebrating ‘Mardi Gras’

(Above) In the spirit of “Mardi Gras,” Soldiers with the 15th Sustainment Brigade show their dancing skills at a mid-tour party Feb. 25 at Camp Taji, Iraq. Soldiers enjoyed dancing, sports tournaments, relay races and food at the event. (Right) A Soldier with the 15th Sustainment Brigade jumps to spike a ball during a game of volleyball at a mid-tour “Mardi Gras” party Feb. 25. Soldiers enjoyed dancing, sports tournaments, relay races and food at the event at Camp Taji, Iraq.





(Photo illustration by Pfc. William Hatton, 7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

To Re-up, or Not to Re-up That is the Question

By Pfc. William Hatton
7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Soldiers thinking about continuing their military career already have a lot to reflect on, but career counselors with the 1st Cavalry Division retention office would like to add one more variable to the mix – money.

Soldiers that are considering leaving the service after six to 15 years of duty should know of all the financial benefits of staying in the military, said Master Sgt. Christina Plante, a career counselor with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Cav. Div.

The military provides housing, medical and dental care, inexpensive life insurance, money for college and addition benefits for Soldiers with families.

Finding a civilian job with the same benefits can be a challenge.

“A sergeant in for six years would have to make over \$21 an hour to equate what he or she receives in base pay and in all other military compensations,” Plante said. “A staff sergeant with 10 years of service would have to make over \$25 an hour to bring home what he or she is bringing home in the Army.

That doesn’t include the retirement benefits of staying in the military. One of the biggest considerations Soldiers that are getting out at 12 to 15 years need to make is what is being lost in retirement pay and benefits, Plante said.

“A staff sergeant that retires after twenty years of service will receive over \$1.2 million cumulatively over a thirty year period and a sergeant first class that retires after 24

years will receive over \$2.6 million cumulatively over a forty year period,” the San Antonio native said.

Soldiers that are interested in finding out how much they would make in retirement pay can check out the retirement calculator at www.dod.gov/militarypay/retirement/calc/index.html, Plante said.

Arming Soldiers with the information of what they have, what they can receive, and counseling them on their career decisions is very important, Plante said.

Soldiers that are questioning whether to reenlist should ask themselves three important questions, said Plante. The first is why you entered the Army. The second would be what prompted you to stay so far. The third would be what is prompting you to leave, she added.

One thing a Soldier shouldn’t do, when deciding whether to reenlist or not, is to make the decision in haste and without thought, Plante said.

“Don’t let the bad days control your decision,” Plante said. “Everyone has bad days, but the important thing is to not let it alone rule your decision.”

These experienced Soldiers lead today’s Army, and she wants them to understand what they are losing by getting out early.

“We want to let the career Soldiers know that they are valued, and thought they might not consider the compensations they receive and what they bring home,” Plante said. “We value them and want them to be fully aware of the benefits they are losing if they ETS (estimated termination of service).”

Soldiers that want to learn more can visit their retention office to find out more about what their options are.

Helping Soldiers Deal with Stress

By Spc. Courtney Marulli
2nd BCT, 2nd Inf. Div. Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE RUSTAMIYAH, BAGHDAD, Iraq—Being exposed to the traumas of war isn’t easy, but no one has to bear that alone, as Combat Stress Control Teams are available to answer questions, give advice and to lend an ear to every Soldier in the 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

One CSC team is based at Rustamiyah, but is ready to travel to different forward operating bases in order to reach all the Soldiers who need to talk.

Capt. Vaughn A. DeCoster, the officer-in-charge of the CSC team, 113th Medical Company CSC, said combat stress and mental health go hand-in-hand, but what separates them is that combat stress is designed to be preventive in order to help Soldiers before their stress becomes a problem.

DeCoster, of Fayetteville, Ark., and a clinical social worker, said the first wave of Operation Iraq Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom were the first major conflicts to use combat stress as a forward deployed asset. Before that, DeCoster said Soldiers who had stress issues were sent to the rear and 55 percent returned. However, combat stress resources are now available, and there is a return rate of 98 percent, he said.

DeCoster said his job is to give debriefings to units or teams after they have gone through a critical event.

“I bring the Soldiers together as a group to begin a process to help them heal,” DeCoster said. “It’s a start, not a quick fix.”

DeCoster’s duties also include providing therapy sessions for Soldiers and working with medical providers to get needed medications.

Even though it may seem depressing to always work around traumatic events, DeCoster and his team stay positive by walking around and talking to Soldiers.

“It’s usually our stress management,” he said.

DeCoster, who signed up for military service after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, said he was surprised how perceptive the commanders have been about the importance of having a combat stress team available for Soldiers. Combat stress is normal and so are the symptoms such as nightmares and fears, he said.

“Soldiers come in and think they’re going crazy, but they’re not,” he said. “It’s a normal experience.”

Helping DeCoster are Sgt. Jeffrey T. Weems, of Olympia, Wash., and Spc. Kirsten M. Shaffer, of Exira, Iowa. Weems and Shaffer are mental health specialists with the 113th Medical Company CSC, who provide aid through talking to Soldiers and group sessions.

Weems said the two biggest stressors they deal with are home life issues and combat exposure. Soldiers are reassured that what they are experiencing is normal, be it nightmares, jumpiness, excessive anxiety, or memory problems.

“We show them ways of helping themselves,” Weems said.

Shaffer said a lot of Soldiers harbor fears about going outside the wire after witnessing a traumatic event or staying inside the wire where they worry about mortar attacks.

“It’s so rewarding seeing the difference between them walking through the door a train wreck and then, weeks later, peachy keen,” Shaffer said. “It’s great.”

Confidentiality is a large aspect of the Combat Stress Control team and they want Soldiers to know that what they say is confidential.

The CSC team is available at any FOB and information can be found by going to a local aid station.

Rank & Time in Service	Yearly Income with Dependents	Civilian Income Equivalent
Specialist (E-4) 3 or more years	\$39,040.32	\$18.77 per hour
Sergeant (E-5) 6 or more years	\$45,192.72	\$21.73 per hour
Staff Sergeant (E-6) 10 or more years	\$52,407.12	\$25.20 per hour
Sergeant 1st Class (E-7) 14 or more years	\$60,586.32	\$29.13 per hour

Soldiers at War Have More Options to Stay in Touch

By Amanda Kim Stairrett
Killeen Daily Herald

Though Tomas L. Shacklee worked as a communications soldier during his two tours in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, communication to his family back in the United States was "almost non-existent," he said Feb. 15 while sitting in his grandson's home in Belton.

The retired Army soldier's son, Chief Warrant Officer-5 Tomas M. Shacklee, and grandson, Chief Warrant Officer-2 Michael T. Shacklee, followed his footsteps into the Army.

The middle and younger Shacklees are helicopter pilots in the 1st Cavalry Division's 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, serving in Iraq.

How families communicate with their soldiers during wartime has changed vastly since the eldest Shacklee deployed in 1965 and 1968. Whereas he had to rely on ink and paper, Michael and his wife, April, use everything from instant messaging to Web cameras.

Seeing a live feed of a family member's face was virtually impossible for Tomas it was hard enough to make a personal phone call. During a deployment, Tomas estimated he made phone calls home two times and those were limited to 2-3 minutes. They didn't have the high-tech satellites, he said, relying instead on phone signals transmitted by microwaves.

The conversations were limited to a, "Hi, how are you and goodbye," he said.

Fast-forward to 1990 when Tomas M. deployed to the Middle East in support of Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. Communication had advanced in 25 years and though Thomas L. had retired from 30 years of active duty, he still worked for the military as a communications expert, this time as a civilian. He was able to talk to his son on the phone a few times.

Like the middle Shacklee, Command Sgt. Maj. Steven Burke, the senior noncommissioned officer for the 1st Cavalry's 1st Brigade Combat Team rear command, deployed in support of Desert Shield/Desert Storm in late 1990.

He thought back to 16 years ago and recalled that the link back to the States was through a Military Affiliate Radio System or MARS, which is much like a Ham radio. This was available when soldiers first arrived in the Middle East before dispersing to their bases. They would often have to stand in line for hours to use the MARS, Burke said, and had to use standard radio language.

"Hi honey, how are you? Over," Burke recalled, then laughed.

Once the troops got into the desert, established areas had phone tents where they could make calls once every two weeks or once a month. A group of soldiers would get trucked to the tents to make their calls.

These tent calls were expensive and unreliable. There was a delay in the call, making it difficult to carry on a conversation, and sometimes the line just cut out, Burke said. He thought that each call cost between \$20 and \$30.

Burke deployed to the Middle East again in 2004, this time in support of Operation



(Photo by Steve Traynor, Killeen Daily Herald)

April Schacklee holds a blanket with her husband's handprints on it. Her husband Chief Warrant Officer 2 Michael Shacklee is currently serving with the 1st Cavalry Division's 1st Air Cavalry Brigade.

Iraqi Freedom II. Once the troops landed in Kuwait, there were phone kiosks and trailers, he said. The lines of soldiers were just as long, but more phones were available, he said. Once the units arrived at their bases, they established their own communication links in places like Internet cafes, making it easier for soldiers to get access to home.

Readily available communication like telephones and Internet connections on bases have now become part of quality of life, Burke said. That wasn't the case for the Shacklees who served in Vietnam.

"We were fighting a war where the warriors came first," he said.

Not much thought was given to the families back home and maintaining that connection for the welfare of the soldier.

When the other two Shacklees left in late 2006, communication opened up even more. Michael was able to get an Internet connection in his room and Burke said the soldiers deploying today have high-tech international cell phones.

Other soldiers have opted to buy cell phones in Iraq, said Maj. Steven Lamb, a spokesman for the 1st Cavalry Division.

Availability of the individual Internet connections depends on where the soldier is

stationed, Lamb said. Larger forward operating bases have the connections, and for those who can't get access to one, Internet cafes are available. Access at smaller bases or remote outposts is "limited at best," Lamb said.

Soldiers pay an average of \$65 per month for an Internet connection in their room. Lamb said the service isn't that great because weather and volume-capability issues often interfere with downloading.

"For those that have (Internet access in their rooms) it appears to be quite popular," he said. "It is always better to be able to talk to family and friends in the comfort and privacy of your own room rather than at phone banks and Internet cafes."

April agreed, saying that no matter what the cost, that connection to her husband was worth it.

She talks to her husband almost every day using a Web camera and instant messaging or e-mail. The camera doesn't have sound and has a delay, but she and their two daughters, Michelle, 3, and Lillian, 18 months, get to see Michael's face.

The longest the family has gone without communicating with Michael has been a few days. With the instant communication that the Shacklees and many other Fort Hood

families are utilizing now means that the importance of methods used in earlier wars letter writing has diminished. And that primarily is because of the time it takes for a letter to reach a soldier.

Lamb said mail takes anywhere from nine to 14 days to travel from the United States to Iraq. This all depends on where the soldier is located, too. A soldier stationed at a remote outpost may have to wait another three to four days for the delivery.

Today's "snail mail" is speedy when compared to that from Vietnam. The eldest Shacklee said letters would take anywhere from 10 days to three weeks. Lamb said when his dad served in the Special Forces during the same war, his mother was content to receive a postcard every two to three months.

Burke remembered a time during that deployment when his niece sent him a Thanksgiving care package. She mailed it in late October or early November and it arrived to Burke in February. It had been run over by a vehicle and the cheese crackers that had once been inside were pulverized and a cheese dust covered the gifts inside.

"Mail call" is a thing of the past now. Mail comes to a central distribution center at a forward operating base where it is distributed down to the battalion and then the company level, Lamb said.

Soldiers in remote locations get deliveries via re-supply convoys.

But that delivery time is overshadowed by technology. E-mails and instant messages can be sent in seconds and soldiers can see the smiling faces of their children despite a nine-hour time difference.

It's the sort of instant gratification that outweighs any disadvantages, April said.

She did say, however, that it is harder to convey feelings and context in e-mails and instant messages. April and Michael exchange short letters notes, really that are typically enclosed in care packages filled with snacks and gifts.

April and the girls put their tiny handprints on a blanket for Michael, and he sent them one back with his handprints.

Burke said care packages were critical during his first deployment to Iraq, something that everyone looked forward to.

Burke and other "old timers" marvel at how communication has advanced, he said, and added that people today take that luxury for granted. Advancement has led to more anxiety in cases, he said. Because of the ever-changing situation in Iraq, communications have had to adapt to the missions and the soldiers' availability. Sometimes families don't understand that, Burke said.

As a leader in the rear command, it is Burke's job to make sure families are informed of why their soldier may not be able to call or log in to an instant-messaging program.

Lamb said that what is available to a soldier for communication is based on where that soldier is located in Iraq.

"The bottom line is that we are more connected than we ever have been, even if it is only at dial-up speeds, and our cell phones don't get great reception," he said.

"It is still much better than it used to be."



(Photo by Pfc. Jon Cano, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div. (LI) Public Affairs)

The People's Champ

Rapper Paul Wall greets soldiers at the Moral, Welfare and Recreation facility on Camp Striker, Iraq Feb 23. Actor/comedian Jamie Kennedy was also on hand to perform for the troops. After the show, the entertainers sat for pictures and signed autographs.

Chick-flick Marks Historic Turnabout for the Red Sox

The New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox have been feuding since their creation. This has created fanatical fans that refuse to miss a single game.

Whether glued to the television or sitting in the stands. You know the kind. The ones that pull out their lucky socks and jersey (whether clean or dirty) for game day and drive around with tribute flags hanging out of the windows of their utility vehicle.

Now this breed isn't limited to the Sox and Yankees, nor is it limited to baseball. My office and family is full of Green Bay Packer fanatics. The kind that paint their faces and wear cheeseheads.

In fact, it is pretty much guaranteed that I have at least six blood relatives sitting in the stands at every home game in Lambeau Field.

Although I am not the huge sports fan, I even get pulled into the hype.

I own key-chains, blankets, socks, pajamas, coats etc, and I have known all about the legend that is Brett Favre since I was

Random Reviews

Sgt. Nicole Kojetin



about 12.

My dad gets credit for explaining the game and telling me everything to turn me into an officially stamped *Cheesehead*. But I will never forget my first trip to that big field with my parents at my side, even though it was just a pre-season game.

So when I watched 20th Century Fox's *Fever Pitch*, I completely understood. I understand the addiction.

The tale starts with little 7-year-old, Ben Wrightman, moved to a big, new town and is exposed to Fenway Park, in all its glory, by his uncle. Almost immediately after stepping

into the stands he was a fan. As Ben grows (into the character played by Jimmy Fallon), he gets sucked into the fanatic stage with Red Sox paraphernalia covering every inch of his apartment and attending every single game.

His obsession creates two different Bens: "Red Sox Fan Ben" and "Winter Ben."

The Winter Ben met Lindsay Meeks (Drew Barrymore) while taking some of his geometry students on a field trip to her company. After getting taunted by his students, Ben asks out Lindsay and is shot down.

Eventually, she changes her mind and they set a date, which unfortunately ends up corresponding with Lindsay's bout of food poisoning. He stays and cleans up the bathroom and the dog and this enables him to get his foot in the door.

Take care of your girl when she is down and she will keep you forever. (Are you taking notes? I am full of good tips)

Their relationship continues, and they have some non-vomit related fun during the off-season. When spring training kicks off,

Lindsay gets her first taste of Red Sox Fan Ben, and isn't so enthusiastic about what she sees.

They agree that they should turn their relationship down a little during the season.

Now this film is pretty much the standard romantic comedy, but the fact that they filmed the movie during the 2004 Red Sox season makes it cool.

You know, the year that the BoSox broke *The Curse of the Bambino*; the curse that dates back to 1920, when the owner of the Red Sox, Harry Frazee, sold a young George Herman "Babe" Ruth's contract to the New York Yankees in order to refinance his girlfriend's play. After that deal, the Sox didn't win a single World Series -- until 2004.

The script of the film had to be rewritten to celebrate this historical event, and is a silly reminder that no matter how many games you lose, you can still conquer all.

Look out Super Bowl XLII, here we come.

(4 out of 5 stars)



(Photo by Spc. Nathan Hoskins, 1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Can you do the Can-Can?

The Buffalo Bills cheerleaders dance the Can-Can for the Soldiers of Camp Taji, Iraq during a show for the troops Feb. 25. More than 100 Soldiers and civilian contractors showed up to see the 'Buffalo Jills' perform.



The 'Buffalo Jills,' cheerleaders for the Buffalo Bills football team, put on a show for Soldiers at Camp Taji, Iraq Feb. 25.

March (Mid-Tour!) Madness Grips the Nation, Baseball a Bore

FORT LIVING ROOM, Texas – Ah, here I sit in Killeen with my feet propped up on my trusty (old) reclining couch, television remote in one hand and a frosty glass of Texas sweet tea in the other. Even on my basic cable service I can find a sporting event to stare at 24-hours-a-day, as long as you count *World Series of Poker* re-runs and the *World Curling Championship* as sports, that is.

Truly, my cup runneth over. (Honey, can you bring me a paper towel?)

Of course, environmental leave isn't all about lazing around the house getting your better half to wait on you hand and foot. I've been to the chaplain's reintegration training. It's all about relationships; like my relationship with the wife, the kiddies, the lawn, the garden, the runny faucet and the garage I trashed as I packed out to get to Iraq.

The reality never quite lives up to the fantasy, it seems. 'March Madness,' the annual pilgrimage of 65 NCAA Division I basketball teams doesn't either.

As I write this, it's championship week for all the conferences. Some teams from lesser leagues have already secured their conference's *one* automatic bid, but other big name schools sit on the bubble looking for at-large bids from the selection committee.

The truth is that for every George Mason (who made the Final Four last year) out there, there are dozens of major conference

Trigger Pull

Master Sgt.
Dave Larsen



'contenders' who get hot at the end of the year and make noise at the big dance. There has never been a team from leagues like the Sun Belt, Horizon League or the Colonial Athletic Association win the whole she-bang.

And there won't be this year, either. Too many small schools head to the NCAA Division I Basketball Championships "just happy to be there," though they all claim otherwise. Most of them go home the first weekend, blown out by a number one or number two seed and watch the rest of the tourney from their living room, like me.

There is drama in the tournament, but in the end, the wheels of Cinderella's carriage come off as it reverts to pumpkin status.

There are the have's and the have not's in big time college basketball. Television exposure, big budgets (at big schools) and location, location, location all play a part in recruiting. Let's face it, if you were young, talented and had every recruiter in the country drooling over having you in town for a

year (because the NBA looms as soon as you're draft eligible) where would you rather play: Los Angeles with UCLA or Springfield, Mo., with Southwest Missouri State?

It's a no-brainer. Rub elbows with Kobe Bryant instead of the maker of Precious Moments knickknacks.

There's a lack of drama in the world of Major League Baseball, too. Spring training is well underway, and the major story lines in the big leagues again revolve around big-name free agent signings and the latest, greatest star foreign import offered millions by either the Boston Red Sox or the New York Yankees.

If you pick the teams from the largest cities with the biggest payrolls, chances are you will be 75 percent correct on your play-off predictions for the upcoming baseball season.

The Detroit Tigers shocked the Yankees in the playoffs and even made to the World Series, yet it was a sluggish St. Louis Cardinals team that whipped them in the fall classic. Despite adding Gary Sheffield, don't expect the Tigers to reclaim their American League pennant this season.

The American League will belong to either the Yankees or the Red Sox – depending on whose millionaires play better. Forget team chemistry.

In baseball it's all about buying the best

talent.

In the National League, expect the Cardinals to remain on top of their game and the senior circuit.

Yet, millions of fans will fill the stands hoping that their team can find 'the right stuff' or whatever it takes to put them in the hunt for a World Series title. All will fall short, as the prohibitive favorites grind the competition to dust over the grueling 162-game season.

For those of us who cheer on small market clubs (in my case, the Milwaukee Brewers), we can sit back and boast for a few weeks in April or May as our teams sit atop the standings. Then, like Cinderella stories in the NCAA, the bubble bursts.

Despite some cynicism, I still love sports. I played baseball and football into my high school years and still can hit free throws (about a 75 percent clip) better than many who get millions to do it.

My sons, especially my eight-year-old, are beginning to catch the fever. That shared love of competition, learning the "thrill of victory and the agony of defeat" is just beginning to manifest itself in my boys and its fun to see, and enjoy. Those little boys, more than any list of 'honey-do' projects, actually keep me off the couch more than not.

That's my reality on R&R. It doesn't quite live up to fantasy, because it's *better*.