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Crossed Sabers

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DoD Unveils Compensation Program for Long Deployments

American Forces Press Service & MND-B Staff

WASHINGTON – The Defense Department April 18 unveiled a program that will reward administrative leave to service members whose service in combat does not meet the department's goal for the time at home station between deployments.

DoD has had a policy since 2004 that pays service members who are extended in theater beyond 12 months \$1,000 a month. That policy is still in effect.

"What I have been told by finance and the (Multi-National Division - Baghdad human resources and administrative office), is that if we are officially extended by the Secretary of Defense then we will still receive an additional \$200 per month hardship duty pay and \$800 a month in assignment incentive pay, which is the \$1,000 we have all been hearing about," said Capt. Jon Flores, the Division Special Troops Battalion personnel officer.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates directed the development of the new reward program Jan. 19, when he implemented a force management policy stating that DoD's goal

was to give active-duty troops two years at home station for every year deployed, and reserve component troops five years at home station for every year deployed.

Under the new policy, active-duty service members who are deployed for more than 12 months in a 36-month period will earn one day of administrative absence for each month beyond 12. If service members are deployed for more than 18 months in a 36-month period, they will earn two days of a month. Past 24 months, they will earn four days a month.

Members of the reserve components will earn one day of administrative absence a month for every month beyond 12, two days if they are mobilized past 18 months, and four days if they are mobilized past 24 months in a 72-month period.

Administrative absences are days off authorized by the commander, and are separate from normal leave accrued by a service member.

In a Pentagon news conference announcing the policy, Michael Dominguez, principal deputy undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, said that this program is meant to recognize the sacrifices service members make, but

is in no way trying to put a physical value on their service.

"This program can't be viewed as being commensurate with the level of service that they offer to the nation. In many respects, while it is substantive and it is tangible, it's also symbolic. It's part of our recognition that we're keeping them in our thoughts and we're trying to do something for them," he said.

The policy is retroactive to Jan. 19, so any service member who was deployed or involuntarily mobilized from that day forward, whose service exceeds the time frame in the policy, will earn the days off, Dominguez said. Also, any troops who were deployed within the last three years, and are deployed now, will earn administrative leave for their current deployment, he said.

In deciding what compensation to give service members who are deployed more frequently than DoD would like, defense officials considered a range of options, Dominguez said. Monetary compensation was considered, but time off seemed the logical choice.

The administrative leave service members earn under this policy will stay with them through their military career and can be used anytime, with commander approval, he said.



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

Ready and Waiting

A Soldier with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, pulls security for his squad as they move toward the forest during a mission to search for caches in Baghdad's Al Mansour neighborhood April 4.



(U.S. Army photo)

Nahias (local Iraqi governments) and Qadas (regional Iraqi governments) throughout the Baghdad province meet April 14 during the Baghdad Provincial Council Conference held in the Iraqi capital to discuss their progress made in 2006 and future projects for 2007.

Provincial Conference Covers Progress, Planning

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- Nahias (similar to town governments) and Qadas (compared with counties) throughout the Baghdad province met with their regional council April 14 during the Baghdad Provincial Council Conference held in Baghdad to discuss their progress in 2006 and future projects for 2007.

Representatives from all six Qadas in the Baghdad Province and most of the Nahias attended the Iraqi-led conference. Serving only as observers who provided advice when needed, senior leaders from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, as well as members of Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams (EPRT) and civil affairs specialists, were also on hand for the event.

"This was an opportunity for the Qadas to bring up issues related

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Extension Announcement Means We Stay on Course

On April 11 the Secretary of Defense announced a new policy extending the length of deployment tours for active duty U.S. Army units in Iraq up to 15 months.

I, like most of you, learned of this after Secretary Gates was forced to publicly announce the policy change.

I share Lt. Gen. Odierno's regret that we were not able to share this important information with you and your families through command channels prior to the public announcement.

The shift to a 15-month deployment cycle is part of the Army's decision to sustain our capabilities here while ensuring all units get 12 months at home station between tours for training, reset and time with their families.

The goal of the policy change is to provide better predictability and sustainability in how our forces are deployed. Our extended service will help to maintain the progress and momentum we've gained and will benefit the Army and our country during this time of war. The details of how this new policy adjusts individual unit rotations will be passed through the formation and our rear detachments as soon as we know them.

This extension is hardest on our families and loved ones. They should have a commitment to our nation with dignity and resolve along side us. Rest assured that our dedication to them stands firm. We will not fail them and will continue to do everything possible to care for them as they serve and help to defend our nation.

Stay confident in your training, your fellow Soldiers, your leaders and our mission. You are getting results here every day on freedom's frontier. Your efforts to protect the hard fought freedoms won by the generations before us represent the highest traditions of military service.

The American people deeply appreciate and respect your noble efforts here. Your service and sacrifice serves as a shining example of all that is good and right with our nation. They are very proud of you, and so am I.

FIRST TEAM !

Pegasus 6 Sends

Maj. Gen.
Joseph F. Fil,
Jr.



A Soldier's Perspective

By Sgt. Todd Selge,
5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment

When you hear about the war in Iraq, you hear it from a high-level Army spokesperson or you hear tragedy and "another deadly day" from the media. The view on the ground, from the Soldier's perspective, is often overlooked.

We are the ones who live the conflict every day, who see the progress day to day. We are the ones who experience the sorrows, deal face to face with the people and see the enemy's effort to undo every good thing the Iraqi people and coalition forces have done.

What every Soldier wants is to succeed in our mission and go home to our families. The things we do each day allow us the ability to do just that.

The Soldiers make the many successes of the coalition possible. My unit, Company A, 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, is no exception.

The most important success is getting the Iraqi security forces organized and capable of handling every problem which may arise in the future. Accomplishing this happens on all levels, from the commanders down to the average private.

Our Soldiers develop friendships with the Iraqi troops and police. We joke, eat, talk about family and conduct missions together. We provide a model for the ISF to follow during the time we spend with one another.

We have a training program, where Iraqi Army soldiers come and learn the same basic tasks every U.S. Army Soldier knows.

Every day Soldiers work hand-in-hand to teach the IA to succeed in securing their country.

Since we have been in Mosul, the ISF have been the main effort.

Our joint successes include finding countless caches, killing or capturing anti-Iraqi force personnel and thwarting attacks targeting coalition forces. The ISF continue to gain the confidence of their fellow countrymen.

We are also building important and long-lasting relationships with the surrounding communities. We continuously visit schools and neighborhoods to give the kids backpacks full of supplies, hand out candy and listen to the concerns of the people. We ask about their basic services such as food, water, electricity and fuel. We hand out cards with hotline numbers to address any problems and we share handshakes.

We see the smiles of a hopeful generation firsthand and see the efforts of anti-Iraqi forces to shatter those dreams.

Recent tactics by the insurgents are trying to break these bonds.

There has been a major effort by insurgents to sell and hand out a wide variety of realistic-looking toy guns.

Their hope is for the ISF and coalition forces to engage children. But with constant training and help from the communities, we will yet again foil the enemy's plans to promote chaos and hatred.

Every day we interact and help Iraq grow, we are one day closer to success and one day closer to seeing our families.

What does the average Soldier think on a daily basis? He wants to accomplish the mission. He wants to see the smiles of the Iraqi people endure.

He is grateful for everything he has back home, and he wishes the very same freedom he is fighting for, upon the country of Iraq.

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Spur of the Moment

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

With the recent announcement of the deployment extension for troops in Iraq, what do you plan on doing with that extra money?



Staff Sgt. Heather Hapanowich
Headquarters and Headquarters
Company, 89th Military Police Brigade

"Harley parts because my Harley's got to look pretty. I got to get it up to standard. I can't have it looking like it just came out of the store. I bought it during my deployment here."



Spc. Christopher Irving
Company E, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry
Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st
Cavalry Division

"I am putting it all away for a house."



"I am going to get a car. I'm not sure what kind, but I'm getting one."

Cpl. Matthew Burke
Company A, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry
Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat
Team, 2nd Infantry Division

"If we get extended, I'll probably use the money to furnish and improve a house I want to buy back at Fort Hood."

1st Lt. Randall Bittner
Headquarters and Headquarters
Company, 89th Military Police
Brigade



Sgt. Robert Dedeaux
Company B, 1st Battalion, 34th Armor
Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st
Infantry Division

"I have a new-born son and I am going to shower him with gifts. Nothing he can use though because he's only five months old, like a three-wheeler for when he's four or five years old, a ten-speed, and a Playstation 3."

Baghdad News Briefs



(U.S. Army photo)

Manchester, N.H. native Maj. Gary DuFresne, the 1st Brigade Combat Team's brigade surgeon, treats a six-month old Iraqi infant suffering from a high fever April 5 on Camp Taji, Iraq. Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment medically evacuated the baby boy from his village of Sheik Hammed, Iraq after being approached by the infant's father.

Soldiers Help Save Life of Iraqi Infant

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers came to the aid of an ailing Iraqi infant April 5 in the village of Sheik Hammed, Iraq.

While on a patrol through the village, Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment were approached by a villager carrying his sick 6-month-old son in his arms.

Medics on the patrol determined the child had a high fever and would die without further treatment. Within minutes, they had the child medically evacuated from the area.

The father and son were first brought to Camp Taji for the baby's initial treatment and then flown to the 28th Combat Support Hospital in Baghdad for further treatment.



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

Cpl. Francisco Frontera, a military policeman with the 240th Military Police Company, 759th MP Battalion, 89th MP Brigade, is given a coin by the Multi-National Division – Baghdad and 1st Cavalry Division's top noncommissioned officer, Command Sgt. Maj. Philip Johndrow, moments after being pinned with a Purple Heart at the 28th Combat Support Hospital April 10.

Leader Spends an 'Ordinary Day Spent With Extraordinary Soldiers'

By Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma
1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – Percentages are compiled, trends are tracked, and numbers are tallied in daily reports that flood the desks of senior leaders, but one senior leader likes to step away from his desk, away from the numbers, and get up close and personal with his Soldiers.

The Multi-National Division – Baghdad's top noncommissioned officer, Command Sgt. Maj. Philip Johndrow, makes it a priority to visit with his Soldiers at the 28th Combat Support Hospital about three times a week.

"You can get caught up in the numbers of stats, but what we never want to lose is the human dimension of our warriors and what a great tight-knit family we are," said the Townsend, Mont., native.

During his visit to the medical facility April 10, Johndrow talked to and joked around with MND-B Soldiers.

He also handed out phone cards, several coins and honored a couple deserving Soldiers with Purple Hearts.

One of the Soldiers awarded the Purple Heart was Pfc. Burley Miller, an infantryman with Company B, 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, a Soldier recovering from a gunshot wound.

Johndrow ran into Miller's brother-in-arms on the first floor and asked if they were ready to go up see their Soldier and they headed upstairs to see the "Black Lion." Johndrow said it was obvious how much they wanted to see their recovering troop.

"When they all walked into that room and (Miller) saw how much they cared. It fills your heart with pride," he said. "I am always humbled when I am among

our wounded warriors and see how much they love and care for each other."

With his friends surrounding his hospital bed, Miller was awarded the Purple Heart by MND-B's senior NCO.

After he handed Miller his coin, Johndrow explained the details of it and then joked that it is equipped with a global positioning system tracker and if it ended up on E-Bay, he would know which coin it was.

But, with all jokes aside, Johndrow said that the heroism that flows in and out of the doors of the 28th CSH is a part of a normal day.

"This was not an extraordinary day, this is how it is every time I go to the CSH," the command sergeant major explained. "It was an ordinary day filled with extraordinary Soldiers."

Johndrow said that even though this is his 33rd month in the heart of the Middle East, it still surprises him to see injured Soldiers come in and feel guilty for being wounded, when it's not their fault. It amazes him to see how much they want to get back out there in the fight with their fellow Soldiers.

For Johndrow, being around Soldiers is like being around family. It hits home for this third-time deplorer to Iraq.

"I have children at home that are around the same age as these Soldiers and both of them served in the Army," Johndrow said. "They will tell you that I love them, just like I love all of our Soldiers."

Johndrow said that although the different generations of Soldiers wear different clothes, listen to different music, there is that one common thread that time doesn't change – a Soldier's sense of camaraderie.

"This is why after 28 years of service, I still do this."

PROTECT THE
SOLDIERS
PROTECTING YOU...



OPSEC IS AN
"EVERY DAY" MISSION!

Reconstruction Team Arrives on Taji

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- The 1st "Ironhorse" Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division just received a helping hand as it works with Iraqis to rebuild government capabilities and capacities which are necessary to enable the new Iraqi nation's transition to a self-reliant government under the control of the Iraqi people.

This new-found assistance comes in the form of members of the brigade's newest attachment, the Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team (EPRT), which arrived here April 10.

Working as a joint civilian and military unit made up of diplomats, military officers and experts in fields such as economics, agriculture, law and engineering, the EPRT's combined efforts with Iraqi local and provincial governments and the 1st BCT are designed to meet several specific goals.

Some of these goals include such things as helping Iraqis start dialogues with each other to solve issues of sectarian divisions on the local and provincial levels, the enabling of economic stability through creating small businesses and the generating of jobs; and assisting local and provincial governments with their abilities to provide essential services (water, electricity and other services) to their people.

The EPRT will also work hand-in-hand with civil affairs specialists within the brigade to meet these goals.

Teaming the EPRTs with brigades is part of a much larger plan outlined by President George W. Bush on Jan. 10, when he announced the embedding of ten new EPRTs within brigade combat teams in Iraq, in addition to the 10 which were already in existence throughout the country.

"We are extremely encouraged about the arrival of the Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams," said Austin, Texas



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

Dean Wooden (left), team leader for the 1st Brigade Combat Team's new Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team (EPRT), greets Austin, Texas native Lt. Col. Peter Andrysiak, the brigade's deputy commanding officer, for the first time at Camp Taji, Iraq April 10. The EPRT will work within the brigade and with Iraqis to help build government capacity and capabilities needed at the local and provincial levels to stimulate economic growth and support the transition to local Iraqi control and self-reliance.

native Lt. Col. Peter Andrysiak, deputy commanding officer, 1st BCT. "The backgrounds of the entire team are exceptional, the Foreign Service officers, U.S. Agency for

International Development representative and the Bilingual Bicultural Advisor are the best the U.S. has to offer.

"Their skill sets and expertise are just

what we need in this counterinsurgency fight where our objective is to 'foster the development of effective governance by a legitimate government,'" added Andrysiak. "For the last four years, we (the coalition and Iraqis) have done our best at developing local governance and trying to stimulate economic growth, but these professionals do this for a living and they will help us develop viable indigenous leaders and institutions that can carry on without significant coalition support."

Members of the EPRT said they look forward to the work ahead of them.

"We feel great about being a part of the (1st BCT) team," said Dean Wooden, team leader for the 1st BCT's EPRT. "From our first meeting, everything was very well organized and we felt very welcomed."

As a Foreign Service officer, Wooden's experience in diplomatic matters stems from assignments in the Congo, Nigeria, Germany, Barbados and one previous stint in Iraq.

One thing that Wooden said will be very important toward economic growth to strengthen the local and provincial governments is awarding "Iraqi contracts (for projects) to the Iraqis."

Within 30 days, the EPRT, Iraqis and Ironhorse Brigade will formulate a joint common plan which will, according to Andrysiak, allow them to bring all of the assets of the EPRT and Iraqi provincial governments to bear against the challenges faced in establishing stable local and provincial governments for the Iraqis.

Andrysiak said he feels extremely optimistic about what the Ironhorse brigade will be able to accomplish by partnering with the EPRTs and the Iraqis.

"As a team, I feel we can build the indigenous government capability and capacity needed to stimulate economic growth that supports the transition to local Iraqi control and self-reliance."

Provincial Council Conference Covers Progress, Planning

Conference

From Page 1

to reconstruction and development projects and for council leadership to check up on these efforts in the nahias and qadas," said Sean Osner, a foreign service officer and U.S. Agency for International Development representative working on the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division's Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team. "Each representative was given a chance to give an overview of their projects and issues as to the types of things they need for those projects to be begun or completed."

One of the major topics of discussion for the government officials included \$120 million left over from their 2006 budget which will be distributed among the Qadas and used toward civic improvements.

Capt. Robert Stigers, political advisor for the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, works closely every day

with representatives in the Tarmiyah Qada. Stigers, who hails from Issaquah, Wash. said he sees the Tarmiyah government representatives using the money to continue providing essential services to their people. Some things currently on the table for the Tarmiyah Qada include a fully-staffed and functioning hospital, a bank and a new police station among 22 other projects.

"We encourage the Tarmiyah Qada to make use of the funds just offered by the regional council for sewage, irrigation and the heavier civil improvement needs like revamping the Ibn Sina, Nasser and Al Samood factories," said Stigers, addressing the conference.

Conferences like this one, Osner said, are important to the fostering of self-reliant democracies that look out for the best interests of all citizens and that are truly representative of their people.

"There was definitely a lot of progress and participation by the Qadas and Nahias. If there were any complaints, it's part of the birthing pangs of nurturing the democratic process which occurs when implementing a new form of

government and a new way of doing business in Iraq," said Osner. "(This interaction among the) district, sub-district and regional councils leads to the enabling of government at the highest level to address concerns at lower levels of government and ultimately down to the individual citizens."

The conference ended after the government bodies agreed to recommendations on how to go about addressing development and reconstruction issues, many of which were specific to how projects are funded and how to sustain them once completed.

Some of the recommendations included that using coalition funds requires local approval down to the Nahia level; that coalition funds will not be used in place of what the local governments have allotted toward a project; and that newly completed projects must adhere to strict quality assurance standards. The next Baghdad Provincial Council meeting will take place in mid-June marking the deadline for Qadas to present their detailed requests for projects in 2007 that make use of the budget surplus from 2006.

Soldiers Get to Know Iraqi Counterparts

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Soldiers from Dagger Troop, 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, attached to the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, took the time recently to get to know their Iraqi Army counterparts here.

To foster esprit de corps and camaraderie, the Soldiers from Dagger and their counterparts in the 2nd Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Division (Mechanized) held a partnership day here April 2.

During the event, tankers from Troop D and Iraqi Army tankers got to know each other and each other's equipment. The U.S. troops provided an M1A2 Abrams tank for the event while the Iraqi Army soldiers provided several of their T-72 tanks.

Interpreters assisted while U.S. and Iraqi troops explained the operation of their tanks and after a brief introduction, they rode on each others tanks.

"This is an important opportunity for us as a troop, it gives me the chance to meet my counterpart," said Anchorage, Alaska native Capt. Martin Wohlgemuth, troop commander, Troop D, 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment. "For the Soldiers, since they're always going out on missions (with their Iraqi counterparts), this affords them the opportunity to take their gear off and get to know each other.

"We're focusing on relationships, we won't build trust and confidence with our Iraqi counterparts without taking time to do these kinds of things," he added. "It's important as they work together and then see each other in gatherings like this one that they recognize the faces they see."

The troops from Dagger have spent a lot of time in Iraq working with the Iraqi Army troops in the 2nd Bde., 9th IA Div. (Mech.) going on both mounted and dismounted patrols together, cordons and searches, finding weapons caches and disrupting insurgent and terrorist cells.

"It's been a really awesome experience working with them," said 1st Lt. Jeremy King-McCrillis, a tank platoon leader for Dagger. "It's good helping these guys to take over their sector, and whenever we go on patrols, they're in the



Pfc. Dane Dubouzet (right), an M1A2 Abrams tank driver for Troop D, 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, attached to the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, explains to his Iraqi counterparts, tankers from the 2nd Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Division (Mech.), how to drive the Abrams tank April 2 on Camp Taji, Iraq.

lead."

King-McCrillis added that the IA troops are making a lot of progress within the area of operations.

"They've been going out there on their own and have found many improvised explosive devices without us," said McCrillis. "Any targets that they want to go after, we're here to assist them with."

With all the time they've spent working with their Iraqi brothers outside the wire, it was no surprise, the Dagger tankers said, that they welcomed the day's bonding experience.

"This has been great and getting to see the T-72s in

action has been really interesting," Spc. Nicholas Bomar, a Dagger Troop loader on the M1A2 Abrams tank who hails from Bay City, Texas. "Despite the language barrier, if I had more chances it would be nice to be able to hang out with them. I look forward to more chances to meet with them."

"It felt great getting to show my Iraqi comrades, my band of brothers here, how to work our tanks," said Bronx, N.Y., native Pfc. Dane Dubouzet, a tank driver for Dagger Troop. "They were very cooperative, and it was easy to show them because they comprehend it all very well. They had a great time learning how to operate the Abrams."



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

Iraqi Army troops from the 2nd Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Division (Mechanized), take a close-up look at an M1A2 Abrams tank April 2 during a partnership day on Camp Taji, Iraq. Iraqi and U.S. tankers had the opportunity to get to know each other and their counterpart's tanks.

Tankers Take on First Mounted Patrol Outside the Wire

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Iraqi Army tankers from the newly-formed 1st Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Division (Mechanized) took the lead on their first real-world mission performing a mounted patrol in their T-55 tanks on a major highway near Kem, Iraq April 12.

The patrol which they conducted with Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment gave the Iraqi Army troopers the opportunity to actively search for insurgents who might be emplacing improvised explosive devices on the roads or performing other terrorist acts that endanger the lives of innocent Iraqi civilians.

Leading up to this first patrol, the Iraqi Army tankers received training from Soldiers from the Company C “Cobras” of 2-8 Cavalry for more than three months.

The training included maintenance on T-55 tanks; instruction on how to drive the tanks; gunnery on all the various tank weapons systems; and how to set up and break down traffic control points among many other blocks of instruction concerning combat operations.

“They’ve really come a long way,” said Capt. Nels Hanson, commander of Cobra Company. “We’re hoping to empower them more and more each day and this week we’ll continue taking them on more patrols. We’ll do this for several days as we want them to gain confidence as they continue becoming more competent at doing this.”

Hanson said he sees this first patrol as a



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

Following their first mounted patrol, Iraqi Army tankers from the 1st Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Division (Mechanized) mounted on T-55 tanks arrive back at Camp Taji, Iraq April 12.

small step toward opening the doors of self-reliance for the Iraqi Army as they continue to take over responsibility for their area of operations which aids in the other transition efforts currently underway in Iraq.

“Eventually, they will be able to fully take over in their areas of responsibility and it’s a good opportunity to get more IA troops into the fight and less U.S. Soldiers into the fight,” Hanson said, explaining the goal of

eventually turning over the security of Iraq to Iraqis which will allow U.S. forces to eventually withdraw from Iraq.

Hanson said one of the keys to the success were Iraqi platoon leaders who assisted his Soldiers with training the Iraqi tankers.

“Many of them had served in the Army under the previous regime,” said Hanson. “We explained to them how we wanted to see the training conducted and they did an excel-

lent job in executing the training and being involved in the day to day activities.”

Although, the day’s mission was a short one and no insurgent activity took place, Soldiers who shared in this first mission for the Iraqi tank battalion said they could tell the Iraqi troops were on their game.

“It feels good to share in this milestone,” said Omaha, Neb. native Spc. Jason Aschenbrenner, a humvee gunner and infantryman with Cobra Company, who pulled security during the patrol. “The Iraqi troops just keep getting better at their jobs and they show that they really do care about the security of their people.”

Sgt. 1st Class Michael Byer, now a platoon sergeant for Co. C, oversaw much of the training for the Iraqi troops.

“We did plenty of training, but the key to being successful is showing heart in your training and that you genuinely care about the Iraqis and the training you’re doing,” said Beyer, who hails from Freeport, Ill. “I was really excited to see them in action for the first time, and I know they’re going to be successful.”

Greensboro, N.C. native Capt. Wes Durham, who works with the military transition team for 2-8 Cavalry, tracked the progress of the mission from the 3rd Bde., 9th IA Div. (Mech.) headquarters and echoed many of Beyer’s sentiments.

“We’re very proud of them, they’re very motivated and we were happy to see them out there,” said Durham. “Cobra Company did a great job training them and it went very well. The next step will be integrating them into more complex missions.”

“Ironhorse” Brigade Combat Team Marks 450th Reenlistment

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- The 1st “Ironhorse” Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division marked its 450th reenlistment during this deployment here April 9 with the reenlistment of Pfc. Andrew Dubay, an infantryman from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment.

Dubay, a native of Fort Walton Beach, Fla., who is temporarily attached to the Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st BCT, serving on the unit’s personal security detachment, joined the Army in 2005 and went to advanced individual training at Fort Benning, Ga., for infantry school. His latest reenlistment was for six years and he received a \$13,000 cash bonus. In addition to the bonus, he received the incentives of his station of choice – which is Fort Campbell, Ky. – and taking the air assault school option.

“The Army has leadership traits and discipline that you just can’t find in the civilian world,” said Dubay, who explained the reasons for his deciding to raise his right hand for a second time. “I love the Army. I wanted to reenlist for the entire 20 years but they wouldn’t give me that option.

“I’m privileged to be able to serve in the military, rather than in a civilian job,” he added. “I like it for the military history—serving is something everyone is honored to do, and it’s nice to be a part of something where people tend to look up to us because of who we are (as Soldiers) and what we do.”

With two years active duty under his belt, Dubay will be leaving his current home station of Fort Hood, Texas for Fort Campbell sometime in early 2008. After completing air assault school there, Dubay hopes to eventually become an Army Ranger and from there move on to the Army’s Special



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

Fort Walton, Beach, Fla., native, Pfc. Andrew Dubay, an infantryman from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, now attached to the personal security detachment of Headquarters Troop, 1st “Ironhorse” Brigade Combat Team, reenlisted April 9 at Camp Taji, Iraq as Ironhorse commander, Col. Paul E. Funk II, reads him the oath of enlistment.

Forces where he hopes to retire as a chief warrant officer.

While serving on his first deployment to Iraq, Dubay spends much of his time pulling security outside the wire throughout the 1st BCT area of operations in villages such as Sab Al Bor, Tarmiyah, Mushada and many others.

But, Dubay said, although he and his fellow Soldiers often face danger in their fight against insurgents, he wouldn’t change a thing about his job.

“It’s a great job and sometimes people ask me, ‘aren’t

you afraid to die,’ but even if I were to die, I would feel great about it—knowing that I’m serving my country,” Dubay said.

Capt. Francisco Casanova, commander, HHT, 1st BCT, praised Dubay’s decision to reenlist and his performance for the past five months while attached to his unit for the current deployment.

“I love this because it means we’re reenlisting one more good Soldier who wants to stay in the Army. It’s not something I’m just saying. I really believe that,” said Casanova. “He’s a good performer who is always enthusiastic and mission ready.”

When he returns home from this deployment, Dubay plans on taking his girlfriend and her child on a cruise to the Bahamas. For his long-term goals, Dubay said after he retires from military service, he hopes to get a job with a major security firm or find work with the Secret Service or on a SWAT team.

As of Dubay’s reenlistment, the Ironhorse Brigade has handed out \$4, 448, 058 million in cash bonuses to reenlisting troopers.

Sgt. 1st Class Humberto Flores, the brigade’s senior career counselor and a native of Laredo, Texas, explained what the milestone of having reached 450 reenlistments means to the Ironhorse Brigade and why the brigade has been successful when it comes to retention.

“This is a great achievement for the brigade and it speaks volumes about the Soldiers who are out here making sacrifices for their country. It’s good to know that these Soldiers are willing to stand up, defend their nation and pay the cost for freedom,” said Flores. “It’s all about the leadership who are out here taking care of the Soldiers everyday and Soldiers trusting in their leadership in everything they do and believing in them.”



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

1st Lt. Brian Long, fire support officer and "Blue" Platoon, 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, leader from Jacksonville, Fla., watches some Iraqi children play soccer in the Karkh neighborhood of Baghdad April 5. He said that even months after the heaviest of fighting happened on Haifa St., Iraqi people are still coming to his troops with information and questions on what's happened in recent months.

Black Hawk Troops Find Persistence Pays Off on Haifa St.

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

BAGHDAD – Troops from 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division patrol the Haifa Street area daily, shadowed by scores of children who greet them at every stop they make to ask for chocolate or a soccer ball.

Most of the Soldiers don't mind handing out a couple sweets for the children to enjoy while they trek through the war-torn neighborhood the children call home.

The "Black Hawk" Troop, commanded by Capt. Chris Dawson who hails from Lima, Ohio, provides an essential service to residents who've been through so many violent times: peace of mind.

1st Lt. Brian Long, a fire support officer and "Blue" Platoon's leader from Jacksonville, Fla., said there's nothing more important than getting to know the people in the area and addressing their concerns.

He said that even months after the heaviest of fighting happened, people are still coming to his troops with information and questions on what's happened in recent months.

The troop took over the area after a heavy bout of insurgent activity forced many to flee their homes or hide for their own safety. Several days of fighting occurred before the Cavalry troops finally slaked the violence, allowing many people to come back



Staff Sgt. Jebediah Arthur, a Moran, Texas, native and fire support team chief with Troop B, 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, patrols the streets of Baghdad's Karkh neighborhood, shadowed by Iraqi children requesting chocolate and soccer balls April 5.

and start to live their lives.

Attacks on coalition forces have since dropped by more than 50 percent. Dozens of bodies were found along sectarian fault lines in the area, but since the new security plan has been established, the Black Hawk troops have not found a single body lying in the street or anywhere in their sector.

Bringing peace to neighborhoods like this one is one of the major improvements the Soldiers from the 2nd "Black Jack" Brigade have been able to accomplish since

they arrived last year.

However, as one Soldier recounts, it wasn't as peaceful the last time he was here.

Staff Sgt. Jebediah Arthur was with 3rd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div., a few years ago when the First Team was in Baghdad during Operation Iraqi Freedom II. He said heavy fighting was a regular occurrence for him and his troops.

The Moran, Texas native said that Iraqis weren't always as friendly as they are now.

They used to shy away from any contact with Soldiers and wouldn't provide more than a cold stare or an unfriendly gesture.

Now, everywhere the Soldiers go, they are greeted like visitors to an almost second home. The people, in the community Arthur and his comrades visit, speak freely to them and often provide an inside look into what's really happening in their community.

"It's finally gotten to where they can come and talk to us and work with everyone," Arthur said. "Acting professionally helps, but they actually see the results of the information they give us. I think that's been the key to our success over here this time."

The troops have been busy with other duties than just patrolling the busy streets. Recently, a medical operation headed by the troop and other Soldiers from the brigade took place to bring some much-needed care to the residents.

The leaders of the troop realize how important it is to continue their work and not to give up on the people of the area.

Long said that the coalition forces have gained a lot of momentum against violence in the area.

"Being out there every day is a good way to dispel the rumors that we're not doing anything but inhibiting the growth of these neighborhoods," Long said. "We are seeing improvements, and we are appreciated by the people we interact with."

"In 10 years," Arthur said, "we'll probably be vacationing here."

Cavalry Mortarmen Help Deter Attacks

By Sgt. Robert Yde
2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE ECHO, Iraq – For many months, coalition Soldiers based here had been the recipients of nearly nightly mortar attacks originating from the nearby town of Diwaniyah.

As the security situation in Diwaniyah continued to deteriorate, the Baghdad-based, Stryker unit, 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, was sent here to help out.

After arriving to the FOB, putting a stop to the constant mortar and rocket attacks was a top priority.

“Basically when we first arrived here, the FOB was receiving several mortar and rocket attacks,” explained the commander of 1-14th’s Troop A, Capt. Gerald Resmondo. “We set up a two-front operation. One is the mortars that we have established here on FOB Echo. They conduct a counter-mortar (fire) where they pick outlying locations that are possible locations where mortars or rockets could be fired from.”

The second part of the operation is sending out troops to search out insurgent mortar teams.

“I push out the troop, and we deny the terrain,” explained the West Palm Beach, Fla. native. “We ... search any vehicles in those areas, and we will investigate any suspicious activities.”

Back on the FOB, mortar teams continue to fire around the clock to deter attacks on the base and support the Soldiers out in sector.

“We shoot a pretty significant amount,” Gervais said.

For most of the Soldiers on the mortar teams, this mission is the first chance they have had to fire mortars since arriving in Iraq nearly 10 months ago.

“We don’t get to do this mission in Baghdad, and it’s a nice change of pace to do what we’re actually trained to do,” Gervais said. “When we’re in Baghdad, we just do presence patrols, raids, clearance ops, all that other stuff just like 11Bs (infantrymen) would.”

The Soldiers have established firing points, in case a mission comes down through the fire direction center. Between missions, equipment maintenance and cleaning are performed to ensure everything is working properly and to cut down on the chance of any misfires.

Each fire team is made up of three Soldiers: the gunner, the assistant gunner and the ammo bearer.

While each job is essential, the gunner plays the central role.

“I deal with the elevation, make sure all the levels are right and make sure everything is functional,” explained Spc. Domingo Sanchez, a gunner with Troop C. “The gunner is the main person who makes sure everything is working right and everything is leveled and makes sure the other guys are doing their jobs. So if they’re doing their jobs and I’m doing mine we get

the mission done.”

As Sanchez’s ammo bearer, Spc. Anthony Rogers said his main job is to prepare the rounds and get them ready to fire.

“I set the fuses and the time for when they need to burst and the charges for the flight,” Rogers said.

Once all the prep work has been done, the process of actually firing the rounds is performed in a matter of seconds.

The mortar teams fire either illumination rounds or high explosive rounds, depending on what each specific mission calls for.

The request for illumination rounds is usually called in from sector at night and according to Resmondo serves two purposes for his troops.

“Once we get eyes on an observer location, we’ll call for illum., initially, just to light up an area and show the enemy that we can do that,” he explained “The second reason is so that we can observe anything that could possibly be out in the open areas.”

This two-front combination of continual mortar fire from the FOB and the Soldiers operating out in the city has seemingly paid off as rocket and mortar attacks on FOB Echo have decreased significantly.

“I think over the last few days we’ve had one rocket attack and it wasn’t very accurate. So it seems to be working,” Gervais said.

Sgt. Jason Chavis, with Troop A, said he believes that the mortar teams have had more of a psychological impact than a physical

impact on militia in the area, but noted that the outcome is the same.

“Everybody’s in hiding now,” said Sgt. Jason Chavis, a Pembroke, N.C. native, speaking of the feedback he is hearing from the Soldiers out patrolling Diwaniyah every day. “They said that they’re not coming out

and all the shooting and everything else has calmed down.”

As life has improved in the city, it has also improved for the coalition troops based at FOB Echo.

“The situation has definitely improved here on the FOB,” Resmondo said.



Spc. Jason Compton looks on as Spc. Domingo Sanchez cleans the inside of their mortar firing tube, while Spc. Anthony Rogers holds it in place April 14. All three Soldiers are with Troop C, 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, and are taking part in continuous fire missions at Forward Operating Base Echo in response to militia activity in and around the city of Diwaniyah, Iraq.



(Photos by Sgt. Robert Yde, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Spc. Jason Compton drops a mortar into the launching tube as Spc. Domingo Sanchez (left) and Spc. Anthony Rogers brace themselves for the blast at Forward Operating Base Echo April 14. All three Soldiers are with Troop C, 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, currently attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, and are temporarily based at the FOB counter militia mortar teams in and around the nearby city of Diwaniyah, Iraq.

'Spartans' Send New NCOs Through Rite of Passage

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

FORWARD OPERATING BASE PROSPERITY, Iraq – In the recent epic movie about the ancient Spartan's, where a young boy was sent in the wild with no food, no clothes and with only his will to survive, he grew up to be a great warrior who would lead a nation to glory.

If that served as inspiration for the modern-day Spartans of the 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, they laughed on those Spartans' right-of-passage when they decided to step up their own noncommissioned officer indoctrination with tougher tasks such as calling for a medical evacuation, putting together an M-4 rifle, and a Soldier cohesion exercise during a ceremony here April 10.

According to Sgt. 1st Class Matt

Villanueva, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd BSTB, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, the NCO induction ceremony is their battalion's way of formally introducing them into the NCO Corps.

"When I did it, back when I was a corporal, it was traumatic," recalled the Pueblo, Colo., native.

The NCOs, more than a dozen of them throughout the battalion and HHC, 2nd BCT, received an in-ranks inspection from 1st Sgt. Darryl Teramano, the top NCO for Co. B, 2nd BSTB. As he found deficiencies, he made each NCO drop and do 25 push-ups.

"I did this because you are NCOs; you're supposed to make sure your Soldiers have everything," Teramano said. "This is not the place to be out of uniform."

After the inspection, they broke off into smaller groups and went from station to sta-

tion performing a multitude of tasks ranging from calling in a medevac to reassembling an M-4 rifle while blindfolded, and a cohesion-building course.

During each of the stations, other NCOs, who led the stations, inserted a little calisthenics while the inductees were performing their individual tasks. Staff Sgt. Yamil Villafane, HHC, 2nd BSTB, put the inductees on their backs and made them do the "dying cockroach."

"This was used to motivate them through their physical needs ... to get them into the right state of mind," Villanueva said.

During each of the stations, the inductees were made to sound-off, or loudly, recite the NCO Creed.

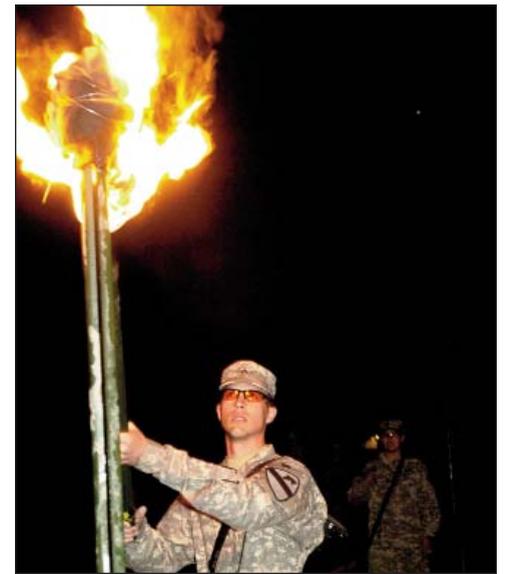
According to Sgt. Jeffrey Bauer, HHC, 2nd BSTB of Fort Towson, Okla., the experience was a "great" one.

"This really opened my eyes on the things I need to do to take care of my Soldiers," he said.

After all the tasks were done, the inductees called over to the hall of the seven leadership values. The hall was constructed of seven torches. Each inductee had to drink from the ceremonial grog before he or she was to be considered in joining the rest of the battalion's NCOs on the other side.

During the ceremony, Sgt. 1st Class Gregory White, HHC, 2nd BSTB, served as the master of ceremony and said this:

"The gate of fire symbolizes the tradition of the Spartan army when young warriors would pass through the gate as a right of passage from childhood to warrior. Today this gate of fire symbolizes the right of passage for the newly promoted NCOs of the Spartan Battalion from the ranks of the junior enlisted to the Corps of the



Cpl. Allan Timmons, a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, lights a torch as a part of the hall of the seven Army values during the NCO induction ceremony on Forward Operating Base Prosperity in Baghdad April 10.

Noncommissioned Officer. The seven torches represent the seven Army values -- values that all professional NCOs must possess."

Each of the Spartan Battalion's first sergeants introduced their inductees to the rest of the NCOs in attendance and asked for permission to take them through the hall of fire.

According to Sgt. Herbert Wilson, B, 2nd BSTB of Spring Hill, Fla., being formally inducted in to the NCO Corps was different and special because he can say that he was promoted while in Iraq.

"I thought [this] would be a waste of time," he said, "but once we got into it, it was pretty cool."



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

Sgt. Gaston Gray (right), Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, tries to put an M-4 rifle back together blind-folded as Staff Sgt. Yamil Villafane, HHC, 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, tries to motivate him during the NCO induction ceremony on Forward Operating Base Prosperity in Baghdad April 10.

Black Jack Communicators Teach Networking Course

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

FORWARD OPERATING BASE PROSPERITY, Iraq – As if the task of setting up and maintaining the brigade's computer network isn't confusing enough, the brigade's information officer bumped it up to the next level.

Recently, the 2nd Brigade Combat Team's communications section decided to offer the Cisco Certified Networking Academy to the communications Soldiers.

"Since the JNN (Joint Node Network) and all of our networks are Cisco based, I discussed with Mr. (Scott) Tiret an idea of running our own little "mini" Cisco academy," said Capt. Jason Edwards, the 2BCT's Information officer of Bloomington, Ill. "The purpose was to get these junior Soldiers opportunities to not only learn the complete system but to make them able to go take their Cisco Certified Networking Accreditation (CCNA) test."

According to Edwards, the course, which is designed to be an entry-level course, is based on a 160 hour curriculum from the actual Cisco academy, but for necessity they have shortened it to half.

"We did the initial course as a two week, five days per week course, so we could iron out the curriculum and equipment issues as well as to get a 'feel' for the class," he added. "Now that it is complete, we will start five week iterations with training conducted three nights per week."

For now, Scott Tiret, the senior network engineer from Saginaw, Mich. is the only instructor. When he's not teaching



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

Staff Sgt. Edith Wilson (left), of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion and Spc. Gregory Clarke from Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 3rd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, work on network exercise during the Cisco Certified Network Academy on Forward Operating Base Prosperity, Iraq.

the course, he is on FOB Prosperity to support the network.

According to Tiret, the course, which is designed for the skill level 1 and 2 communications Soldier who works with this equipment (JNN) or in the Battalion S6's, is extremely difficult.

"They are not going to learn everything in two weeks, but at least they'll have a start of willingness to learn," he said.

For Staff Sgt. Edith Wilson, a San Antonio native

assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, who had previous experience in networking, the course was "hard."

"It was something we know, but this was more in-depth," she said. "This is the most beneficial course I've taken in the Army."

Edwards said the course is designed for Communications Soldiers because they already do some of the basic skills such as cabling and physical networking. So this is a logical extension to that.

For Soldiers like Spc. Gregory Clarke, of New York, whose battalion is on another base, they might not have the luxury of always having the brigade communications shop there to help out.

"For us on Union III, we don't have enough people; we only have three people for S6," said Clarke who is assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 3rd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment. "It's an asset to our unit to be able to go back and know this stuff."

More than that, Edwards, who took the complete Cisco academy while at Fort Gordon, Ga.'s Information Systems Managers Course, knows that having the certification is beneficial to not only the unit, but its Soldiers.

"The CCNA not only earns [Soldiers] college credits and promotion points, but it will allow them to work in the civilian world if they choose not to stay in," said Edwards.

In the future, Edwards said that he'd like to add on more instructors and equipment so they can expand the training to non-communications personnel.

New Security Program Working in Muqdadiya

Multi-National Division – North PAO

MUQDADIYA, Iraq – The neighborhood watch program, which began March 5 in Muqdadiya, Iraq, has begun to show signs of success throughout the area, said Dr. Abdulla al Jubouri, the former governor of Diyala and founder of the program.

The program, which includes 15 villages throughout the Muqdadiya district, hires local villagers to protect their village and encourages the population to contact their security forces with regards to criminal or terrorist activity.

“The idea is ... to protect the village and to clear it from the armed people and insurgents,” said Abdulla, who knows a secure environment is not possible without the help of the people.

Since the program began, Abdulla said there have been several signs of success to include roads free from improvised explosive devices, fighting stopped between what used to be rival villages, schools are re-opened, and electric and water services have been repaired.

“The neighborhood watch program has put positive energy into the security of Muqdadiya,” said Lt. Col. Keith Gogas, 6-9 Armored Reconnaissance Squadron commander, responsible for Coalition Forces in the Muqdadiya area.

“People from all around Muqdadiya have been emboldened by the hard work and sacrifice of Dr. Abdulla, Mayor Najim and many local leaders working to secure this area of Diyala,” Gogas said. “This area is beautiful – full of hard-working, patriotic people who deserve the freedom this security plan gives them.”

Aside from providing security, the neighborhood watch program is important because it provides jobs for local citizens who are often poor and persuaded to turn to the terrorists to support their families, said Mayor Najim, Muqdadiya mayor.

“The cycle of violence that has existed in the province of Diyala is being defeated by the people who are disgusted and



(Photo by Sgt. Serena Hayden, 3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Col. David W. Sutherland, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division commander, thanks (from left to right) the Muqdadiya mayor, Iraqi police chief, Iraqi army battalion commander and Dr. Abdulla, the former governor of Diyala, who have worked to create a neighborhood watch program in Muqdadiya, Iraq.

disillusioned by the hatred provided by the terrorists,” said Col. David W. Sutherland, commander of 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. “The people recognize the fact that their place in a free and democratic society is their future and ultimately lies in their hands, and cannot be achieved unless there is stable security and government, which enable progress.”

The neighborhood watch program has also encouraged many citizens to join the Iraqi police, and approximately 1,000 citizens want to join the Iraqi army, Abdulla said.

“It’s a good idea and I hope it will be done in more than one area,” Najim said. “I hope once the security is improved

and jobs start to open, that people will participate in the political process and other people will follow.”

Abdulla said he also hopes others will follow in Muqdadiya’s footsteps.

“It is our goal to help for the security plan,” Abdulla said. “If we can start from the villages ... it encourages the districts to do the same thing.”

And while attacks on Abdulla himself have shown that the terrorists dislike the neighborhood watch program, he and the people refuse to accept defeat.

“[Terrorist attacks] are not going to stop us,” he said. “[We will keep going] until we make sure Diyala is secured.”

New Combat Arms Soldier Learns Realities of War

By Staff Sgt. Antonietta Rico
5th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

BAQUBAH, Iraq -- Sweat mixed with dirt on the face of Pvt. Eric Rundquist. Slowly, it made glistening streaks down his face as he rode within the dusty confines of a Bradley fighting vehicle, March 28.

A muffled thud briefly shook the 40-ton personnel carrier, and those inside checked on each other. The Bradley had just hit a roadside bomb — another combat experience for Rundquist, as he rode away from the scene of his first firefight in Iraq.

His experience may have been similar to the media’s portrayal of a Soldier’s life in Iraq, but not identical. With little more than two weeks spent in Baqubah, Rundquist said he has learned that there’s more to his job than combat.

“As a little kid, watching war movies, I was like, ‘I want to be a Soldier,’” Rundquist said, “My uncle was a Soldier. He pretty much glorified it all for me.”

The 22-year-old Rundquist has been in the Army for nine months. He acknowledged the rush of adrenaline he felt during the firefight, but he can’t ignore the satisfaction he’d experienced when performing other duties, such as handing out food to the residents of Baqubah.

“It’s not always action,” he said of his duties to this point. Rundquist now realizes



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Antonietta Rico, 5th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

Pvt. Eric Rundquist, left, and Pvt. Jason Taylor, both with 1st Platoon, Company B, 1-12 Combined Arms Battalion, hold on to a strap inside a Bradley fighting vehicle after the Bradley hit a roadside bomb.

he had a false impression about the Army and its presence in Iraq, which was shared by family and friends in his hometown of Streamwood, Ill.

Their perceptions, he said, were influenced by what they’d seen on the news.

“You only hear about the bad stuff. You never hear about the good things,” he said. “I mean, we are doing good things out here.”

Rundquist, a member of Company B, 1-12 Combined Arms Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, said he didn’t know about the humanitarian aspect of

being a Soldier until he arrived in Iraq.

“You think every time you go out there, its going to be a firefight,” he said.

But his first mission in Baqubah was handing out shoes and food to civilians. He said his interaction with the Iraqi people helped him let go of misconceptions about the country’s people, as well.

“There are good people out here,” said Rundquist, “They are just trying to live their life. They just happen to be caught in the middle of a war.”

In his first few weeks in Baqubah,

Rundquist has faced the intensity of war. Minutes before the Bradley hit the roadside bomb, Rundquist and his fellow Soldiers had finished a sporadic engagement with insurgent snipers that lasted about two hours.

But Rundquist has also talked with Iraqi children. A feeling of compassion for the Iraqi people now dominates his attitude.

“People actually have to live around that stuff 24 hours a day, and people will and are getting killed,” he said. “I would somehow like to help. They deserve it - a normal life away from all this war.”

Before he joined the Army, Rundquist worked and spent time with his friends like most people his age. He said his experiences in Baqubah make him feel like he is living a small part of history.

Sometimes he thinks, “Look what you were, now look what you are ... look where you have gone. Now, you are in Iraq, halfway around the world, in a street in Baqubah, in a firefight.”

He will remember when he returns home that war is not like what it’s portrayed as on the news, he said.

Until then, he is determined to keep his mind here in Iraq, and as the new kid in his squad, he’s determined to be an asset to his team.

“I’m going to keep my morale high, because I do not want to let anybody down,” he said.



(Photo by 1st Lt. Quinn Robertson, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment)

Taking Out the Trash

In an effort to clean up Yarmouk, troops from 2nd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division have been clearing away trash and abandoned vehicles from the streets that could be used for hiding explosives. Other large piles of trash, used to block crossroads and keep insurgents out of the neighborhood, are currently being replaced by concrete barriers. The Iraqi Army soldiers, also, have been clearing homes and businesses throughout the neighborhood, and have discovered weapons caches within the area and confiscated them in order to eliminate the potential threat these weapons pose.



(Photo by 1st Lt. Matthew Offler, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment)

Sgt. John Steele, from Bremerton, Wash., assigned to Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, hands a local Iraqi child a soccer ball during a recent patrol.

Daily Interaction with Baghdad Residents Making a Difference

**By 1st Lt. Charles Bloomfield
2nd Bn., 32nd Field Artillery Regiment**

BAGHDAD – For some, daily missions have been described as ‘Groundhog Day,’ where nothing ever seems to change and each day mirrors the last. But 1st Lt. Matthew Offler, of Hyannis, Vt., a member of Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, sees things differently.

“On many of the streets we noticed there were work crews cleaning up trash, planting trees, and generally cleaning up the area,” he said after a recent patrol.

“Everything is good and there aren’t any real problems,” a local shop owner told the officer during the same patrol.

Offler and his platoon, the ‘Black Sheep,’ have contributed to the community by providing security and interacting with residents.

While patrolling through the streets of the capital city, platoon members are often given informa-

tion which range from sites where kidnap victims are being held to where militia members live.

The ‘Proud Americans’ of 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, have maintained their area of operations for more than three weeks now, and the local citizens are responding positively to the patrols.

All these tips about insurgent forces help immensely, and push the neighborhoods toward greater security.

“We talked to the local civilians, who again stated that they wanted our help in restoring power to their neighborhood,” said 1st Lt. Patrick Henson, from Orlando, Fla., and assigned to Battery B. “They also helped our teams hand out small pieces of candy, soccer balls, and ‘I Love Iraq’ stickers to children.”

Henson said a spirit of cooperation is being built with Iraqi citizens and coalition forces, which over time helps improve the security situation.

It also helps to make every day different – and better.



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

Sabeeh Al Ka'abi, the director of the Rashid District Council, cuts the ribbon during a ceremony marking the reopening of the Al Kumait School in the Doura Region of Baghdad, April 16. Along with Mr. Sabeeh, Brig. Gen. Ghazwan Sharif Abdal-Hamid, commander of 6th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division cut the ribbon during the ceremony.

School Reopens After Renovation

By Sgt. 1st Class Robert Timmons
4th IBCT, 1st Inf. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – The children of the Al Kumait School in the Doura region of Baghdad peered cautiously through the windows and from behind classroom doors at the heavily armed men walking around their recreational area.

But once it became clear that these were the ones responsible for the building's new windows and coat of paint, hands thrust out from the windows waving Iraqi flags.

Those who were responsible for the school's renovation were the director of the Rashid District Council Sabeeh Al Ka'abi, Brig. Gen. Ghazwan Sharif Abdal-Hamid, commander of 6th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division and Lt. Col. Faisal Malik Mhsen Al-Talall, who commands the police unit directly responsible for the mulhallah's security.

"This school opening is important because education means no to fighting and challenges terrorism," Mr. Sabeeh said. "We have to stop harm doing harm and blood doing blood – we need to think about dialogue and peace and work towards it."

Lt. Col. Stephen L.A. Michael, commander of 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division out of Fort Carson, Colo. And attached to the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, was also present at the opening.

Michael said the school was repainted and broken windows repaired, doors and chairs were replaced and a generator was bought, "which brought this school back to life."

The Al-Kumait School is just one of many projects in the works for the Doura area, Michael added.

"There are other schools being repaired, there are also plans to bring six generators to this muhallah (neighborhood), so this area can have electricity 24-hours-a-day," he said. "There is a park that has already been built, and a hospital that is built in the area that will be able to support the entire region."

The school opening is a direct correlation to the bettering security situation in the area.

"We have seen attacks go down since we have been here. Security is a function of the people, a function of the Iraqi security forces and coalition forces. Those three entities working together will bring peace to the people of Doura," Michael said. "The local populace needs to know that they are many and the attacks here are very few."



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

Capt. Tim Wright, the commander of Company D, 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division from Bangor, Maine, shakes an Iraqi boy's hand at the Al Ansar Elementary School in Baghdad's Rashid district April 3 after delivering school supplies. The Black Lions teamed up with the 2nd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division to deliver the supplies to the children.

National Police, Troops Deliver School Supplies

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

BAGHDAD – Iraqi security forces and Multi-National Division-Baghdad troops delivered school supplies to the Al Ansar Elementary School in the Rashid district here April 3.

The 2nd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police and Company D, 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division dropped off supplies such as backpacks, paper, soccer balls and Iraqi flags.

Giving supplies to schools is part of the way MND-B and ISF are working to gain the trust of the local populace.

"We want to build relationships between the kids and the coalition forces and (Iraqi Army)," the headmaster of the school, Samir Al-Abas, said, "so they won't be afraid of them, any more."

Al-Abas said the children feel safer as this bond continues to be built.

Sgt. Robert Savant, a squad leader with Co. D from Ville Platte, La., said missions like these have a far-reaching impact.

"If we can help give a little bit back to them, help them get back on their feet, we're helping the children in the long run," Savant said. "They can get a better education and provide better for their families in the future."

It has been difficult to provide this education to the students because funding for education has had to be funneled away to deal with terrorists.

Savant said, as a father, this mission had a special meaning to him.

"(My children) have the opportunity to get an edu-



An Iraqi policeman from the 2nd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 2nd Division Iraqi National Police delivers soccer balls to the Al Ansar Elementary School in the Rashid District April 3. In addition to soccer balls, paper, pens, pencils and backpacks were delivered.

cation in the United States," he said. "If we can give the same thing back to these kids, hopefully they'll have the same opportunities that my kids have in life."

Ultimately, for the Iraqi children to have these opportunities, it will be up to the Iraqi security forces to provide a safe learning environment for them. Savant said they have taken a step in the right direction since his first deployment.

"Compared to the last time I was here in '05 and '06, they've made great strides," the Black Lion said. "They seem to have more awareness for the situation around them."

"It seems like their training has come a long way."

Iraqi Police Training Center Construction Underway

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

BAGHDAD – In an abandoned tree grove with a pair of deserted buildings, the face of the war on terrorism in this part of Iraq began to change.

The first steps in constructing an Iraqi security forces' Warrior Leaders' Compound took place in the Rashid district of southern Baghdad April 9 with range-clearing operations conducted by elements of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, the 6th Brigade, 2nd National Police Division's training team and the 47th Ordnance Company, 79th Ordnance Battalion.

The compound takes on added importance as it represents a step towards transitioning to an Iraqi-led war effort.

Sgt. 1st Class Jason Briglin, the reconnaissance noncommissioned officer and brigade engineer for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th IBCT, said the facility is an important symbol of progress for the Iraqis.

"This mission's extremely important because we're building a facility that will allow the Iraqi people to train their own protection forces," the Rochester, N.Y. native said, "which, in turn, means they will be able to take care of themselves.

"It's the first step towards that within the Dragon (area of operations)."

That step took place with a loud bang as the tree grove and one of the buildings were demolished using roughly 400 pounds of explosives.

As with any demolition operation, there were obvious safety concerns such as the throwing of dangerous debris into civilian areas.

To deal with this concern, explosives were placed in a way to cause the building to implode on itself. Outer and inner cordons were also established to prevent civilians from unknowingly wandering into the blast area.

With the first step safely completed, the team can turn its eyes toward the next, when more trees must be removed, heavy equipment used to dig the range, pour concrete, and a



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

Rochester, N.Y., native Sgt. 1st Class Jason Briglin, a reconnaissance noncommissioned officer, and fire support specialist Pfc. Jeffrey Johnson of New Port Richey, Fla., survey the demolition site at the future National Police Warrior Leaders' Compound in southern Baghdad April 9. On the first day of range-clearing, more than 400 pounds of explosives were used.

secure berm constructed.

In addition to the range, the facility will have a soccer field, a military operations in urban terrain practice area, traffic control lanes and entry control point lanes, all costing roughly \$1.8 million.

Contractors will be hired to construct the rest of the compound, but by using Army personnel to start construction, Sgt. 1st Class Michael Wright, the 4th IBCT's master gunner

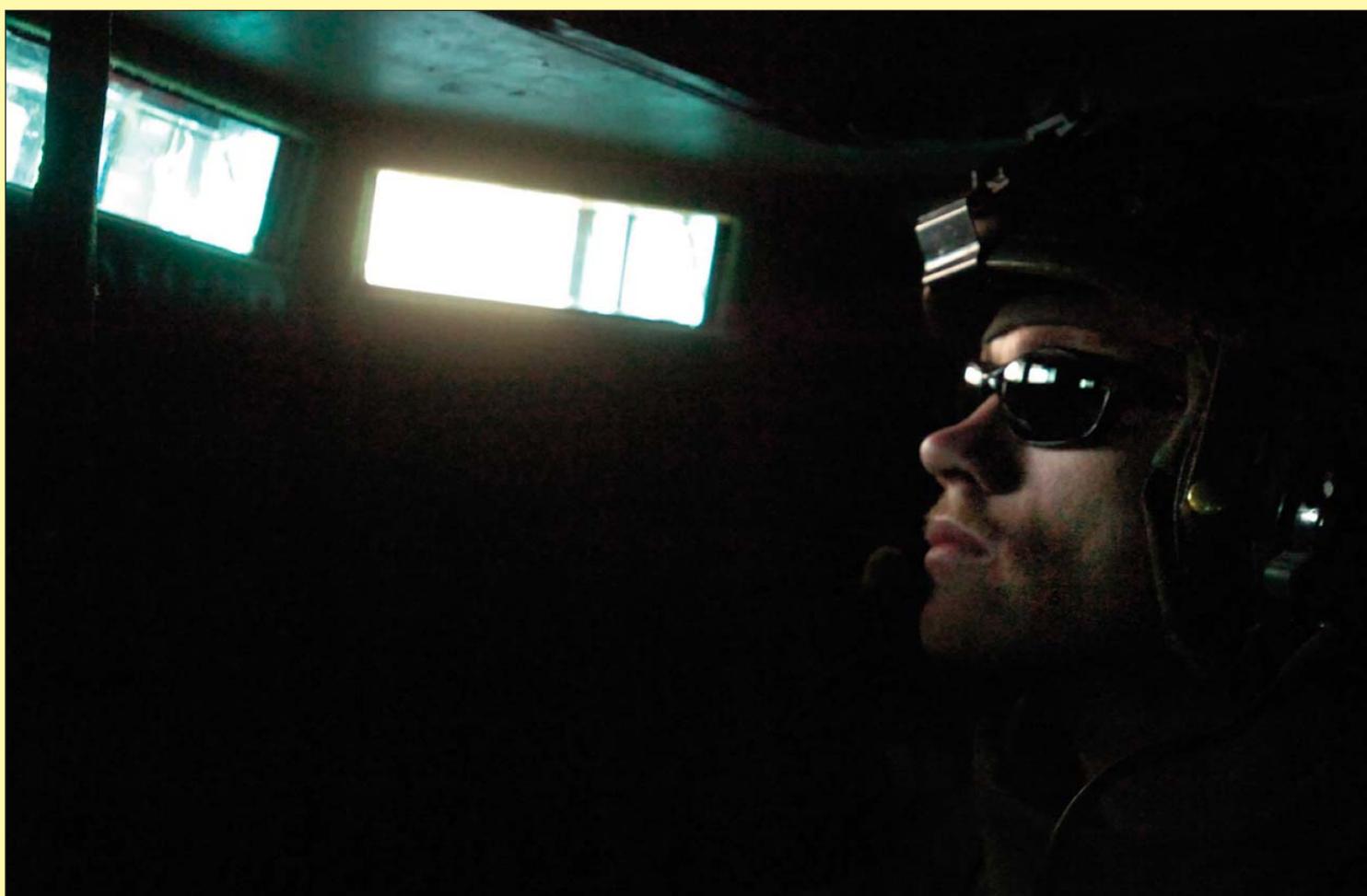
and noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the brigade's Iraqi security forces cell from Alton, Mo., estimated that as much as \$400,000 was saved.

All costs aside, Wright said this construction is meaningful to Soldiers as well as the Iraqis.

"The only way that we are going to get to go home is if they start taking over the mission," he said. "This is a step in the right direction."

Light Shining in The Darkness

Cpl. John McClure, a medic with the personal security detachment of 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division out of Schweinfurt, Germany, stares out the window of a Bradley Fighting Vehicle while returning from a mission in southern Baghdad's Rashid district April 16. The Harvard, Mass., native had been escorting Gen. David McKiernan, the commanding general of U.S. Army Europe, on a tour of the Vanguard's area of operations.



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



Spc. Steven Reyes looks down into a hole while searching a rooftop in Diwaniyah, Iraq April 11. Reyes' unit, 1st Battalion, 14th Cavalry Regiment, attached to the 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div., is supporting Operation Black Eagle in Diwaniyah after being relocated from Baghdad.



Sergeant 1st Class Rodney Bryant (left), a Soldier with Task Force 1-14 Cavalry, looks at a Diwaniyah resident's identification card during a search of the area for a suspected militia member April 11.



After clearing a fence, Soldiers with Troop C, 1st Battalion, 14th Cavalry Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, get back on line to continue their sweep of a palm grove on the outskirts of Diwaniyah, Iraq April 12.



Spc. Steven Reyes, a Soldier with Task Force 1-14 Cavalry, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div., pulls security on the streets of Diwaniyah, Iraq during a search for militia members April 11.



(Photo by Sgt. Robert Yde, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Spc. Jason McCartney, a member of Troop C, 1st Battalion, 14th Cavalry Regiment, searches through fallen palm leaves for any indication of hiding spots for weapon caches or other militia activity during a sweep on the outskirts of Diwaniyah, Iraq April 12.

Soldiers See Improvements in Diwaniyah

By Sgt. Robert Yde
2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE ECHO, Iraq – After a little more than a week of operations in city of Diwaniyah, Soldiers with Task Force 1-14th Cavalry, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, continue to make strides toward restoring security in an area that has seen an increase in militia activity after a couple of years with no steady coalition presence.

“We came here to do a mission, and we came here to accomplish handing over security to a follow on unit, whether that’s IA (Iraqi Army) or IP (Iraqi Police),” Troop A commander, Capt. Gerald Resmondo said April 15. “I think we’ve just about completed the mission.”

For the past week, these cavalry troops have been out patrolling the neighborhoods of Diwaniyah. They target different neighborhoods each day, search the houses and buildings within that area, talk to the locals about problems in the area and pass out cards with information and a tip-line number, which can be called to report suspicious activities.

“We’re going to houses looking for weapons, and not only that, but we’re establishing a presence in the neighborhood,” explained Spc. Adam Brookshire of Troop A.

Although the task force has been successful locating weapon caches and have captured several suspected militia members, as was the case on this day, they are starting to find less and less.

“All the weapons we found today were the one [AK-47

rifle] and two magazines that everybody is allowed to have in their house and everybody was pretty honest about whether they had it or not,” Brookshire, a native of Lexington, Ky. said.

After completing a short clearing operation April 15, Resmondo’s troop performed what he called “an assessment of the mosques in the area.”

Resmondo said that the goal behind this is to put together information packets that will be passed on to the unit that takes over the area, which will give them a base from where to begin their own assessments of the area.

According to Resmondo, the unit that does take over operations in the Diwaniyah area should find the area to be pretty stable.

“There have been no major reports of any security crises, and I think we’ll leave the city in pretty good shape,” he said.

Of all the improvements that he has seen over the last week-and-a-half, Resmondo said that the most important is probably the increased presence of Iraqi Army soldiers and police officers, who perform operations around-the-clock in the city.

“I think the biggest improvement has just been the integration of the 8th IA and the IPs together in the city,” Resmondo said. “When you travel through the city, you’ll see checkpoints that are set up at just about every major intersection that will have either IA or IPs.

“We ran into a location today that was an IP station. (It) had almost 500 recruits that they were training – sort of an IP academy to train more police for Diwaniyah,” he added. “That’s probably the most marked improvement. We’ve put

them in a position that they weren’t before.”

According to Brig. Gen. Sadiq Jafar Ali, the provincial police chief, there are plans to improve the quality of the Iraqi police in the province.

“We are preparing to hire an additional 3,000 policemen,” he said. “We are receiving new equipment all the time and thanks to the coalition we are receiving excellent training.”

The new security measures have helped curve the violence in the city and the operation was deemed a success.

“There is no fighting going on in the city at this time,” said Qadasiyah Province governor Hamza during a press conference in Diwaniyah April 13. “The city is returning to normal, step by step.”

The partnerships of the Iraqis with coalition forces and Iraqi citizens have aided to that quietness.

“The only way our city will get better is through a joint effort with our friends in the Iraqi Army and coalition,” said Hamza. “I want to thank the citizens for their help and support. They are helping us, helping the city and helping themselves.”

According to Brookshire, being able to come in and know that they have this type of immediate impact on the city is a good feeling.

“I don’t know whether it’s going to flair up after we leave or not, but I definitely got the impression that we made a difference, and that’s important,” Brookshire said. “It really makes me feel good that we can make a difference.”

(Editors note: Additional governmental quotes for this story were taken from a 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division press release)



(Photo by Command Sgt. Maj. Norman Corbett, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment)

Leading from the Front

Lt. Col. Mark Odom, commander, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division and Washington, D.C. native, discusses current operations with a fellow paratrooper near Adamiyah in Iraq April 13.



(U.S. Army photo)

Iraqi police officers from An Najaf, Babil and Karbala provinces observe instruction in hand-to-hand combat at Forward Operating Base Kalsu during Iraqi Police Sustainment Training Class 07-03 April 5. Sgt. 1st Class Scott Self, a level four Army combatives instructor, demonstrates a take down on Sgt. 1st Class Matt Ivacic, military policeman.

Three Provinces Graduate Officers

By Maj. Eric Verzola
4th BCT (ABN), 25th Inf. Div. PAO

KALSU, Iraq – The feeling in the air was a mixture of happiness, pride, satisfaction, and a hint of melancholy. The bright Iraqi sun hung in the sky like a glowing ember of coal, as graduates of the third Iraqi Police Sustainment Training program staged their luggage and books for movement back to their respective home provinces April 10.

This was the first class that included IP from all three provinces of Babil, Karbala, and An Najaf.

Babil sent 17, Karbala 20, and An Najaf 10.

This diversity in provinces, while training as one unit was reflected in the graduation class remarks of Lt. Col. Greg Bell, commander, 2nd Battalion, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division.

“This graduation truly symbolizes that the IP train and fight as a team,” said Bell and an Oak Hill, W. Va., native.

The military liaison instructor for the class, Sgt. 1st Class Matt Ivacic, a military policeman and native of Orange County, Calif., saw firsthand the effect of having the three provinces together for this program.

“When this class started, I could see that the class divided on a provincial level,” said Ivacic. “But as the class went on, I could see them grow closer and build ties.

“Today, at the end of the program, in very short period of time, these men have formed life long bonds by working and living together for only 10 days, but where the real root took hold was the deep understanding that occurs when they see that they share the same struggles and hardships that all law enforcement personnel share and, even more so here where the dangers on your life as an IP are tremendous,” Ivacic said.

The instructors in the program, called Iraqi police liaison officers, feel that the 10 days of training offered in police work is just the right time to sustain and develop peace officers for a more secure Iraq in the future.

“One way we are able to see the fruit of our labors is going out to the stations and doing visits with the IPs, along with Police Transitions Teams,” said Nathan Wheeler, an instructor and a native of Faulkton, S.D. “These visits let us see the men perform on the job and we can see that they do stand out from their peers.”

Wheeler reflected on the motivation he observed as he trained the class.

“I could clearly see that these men are eager and willing to go out and do their duties as law enforcement officers,” said the former Sioux City Police Department officer. “Most Americans back home don’t always realize that IP face a tremendous challenge, unlike anything most law enforcement personnel in the U.S. usually faces on a daily basis.

“While this program is a great resource, many of the IP face challenges due to the amount of training they may have received, and the equipment challenges they have; you might say that the challenges they face are a different kind of challenge than what American law enforcement faces because we get what we need to go out a do our job,” said Wheeler.

But he stated that as he goes out and sees the Iraqi policemen in action, he recognizes more students he has worked with through the course doing an exemplary job despite the challenges, which gives him great hope for the future in Iraq.

This hope is realized through this program designed to improve the IP in their security and law enforcement missions.

The three provinces represented in this graduation class can be proud and confident in these men who will fulfill their duties as Iraqi Policemen.



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

No Water Walker

Hugo, Minn., native Chaplain (Maj.) Charles Causey, the chaplain for the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, grimaces as he walks through a puddle on the way back from the dining facility at Camp Taji, Iraq. When most Soldiers believed the rainy season was over, nature surprised them with a downpour leaving large puddles covering the base.



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

Oklahoma City native Cynthia Ballinger (left), the noncommissioned officer in charge of personnel operations for Headquarters Support Company, 615th Aviation Support Battalion, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, along with Fort Hood, Texas, native Staff Sgt. Nathan Bergkamp (right), an operations noncommissioned officer for HSC, 615th ASB, stretch their legs before the Eisenhower Marathon at Camp Taji, Iraq, April 7.

Soldiers Take on 10K for Fun

**By Spc. Nathan Hoskins
1st Air Cavalry Brigade Public Affairs**

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Before the sun peaked above the horizon, Soldiers from the 1st Air Cavalry “Warrior” Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, stretched and prepared themselves for the Eisenhower Marathon, April 7, at Camp Taji, Iraq.

The run here was coordinated in conjunction with the fifth annual Eisenhower Marathon taking place in Abilene, Kan., on the historic Chisholm Trail. There was a five-kilometer run, the “half-marathon,” and a 10-kilometer run, the full “marathon.”

Much like the race in the states, the Soldiers ran for the joy of running except there isn’t any monetary compensation for the winners.

“I’ve competed in marathons for almost 11 years now. It’s a hobby of mine – I enjoy it. Any opportunity I get to run, I’m out here doing it,” said Fort Hood, Texas, native Staff Sgt. Nathan Bergkamp, an operations noncommissioned officer for Headquarters Support Company, 615th Aviation Support Battalion.

Along with the physical health benefits to running, some Soldiers find it a great outlet for stress that builds up while deployed, said Staff Sgt. Cynthia

Ballinger from Oklahoma City, the noncommissioned officer in charge of personnel operations for HSC, 615th ASB.

Hearne, Texas native Chief Warrant Officer 2 Levar Wilson, a security officer for 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, finished along side the women’s first place winner in the 10K.

“I didn’t even know she was the first female,” he said.

He proudly stated that she didn’t beat him and stressed that they tied.

Wilson crossed the finish line with a time of 45 minutes and 30 seconds next to Mechanicsburg, Pa., native Sgt. Julieta Lainez, a medical supply logistician for Company C, 407th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division.

Finishing first for men in the 5K run was Staff Sgt. Charles Hale from the 229th Military Transition Team with a time of 18.53. For women it was Sgt. Amelia Brown from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, with a time of 20:48.

Mesa, Ariz., native Sgt. Miguel Gamez, an operations noncommissioned officer for Company B, 407th BSB, took first place in the men’s category 10K with a swift time of 38.06.

“On Behalf of a Grateful Mother and Father:” Son Promoted

**By Sgt. 1st Class Rick Emert
1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs**

TAJI, Iraq – Paul Burch got the chance to do something not many fathers of deployed Soldiers are able to do – pin on his son’s new rank.

At an April 2 ceremony, Burch, a paralegal with KBR, was on hand to promote his son, Rusty Burch, to chief warrant officer three.

The senior Burch, a native of Sterling, Ill., is stationed at Camp Victory while his son, who was mostly raised in Sterling, Ill., home, is an AH-64D pilot with the 4th Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division in Taji, Iraq.

“I think it’s great,” Rusty Burch said of his father being on hand to pin on his new rank. “Not very many Soldiers get the oppor-



(Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Rick Emert, 1st ACB Public Affairs)

Paul Burch, a paralegal with KBR at Victory Base, left, salutes his son, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Rusty Burch after pinning on his rank at his promotion ceremony April 2 at Taji, Iraq.

tunity to see their father, or much less have their father or mother pin them in a combat zone, so I thought it was pretty awesome.”

Paul Burch, his voice cracking with emotion, said, “On behalf of a grateful moth-

er and father” as he pinned the new rank on his son’s chest.

“Being in the military myself, I missed a lot of his childhood happenings, and I wasn’t about to miss some of these,” the elder Burch said. He retired from the Army after 24 years as a paralegal.

In remarks after the ceremony, Rusty Burch credited his father for pointing his life in the right direction.

“He pretty much stuck a boot up my butt when I was a freshman in high school, and that’s ... why I’m here today,” he said.

The two have had a few chances to meet and catch up on old times.

“It’s been kind of a unique experience for me for my dad to be here,” the junior Burch said. “I’ve gotten to go see him once at Victory and he’s gotten to come here – this is his third time coming up here to see me, so

it’s worked out pretty well for us.”

The two don’t spend much time worrying about each other’s safety as they work here.

“Both of us put our faith in the one we know will take care of us,” Paul Burch said. “And there’s some security there, knowing you’ve got a loved one around. I also have a nephew that’s in Anaconda, and I have a niece that’s at Victory Base with me. Not only that, but some of these pilots are my family. They’ve been at my house a couple of times in the states, so it’s like coming home to family. After 24 years of serving in the military, the military is my family.

“This is one of the greatest achievements or aspirations that a father could ever have. Except for my marriage and the two sets of twins that my wife and I have raised together, this is probably the greatest moment in my life.”

Makeover for Loyalty: Landing Zone Expanded

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

FORWARD OPERATING BASE LOYALTY, Iraq – An expansion of the landing zone here now accommodates four helicopters at a time.

The group in charge of overseeing the expansion was Company A, 2nd Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. Company Soldiers initially breeched the outer wall, excavated the land and created new barrier walls with the help of the 20th Engineer Battalion and the 1169th Engineer Group.

Capt. Bob Gordon, Co. A commander, said his Soldiers have provided a majority of the construction effort for the force protection piece of the project, which includes putting up HESGO walls, which are lined wire barriers filled with dirt to provide protection. They also are in charge of the command and control of the overall project.

“The reason we’re as far as we are is due to junior leaders, (our) NCOs out there,” he said.

The construction aspect of the project went fairly smooth, Gordon said. The



(Photo by Spc. Courtney Marulli, 2nd IBCT, 2nd Inf. Div. Public Affairs)

Soldiers from Company A, 2nd Special Troops Battalion, work through the night in order to get the barriers filled before moving on to the next phase of the landing zone expansion project at Forward Operating Base Loyalty.

Soldiers didn’t work alone as they had help from three Soldiers in the 1st Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Division, as well as an Iraqi civilian contractor.

Gordon said it was this combined group effort that kept the project moving forward.

“Everyone was just working together for

the same goal,” he said. “You couldn’t tell who was Iraqi or American when operating the equipment. They made a footprint on FOB Loyalty.”

With the initial construction completed, Gordon said the next phase of the project is to create landing pads. One of those hard at

work each day was Sgt. Richard Araiza, from Co. A.

Araiza, a Milwaukee native, has operated the bulldozer and the grader during the project. His efforts were to help the excavators and to level the ground.

“It’s been good,” he said. “Everything’s been working along really well.”

The only problem Araiza ran into was the area’s water table was reached after only digging four feet. Dirt from another area was used to fill in low spots. The Iraqi Army soldiers and the contractor helped, Araiza said, as their vehicles and knowledge came in handy.

“They knew their job,” Araiza said.

Sgt. Chad A. Burrington, of the 642nd Engineers Company, 20th Engineer Battalion, helped operate the heavy equipment needed to complete the project. He oversaw other equipment operators and served as an advisor to the battalion.

“I’m happy to help,” he said.

Sgt. Dennis J. Downs, a construction equipment supervisor with Co. A, said he is in charge of everything on the ground. Downs, of Whitehall, N.Y., said his job is to make sure the deadlines are met each day.

Life Outside the Wire Shown Through Infantrymen’s Eyes

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

AR RAMADI, Iraq — Soldiers in Company D, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team have been working for almost six months to help bring security to Ar Ramadi.

It often means long hours in austere conditions, but the Soldiers know they are making a difference. Staff Sgt. Richard L. Sanchez, a squad leader, said keeping an observation point running smoothly requires teamwork. With sandbags to be filled and positions to be dug, “Everyone has to contribute in order to make it work,” he said.

It can get boring when a firefight isn’t raging, but Sanchez said the morale of Soldiers is kept up by working out as a squad and watching movies with one another. But most of all, the Soldiers tell one another stories.

“It’s nice to not always be on the go,” Sanchez said. But being in a defensive position, such as an observation point, isn’t just a walk in the park. Firefights can erupt at anytime and, as such, everyone has to stay alert.

When Company D Soldiers first moved in, they inherited a building piled with trash and debris. But they cleaned it up, then created rooms and doors by using wooden scraps, tape, cord and just about anything else available. A recent addition is electricity. It’s still far from glamorous, but Soldiers said they have what they need to carry out their missions.

Cpl. Josh N. Brown, a team leader from Centerville, Iowa, said an observation point requires one to avoid complacency.

“You’re staring at nothing, waiting for something to happen,” he said.

Brown said it is nice to know that he is relatively safe while at the observation point, but is anxious to get on the move again, which is something he misses.

Cpl. Joseph L. Hill, a team leader, said the observation point affords the chance to take a break from missions, although it can grow monotonous. But he knows being the eyes over Ar Ramadi is an important security role.

“Just our presence here discourages them,” Hill said of the insurgents.

The night has a slight chill to it and both Soldiers don’t seem to notice as they keep their eyes focused on their sec-



(Photo by Spc. Courtney Marulli, 2nd IBCT, 2nd Inf. Div. Public Affairs)

A Soldier in Company D, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, looks out from the observation point onto the streets and alleyways of Ar Ramadi, Iraq watching for movement and suspicious behavior.

tors. They take a drink from their cans or eat an occasional snack, but it’s the conversations they have between themselves that get them through the shift.

This is Brown’s second deployment, but first as an infantryman. During his first deployment he was a truck driver, but ended up doing infantry missions. He said that he did the job, just without the skill identifier. So, he decided to reclassify into the infantry.

“When you think of the Army, you think of the infantry,” he said.

For Brown, being an infantryman is fulfilling the role he played as a child when he pretended to be a Soldier. No one goes out to play Soldier and sits behind a desk, Brown noted, and he wanted to be a Soldier who is down in the dirt getting hard jobs done. He loves the high-speed weaponry and training such as airborne school and kicking in doors.

“It’s the adrenaline-junkie stuff civilians pay a bunch of money for that we get paid to do,” he said.

For Hill, the best part of the infantry is the satisfaction of finding improvised explosive devices or weapons caches.

“It’s something you know that’s going to keep someone else from getting killed because you found it,” he said. “If you say you’re not scared you’re either lying or stupid,” he said.

But once the mission is underway and he’s walking

amongst buildings, Hill said his mind is no longer thinking about himself but watching the ground for IEDs, the rooftops for snipers, and making sure fellow Soldiers are safe.

Hill goes silent as he looks out into the night and Brown’s voice breaks the silence.

“Hill and I have two other people we have to worry about beside ourselves,” he said. “We spend more time worrying about if our guys are OK. You have to make sure your two guys make it back.”

Hill nods in agreement.

“Their lives are in your hands,” he said.

Once the mission is over everyone starts laughing and joking, but one scary part remains: the trip back to safety. Brown said turning the horrific events into jokes helps keep things from getting too serious, which can drive people crazy.

“You have to put a comedy spin on everything that happens so you can deal with it in your mind,” Brown said. “Me and Hill are good about making it funny.”

While in sector, Brown said he and other infantrymen become a sort of machine where they aren’t worrying, but thinking about completing the mission.

“The hardest part is losing someone that’s part of your family,” he said of losing fellow brothers-in-arms.

Brown said everyone felt the loss when the company lost Pfc. Albert M. Nelson and Pfc. Roger A. Suarez Dec. 4.

“It hurts,” he said. “I can’t really describe it. It hurts.”

Despite the hardships and loss, the bonds these infantrymen have with one another will never break. While many other Soldiers may be friends with some people in their section or squad, infantry Soldiers constantly hang out and even their wives all become friends. It forms a strong support group.

“You’re away from your family, but you’ve got your family right there,” Brown said of his battle buddies.

As the deployment passes the six-month mark, Brown said he and his fellow infantry Soldiers will still continue to do their jobs to the best of their ability.

“Me and Hill, no matter what, do our job the best we can,” Brown said. “We do what we do because we wear this uniform. That’s never been a question, never will be a question. I signed a contract. I’ll do my job.”

“As long as I wear a flag on my right arm,” he said, “I’ll fight, regardless of the mission.”



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

1st Lt. Larry Pitts (center), of Fayetteville, N.C., a platoon leader with Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, talks with shopkeepers in the Graya'at area of Baghdad's Adhamiyah District during an evening patrol April 1. Pitts' platoon later conducted a successful raid based on information gathered from talking to the neighborhood people.

"Shake & Bake"

Paratroopers in Adhamiyah Use Brains Over Brawn

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

BAGHDAD – Staff Sgt. Darin Morgan's platoon had just snatched a suspected insurgent off the streets. They had done it without Apache gun ships hovering overhead and without Stryker vehicles blocking the roads. They did it without blowing open any doors or damaging any property. And they did it without firing a single shot.

All of which, Morgan said, means they did it the right way.

There's a time and a place for overwhelming force, but in Baghdad's Adhamiyah District, paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division are learning that sometimes a soft touch can be just as effective.

"We live here. If we have to go in hard, we still have to come back the next day. So if we can take an insurgent off the streets with the minimum amount of firepower and resources necessary, it's a good thing," said Morgan, a platoon sergeant with Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, from Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.

It all began at the tail-end of a long foot patrol April 1, when Morgan's platoon leader, 1st Lt. Larry Pitts, stopped to talk to a man on the steps of his house in Graya'at, a poor, mostly-Sunni neighborhood in the Adhamiyah district. 2nd Platoon had spent

the past five hours knocking on doors and talking to people about their problems. Everyone up to that point had been happy to talk, chattering away as Pitts wrote their answers down in his little green composition pad.

But the owner of this house was different. He and his wife were defensive, reluctant to give Pitts any information. After a few minutes of getting nowhere, Pitts took the man's name, thanked him for his time, and walked back to his platoon.

Pitts couldn't shake the feeling something was wrong. He pulled aside intelligence analyst Sgt. Zac Manafort of Moondus, Conn., and asked if he recognized the man's name. Manafort had memorized the names and aliases of hundreds of suspected insurgents in the area, and this one set off an alarm in his head.

"That guy's dirty," Manafort said.

Pitts immediately radioed the man's name up to headquarters for verification. They said it would take a few minutes. In the meantime, Pitts told the platoon to look busy.

The paratroopers spread out, pretending like they were checking out some shops on the suspect's street. Staff Sgt. Antonio Alvarado and a few others crowded into a record store around the corner, pretending to look for CDs. The shocked shopkeepers stared wide-eyed at the paratroopers as they

browsed the shelves, their bulky body armor, radio antennas, and weapons making it a tight fit inside the cramped shop.

"Here's that Ricky Martin CD you wanted," one paratrooper teased his buddy.

Pitts was across the street in a smoothie bar when the response finally came back from headquarters – the suspect's name matched that of a wanted insurgent. Detain him, they told Pitts.

Pitts and Morgan quickly huddled together to come up with a plan. They needed to separate the suspect from his family.

"We knew they had kids inside (the house), the family was all there, so instead of blowing the door down or kicking it in, we decided to try to gain entry without force," Pitts said.

Pitts and Morgan decided the circumstances called for a little deception.

They went back to the house. Pitts knocked on the front gate, waving a scrap of paper. It was his phone number, he said, in case the man needed to reach him. The suspect came out to get it. As he took the paper from Pitts' hands, Pitts took a step back.

"Get him," he said, out of the corner of his mouth.

San Antonio native Sgt. Hector Hernandez stepped forward and took the man by the hand, pulling him outside into the street. A humvee pulled up. The man looked

confused. Within 30 seconds, he was flex-cuffed, searched, and bundled into the waiting vehicle.

The rest of the platoon rushed up to clear the house and search for evidence.

Pitts found Morgan inside. Morgan congratulated the platoon leader on his performance with the phone number.

"Smooth," said Morgan.

"Shake and bake," replied Pitts.

Afterwards, Morgan was pleased at how it had all gone down.

"I think it's actually more of a surprise than a traditional raid," he said. "You're shaking the dude's hand and then you slap the cuffs on him."

He said he wasn't sorry about grabbing the man under false pretences.

"(Insurgents) live a two-faced life, so this was just a taste of their own medicine," he said.

Pitts was just happy that the platoon had been able to take the man outside, in the open, when they knew he was unarmed.

"It's safer for our guys and it's safer for the family," Pitts said. "If we had to go in blind, that's when bullets start flying."

On the ride home in Morgan's truck, someone realized that it had been a fitting day for the kind of deception they had just pulled off.

It was April Fool's Day.

Soldiers Take Down Insurgents

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

BAGHDAD – On the surface, the market seems perfectly ordinary. Men outside the shops gather to play dominoes, smoke, and drink tea. On hot afternoons, an ice cream stand does a brisk business. But in the dark back rooms of some of the shops, murderous plans are hatched.

It's called the Fish Market, a seemingly benign marketplace in the Graya'at area of Baghdad's Adhamiyah district. But according to 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers responsible for security in the area, it's also the nexus for Adhamiyah's criminal-terrorist underground.

Since paratroopers from 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment began conducting security operations in Adhamiyah two months ago, residents have consistently pointed them back to the Fish Market as the source of much of the region's criminal activity. Over time, the paratroopers narrowed in on a handful of individuals based at the market who they believed were responsible for some of the worst crimes. They even gave them a nickname: "The Fish Market Five."

Now it's the Fish Market Three.

In simultaneous, early-morning raids Mar. 31, paratroopers from Battery B, 2-319th AFAR captured two members of the Fish Market Five and detained three other suspects.

One of the detainees was a suspected lieutenant in a murder, torture and kidnapping cell. The other was allegedly one of the leaders of a group responsible for sniper and bomb

attacks on U.S. forces. Three other suspects were also taken into custody during the raids.

The raids took place within minutes of each other. 1st Lt. Josh Rowan, whose platoon led one of the assaults, said the point of conducting the raids simultaneously was to catch the targets off guard. The kidnapper was taken into custody first, when paratroopers shotgun-blasted his door open and hauled him out of bed. Two other unidentified males staying in the house were also detained. In addition to kidnapping and murder, Rowan said the target of the raid had a hand in numerous other criminal activities, including pimping and gun-running.

A few blocks down the street from where Rowan's platoon was conducting their raid, 2nd Lt. Larry Pitts and his platoon were about to hit the bomb-maker's house. Pitts quietly unlatched the front gate and they moved inside the courtyard. When they were set, the breach man blew the front door open with a shotgun blast and the assault squad rushed in. The suspect went quietly, and it was all over in minutes.

As he was supervising the search of the kidnapper's house, Rowan got the call over his radio that the other platoon had got their man.

"Nice. Two for two," he said.

The raids were the return on months of investigative work. It took countless hours spent meetings with residents, cultivating sources, and painstakingly piecing together information before it finally paid off, said Sgt. Billy Davison, a team leader with Battery B. But Davison said the final results made it all worthwhile.



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

Staff Sgt. Jeramie Schader, a squad leader with Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, guards female occupants during a search of the house of a suspected gun-runner in Baghdad's Adhamiyah district.

Paratroopers Help Create 'Gated Community' in Adhamiyah

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – According to an old proverb, good fences make good neighbors. Paratroopers with the 82nd Airborne Division are putting that idea to the test in Baghdad's Adhamiyah district by building a three-mile protective wall on the dividing line between a Sunni enclave and the surrounding Shiite neighborhood.

Paratroopers with the 407th Brigade Support Battalion began emplacing the first section of the wall during an overnight operation April 10 -11. They will be putting new barriers in almost nightly until the wall is complete.

The area the wall will protect is the largest predominantly-Sunni neighborhood in East Baghdad. Majority-Shiite neighborhoods surround it on three sides. Like other religiously divided regions in the city, the area has been trapped in a spiral of sectarian violence and retaliation.

"Shiites are coming in and hitting Sunnis, and Sunnis are retaliating across the street," said Capt. Scott McLearn, of Gaithersburg, Md., an assistant operations officer with 407th BSB.

Planners hope the creation of the wall will help restore law and order by providing a way to screen people entering and exiting the neighborhood – allowing residents and people with legitimate business in, while keeping death squads and militia groups out.

"(The wall) is on a fault line of Sunni and Shia, and the idea is to curb some of the self-sustaining violence by controlling who has access to the neighborhoods," said Capt. Marc Sanborn, brigade engineer for 2nd BCT, 82nd Airborne Division, of Savannah, Ga., who helped plan the project.

When the wall is complete, traffic control points manned by Iraqi Army soldiers will provide the only means of entrance into the community, Sanborn said.

"They'll be able to control who comes in and out of there," said McLearn.

Around the brigade, the project has been jokingly referred to as "The Great Wall of Adhamiyah." But in fact, the concept is closer to an exclusive gated community in the U.S. than it is to China's great wall, Sanborn said.

"That community will be completely gated and protected,"



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

An Iraqi contractor attaches chains to a huge 14,000 pound concrete barrier so that a crane can lift it into place alongside a road in Baghdad's Adhamiyah district April 10.

said Lt. Col. Thomas Rogers, commander of the 407th BSB.

Sanborn stressed that when the project is complete, security on both sides of the wall is going to be increased.

"It's really for the security of all the people of Adhamiyah, not just one side or the other," he said.

Sunnis inside the wall can take comfort knowing the added security will prevent gangs of Shiite extremists from being able to come into the area and target residents.

"Those pinch points are going to cut off their access routes and limit their mobility," said Staff Sgt. Michael Mortimer of Keokuk, Iowa, a platoon sergeant with A Co., 407th BSB.

But the Shiite communities on the other side of the wall will also benefit. When the wall is in place, Sunni terrorists will no longer be able to use the neighborhood as a staging point for attacks against Shiites, said Sanborn.

Coalition forces will also see advantages from the wall. The barriers will make it more difficult for insurgents to plant roadside bombs along routes traveled by Coalition and Iraqi forces operating in the area.

"You're not going to be able to just walk over here, set an IED, and then walk back across the street," said 2nd Lt.

William Archer of Desoto, Ill., a tank platoon leader with the 1st Battalion, 77th Armor Regiment out of Schweinfurt, Germany.

But before any of these changes can occur, the wall has to be in place. It took Chinese laborers hundreds of years to create the Great Wall. The 407th BSB hopes to be finished with its wall in a month. The first night of emplacing barriers, April 10, illustrated some of the hurdles the paratroopers face in the operation.

The convoy of more than a dozen vehicles left Camp Taji under cover of darkness. Long flatbed trucks carried the stacks of huge concrete barriers – each weighing 14,000 pounds. Gun trucks to the front and rear provided security.

The danger of the mission was evident from the start. Only minutes after the convoy left, it was hit by small arms fire.

The paratroopers pressed on into Adhamiyah, where curfew was in effect and the streets were deserted. The convoy crawled along until it reached the link up point.

The cranes, towering over everything else on the road, were waiting for them, along with an escort of Archer's tanks. But there was a problem: the convoy was on the wrong side of the street, and barriers in the middle of the road made it impossible to cross over to where the cranes were.

But then Pfc. Sonia Padron bulldozed a cement barrier out of the way with her humvee and the huge flatbeds painstakingly squeezed through the narrow passage.

No one wanted to stay on the streets any longer than they had to. As the paratroopers quickly undid the straps on their pallets, the crane operators scrambled around attaching chains so that the cranes could swing the barriers into place. In less than an hour, all the barriers had been set in position.

On the way home, one of the vehicles punctured a tire, and the convoy halted to fix it. An electrical storm was raging. It started to rain, and then someone heard machine gun fire coming from the direction of some nearby buildings. The drenched gunners swiveled in their turrets anxiously. Finally, the tow bar was ready and the paratroopers moved out again.

Ten hours after departing, the convoy returned to Camp Taji. The exhausted, wet paratroopers went home to sleep. In less than 12 hours, they'd have to repeat the whole operation again.

"If it works," Mortimer said, "it will all be worth it."

Boston Marathon Makes its Way to Camp Taji

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Before the sun ever squeezed over the horizon, the runners stretched and joked in the early morning cool. They waited for final instructions and the start of the Coalition Air Force Training Team's Boston Marathon.

The 26.3-mile run was the idea of Air



Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Sean Marchal wears a banner proclaiming his marathon battle-cry, "Servin' 4 Irven!", in memory of his long time friend and mentor, Army Sgt. Irven Murphy, during the Coalition Air Force Training Team Boston Marathon held at Camp Taji, Iraq on April 13.

Force Senior Master Sgt. Sean Marchal, senior air traffic controller with CAFTT. His plan was to run the famous race in Boston this year, but deployment orders to Iraq cancelled his chance. Instead, he organized his own marathon on the Iraqi Air Force controlled side of Camp Taji.

"I ran the Boston Marathon last year, said Marchal. "I couldn't get to Tallil for the satellite Boston Marathon, so I decided to put this [race] on."

Capt. (Chaplain) Troy Morken, an avid marathoner from the 15th Brigade Troops Battalion, 15th Sustainment Brigade, was unable to make it to the Tallil race as well. The CAFTT marathon would be his sixth race in two years and his first international one.

True to his calling, Morken said he tries to meet each grueling mile with a positive attitude; encouraging other runners along side him that they can make it.

"Usually the last couple of miles I'm not as upbeat," he grinned. "[When I finish] I feel terrible; then I ask when is the next one is."

As race organizer, Marchal outlined the cramped route and unique obstacles runners' would face. He joked that the course would be a mind-numbing 1.33-mile loop for 20 turns. Hazards included water, mud, gravel, Iraqi sheep and Sasha; an amicable but highly protective stray dog that claimed the CAFTT compound has her home.

The upside is, he said, that unlike the course in Tallil, held on the coalition forces' side, the CAFTT marathon is the first one run on Iraqi controlled turf.

In addition to the full marathon, Marchal

planned a half marathon, a "nearly" four miler and the Battle Rattle Ramble; one lap in helmet, body armor with protective plates and weapon.

Senior Airman Michael Schweers, a maintenance production scheduler with CAFTT, wanted to challenge himself and put his new fitness level in perspective.

"I just lost 25 pounds, so I put the 25 pounds of battle-rattle back on to see how it felt," he said. He couldn't believe he had been running with that much weight in the past.

Marchal ran the course with a yellow, "Servin' for Irven" banner attached to the back of his shirt. It was his tribute to life long friend and mentor, Army Sgt. Irven Murphy, who passed away last St. Patrick's Day.

Marchal worked for Murphy, a retired World War Two veteran, at the parks department in his hometown of Greenville, Oh., prior to joining the Air Force.

"He knew me since I was born. He was the proto-typical sergeant; always had a three-quarters smoked cigar and a flat-top haircut," he laughed.

With the chest-thumping drone of Apache and Blackhawk helicopters from the neighboring flight line, runners ticked off the miles using colored rubber bands around their wrists. At the start, each marathon runner was given 20 rubber bands; one for each lap. When the bands were gone, the 26.3-mile ordeal was over.

Capt. (Chaplain) Troy Morken finished first, in 3 hours, 4 minutes and 38 seconds. Senior Master Sgt. Marchal completed the course in 3 hours, 25 minutes and 44 sec-



(Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Conner, 15th SB)

Tech. Sgt. Chad Scholl, a non-destructive inspection craftsman with Coalition Air Force Training Team, rounds the corner during the "Battle-Rattle Ramble," a side event held during the CAFTT Boston Marathon on Camp Taji, Iraq on April 13.

onds.

Both say they're looking forward to the next marathon, be it in Boston next year or not.

"Stagecoach" Troops Provide Center of Gravity for Support

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

VICTORY BASE, IRAQ – In a dusty corner of Seitz Annex here, near Baghdad, Soldiers of the 68th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 15th Sustainment Brigade, work to provide what is needed to maintain security operations for the Multi-National Division - Baghdad area.

As one of the Iraqi theater's central receiving and shipping points, convoys from Iraq and Kuwait pass through, bringing and taking containers and pallets of all shapes and sizes.

"The Victory CRSP is one of the smallest and busiest yards we have. It really is the center hub of activity for all cargo in and out of country," said Maj. Aaron Hardy, transportation integration officer in charge for the 15th SB.

The goal of the yard, he said, is to keep the flow of goods and supplies moving. It allows convoys one stop to transfer cargo, rather than delivering to units spread all over Baghdad.

The challenge for troops and civilian contractors is to maintain that steady flow of supplies out of the cramped yard, while continually receiving new shipments every night.

"It's a constant rotation. [My job] is to make sure the yard runs smooth and fluid," said Sgt. Kevin Dipiazza, a transportation movement NCO for the 68th CSSB.

For Dipiazza, a normal day can mean seeing 200 shipping containers leave the CRSP yard, only to have another 150 come in later that night.

The influx of additional combat units to support security operations forces caused CRSP yard operators to focus an obsessive eye on details. Coordination of trucks, transportation movement requests, and supplies to units scattered



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

Sgt. 1st Class Lainnie Daley, a transportation movement noncommissioned officer with the 68th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 15th Sustainment Brigade, works with a civilian contracted truck driver at the Seitz Annex Central Receiving and Shipping Points yard in Baghdad.

around Baghdad and outlaying forward operating bases means the smallest delay or shortage can cause a domino-effect to the logistics train.

"What we have done is to get all of our assets together and prioritize on a daily basis," said Sgt. 1st Class Lainnie Daley, 68th CSSB support operations NCO. By conducting daily meetings with her crew and civilian contractors, she helps determine what must go and what can stay.

Ample space is a short-lived luxury at the CRSP yard. Every piece of cargo and equipment that comes into theater

passes through the 68th CSSB's hands. Without transportation assets of their own, "Stagecoach" troops maintain close ties with sister battalions and customer units.

Coordination with the 867th CSB (out of Camp Taji to the north) the 541st Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, on Victory Base Camp and the addition of civilian contracted trucks, ensures transparent logistical support.

We work in a joint environment, said Dipiazza, to support coalition troops. It can become a hurdle trying to find the medium between getting material out and working with an outside unit's operations timetable, he said. The goal is to move supplies out as quickly and efficiently as possible.

"The longer it sits in our yard is the longer somebody out there goes without it," he said.

Inside the CRSP operations cell, the phones ring constantly. Soldiers from the 169th Cargo Transfer Company, 867th Corps Support Battalion, from Fort Eustis, Va., perform an intricate dance of inventory tracking and control, customer relations and oversight of equipment movement.

The arrival of troops from the 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) has kept Staff Sgt. Phillip Smith, CRSP operations NCO, very busy. In addition to the hectic pace of providing sustainment to current units, he and his Soldiers said they remain confident they can move the extra M1A1 tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles and other heavy equipment.

"As long as we have the truck assets, we'll be able to handle it," he said.

Capt. Ryan Speed, transportation support officer, said his battalion is working to find additional space for operations.

"This is a never empty yard," he said. "We always have something in the CRSP."



(Photos by Sgt. Tierney Nowland)

Just Another Day's Work

(Above) Soldiers from Company B, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, take a nap at Forward Operating Base Union after conducting raids in Baghdad's Mansour district April 3. (Left) Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Ogawa from Company B, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, goes through a hole in the door to enter a house they were searching in the Iraqi capital's Mansour district during a combined cordon and search with Iraqi Army troops April 4.

Eyes From Above Aid Ground Mission

By Pfc. William Hatton
7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP STRIKER, Iraq – In a damp narrow alleyway in the Baghdad neighborhood of Al Mansour, Soldiers move swiftly between buildings, going through each one to check for illegal weaponry.

In this neighborhood, Soldiers are going door-to-door, visiting with locals to not only search for weapons caches, but to build relationships and gain a better understanding of the needs of the residents.

As they move through the alleyways and on the streets, three Soldiers sit up on a rooftop guarding the streets below.

For Sgt. Chris Bryant, an infantryman with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, sitting on the rooftop is more than a good opportunity to get a sun tan – it provides the much-needed security for his comrades on the ground.

“Our basic job is to sit up on a rooftop and provide security from a high place,” said Bryant, a native of Peoria, Ill. “We make sure that no one fires at our squad or platoon.

“As the unit moves across the neighborhood, we move



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

Sgt. Chris Bryant, an infantryman with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, pulls security on a rooftop for his platoon in Baghdad Al Mansour neighborhood April 6.

with them,” Bryant said. “We set up on a different rooftop that provides a better view of the ground when they move.”

With the constant movement from building to building,

Bryant said it becomes important to pick the building with the best view of the area below.

As this day lingers on, Bryant said the job can be tedious, just sitting in place all day long.

Although things are slow this time, the job is still important, Bryant said.

Without eyes on the ground from up above, units wouldn't be able to move safely.

“If we don't have good security, then the platoon can't move,” Bryant said.

The job of providing security for the troops on the ground is important, but it's also important for the troops to interact with the people and build better relations, Bryant said.

When a building is picked for security, the squad providing security also tries to build a bond with the family inside, Bryant said.

The last of the alleyways is secured and the final houses are searched.

It was a quiet day in Al Mansour and Bryant and his squad have the satisfaction of knowing their birds-eye view of the neighborhood helped keep the rest of their platoon safe.

Soldiers Embrace Pocket-Size Memories of War

By Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma
1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – One undeniable commonality in every battle fought is the memories of war that burn into the minds of the Soldiers who fight in it and the small pieces that remind them to never forget.

Three infantrymen with Company C, 1st “Tomahawk” Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, experienced three different attacks, on three separate occasions and each came away with different stories to tell and some proof that fit into the palm of their hand.

The Shot

After clearing a corner house on a road named for its high frequency of rocket-propelled grenade attacks, RPG Alley East, Oct. 12, Spc. Nicholas Myers was standing outside pulling security when a car blazed by and sprayed gunfire in his direction. Simultaneously, about half a mile away, people shot from rooftops across the highway.

“When the gun shots started going off I was looking around and asking myself ‘Where are these guys?’” Myers recalled, wanting to return fire.

As his eyes continued to scan, he saw a row of bullets, one by one, climb up the wall behind him.

“There was concrete blowing up everywhere and then I felt something hit me in the leg, right in the shin,” said the native of Licking, Mo. “I thought it was a chunk of concrete that blew out of the wall and nicked me in the leg.”

Instinctively, he ran back into the house with the rest of his squad and got on the roof where they could seek out where the shots were coming from, but the assailants were gone.

Then the throbbing became more noticeable as he looked down to his blood-soaked pant leg.

Still unaware he had been shot, his squad got back into their Stryker vehicle and a tightly-wrapped field dressing was applied to his wound.

When he finally got back onto the base, he walked to the aid station where they X-rayed him and discovered, lodged in the back of his leg, a bullet.

He ended up keeping the bullet the medical staff extracted from his leg.

Soon after, he went straight to a phone and called his wife and mom to tell them what had happened.

Myers said that his mom stayed emotional during the entire conversation and although his now-expecting wife, Felecia, started off very emotional, ended the phone call with a ‘Well, I guess that’s pretty cool’ attitude.

An Explosive Christmas

Later that year, operations for Pfc. Joshua Ruth continued as usual. It was Christmas day, and Ruth was out on a clearing mission in New Baghdad and the path they were wheeling through was Route Predator.

“We’ve been taking contact and hostilities all day,” said the native of Elizabethtown, Ky.

That night they were going to have three to four hours to eat a Christmas dinner and relax before heading back out to patrol and secure their area of operation.

This battalion effort had the Soldiers on rotations, but another platoon was outside the wire and hit an improvised explosive device.

The attack flattened a couple of tires, forcing Ruth’s group to go out earlier than expected.

So they answered the call to duty and were out of the wire once again.

They were driving along and then it happened.

“I remember the sound of the (explosively formed projectile) and I remember thinking that it must be somebody else,” Ruth said. “The next thing I remember is me lying on the floor.”

The blast had knocked him down into the vehicle. It exploded about a meter and a half away from him. It sent shrapnel across his face, perforating both eardrums and giving him a concussion.

“For a little bit, we were just disoriented; there was smoke



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

(Left to right) Infantrymen with 2nd Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, Pfc. Joshua Ruth, native of Elizabethtown, Ky., Spc. Nicholas Myers, native of Licking, Mo., and Pfc. Brandon Kroger, native of Cincinnati, have all kept pocket-sized pieces of metal which wounded them during their deployment to Iraq.

everywhere; the vehicle was totally destroyed,” Ruth said.

As the squad dismounted and pulled security, Ruth started to feel lightheaded so they took him over to the physician who cleaned and patched up the lacerations on his face.

The next morning, they went back out to the site to secure other items.

“I was looking at the vehicle and where I was when it happened and I found it stuck up inside of one of the hubs and I pried it out,” Ruth said.

The battalion was hit by its first EFP and now Ruth has a lasting reminder that fits in the palm of his hand, a piece of that ten-slug EFP that hit them that day.

“Because we spent the nights sleeping on the ground at other (forward operating bases), it wasn’t until a couple days later that we got back and I was able to call my family,” Ruth said. “On the phone, my mom started crying, but my dad said that they were just so happy to hear my voice.”

Pieces of That Day

It was early morning, Jan. 24, and the first objective was a mosque. While Pfc. Brandon Kroger and his squad secured the area, an Iraqi army element was trying to get into the mosque to search it.

“But they couldn’t find a way in, so we got ready to help,” said Kroger. “We all dismounted and there we were at the nose of the vehicle. Me, (Spc. Brice Sandefur) and Ruth, were sitting there pulling security waiting for the order to move to go blow this door up.”

Then he heard a noise.

“It sounded like a tin can that hit the ground,” said Kroger, a native of Cincinnati. “So I turn, thinking that there’s someone there about to shoot me. (I) raise my weapon and, boom!”

“Five seconds went by and I didn’t even realize I had been hit,” Kroger remembered. “Suddenly, my left hand went completely numb and my calf felt like someone took a sledge hammer to it.”

Everyone got back into the vehicle and Kroger pulled out his first aid pouch, assessed his wounds, and wrapped them up the best he could.

It was a grenade that exploded about 25 feet away from him. X-rays showed that there were a total of eight known pieces of shrapnel in his body.

His mother didn’t take the news so well and once word got around about the grenade attack he survived, e-mails



Infantrymen with 2nd Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division display pieces they have kept from their attacks during their deployment April 13.

from family members filled his in-box.

A couple of weeks went by and Kroger noticed the color of one of the welts had changed to black. There he was sitting on his bed when he pulled a piece of black metal out of his inner thigh.

He said that although some pieces are slowly seeping out of his skin, there is a piece that is in so deep in his left thigh, a quarter of an inch from his femur, that he is probably not going to get it removed.

“So I’ll probably be taking it to my grave,” Kroger said.

But for now, he has a tiny reminder of that day.

“Eventually I will have kids and my kids will have kids,” the 24-year-old said. “So I’ll be this 85-year-old talking about how he was in Iraq and got hit by a grenade and I’ll have a piece of shrapnel to prove it.”

Although these ‘Tomahawk’ Soldiers all came back to base with a piece of their Iraq War and a unique story to tell, their attacks left them with something else.

All of them came out of this with a desire to get back out and join their fellow comrades in the fight.

“You feel like you’re that extra element in your squad, in your platoon, that might make that difference,” said Kroger. “Having that extra set of hands and feet out there is good.”



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

The view from the high-dive platform shows the layout of Freedom Rest, a Morale, Welfare and Recreation resort in the heart of Baghdad. Despite the surge of troops into the Iraqi capital, there are room availabilities for Soldiers seeking a brief respite from day-to-day operations.

Soldiers Get Away From It All in Heart of Baghdad

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

BAGHDAD – The Soldiers shouldering the load of battlefield operations are not always afforded the luxury of rest and relaxation. When they do receive a break to decompress, it is in their best interest to make the most of the opportunity. Enter Freedom Rest, an oasis in the center of the Iraqi capital which affords Soldiers the opportunity to escape the stressors of life on the front line of the Global War on Terrorism.

With the additional three months of service mandated for all active-duty Soldiers, the ability to escape, if for even just a few days, is greater than ever. Freedom Rest allows just such a getaway.

Freedom Rest proves not every mission in Iraq requires body armor, ammunition and a strong constitution. While partaking in some much earned, and needed, rest and relaxation, Soldiers may wear civilian attire, lock their weapons up and cut loose for four days of recuperation.

Located in the International Zone, Freedom Rest allows Soldiers to take a break from it all without leaving the Operation Iraqi Freedom theater of operations. The only challenge at Freedom Rest is deciding what to do.

The Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) staff schedules various events, including: basketball, flag football, poker, dodge ball, karaoke, tug of war and a big splash competition. The staff photographs and video tapes Soldiers enjoying themselves and then provides them with CD to remember the experience.

A complimentary internet café provides 24-hour service as well as wireless service. Soldiers can speak with friends and family at no cost. There is a room for Soldiers to record video messages to DVD. For Soldiers who are parents, an assortment of children's books is available. The books may be read to the camera, so children can watch the DVDs as a bed-time story.

For the active Soldier, there is a certified personal trainer on site. A combat stress team and chaplain meet incoming

Soldiers on their arrival and remain available by appointment during Soldiers' entire stay. The typical services for Soldiers are also present, including a Post Exchange and barber shop.

Although General Order Number One remains in effect the whole visit, at Freedom Rest civilian clothes are authorized and local vendors on the premises sell affordable attire. Body armor and weapons are stored for guests' stay.

Despite the many enticing amenities of Freedom Rest, it's more than just a resort for some Soldiers who carry more than their rucksack through the doors. It's a chance for Soldiers to take a step back from the combat zone and live like there were no improvised explosive devices to spot, explosively-formed projectiles to fear or battle buddies who would not be making the trip home.

For Spc. Corey Kupiec, a native of Worcester, Mass., a loss in the U.S. was the impetus for his visit to Freedom Rest.

"I had a friend back home commit suicide two weeks ago. I think that is why they (his command) sent me out here, to kind of let me not think about it and relax," the 22-year-old said.

In Baghdad, on Forward Operating Base Falcon, death is not an uncommon visitor for Kupiec, who is assigned to Troop D, 1st Battalion, 40th Cavalry Squadron, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division. Ten days before, a medic died during operations conducted by Kupiec's company, he said.

In addition to loss, both near and far, the all-wheel mechanic sees the value of a break from the action now and then.

"You just get stressed out sometimes. You feel like you're a grenade and your pin is going to pop sometimes. You don't want to freak out and do something stupid, so you just need some time to relax," said Kupiec, who was deployed in October. "A lot of guys deal with the stress differently."

Many of the Soldiers in Kupiec's company are merely teenagers, straight out of high school, who have never lived on their own, let alone deployed to a war zone and have been

relatively sheltered in life, he said.

"They need some time to kick back, relax and realize it's not the end of the world coming to Iraq," Kupiec said.

Relaxation is really what the MWR staff are employed to provide.

"We're here to make sure you have a good time. We want you to relax," said

Craig Miller, a certified personal trainer at Freedom Rest. Originally, the Freedom Rest facility served Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard as an officers' club. The villas Soldiers occupy today housed Iraqi officers prior to 2003. After the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the 1st Armored Division opened the facility to Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers in October 2003. Since then, Freedom Rest has hosted more than 35,000 Soldiers, said Sgt. 1st Class Stephen Sanders, the facility's noncommissioned officer-in-charge.

"We really try to take care of the Soldier and we have nothing but good times scheduled for the Soldier," said the native of from Williams Town, Ky. "When it comes time for them to leave, they don't want to leave and all they say is that I hope to get another chance to come back to Freedom Rest."

More than just a resort for Soldiers to enjoy themselves, Freedom Rest is a tool for commanders to use.

"I want leadership to know about Freedom Rest and be able to send their Soldiers here. Even though they say they're not able to lose a Soldier for four days, this is a prime opportunity for Soldiers to be totally refreshed," Sanders said. "It's the only R & R facility within the Iraqi theater, so it allows the leadership to send their Soldiers for four days instead of losing them for nine if they go to Qatar (Freedom Rest offers everything Qatar has, sans the alcohol)."

Currently, only 45 percent of Freedom Rest's capacity is being utilized, meaning reservations are available despite the on-going surge of troops into Baghdad, Sanders said.

Freedom Rest also hosts conferences and meetings. The Falaniko Inn is a six-bedroom and 16-bed house for units to come together in a living room atmosphere for team building or professional development, Sanders said.



(Photos by Sgt. Jason Krawczyk, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

(Above) Teens of the 1st Cavalry Division family round the rink at the First Team's Teen Family Readiness Group event at the Fort Hood Skate Center March 31. More than 70 teens from various Cav units showed up to skate. (Left) Lt. Col. Archie Davis, the assistant division commander for the 1st Cavalry Division Rear Detachment, demonstrates a speed skating technique for division teens at the First Team's Teen Family Readiness Group event at the Fort Hood Skate Center March 31.

First Team Teens Skate Until Late

By Sgt. Joy Pariante
1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

FORT HOOD, Texas – Teens came out in droves to the Fort Hood Skating Center for the 1st Cavalry Division's Teen Family Readiness Group event. The teen FRG is a new organization for the Cav, aimed at providing support to a group that isn't always attended to.

"We started this FRG because there was a demographic not being touched," said Carol Livengood, the division's family readiness support assistant. Livengood explained that there are a lot of programs for spouses and for younger children, but not really for the 13-18 year old group.

Events like the skating party and last month's rodeo are designed to get Cav teenagers together and give them a

chance to talk to other teens about deployment issues.

"In my own deployments, I have seen the impact on my own teens caused by the absence of a parent at this very critical time in their lives," said Col. Larry Phelps, commander, 1st Cavalry Division (Rear). "The Teen FRG gives us a chance to get a group of teens together, in a fun environment, so that they are able to talk to each other and our chaperones, and realize they are not alone in this world."

"It shows them they're important and they're taken care of, too," Livengood added.

The teenagers appreciated the effort.

"It's nice to talk to other people and see how they're dealing with this," said Mindy Vela, who's dad is deployed with the Cav.

"This gives us stuff to do instead of sitting at home

thinking about what our parents are doing," said Shelby O'Rourke, whose father is also deployed. "Instead we're out here thinking about friends and having fun."

The event included free skating, dodge ball and recording messages for family members downrange. Chaperones for the event were FRG members and First Team Soldiers, like Capt. Pablo Garcia Jr., rear detachment commander for the 4th Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment of the division 1st Air Cavalry Brigade. Garcia supported the skating event because "it's an interactive type of activity," he said. "It really gets kids to come out of their shells."

"If we help just one teen with issues of deployment then this is all a success," Livengood said.

"The Army has a vested interest in making sure families are happy," Garcia said. "And this is part of that."





(Photo by Steve Traynor, Killeen Daily Herald)

Lets Go Another Round

'Hokie,' a boxer owned by Capt. David Clay, stands almost at attention with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, after a brisk one-mile run with units and family members from the 1st Cavalry Division April 5 at Fort Hood, Texas.

Cav Brings Support to Soldiers at Brooke Army Medical Center

By Sgt. Joy Pariente
1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

FORT HOOD, Texas – Soldiers who are injured downrange need many things for a successful recovery. One of those necessities is encouragement and support and the 1st Cavalry Division family is dedicated to making sure there is no shortage of that.

At least every two weeks, the 1st Cav rear command group – Col. Larry Phelps, commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. William Wallace – take a trip down to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio to visit wounded Soldiers.

“In 1st Cav and III Corps, our Soldiers are our most important asset,” Phelps said. “Our chains of command think it is critical to stay “plugged in” to these heroes who have sacrificed so much for our unit and our country, and do whatever we can to assist them in their recoveries.

“I think that personal interaction with them is a big piece of that,” he added.

The command group is joined by members of the Cav’s Family Readiness Groups, local church groups, members of the Association of the United States Army, 1st Cav Soldiers

and many others. Susan Green, who’s husband, Col. Toby Green, is downrange with 1st Cav, explained that the FRGs come out because the young Soldiers in the hospital are like family to them.

“They’re like little brothers and sisters even though I’ve never met them,” she said. “We (spouses) put our heart and soul into our military family. It forms bonds like no other.”

“I care very much about our Soldiers,” explained Wendy Fil, wife of Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Fil Jr., commanding general of the Multi-National Division-Baghdad and 1st Cav. Div. “We want to give the message that First Team still cares about them.”

The Cav group moves from room to room, stopping to talk with those who are willing and able to have visitors.

“You go down feeling like you’re going to give something and you come away with something instead,” Fil explained. “They’re not griping or complaining. They’re in pain, but they’re asking how their buddies are.”

“Every Soldier and every wounded warrior is unique, but uniformly, I feel a great sense of pride that our nation produces such heroes,” Phelps said. “I am also reminded that these Soldiers are dealing with tough recoveries, and I draw

my inspiration from their examples.

“If they can continue to fight or recover, I can continue to fight the battle in the rear command,” he added. “I draw great strength from each of them.”

Everyone brings gifts for the wounded including blankets, teddy bears and candy. But the presents and encouragement aren’t just for Cav Soldiers. Visitors from the 1st Cav also stop by the rooms of other units’ Soldiers as well as Marines, sailors and airmen.

“These Soldiers [service members] from throughout Multi-National Division -Baghdad are all under Maj. Gen. Fil’s command downrange, and are, therefore, part the First Team family,” Phelps explained. “These troopers were injured in support of MND-B. We are able to visit them and give the same sense of confidence to their many commanders downrange that these Soldiers are still part of the MND-B team.”

Phelps said the BAMC visits will continue as long as he is the rear commander for 1st Cav.

“As long as there is a single trooper in these medical facilities,” he stressed, “I am sure we will continue to be there for them.”

'Grey Wolf' Entertained by Three Wild Comedians

By Spc. Ryan Stroud
3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

BAQUBAH, Iraq - It was a wild night of laughter and comedy as the Soldiers of 3rd "Grey Wolf" Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, were treated to a show by comics Chris Simpson, Tobe Hixx and Jamal Doman, April 8.

The comedians entertained the Soldiers of Grey Wolf at the Faulkenberg Theater at Forward Operating Base Warhorse, as part of the Morale, Welfare and Recreation Comedic Tour of Iraq.

As nightfall came to FOB Warhorse, Chris Simpson took the stage as the host for the evening. He began his routine by cracking on Soldiers coming into the show late and offering to "get them a watch."

After his routine was complete, he was followed by Tobe Hixx, who entertained the crowd by cracking on how skinny he was.

Jamal Doman closed the show with an extremely animated set of jokes which had him throwing a stool around the stage and fighting with it. After all was said and done, Simpson and Doman got into a "Your Mamma" contest with each other, which ended with thunderous laughs from the audience.

"[The show] was extremely funny," said Sgt. Robert Whitfield, Company B, 215th Brigade Support Battalion, and a native of Mobile, Ala.

"These guys came out here and made us laugh, which was nice," he added. "We all need to laugh every now-and-then."

"The show was actually great," added Spc. Robert Morton, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 215th BSB, and a native of Atlanta.

"It was good getting to see something this funny and it really helped boost some Soldier morale out here," he said.

Both Soldiers said all three comedians were outstanding and both agreed it was nice to have Simpson, Hixx and Doman out here to entertain them.

"The whole experience was nice," said Whitfield. "They weren't scared at all of us or Iraq; they came out here and did their thing and put on a really funny, great show."

"It helps remind us that there is someone in the United States that actually does care and would like to spend time out of their busy schedules to come overseas and actually lookout for people who they don't even know about," added Morton. "It's really cool of them."

Simpson, Hixx and Doman said the pleasure was all



Comedians Jamal Doman (left) and Chris Simpson get into a "Your Mamma" battle at the end their comedic show at the Faulkenberg Theater at Forward Operating Base Warhorse, April 8.

theirs, and they felt honored and privileged to entertain the Soldiers.

"As a comedian, this is one of the biggest honors we can have, to be honest," said Simpson. "As a comic, it's a stepping stone, but as a human, it's a real honor."

"We can't be out here with you guys, but at least we can let you know that you're supported and make you laugh," he continued. "And at least let you feel that you are still at home, somehow, someway."

"It means everything to me," said Doman. "I feel like I'm doing my American duty."

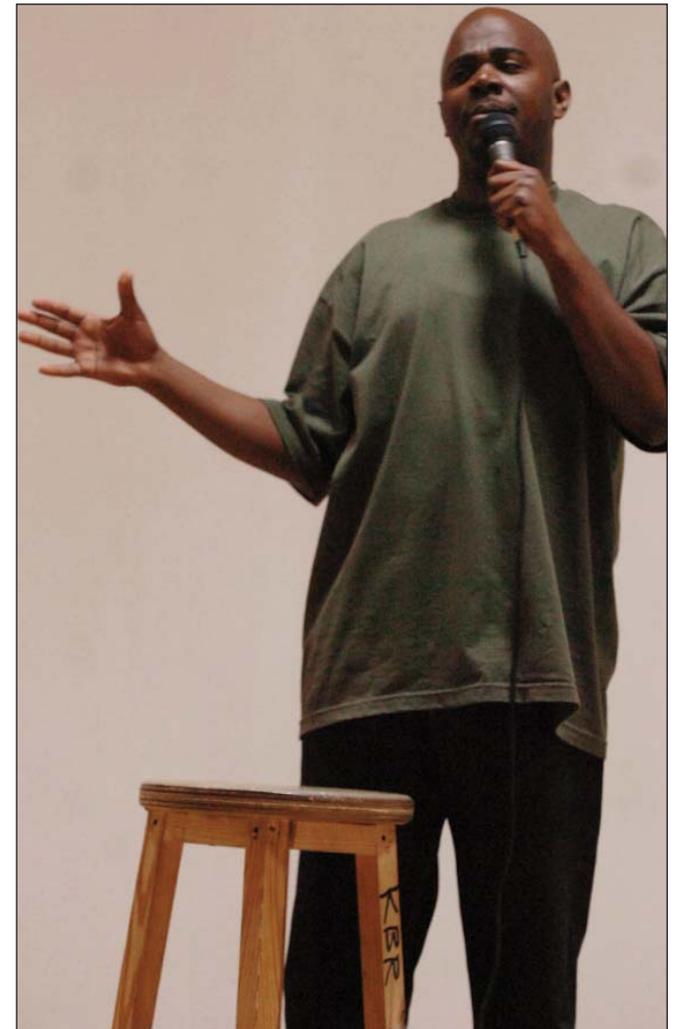
"When they first came to me about this, I didn't even think about it, it was 'Lets do it!'" he added. "I want to be here and do what I can do for these Soldiers."

For Hixx, it's his second time over here, completing a comedic tour in Afghanistan.

"I feel wonderful about coming over here," said Hixx. "I've been to Afghanistan and now Iraq. I really feel like I've completed my mission."

"As a comedian, and like the rest of the working world, sometimes you have your good days and sometimes you have your bad," he continued. "I'm glad we've had this chance to come out here and make the Soldiers laugh and hopefully shine some light for those bad days they might have."

As the Soldiers exited the theater, autographed photos in hand, Simpson said he really hoped the Soldiers enjoyed the



(Photos by Spc. Ryan Stroud, 3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Comedian Jamal Doman goes through his routine of animated comedy which involved him wrestling and fighting the stool in front of him. Doman, along with Chris Simpson and Tobe Hixx, entertained a crowd of 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division Soldiers at Forward Operating Base Warhorse, April 8.

show and the chance to escape for a few moments.

"Our job is to make you and the Soldier laugh," he said. "Since the jester days, comic's jobs are to make people laugh when they need it, and the Soldiers really need it."

"We really try to do our best for the Soldiers to give them something else to think about and help them remember home," Simpson said.

Why Can't Men and Women Live by the Same Rules?

Double standards.

As I get older, I get amazed at how much worse they get every year between men and women.

If a woman enjoys being physically fit, men get intimidated and tell her that she's too masculine, but for a man you can't work out too much.

If she chops off her hair or (God forbid) shaves her head, she must be playing for the other team, but look at the men in the military. It's the standard.

The last time I checked, women aren't allowed to belch, pass gas, scratch in appropriate places, smell, or go number two - or at least not admit it.

Oh... believe me it doesn't stop there. (Stop me if I am lying.) In the dating world, if women give too much they are too easy, if they give too little their prudes. Don't even think about dating more than one man at a

Random Reviews

Sgt. Nicole Kojetin



time.

The world is full of these double standards, and I ran into one in a movie that I don't often see. In Universal Picture's "Prime" a woman is dating a much younger man.

Let me define "much younger." Rafi (our main character played by Uma Thurman) is a 37-year-old recent divorcee falling for Dave (Bryan Greenburg) a 23-year-old painter. Let me do that math for you;

that is a 14-year difference. I tell you what, if I was single and 37, that would be the route I go, too.

Granted if the genders were flipped around, men would be patting him on the back telling him to go for the gold.

You know... when the wife gets too old, trade her in. Hugh Hefner is a prime example.

But no, her friends tell her that he is too young and she will never get what she needs from him. She is convinced of it, too. His best friend tells him that she is ancient. Dave's mom, played by Meryl Streep, exclaims in protest when he lies and says that his girl is 27.

Why is this? Where did it come from? Is it because women can't make babies when they are 60 and men still can? Do men always want someone fertile around them for spreading their seed? Somebody, please, fill

me in.

Sorry, got off track again.

Rafi and Dave started out their relationship trying to overcome their age difference. The cards were definitely stacked against them and it was only going to get worse.

The interesting and funny twist of the movie is that Rafi's therapist, the woman she has been sharing all her dirty relationship details with, happens to be Dave's mom. This brings on some comical, awkward scenes with an over-the-top dramatic Streep.

I can't go into much more detail without giving away the whole thing, so I will stop there. It is another chick flick, but over my past few months here, I have realized that many guys like chick flicks, too.

This movie isn't hilarious, but it did make me laugh out loud a few times. It is no "Kill Bill," but Uma Thurman fans will definitely enjoy it. (3 out of 5 stars!)

Gridiron Greats Give Gratitude to Soldiers

By Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma
1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – Instead of an outer tactical vest they don shoulder pads. Instead of combat boots, they slide on cleats. And instead of an army combat uniform top, they slip on their team's jersey.

To increase troops' morale, three National Football League players, weighing in at a combined 662 pounds, visited with Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers at the Liberty Morale Welfare and Recreation building April 16.

As part of the Gridiron Greats Tour 2007, Chris Harris, a safety with the Chicago Bears, Nick Harper, a cornerback with the Indianapolis Colts, and Israel Idonije, a defensive end also with the Chicago Bears, autographed everything from posters

to footballs.

One behind the other, Soldiers filed into the MWR building to get closer than pricey seats right at the 50-yard line, to the three Super Bowl XLI players wearing desert tan and Army green camouflage gear.

"It's motivational for people, especially people we label celebrities, that seem above everybody else to just come out and condone what we do and say 'we support you,'" said Sgt. Robert Harbour, a signal support systems specialist with Company A, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division.

"It gives everybody a chance to meet people you don't usually run into when you're back home," said Harbour, a native of Broken Bow, Okla.

"These players understand what (Soldiers) are doing and

they understand how (they) are serving and they want to give back to the community, the greater community of the Army," said Joe Canfield, the manager of the three players.

Although they arrived here to raise the spirits of the Soldiers fighting in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, they will depart with a glimpse of what it means to be a Soldier.

"It's been an eye-opener to see what Soldiers go through, where they stay, how they live," Idoniji said. "The unbelievable amount of courage and sacrifice and dedication that these guys have - it's unbelievable."

During the 6-foot-6-inch player's stay he got a chance to talk to young men and women and hear some of their stories.

"Stories about losing friends and how they manage to go back out and continue to do their jobs everyday are truly inspirational," he said.

Idoniji added that back home, media can be very negative and although many people want to support Soldiers, not many people take that extra step to see what's really happening on the ground.

For this African-born, Canadian-grown football player, this tour has allowed him to see and experience what's happening on the ground using the Soldiers as his eyes into this war.

"Being out here and having exposure to the military, exposure to the Soldiers, allows them to go back and share the good things that are going on here," Canfield said. "We know the media doesn't always promote the welfare of the Soldier or promote the image.

"These guys can go back to their fellow athletes, their fellow teams, the NFL, their friends and family and share the good things that are occurring and promote a positive image of the Army overall."

With the recent announcement of extended tours for troops on the ground, it leaves these professional athletes with a greater task at hand.

"It gives them a greater responsibility to be more energetic, more active and raise the morale of the troops who just realized they are staying here for another three months," Canfield said.

Harbour said all the small things, something as small as a handshake or a snapshot, can make a difference by helping Soldiers keep their minds off the sudden, but expected, three-month extension.

"In times of war, it takes special people to come together and do what's necessary to stand for what's right, what we believe in as a people," said Idonije. "I am not here every day crossing the wire, so for me to be able just to hang out with the guys and thank them personally is an honor I am grateful for."



(Photo by Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma, 1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs)

Pfc. Nigel Norvell, with Company A, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, and native of Augusta, Ga., poses for a photograph with (left to right) Israel Idonije, a defensive end with the Chicago Bears, Nick Harper, a cornerback with the Indianapolis Colts, Chris Harris, a safety also with the Chicago Bears during the football players' visit to the Liberty Morale Welfare and Recreation building April 16.

Raiders' Silver (Al Davis' Hair) & Black a Losing Combination

When this edition hits the streets, the National Football League's annual draft will be over. Of course, as I write this, speculation abounds as to who will be the number one pick this year.

The early favorite in most mock-drafts is Louisiana State University quarterback JaMarcus Russell, whose size, mobility and strong arm make him a top five pick, even he doesn't go first overall this year.

The problem with being the number one pick in the NFL draft is this: you're going to the league's worst team. In this year's case that team is the Oakland Raiders, whose dismal offensive showing last season more resembled a mediocre Division III football program than highly-paid professionals playing in one of America's largest cities.

To be blunt, the Raiders stink.

Now, the Raider Nation of fans hopes to rekindle a lost legacy of excellence by the Silver & Black with possession of the first

Trigger Pull

Master Sgt.
Dave Larsen



selection of the draft. Remember, though, that the Raiders couldn't block last year – for the run or the pass – and whoever gets behind center next season will be running for their life, rather than running to day light.

In that respect, Russell would be a good pick. He can definitely create on the move. Other sports pundits are taking a different tact, however.

The buzz on the street is that the Raiders will draft wide receiver Calvin Johnson from Georgia Tech and trade for Detroit Lions quarterback Josh McCown, not necessarily

in that order.

To be frank (though my name is Dave), whoever the Raiders draft will not help them much in the coming season. Al Davis managed to put together a Super Bowl-bound team a few years ago, but he did it by killing his salary cap with huge bonuses to great players playing on their last legs.

Davis made a name for himself, as did the Washington Redskins of yore, by taking other team's misfits, castoffs, attitude cases and bad boys. Those retread veterans added to some great draft picks over the years made the Raiders (Oakland or Los Angeles versions) one of the best teams in pro football, year in and year out.

The vertical passing game, however, is dead in the NFL today because there are just too many defensive backs now who can clock a sub-4.5-second 40-yard dash and match the speediest wide receiver step for step.

Unless it's a blown coverage, you rarely

see someone get beat deep by two steps. There are just too many quality athletes out there to choose from. Still, the Raiders persist in throwing it deep into Cover Two defenses, and making seven-step drops behind an offensive line that leaks like a sieve.

The Raiders, with all their past glories, remain doomed in the coming season. They couldn't bring back the Raider mystic with Art Shell last season, and as long as Al Davis is calling the shots, history will continue to repeat itself for the Raider Nation.

Al Davis gets the first pick in this year's draft, but no matter who he takes, the Raiders will keep a black eye under that pirate patch.

If you've got something you want to get off your chest (about the sporting world), shoot me an e-mail and we'll include your comments in future columns. You can reach me at david.j.larsen@mnd-b.army.mil

It's still baseball season, so ...Go, Brewers, go!