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Crossed Sabers

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(Photo by Chief Warrant Officer 4 Daniel McClinton, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade)

Sky Warriors

An AH-64D Apache helicopter fires flares as it conducts an air mission April 29 over in the Multi-National Division - Baghdad area of operation. The Apache is from the 1st "Attack" Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, based at Camp Taji, Iraq.



(U.S. Army photo)

Iraqi Army troops from the 3rd Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division stand over munitions and explosives lined up for inventory following a weapons cache discovery in a northwest Baghdad neighborhood April 26.

Iraqi-Led Mission Nets Large Cache

Multi-National Division - Baghdad Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – Iraqi troops from the 3rd Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, together with a military transition team from the Multi-National Division - Baghdad discovered a large weapons cache in Baghdad's Ghazaliya district April 26.

The Iraqi troops acted on a tip and found the cache in the Shulla neighborhood, in the northwestern portion of the Iraqi capital.

Following a cordon and search of the area, the Iraqi troops found 127 mortar rounds, more than 200 pounds of TNT, 10,000 PKC rounds, 10 mortar tubes, 15 hand grenades, 13 rifles, including two M16s, 150 fuses and three anti-tank mines.

The Iraqi Army troops also detained seven suspected insurgents in the operation.

Baghdad's Safe Neighborhoods Explained

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

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Concrete barrier walls will outline selected neighborhoods around Baghdad in an attempt to help protect the Iraqi population from terrorists, a senior U.S. military leader in Baghdad said today.

"The intent is not to divide the city along sectarian lines," said Brig. Gen. John F. Campbell, Multi-National Division – Baghdad's deputy commanding general. "The intent is to provide a more secured neighborhood for people who live in selected neighborhoods. Some of the people who I've talked to have had favorable comments about it, and they want us to build some of them faster." Campbell said several more gated communities are being erected in the Iraqi capital.

He said troubled neighborhoods aren't the only places

barriers have been emplaced. Campbell noted Baghdad's International Zone and some Baghdad market places have already been encircled by the concrete barriers. He pointed to a recent bombing outside of a Baghdad market where the barriers saved lives.

"Without those barriers, many more lives would have been lost," Campbell said.

He said protecting the population is the primary reason behind the concrete barrier emplacements, but added that decision to construct protective barriers is just one of many security options available. The decision to emplace the barriers is a cooperative one.

"It's based on the ground commander working with Iraqi security forces and also working with the community in those different neighborhoods," Campbell said. "We've selected communities that have seen an increase in violence, a height-

ened violence, and we're protecting some of those communities with walls.

"Where they exist, we consult with the area district advisory councils and neighborhood advisory councils," Campbell continued. "We work in conjunction with them. They represent the people of those neighborhoods.

Joint Security Stations, combat outposts and security patrols continue operating around-the-clock in the Iraqi capital, Campbell said. Placing barriers around troubled neighborhoods is simply one more option. There are always lessons to be learned, he said.

"We'll learn from the ones we're putting in and we'll adjust, as necessary," Campbell said. "We'll take feedback from the local communities. If we find that they're not doing what they're intended to do, we'll certainly move them. We'll add where we have to."

“There’s No Place Like Home”

Kansas Soldiers Reach Out to Iraqi Community

By Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma
1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – Although the Emerald City gates and a yellow brick road are nowhere to be found, these “Sunflower State” Soldiers are definitely not in Kansas anymore.

With family and friends back home wanting to help the cause and the Iraqi people needing so much help, one Topeka, Kan., Army National Guard unit stepped up to the plate and killed two birds with one stone with Operation Ruby Slippers.

“Operation Ruby Slippers is a result of being outside in the battle space and recognizing the humanitarian aid piece with the Iraqi people that isn’t being provided right now,” said Lt. Col. Kirk Pederson, a civil affairs officer with Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 130th Field Artillery Brigade.

Pederson said that taking his brigade commander out to the Civil Military Operations Center, a place where Iraqis can come get medical treatment and pick up some supplies, is what tipped the scales toward starting up the operation.

“It was that experience and that interaction with the Iraqi people and the children that made us say, ‘We need to do something,’” said the Shawnee, Kan., native.

The operation asked for the surrounding communities of Topeka to donate everything from over-the-counter medicines, tape,



(Courtesy Photo)

An Iraqi civilian talks to a Kansas Army National Guard Soldier about picking up the donated basic medical supplies April 9.

bandages, wraps – the essentials for the basic first aid kit – to clothing and school supplies.

Pederson added that they will be delivering these donations directly to the Iraqi people who need it most.

“Whether its soccer balls, pencils, school supplies or doing a medical operation where we augmented with supplies given

from our family and friends and neighbors from back home, its all welcomed with open arms and sincerity by the local leaders that we get it to,” Pederson said. “The local leaders can make sure the right people in their neighborhood get what they need.”

Contributions have been as big as providing the warehouse holding area for all the things being donated or as small as donating

a pair of sneakers for an Iraqi child.

The collaboration of all the people, back home and here in the Iraqi capital, resulted in two tons worth of donations.

Pederson said that he knows that people, companies and corporations back home want to help. Whether it’s during a hurricane disaster or tsunami, the American people are known for their generosity and compassion, he said.

“Through our (radio) drive, the first donation we got was an anonymous donor. He walked up to the disc jockey and rolled out five \$100 bills and said, ‘This is for the Soldiers. I didn’t know what to get, but take this money and go buy what they need for the Iraqi people,’” Pederson said.

Despite all the generosity, one challenge still stands in their way.

“We are having difficulty via the requirements of the Denton Amendment, getting an Iraqi custodian to accept the donations and acquire the customs approval in Iraq,” Pederson said.

Although many people have pulled together to get this humanitarian aid project rolling, it will cost an estimated \$20,000 to privately ship the rest of the donated items from Kansas to Iraq.

Pederson said he knew that getting donations - because they’re National Guard, because they’re military and because they’re family - would be the easy part.

“Now,” he said, “it’s about getting it from Point A to Point B.”

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

Georgian Defense Minister Visits

(Above) David Kezerashvili (left), the Georgian Defense Minister and Col. Zaza Gogava (second from left), the Chief of Defense tour Forward Operating Base Union I in central Baghdad, which houses the 33rd Light Infantry Battalion of the Georgian Army, during a visit to the Iraqi capital April 26. (Right) Georgian Defense Minister David Kezerashvili (front) tours the facilities of Forward Operating Base Union I, which houses the 33rd Light Infantry Battalion of the Georgian Army, during a visit to Baghdad April 26.



Baghdad News Briefs



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

Col. Aundre Piggee (left), 15th Sustainment Brigade commander, introduces Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond (center), 4th Infantry Division commander and Brig. Gen. William Grimsley (not pictured), 4th ID deputy commander for support, to his staff prior to a briefing on Camp Taji, April 24. The general's visit was part of a senior leadership tour of the greater Multi-National Division - Baghdad battle space.

4th Infantry Division Commander Looks At 15th Sustainment Capabilities

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – The 4th Infantry Division's commanding general met with leaders from the 15th Sustainment Brigade, 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary), during a visit to Camp Taji, Iraq, April 24.

Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond, along with senior leaders from the 4th ID, received an update on how the 15th SB conducts the majority of supply and logistical support missions for the greater Baghdad area.

Col. Aundre Piggee, commander of the 15th SB, highlighted how the logistical mission has evolved since the 4th ID left theater in 2006. Since assuming responsibility for the logistical mission, Piggee and the Soldiers of the 15th SB have seen their support duties grow to encompass more than 75,000 troops in three separate areas of responsibility.

"A majority of sustainment is pushed through [Victory Base Complex] or Taji to all [forward operating bases]...the battle space has changed," Piggee said.

In addition to coalition forces in Baghdad, the 15th SB also provides support to surge forces operating in Multi-National Division-Central and North.

Since September of last year, "Wagonmaster" troops have logged more than two million miles on Iraqi roads, delivering supplies without a single Soldier lost.

During the briefing, Hammond expressed amazement with how the nature of sustainment and logistics operations changed since his last tour. The fact that the 15th SB can boast impressive statistics, he said, is an indicator of leadership.

"There's a line between a good logistician and a great one," Hammond said. "Andre Piggee is a great logistician."

Efforts Against Extremists Continue

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

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Efforts to reduce the violence by Iraqi security forces and the coalition in Baghdad continue as Operation Fardh Al-Qanoon enters its ninth week.

"Progress is measured neighborhood by neighborhood in an attempt to rid the capital city of extremists who are intent on terrorizing the population and undermining the elected government here," said Brig. Gen. John F. Campbell, the deputy commanding general for maneuver with MND-B and the 1st Cavalry Division.

He said Joint Security Stations, manned by coalition and Iraqi forces continue to stand up throughout the city and improve the overall security situation by maintaining a permanent presence in troubled neighborhoods.

"Threatened by the success of Joint Security Stations across Baghdad, Al Qaeda in Iraq continues to attack them with a combination of mortars, small arms fire and car bombs," said Campbell, who grew up in Fairfield, Calif. "On April 16, we saw their efforts thwarted by alert Soldiers."

At a JSS along the main highway out of northern Baghdad, the Soldiers on guard noticed a dump truck erratically driving towards the compound. When they engaged the vehicle, it attempted to evade and tipped over, spilling its contents and failing to detonate.

Checkpoints have also seen their share of successes and are working to prevent additional civilian deaths, Campbell said. He pointed out the Iraqi national police, running a checkpoint outside of Sadr City Saturday, halted a vehicle for inspection and prevented it from detonating inside Sadr City.

"The driver, a suicide bomber, realized he would not reach his target and detonated the vehicle at the checkpoint," said Campbell, a 27-year Army veteran. "He killed himself, and wounded one innocent civilian that was passing by at the time."

Another initiative to improve security, Campbell said, is the emplacement of temporary concrete barriers around Baghdad neighborhoods that have experienced high levels of violence.

"The barriers are not meant to keep people out, or shut people in," Campbell explained. "What they allow Iraqi and coalition forces do is to closely monitor the traffic in and out the area, though, and help ensure the safety of the residents."

Clearing operations and cordon and search operations continue throughout the MND-B area of operations.

Two recent security operations that have been very successful – one on Baghdad's west side and the other in Diwaniyah, Iraq, a city south of the Iraqi capital.

"Operation Arrowhead Strike 9 began April 2 in the Mansour district," Campbell said. "The operation detained 49 suspects and found 23 caches, demonstrating to the Iraqi people the commitment of the coalition and Iraqi security forces to secure this city by targeting anti-Iraqi forces."

Operation Black Eagle began April 6 with the intention to disrupt illegally-armed militia activity in that city. Campbell said more than 100 suspects have been detained there, ten weapons caches have been uncovered and 11 explosively-formed projectiles were found in two separate caches.

"The Iraqi-led operation is bringing back peace to the people of Diwaniyah," Campbell said. "In the aftermath of clashes with militiamen, the focus in Diwaniyah is now on maintaining security, reconstruction, the infrastructure and allowing residents to get on with their lives without fear."

Successes are also occurring regularly inside of Baghdad, as Iraqi security forces and their coalition partners aim to disrupt insurgent networks through precision, intelligence-driven targeting.

To date, more than 200,000 patrols have been con-



(Photo by Sgt. Tierney Nowland)

Soldiers from Company A, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division lay out magazines of ammunition and weapons found in a room during a cordon and search in Baghdad's Mansour district during Operation Arrowhead Strike 9 April 11.

ducted in support of Operation Fardh Al-Qanoon. More than 300 caches have been uncovered and more than 800 improvised explosive devices have been found. The Iraqi Army, police and Iraqi national police continue to lead the security effort in support of the operation, Campbell said.

The number of attacks against the civilian population of Baghdad has declined over the last six months Campbell said. In November 2006, 41 percent of all attacks reported in the city were directed against civilians, he noted. During the month of April, 20 percent were targeted the civilian population.

That 50 percent decline in attacks on Baghdad residents Campbell attributes to the increase in security patrols, clearing operations on-going throughout the city and the creation of safer neighborhoods.

Campbell said that while attacks have continued to decline over the first nine weeks of the new security plan, some attacks have been very lethal in nature, noting the four vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonations within the MND-B footprint April 18.

"Al Qaeda in Iraq indiscriminately targets civilians across Baghdad intent only on causing chaos to undermine the government of Iraq and dishearten the Iraqi people," said Campbell, 50, a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. "We've deprived terrorists from attacking the pedestrian markets in eastern Baghdad by enhanced security measures, so Al Qaeda in Iraq sought out new targets for their terror attacks like the bus depot near the Sadriyah Market during rush hour."

Shia militia members have also brought their own brand of lethality to Iraq, in the form of explosively-formed projectiles. Since January 1, Campbell said 54 EFPs have detonated within his division's area of operation against coalition forces, killing 19 service members and wounding 84 more.

"We've been able to find 37 EFPs since the first of the year, and we continue our efforts to shut down roadside bombers," the general said.

Despite the bombings, the level of sectarian violence in the Iraqi capital has also decreased, Campbell said. There has been a sharp decline in the number of murders in Baghdad security districts.

He said there has been a 27 percent reduction in murders compared to last month, and a 65 percent decline compared to November 2006.

Despite the reduction, terrorists continue to use sectarian slayings to intimidate the local populace. Al Qaeda in Iraq brutally executed members of the local Sunni population in Rashid security district who would not support their extremist doctrine.

"The bottom line is that we are in a very tough fight with our Iraqi security force brothers and the government of Iraq," Campbell said. "We remain committed to them and the Iraqi people."

Aggies Hold Muster to Honor Comrades

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq - Although they are serving far from their beloved alma matter, Soldiers who are former students of Texas A & M University in College Station, Texas recently took the opportunity to commemorate the lives of fellow "Aggies," who have died in the service of their country.

Taking part in the traditional and annual Aggie Muster April 21 here, the Soldiers, Aggie alumni from brigades on the base camp to include the 1st Brigade Combat Team and 1st Air Cavalry Brigade both of the 1st Cavalry Division, shared a night of esprit de corps as well as a time for reflecting on their university brothers and sisters who have passed on since last year's muster.

"Aggies throughout the theater tonight and all over the world are doing this," said Capt. Nathan Reed, company commander, Company A, 1st Brigade Special Troops Battalion, who hails from Midland, Texas and coordinated Taji's 2007 Aggie Muster.

"This is a time honored tradition," said Dickinson, Texas native Capt. John Burrescia, company commander, Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment. "This is my second muster in theater since 2004 and doing this comes from a sense of duty and my responsibility as an Aggie to maintain this tradition. It let's me know that I'm not only a member of the military family but a separate family as well. If I wasn't here doing this, I would be doing this in the states, or regardless of where I was."

According to Burrescia, the Texas A & M tradition has strong military roots. The college which began as an all-male senior military academy in the 1800's eventually became a co-ed institution by the 1960's that also accepted students who were pursuing careers outside the military.

Today, the school is a mix of more than 42,000 students seeking military careers and those seeking career fields leading to civilian employment. The university boasts the second highest number of military commissions, running second only to West Point.

The muster began in 1883 as a track and field day for military cadets and alumni to gather and discuss their experiences on the playing field, drill field and battlefield. By 1903, the gathering was held as an observance to celebrate Texas' Independence on San Jacinto Day.

In 1922, the event became what it is today with the tradition of holding a muster every April 21st to include a roll call of members who have passed on.

Aggies began gathering worldwide in 1929 to hold the muster meetings eventhough they might be spread across the



Soldiers on Camp Taji, Iraq who are alumni from Texas A & M University light candles in remembrance of fellow Aggies who have died over the past year during the 2007 Aggie Muster held April 21 on Camp Taji, Iraq.

globe in cities and towns far away from College Station, Texas, said Burrescia.

He added that this was the time in which the tradition took on a mantra that originally was written in 1923 explaining that "if there is an A & M man within one-hundred miles of you, you are expected to get together, eat a little, and live over the days you spent at the A & M College of Texas."

During World War II, the most famous Aggie muster took place in 1942 as Gen. George Moore held an Aggie Muster with 25 of his men on the island of Corregidor, Philippines while under enemy artillery fire and just days before the Japanese took the island, said Burrescia.

Most of Moore's fellow Aggies were later killed on the Bataan death march. Shortly after the war in 1946, Aggies returned to the island of Corregidor to remember their fellow A & M comrades by holding another muster there on the spot where Moore held his muster in 1942.

"We've seen the photos of the (1942) meeting on Corregidor numerous times," Burrescia said. "So for us doing this while we're deployed, I think Soldiers know the importance and see it as us carrying on what they did."

During the memorial ceremony here, members of Taji's "Aggie family" held speeches, read poems, sang their alma matter's songs, lit candles of remembrance for Aggies who have passed on in the past year and sounded out a roll call for the deceased members.

A table was set near the speaker's podium for the event which was decorated with a single candle and a Texas A & M table cloth in the school's colors of maroon and white. Photos of six deceased Aggies, military service members who died



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

Dickerson, Texas native Capt. John Burrescia, company commander, Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment and an alumnus of Texas A & M University in College Station, Texas, calls out the roll for "Aggies" who have passed on since last year's muster during the 2007 Aggie Muster on Camp Taji, Iraq April 21.

over the past year were placed on the table.

"I'm proud to stand among you," began Lt. Col. Scott Efflandt, commander, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment.. "This is a time for us to gather with and draw strength from each other and rekindle our commitment to our values."

Efflandt added that Aggies who gave the ultimate sacrifice have shown unwavering "selfless service while answering the call" to serve their nation.

He also made a historical reference to Moore's men.

"When they received orders to war, the call to service, they never left behind the traditions that they knew were important," said Efflandt. "That's what defines Aggies."



Troopers Hold 'Refresher' Training on Camp Taji

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – After nearly six months in the combat zone, Soldiers from the 1st "Ironhorse" Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division have been given the opportunity to hone their combat skills during some refresher training here.

Continuing throughout the next few weeks, troopers within many of the brigade's units along with those attached to the brigade will have the chance to experience advanced training on how to detect improvised explosive devices, how to handle IED attacks while traveling in convoys, cordons and searches and situations involving medical evacuations and combat life saving techniques among other vital skills.

"Sometimes when we train in the rear, you might have a tendency to do a brain dump. But doing training here allows you to retain what you've learned better because you may be going back outside the wire the very next day," said Sgt. Danal Jimenez, a medic for Charlie Medical Company, 115th Brigade Support Battalion who oversaw some of the medical training. "We want to give them more experience and show them some ways of thinking that they may not have thought of before, getting them to think outside the box."

"We hope to be like the eyes out here for them," said Staff Sgt. Derwin Epps, an observer controller for the training and military policeman for the 1st BCT, who hails from Kingstree, S.C. "We're trying to take away gaps in the training—things that they may have missed that we can help them fill in."

Epps said the training that he and the 1BCT's other observer controllers are giving the brigade's troopers is, in many ways, some of the best training they can get while in theater.

"It's more in-depth because we're taking what all our units have learned here after nearly six months in combat and incorporat-



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

Copperas Cove, Texas native Sgt. John Juhnke (right), a field artilleryman with Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, yells out to his comrades that he has stabilized a simulated casualty during a medical portion of combat skills training at Camp Taji, Iraq April 21.

ing that into the training," said Epps. "Every time we get new information, we're adding that into the training. So we can take what's happening now – what the enemy is doing

now out there—and it gives them a better feel for the types of things to expect when they go outside the wire."

Troopers from Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment took on the training April 21, which included looking for terrorist cell members in a "mock up" of a house, handling an IED attack, a sniper attack and a medical evacuation.

During a cordon and search scenario, some 1st BCT troops played the roles of villagers living in the house and some acted as terrorists.

The HHB troops searched the house for weapons and questioned "role-playing" suspects who they detained after finding simulated bomb-making materials.

Observer controllers hid weapons in the house and it was the job of the Soldiers to find the hidden weapons caches.

In another scenario, the HHB Soldiers were tasked with stabilizing two patients one of whom had a gunshot wound to the hand and a fractured femur while the other had an amputated arm.

Eventually, the troops stabilized the patients and had them medically evacuated from the area.

Epps said that despite the rigorous train-

ing and the stress that they put the Soldiers through, the day's group did very well.

"They really showed that they are capable of handling the mission and the scenario," said Epps. "They really took the training seriously and that's what counts."

Soldiers who have taken the training said it was worthwhile.

"This was great training that will come in handy," said East Rockaway, N.Y., native Spc. Antonio Borja, an artilleryman for Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment. "Now when I go outside the wire, I'll have confidence and know what to do in future situations that I may run into."

Epps said the way the Soldiers conduct themselves in the training isn't just about helping to prevent attacks against U.S. or coalition forces, but has a lot to do with protecting and building trust with Iraqis.

"We want to make sure that they're keeping a respect for the Iraqi people and their culture as they go about capturing detainees and not mistreating them," said Epps.

"We also want them to build trust with the Iraqi people so that as our Soldiers take more insurgents off the streets, they'll make the civilian population feel safer," he said.



Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment take down "mock" terrorists in a cordon and search scenario during training April 21 at Camp Taji, Iraq.

Battalion Helps Re-Open Secondary School

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

BOOB AL SHAM, Iraq – Soldiers from the 1st “Red Lion” Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment assisted the city council here with the re-opening of the Boob Al Sham Girls Secondary School April 18 after a \$100,000 renovation on the school building.

On this first day of school since the renovation began a few months ago, nearly 600 students from ages 12 to 17 came back to the facility that now has freshly painted walls,

ceilings, new light fixtures, new restrooms, fans, water fountains and repaired roofs.

The renovation is just one of many projects the Boob Al Sham city council, Red Lion battalion Soldiers along with civilian contractors and civil affairs specialists from Co. A, 492nd Civil Affairs Battalion have been bringing to fruition for the people here. Other projects for the town include improving electricity, a water treatment plant and improving sewage systems.

“When we talked to the city council and asked them what was the most important thing they wanted to do first as a project, they

told us it was the education of their children,” said Capt. Evan Gotkin, battery commander, Battery C, 1st Bn., 37th FA Regt, during a dedication ceremony on the school’s basketball court. “They wanted to ensure their children had a clean, safe and well-built building before pursuing other projects like electricity, water and sewage.”

“They realized that Iraq does not have a bright future unless its children are educated,” added Gotkin, who hails from Long Island, N.Y.

Throughout the morning, Soldiers handed out school supplies to the children. They also donated and put together a swing set in the school’s recess yard for the younger children to enjoy.

“We’re celebrating a small victory over terrorism by providing a good place for kids to be educated,” said Idaho Falls, Idaho native 1st Lt. Burke Manwaring, a platoon leader for Battery C, 1st Bn., 37th FA Regt.

“This is an opportunity for us to show encouragement to the kids, and we’re here to let the people know that we’re not here to terrorize them, we’re here to help them help themselves,” said Chaplain (Capt.) Tom Strong, the 1st Bn., 37th FA Regt. chaplain. “One of the things we’re starting to see here is Sunni and Shia working together to reinvest their own money in their communities.”

Many of the school supplies given to the children in Boob Al Sham, were donated through Operation Lion’s Castle, which was established by the 1st Bn., 37th FA Regt. chaplain’s office in August to collect donations of clothes, school supplies, shoes and toys among other items to give to people in Iraq. The donations were made by the families and friends of Soldiers currently serving



A tribal sheik and Soldiers from Battery C, 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment and Company A, 492nd Civil Affairs Battalion offload a swing set at the Boob Al Sham Girls Secondary School April 18.

in Iraq.

“There are a lot of generous donors out there in the states who care about what’s going on here and about the Iraqi people, so there are a lot of good things going on,” added Strong.

In order for projects like the school to continue moving forward, villagers in the town, which has had its share of insurgent activity, have been working closely with Iraqi security forces and coalition forces to kick insurgents out of their neighborhoods.

Slowly but surely things in the village have been improving, according to Gotkin.

“Once people began being intimidated and threatened, the sheiks were angered (by the insurgents) and called a meeting with the Iraqi security forces and coalition forces and said, ‘We want security,’” said Gotkin.

In response to the demands of the local citizens, the Iraqi Army and Iraqi police have now set up 24-hour checkpoints in the area.



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

Idaho Falls, Idaho native 1st Lt. Burke Manwaring, and Sgt. Tysean Chapman, a chaplain’s assistant who hails from Jeffersonville, Ga., both from the 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment, hand out school supplies to children at the Boob Al Sham Girls Secondary School April 18 in Boob Al Sham, Iraq.

Small Macedonian Contingent; Big Strike Against Terrorism

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – It has more than 50 natural and artificial lakes and 16 mountains higher than 6,000 feet. It’s a country only slightly larger than Vermont. It has a population of approximately 2 million citizens. Some of them have been calling the heart of the Middle East home.

They are the Macedonian Army Contingent, based here and working in concert with the 1st Cavalry Division’s 1st “Ironhorse” Brigade Combat Team from Fort Hood, Texas.

Lazar Elenovski, the Macedonian Minister of Defense, kept a promise to visit with his country’s Soldiers in Iraq, visiting this base camp north of Baghdad April 28.

The commander of the Macedonian Contingent, Capt. Trajkovski Vlatko, said before heading for Iraq, the defense minister promised to visit them. His arrival in Taji kept that promise.

After a lunch in the Colton Room at one of the camp’s dining facilities with ‘Ironhorse’ leaders and his troops, Elenovski headed down the street to the troops’ living quarters where they went over operations and took a look at Soldier issues.

Vlatko, said that the Minister of Defense has been very good to the troops. He said it is easy for his troops to relate to the 36-year-old senior Macedonian defense official.

Vlatko and his troops explained different weaponry and equipment they currently use when they head outside of the wire to their top defense official. Elenovski said there is always room for improvement, though what they have is



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

The Macedonian Minister of Defense, Lazar Elenovski, and Vladimir Gjorcev, the Chairman of the Committee on Defense and Security, shake hands with company-size Macedonian Army Contingent stationed at Camp Taji, Iraq April 28.

working. He noted that combat equipment standards are getting better and better.

In addition, he said, the Macedonian Office of Defense Cooperation is also working on modernizing the soldiers’ equipment.

Despite being a relatively new force, the Macedonian Army Contingent has quickly developed an outstanding rep-

utation and because of the company-size unit’s great reputation, Col. Paul E. Funk II, commander of the Ironhorse Brigade, said he would have no problem having the Macedonian contingent covering his front and watching his back when disaster strikes.

“I have had command of them during major operations and have watched them in awe,” Funk said about the second group of Macedonian Soldiers he has worked with since deploying in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Confidence in their abilities is something that flows freely among the leadership, both American and Macedonian.

During their stay in Iraq, Elenovski said Macedonian troops have proven to have the capabilities to handle missions. He said that Macedonia, a young country of only 15 years, is extremely proud to be a part of the coalition forces.

“We feel that our contribution is important and shows our commitment to being a partner in aid,” Elenovski said. “I hear over and over again on how well our soldiers are performing.”

The Minister of Defense said the Republic of Macedonia, previously the southernmost part of the socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, will continue to give support as long as the coalition forces need it.

Elenovski later reiterated the importance of being a part of the global war on terrorism and standing up a democracy in Iraq.

“Iraqis are now starting to stand up, but to leave them now would be too soon,” said Funk, a native of Roundup, Mont.

Doctors Hold Joint Medical Mission in Haifa St. Clinic

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

BAGHDAD – Dr. Haitham Issa, with his stethoscope, walked from exam room to exam room monitoring his staff and patients in the Al Karkh Public Health Clinic April 14.

It's something he hasn't been able to do for a while during the violence in the Karkh district, and the burden of not being able to not only do his job, but to fulfill the oath he took when becoming a doctor has been hard on his conscious.

"I'm afraid to come here, but I am a doctor; I have to give something back to the public because they are so poor," Issa said. "It is my duty; of course there are risks – I have to take all those risks."

According to Maj. Bruce Rivers, the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division's brigade surgeon, the clinics in Karkh, around the Haifa Street district, all shut down due to the violence of the past year or so. Only until recently, as the Iraqi security forces and coalition forces helped provide that important piece have the local residents, doctors and other medical staff been able to come back and open up one clinic.

Approximately 180 patients from the local area came by the clinic to seek treatment for such ailments from common colds to shrapnel wounds.

Last month, Rivers, who calls Washington, D.C. home, and a team of 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cav. Div. medics went to Haifa St., and ran a sick call,

of sorts. According to Rivers, although it went well, his intent was to have the medical mission "totally" run by Iraqi doctors and nurses.

So, this time, with the local Iraqi national police and 4-9 Cav. Soldiers providing security around the area, a team of Iraqi doctors, nurses and pharmacists completely ran the medical mission.

"I've been able to stay back and work on just the planning," Rivers said.

According to Lt. Col. Patrick Matlock, 4-9 Cav.'s commander, having the Iraqi security forces lead the charge in this medical mission was a "really big deal."

"[The residents] have to associate good with their local government," said Matlock of Chico, Calif. "They have to see the local government as strong ... our job is to make that a reality."

For local doctor, Mustafa, the new level of security in and around Haifa St. is "nice."

A doctor since 1963, Mustafa, has practiced general surgery in that area for a long time, but had to take a break due to the recent violence.

"It's really nice to have all the security now," he said. "It was also very good to bring all the medicine."

According to local health officials, the clinic plans to stay open for as long as the security in the area allows for the locals to receive the care safely, and to get back to the amount of patients it once received.

Being able to operate as they did before has been "great" for Issa, who is happy that he gets to fulfill his duties as a doctor and also to help his fellow Iraqis.



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

Staff Sgt. Michael Jenkins Jr., a medic assigned to B, 4-9 Cav., 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, of Chicago, checks out a rash on a child during a medical mission in Baghdad, Iraq April 14.

Bronze Star Awarded with "V" Device to Stryker Soldier

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

FORWARD OPERATING BASE UNION III, Iraq – During a squadron awards ceremony April 29, Sgt. Marvin Sanjurjo, a member of 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment was awarded the Bronze Star with Valor Device for actions he took last year while his unit was conducting operations in Baghdad.

The Bronze Star Medal, which is the Army's fourth highest combat medal, is awarded for heroic or meritorious achievement while engaged in action against an enemy of the United States, and the Valor device identifies the award as resulting from an act of combat heroism.

The incident, for which Sanjurjo, a native of Huntsville, Ala., was awarded the medal, occurred in the fall of 2006 while elements of 5-20th Infantry, which is part of Task Force 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment operating with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, were patrolling the Al-Hadher neighborhood.

"Every platoon in the company had been taking contact throughout the day," explained the company's top noncommissioned officer, 1st Sgt. Christopher Ward, "and it all basically zeroed in on one mosque."

Ward, originally from Woodland, Calif., said that two of his platoons cordoned off the area around the mosque as they waited for elements from the Iraqi National Police to arrive and clear the mosque. The companies TAC (tactical assault center), which both Ward and Sanjurjo were members, had just returned to Forward Operating Base Falcon, where TF 1-14th Cavalry was based at the time, but once they found out about the mosque entry, they returned to sector to assist in the operation.

As they approached the cordoned area from the west, their Stryker vehicles were ambushed by what Ward estimat-



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

Huntsville, Ala., native Sgt. Marvin Sanjurjo (right) talks with the commander of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, Col. Bryan Roberts, after receiving a Bronze Star with "V" Device during an awards ceremony at Forward Operating Base Union III April 29.

ed to be 10-15 individuals firing from a two-story house about thirty yards away.

"My truck and the XO's (executive officer's) truck, which Sgt. Sanjurjo was on, were basically in the kill zone," Ward said. "The fire was pretty intense, and we immediately pivoted in and started to return fire toward the enemy."

Sanjurjo was manning his vehicles remote weapons system, a system that allows the Soldier to aim and fire the vehicles .50-caliber machine gun from inside without having to expose him to incoming fire. Ward said that he made the decision to dismount from his vehicle, and that's when things

started to turn bad.

"I dismounted expecting the snipers to come with me," he explained, "but they were pinned down, and I ended up running across the road, getting shot at before I realized that I was pretty much by myself."

At about the same time that Ward made the decision to go to the ground, Sanjurjo's RWS malfunctioned, leaving the Soldiers on the ground with no heavy machine gun support.

"One of the cables had shrapnel in it, and I didn't know and I couldn't fire," Sanjurjo said. "I've got to get this fifty up, that's all I can remember thinking, and Sgt. Young, one of the snipers, started laying fire, and when I got a good chance, I just hopped up top and free-gunned."

Ward said that he remembers looking back and seeing Sanjurjo on top of the Stryker trying to fix the gun while bullets were ping-pong off the vehicle's armor.

"He got the gun up and started suppressing the enemy and soon after that the enemy quit shooting, and we were able to clear the building."

Ward credits Sanjurjo's actions that day with saving his life.

"I dismounted expecting people to follow me, and they didn't and I was by myself, which put me in a pretty tight jam," he said. "His actions pretty much saved my life that day."

While Ward credits Sanjurjo with saving his life, Sanjurjo said it was the Soldiers who were firing from the ground that enabled him to climb on top of his vehicle and fire from the uncovered position.

"I was an open target sitting on top of the Stryker," Sanjurjo said. "I was covering them, and they were covering me."

A six-year veteran, Sanjurjo, who has spent his entire career with 5-20th Infantry, said that while he was happy to receive the medal, he wished it his entire company could share the award.



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

Spc. Stephen Tapia, a native of San Antonio, and a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-12 Combined Arms Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, hands a bag of rice to a school shop employee while the 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 5th Iraqi Army and 1-2-5 Military Transition Team traveled to Hadid, Iraq, one day after conducting a cordon and knock mission through the city.



A 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 5th Iraqi Army soldier carries a bag of rice to the headmasters of the school in Hadid, Iraq, to be handed out to the school children and their families. The Iraqi Army and Coalition Forces headed back into the city of Hadid one day after conducting a cordon and knock in search for information on the presence of al-Qaida in the area.

Iraqi Army, Transition Team Hand Out Supplies in Hadid

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

BAQOUBA, Iraq - One day after flowing through the streets of Hadid, Iraq, on a cordon and knock mission, the 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 5th Iraqi Army and members of the 3rd "Grey Wolf" Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, comprising the 1-2-5 Military Transition Team, headed back into Hadid to hand out rice and school supplies to the local children and their families.

The Iraqi Army and Military Transition Team traveled to a heavily populated school in the heart of Hadid for the giveaway in hope to show the city the Iraqi Army's mission was not to bring terror to the city but rather to help Hadid remove terrorist groups living in the area.

"Today's mission was to show the community that (the IA and Coalition Forces) are not out to get everybody; we are here to help them make a better town for them to live in and for their children to grow up in," said Sgt. 1st Class Patrick Gage, a native of Fort Wayne, Ind., and a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-12 Combined Arms Battalion.

"As a token or a sign of our commitment to the city, we brought some things they may need," he continued. "We wanted to let them know we're not here to bring you harm, we really do want to help you out."

Convoys traveled into the town just as the school's day was beginning. The presence of IA and Coalition Forces brought huge smiles to many of the faces of the

children.

The IA truck parked outside the grounds and soldiers began unloading their vehicles, pulling giant bags of rice on their back and carrying them into the school.

"The IA does that to help out the town," said Capt. Brian Slotnick, a native of Tom's River, N.J., and a member of the 215th Brigade Support Battalion.

"Getting rations into the town is sometimes very difficult," he continued. "We try to encourage the IA to help with that aspect. It also helps gain trust of the people so they can see ... we want to help. If these people see we want to help, they might give us some information."

After the IA had completed bringing in the goods to be handed out, they decided to turn the supplies over to the school instead of directly handing it out to the children. After they were finished, many school children gathered around before class, and asked questions and posed for pictures with the IA soldiers, bringing smiles to everyone's faces.

"What we decided to do was let the teachers decide who got what," said Maj. Dominique Dionne, a native of Harker Heights, Texas, and the MiTT leader, since they know which families are more in need.

Though the IA and Coalition quickly moved out of the school to carry on with other missions, they hoped their presence was felt and families enjoyed their gifts.

The mission is important because it helps the people gain trust in their security forces, who are often viewed as sectarian, said Dionne. As the soldiers interact with the population, they are able to build trust and bonds.

IA, MiTT Conduct Successful Cordon, Knock

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

BAQOUBA, Iraq - Dust and dirt flew from under the tires into the air as a long row of Iraqi Army and Coalition Forces' humvees and Bradley Fighting Vehicles cordoned the dirt roads of the city of Hadid, Iraq, April 21.

With little updated intelligence about the area, both IA and U.S. Soldiers had to use information they had previously learned about the town.

The last time these Soldiers traveled the roads of Hadid, they discovered 11 improvised explosive devices on a small section of the road into town, placed there to attack both the IA and Coalition Forces.

But this past experience would not shake the determined fighters of freedom. They had a mission -- make their way into the city to conduct a cordon and knock, and go door-to-door; meeting every citizen they could and gather as much information about the presence of al-Qaida in their city.

With the 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 5th Iraqi Army leading the way into Hadid, Soldiers from different units of the 3rd "Grey Wolf" Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, combined forces to form the 1-2-5 Military Transition Team to help guide the young group of Iraqi soldiers into the city.

The job's of those in the MiTT is to travel with the IA and make sure they are carrying out their missions to the proper standards, and with the mission they faced, the Iraqi Army soldiers were about to learn about a different way to gather information.

"The purpose of the mission was to capture and defeat Iraq insurgents in the town of Hadid in order to make it a safer place to live," said Capt. Brian Slotnick, a native of Tom's River, N.J., and a member of 215th Brigade Support Battalion.

"We conducted a cordon and knock mission," said Sgt. 1st Class Patrick Gage, a native of Fort Wayne, Ind., and a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-12 Combined Arms Battalion.

"We didn't have any hard intelligence about what was happening in Hadid, but we knew from previous missions that the village was starting to become a hot-bed for insurgent activity," he said.

"The main reason the mission was [a cordon and knock



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

Capt. Brian Slotnick, a native of Tom's River, N.J., and a member of the 215th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, travels with the 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 5th Iraqi Army during a cordon and knock mission in Hadid, Iraq, April 21.

and not a cordon and search] was because we didn't have specific targets," Maj. Dominique Dionne, a native of Harker Heights, Texas, and a member of the brigade's Headquarters and Headquarters Troop.

"When we have no intelligence driving an operation, we inform the [IA] leaders that this is more of a presence-type mission," Dionne, the MiTT Leader, said. "You knock on the doors, you talk politely to the people, you conduct your search and you find out what they know and what information they can give you."

"We were starting to see a lot more IEDs while traveling down [the roads toward the village] and the last time we were down there, we found 11 IEDs and they were all in one major spot," Gage said. "Our mission was to go down there to see if there was anybody down there who didn't belong there and just let the people know we're here to help them out."

The IA and MiTT made their way into the streets of Hadid early in the morning, pulling their vehicles into the town to begin their mission of going door-to-door. With the IA leading the way, Slotnick quickly followed into the houses, hoping to get some greater information about terrorist activity in the city.

The IA soldiers knocked on the doors to homes, checked identification and asked if the citizens had any information they would like to share about the area. The cordon and knock was beginning to become a success when information about two abandoned cars in the town, believed to be al-Qaida related, and a small cache in the palm groves, were discovered through the citizen's help.

"[Through the help of the citizens] we did capture some good intelligence as well as some weapons and ammunition," said Slotnick.

"We found, as well as received, a lot of helpful information from the mission," added Gage. "A lot of our suspicions were confirmed that a lot of insurgent activity is not necessarily being conducted out there but it is being planned out there."

As the mission drew to a close, the members of the IA and MiTT headed back to their patrol base to catch a few hours of sleep and prepare for the next day's mission. With another successful mission behind them, the MiTT feels the IA is one step closer to providing security to their local cities without Coalition assistance.

"I felt the mission was a success," said Gage. "We got some people who we think are bad guys and we were able to show some community support. I think this was a good day for us."

"The situation has changed the past few years in Iraq,"

added Slotnick. "It used to be busting down doors, but for [the day's mission], the intelligence we had wasn't at a specific target, so we were very respectful with entering the houses.

"We knocked; we talked to the leader of the house, searched the house and just went from there," he said.

"The big thing is to put the IA in the lead," Dionne said. "We want the people in the villages and towns to actually see the Iraqi soldiers actually going through and conducting the missions and searches. We used the Coalition Forces to provide the outer cordon, which enabled more of the Iraqi units to get their feet in the city to conduct the search.

"It was a lot more successful mission than I thought it was going to be," said Dionne, who mentioned problems in Hadid included IED emplacements, snipers and possible al-Qaida influence.

"But when we got in the city and talked to many of the community leaders and teachers, they were saying the people do not like the al-Qaida and the majority of the people want the IA and the [Iraqi Police] in there patrolling to keep the bad people out," he said.

"That was a good thing for us to hear and it will help convince the IA to conduct more patrols in the town now that they know the population does support them," Dionne said.

"The Iraqis are a lot better than I thought they would be and they've only gotten better," said Gage. "When we first got here, they had a lot of problems with discipline. Since we've gotten involved with them, there have been very few incidents that I've heard about.

"The Iraqi NCO corps is starting to step up and take charge of things they never did in the past," he said. "That's really helping them out and making the mission an even greater success."

Since the MiTT has been working with the IA battalion, Dionne said they are helping the IA understand how important it is to interact face-to-face with the local population.

"[If the IA conducted missions without talking to the people], the soldiers would get the impression that all the people are all bad," he continued. "It's never that black and white.

"If we get [the IA soldiers] to see that these are real living, breathing, bleeding people on both sides, they start to get the common bond that they are all Iraqis, they all have problems and they need to work together to come up with the solution," he concluded.



A 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 5th Iraqi Army soldier begins to climb the steps of a home in the town of Hadid, Iraq, to support a fellow brother-in-arms during their cordon and knock mission, April 21.

Brigade News Briefs



(Photo by Capt Brian McCall, 2nd Bn., 32nd Field Artillery Regiment)

An Iraqi Army medic assists an elderly Iraqi man, one of more than 100 residents seen during a community health outreach mission in Baghdad's Hateen neighborhood April 18.

Iraqi Army Takes Lead in Health Outreach

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

BAGHDAD – More than local residents received medical attention in the Hateen neighborhood of Iraq's capital city April 18.

Soldiers from 3rd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army worked with 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division to conduct a community health outreach program. The program was designed to give medical attention to local residents who normally do not have access to medical assistance.

"We assessed and treated 102 patients over about two-and-a-half hours," said Junction City, Kan., native Capt. Brian McCall, commander of 2-32nd's Battery A. "We did not leave anyone in line; all (who) came were seen."

The combined Iraqi, coalition force mission was conducted in coordination with the local neighborhood advisory council.

"Mr. Jafron Hassan, a neighborhood advisory council representative, helped the Iraqi Army control the crowd and usher people through the entry control point," added McCall. "The response from the populace was overwhelmingly positive. Lt. Col. Rahim, the 3rd Bn. Iraqi Army commander, and his men did a great job and really took the lead on the whole event."

Artillerymen Celebrate St. Barbara's Day



(Photo by Capt. Matthew Angliss, 1st Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Regiment)

Command Sgt. Maj. Chucky Young (left) joins Lt. Col. Michael W. Griffith, commander of 1st Battalion, 7th Field Artillery, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, to cut the cake during the battalion's annual St. Barbara's Day celebration, held this year at the Al Faw Palace on Camp Victory, Iraq. The celebration commemorates the Legend of St. Barbara, who is the patroness of all artillerymen. The celebration also provided an opportunity to induct the battalion's outstanding artillerymen into the Honorable Order of St. Barbara.



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Benny Corbett, 2nd BCT, 1st Inf. Div.)

Lt. Col. Gregory D. Gadson, commander of 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, briefs senior Multi-National Division - Baghdad and Iraqi Army leaders on the capabilities of the newly established Joint Security Station "Torch" in the Mansour district of the Iraqi capital.

"Torch" Lighting the Way for Security

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

BAGHDAD—Construction of Joint Security Station "Torch" was completed and it was officially opened Apr. 21, in the Mansour district of the capital city.

Planning and securing such a location does not come quickly or without proper preparation. In March, members of the Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC) and the Iraqi Army began nominating locations for the station.

Iraqi Army troops and Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, conducted a recon of the area April 12, and plans for construction began in earnest.

A concept brief took place the following day and a final synchronization meeting with all the elements involved from the 2nd "Dagger" Brigade ensued a couple days later.

Plans were made for barrier emplacement, concertina wire, sandbags, over watch positions, checkpoints, waste removal, and many other logistical details. Pieces began to fall into place for building, securing and making the site habitable.

The construction operations began as scheduled, but that was not the only mission Soldiers from the 2nd "Proud Americans" Battalion, 32nd FA, had in mind.

JSS Torch is located on the corner of a city block and would definitely have an impact on the local residents of the community. On the first day of construction, the 'Good Neighbor Plan' went into effect and Capt. Jose Henderson, Capt. Brian McCall, and Capt. Jayson Morgan visited each of the houses surrounding the newly-acquired property.

They introduced themselves and offered a gift, including candy, a picture of the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Gregory Gadson, Col. Ali, the 2nd Bn., 5th Bde, 6th Iraqi Army commander, and Lt. Col. Rahim, the 3rd Bn., 5th Bde, 6th Iraqi Army commander.

They also hand-delivered a letter to introduce and

explain the current project. Soldiers placed the first barrier of JSS Torch into place on the morning of April 16.

Soldiers throughout the Proud American Battalion, as well as those from 9th Engineer, 20th Engineer, and 299th Forward Support battalions, worked tirelessly day and night to complete the project on time, keep it secure, and to get it fully operational. Construction was completed on April 19.

JSS Torch officially opened for business the morning of April 21. Iraqi security force liaisons occupied the building that morning and the JSS became a center for combined forces.

Later in the day, Maj. Gen. Abdul Al-Ameer, commander of the 6th Iraqi Army Division, arrived for a brief on the JSS, a tour, an awards ceremony and a traditional Iraqi lunch. After the awards ceremony, Ameer addressed everyone and specifically reminded the Soldiers of their duties.

"Be good to the citizens and they will trust you," he said. "Remember that your loyalty is to Iraq; not for the party, not for the tribe, not for sect or religion. The party will go away; the tribe will go away; the religion might go away, but Iraq will stay."

Gadson echoed the Iraqi Army general's remarks, and told the Iraqi and U.S. troops assembled why he had chosen the name "Torch" for the JSS. He said it not only honored the Proud American's combat experience in 1942, but this JSS and Iraqi Army represent "the light in the future of the Mansour district."

With the formalities over, the first southeast Mansour security meeting, representing the real work of the JSS, occurred the next day.

The meeting outlined ideas to conduct coordinated combined operations with Iraqi security forces and coalition forces.

Future goals include building a common operating picture for the combined forces to work with and to secure support for the civil authorities. Through this way ahead, Iraqi security forces will eventually take control of security and the civil leaders will be empowered to improve the living conditions within their neighborhoods.

Combat Medics Proven Under Pressure

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

BAGHDAD – There's countless hours of training involved in becoming certified as an Army medic.

However, for some healthcare specialists, the seal of approval doesn't come with a certificate on graduation day, but from the experience of performing their duties under the added stresses a combat zone thrown into the mix.

A healthcare specialist at Joint Security Station Thrasher, Pfc. Tony Lawry said every opportunity he gets, whether lying on his cot or rolling in a convoy, he thinks about all the possible injuries that he might come across - what he might see, what his thought process will be, and what he needs to do.

"The first time I saw something I reacted with training," said Lawry, a native of the seaside town of Morro Bay, Calif. "It was exactly what I've trained to do in my head, on my buddies, on manikins hundreds of times."

On Saint Patrick's Day, when JSS Thrasher was only a couple of days old, the first challenge appeared in the form of a Soldier with a gunshot wound to the leg.

Although not the smartest of ideas, he ran from behind cover to get to the wounded Soldier and training took control.

"(The) first thing I did (was) I rushed up, cut away his pants, found the wound, put the tourniquet on, gave him morphine and got him the hell out of there," said Lawry, who is a member of 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, based out of Fort Bliss, Texas and operating in Baghdad with 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division.

The gunshot victim had a "through and through," meaning the bullet went in one side and out the other.

"One of the first things medics learn is when someone is shot in the leg you just drop your knee there, jamming it on the artery," Lawry said. "You'll stop that bleeding. If it hurts the patient, not doing any further dam-



Medical staff members at the Camp Liberty aid station rush to aid casualties after an improvised explosive device detonated near a patrol April 21.

age, but is physically painful, you're probably doing it right."

Lawry said when medics are working on their fellow Soldiers, one of their own, all they think about is getting him stable and evacuated.

"You don't think about your gloves, you don't think about your safety," Lawry said. "I had my nomax gloves on and they were soaked with blood."

As medics at a JSS, working side-by-side with Iraqi troops, they also work on people that aren't in the same uniform.

"I treated this guy. I don't remember his name, I don't really remember what he looks like, but I remember his wounds and what was going on," Lawry said. "Something in adrenaline enhances memory and when someone is bleeding in front of you, you're going to get a little spike."

Another issue medics face is the unpredictability of the situations that come up. They don't always know all of the circumstances behind every person that they come across.

"It's basically fly by the seat of your pants, moment's notice, 'Hey, we got casual-

ties coming in' and you don't really know what's going on until they're right in front of your eyes," said Spc. Andrew Demma, the senior medic at the JSS, also with 2-12th Cavalry.

A medic sees things not everyone sees, hears things not everyone hears and smells things not everyone smells.

"I'll have trouble getting to sleep and then when I finally do get to sleep I'll have a nightmare. I'll wake up and all I'll remember is seeing (what I saw), smelling that smell - that smell I get for everything. It used to be associated with just a bad smell, now it's connected to some of the things I've seen. Sometimes I'd wake up drenched in sweat," Lawry said.

Like nightmares some of the experiences can be difficult to get through, but somehow medics learn to get through them.

"If you're in a helping profession that's got to say something about the type of person you are," Demma said. "When the end result is death, it's always going to be tough, but it's something you get used to."

Both agreed that it's not the first time they've seen someone die and it probably

won't be the last.

"I've ridden back to the (Treatment Medical Center) with a dead Soldier. I watched my best Army friend suffer from a chest wound on the way back to the TMC," Demma said.

"After seeing more and more things here, whether it's dead bodies out in sector, dead Soldiers, dead Iraqi soldiers, wounded Iraqi soldiers, wounded civilians, it's just like everything else," the native of Springfield, Ohio added.

Gradually medics grow immune to the potentially-traumatic situations that fill their days, however, the point in which it happens is still left unknown.

"It's like any other thing in life - you get desensitized. It's something that somehow you get used to and maybe you don't get used to it, but you build some kind of emotional defense," said Demma. "Every once in a while you catch yourself thinking back after each incident (and) you just realize it's not bothering you as much. You don't dwell on it as much each time and as time goes by, you tend to do what you do and go about your business a little quicker after each incident."

In the end, the fulfillment that comes with being a medic outweighs the bad that comes hand-in-hand in the career field - even with the added horror of doing it on the battle field.

Lawry said a feeling of pride took over when a doctor told him that he saved the Soldier's life and that he should be naming his kids after him. Still, Lawry just feels that he simply did his job.

"I felt like I finally had done my job," Lawry said. "I can say I've been under fire treating a guy (and) that makes it so that people listen to you more. I feel if someone listens to you, and respects what you're saying because you've been there and you've done it, you can do your job better."

"Those nightmares - I lose a little sleep and have to change a sweaty shirt," Lawry said. "The smell - I'll get over it. If it stays with me the rest of my life, I'll get used to it."



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

The driver of a humvee, from 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, prepares to maneuver past a burning vehicle, the aftermath an improvised explosive device detonation, in Baghdad's southern Ghazaliya neighborhood April 21.



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

In the Line of Fire

Iraqi national police officers from the 6th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division, train on military operations in urban terrain at Forward Operating Base Falcon in Baghdad's Rashid District April 25. The police are from the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of 6-2 NP.

Insurgents Fail to Disrupt Atwan School Opening

By Maj. Kirk Luedeke
4th IBCT, 1st Inf. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – The Rashid District Council and 1st Battalion, 6th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division conducted a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Atwan School for boys April 24, despite insurgent efforts to prevent the event from occurring.

Prior to the ceremony, small arms fire had been directed at the school, but after NP and Multi-National Division – Baghdad forces returned fire, the gunmen fled.

“We will not be stopped by the terrorists,” Ra’ad said to the crowd of boys ranging from elementary school age all the way up through high school. “We will all live in peace together.”

“Education is the future for Iraq,” said Sabeeh Al-Ka’abi, the director of the Rashid District Council, who presided over the school opening with Col. Ra’ad Eyas Amin, the 1st NP Battalion commander.

The Atwan School is located in the Mechanix

neighborhood of the Rashid District in southern Baghdad.

The renovation of the school included improvements to the outer wall, installment of new doors, electrical wiring, fans, plumbing, 100 new desks and 40 blackboards for the 650 students who attend classes there.

After the event, policemen handed out soccer balls to the students.

As those gathered began to disperse, shots rang out once again, as the insurgents returned for one more unsuccessful attempt to disrupt the proceedings.

“This just goes to show how little regard these criminals have for human life,” said Col. Ricky D. Gibbs, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division commander. “They tried to take what was a celebration of a much-improved learning institution and instead put children in harm’s way. They did not succeed, and now everyone can see the kinds of tactics they employ.”



(Photo by Maj. Kirk Luedeke, 4th IBCT, 1st Inf. Div. Public Affairs)

Col. Ra'ad Eyas Amin, commander of the 1st Battalion, 6th Brigade, 2nd Division National Police, talks to the children at the Atwan School for boys' ribbon-cutting ceremony April 24 in Baghdad's Rashid District. Prior to the ceremony, small arms fire had been directed at the school, but after National Police and U.S. forces returned fire, the gunmen fled.

Soldiers Vie for Audie Murphy Club Invitation

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

BAGHDAD – Audie Leon Murphy was the United States' most decorated service member during World War II, received every medal for valor the Army awards, in addition to one Belgian and one French medal. Today, his memory is carried on through the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club, which requires special induction by a board of senior noncommissioned officers.

The Audie Murphy Board was held by the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division's brigade and battalion sergeants major at Forward Operating Base Falcon April 29.

Command Sgt. Maj. James Foreman, sergeant major of the 4th IBCT's Special Troops Battalion, said the Audie Murphy Board is unique from other boards due to the esteem the accomplishment carries.

"Regular promotion boards are more personal, there's more money and there's more rank," Foreman said. "For this board, there's no money, no rank. It's about prestige."

Command Sgt. Maj. Eddie Fields, the sergeant major of 610th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th IBCT, 1st Inf. Div., said being invited to the Sergeant Audie Leon Murphy Club is a huge compliment to a noncommissioned officer.

"The Sergeant Audie Leon Murphy Board is unique that it separates an average NCO from a superb NCO," Fields said. "A superb NCO goes beyond his regular duties and does them without being asked. He is



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

Sgt. Wayne Worrell, an infantryman with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division from Fort Benning, Ga., fields questions from a board of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division's senior noncommissioned officers at the Sergeant Audie Murphy Board April 28 at Forward Operating Base Falcon.

truly the 'Backbone of the Army'."

The board mirrored the fact that Murphy, who was too short and young to join most of the armed services except the Army, had to work diligently to overcome his small stature to become the best. Sgt. Kevin Dick, a satellite operation and maintenance team leader with Company C, Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 4th IBCT, 1st Inf. Div., was one of four out of 17 nominees that proved to be a superb NCO. The Henderson, Nev., said he placed a lot of stress on himself to do well.

"It was without a doubt the most nerve-

racking experience I've been in," Dick said. "I put a lot of pressure on myself for it."

Dick said that while he was taken aback when he found out he had gained admittance to the SAMC, the payoff made it worth the time he invested in it.

"It kind of validates all the studying and all the things that I did to prepare because a lot of effort went into it," he said. "It was hard not to smile."

"I studied so hard for it and I wanted the people who supported me to know that I did well, I made it, and their support was justi-

fied."

Though it wasn't like Murphy standing aboard a burning tank destroyer and fighting off swarms of German troops enroute to being awarded the Medal of Honor, the board made the Soldiers think outside the box.

Sgt. Maj. Richard Cunningham, the operations sergeant major and acting command sergeant major for the 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division attached to the 4th IBCT, said even the way Soldiers are judged in front of the SAMB is different.

"The Soldier is constantly on display," Cunningham said. "He's selling himself the entire time."

Cunningham said things he looks for while judging an aspiring member of the SAMC are the way he carries himself, his tone and enthusiasm while answering questions and the appearance of his uniform.

The 2-12 Inf. sergeant major said such things reflect on the amount of pride the individual takes in himself and in his unit.

Even the questions are different from regular boards, Cunningham said. The 2-12 Inf. sergeant major said the questions are more situational and require more thinking than simple memorization and regurgitation of facts.

"It makes you think," he said.

In addition to Dick, Staff Sgt. Douglas Middleton, Staff Sgt. Andrew Schmith, and Staff Sgt. Ryan Whitebull of the 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division passed the SAMB.

Success Found Doura Market

Harker Heights, Texas native Col. Ricky D. Gibbs, commander of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Inf. Div., points out key spots in the Doura Market to Maj. Gen. Jeffery W. Hammond, commander of the 4th Infantry Division during a visit to Baghdad's Rashid District April 26. The 4th Infantry Division is slated to replace the 1st Cavalry Division in the Iraqi capital. On Dec. 23, 2006, the Doura Market had three businesses open. Today there are more than 200 shops open for business.



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



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

Miami native Sgt. Michael Cockroft, a Headquarters and Headquarters Company indirect fire infantryman attached to Company D, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, out of Fort Bliss, Texas, helps build a wall of sand bags at an Iraqi Army checkpoint April 21.



Sgt. Lamitra Niles, a truck driver with Company F, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment out of Fort Bliss, Texas, and a native of Porterville, Miss., attaches chains to concrete barriers during the construction of an Iraqi Army checkpoint in the Iraqi capital's district of Ghazaliya April 21.

Troops' Efforts Help Calm Southern

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

BAGHDAD – It has been about 40 days since they stood up the first of the concrete barriers that surround Joint Security Station Thrasher. Since then, much has changed.

Soldiers with Company D, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, out of Fort Bliss, Texas, and currently attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division here, have watched the dissolution of violent activities since they began maintaining a continuous presence in Iraqi capital's once-hostile neighborhood of southern Ghazaliya.

As part of the Baghdad Security Plan's main goal to not just conduct major clearing operations, but stay in the areas to prevent militia activity from re-emerging, JSS Thrasher, named after a fallen 2-12th Cavalry Soldier, was erected on March 14 to establish a strong Iraqi security force and coalition presence in the primarily Sunni neighborhood.

Since the implementation of the relatively new idea of a joint security station, the progress in the tone that blankets the surrounding neighborhood is evident. For the commander of Company D, the difference is like night and day.

"Before it was a constant fight, we had to fight to get into these places. My front yard was a body dump spot where we usually picked up four or five bodies every three days," Capt. Darren Fowler said. "Improvised explosive devices were planted on every major route coming east to west. (They're was) small arms contact continuously while on patrols, you couldn't do a dismounted operation without getting shot at and since we established the JSS and got a new battalion to work solely in southern Ghazaliya, versus the one company we had before, (it) has allowed us to dominate the battle space."

In conjunction with 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry

Division's clearing operations of the surrounding area and the barrier plan around Ghazaliya, designed to enable a firm grip on the city's security, strengthened the effectiveness of the JSS.

"It allowed us to gain control and now we are in the control phase in southern Ghazaliya where we can focus more on essential services and restoring civil projects to the communities," Fowler said.

The JSS, being such a new concept, took time to catch on with local residents. But Fowler said that didn't take too long to change, as the local populace started to get comfortable with the idea of the outpost in their neighborhood.

"They started coming here and starting saying, 'Hey, this is my problem. Can you help me with that?' and we actually go out and help them," Fowler added. "(They said) 'Hey, they're actually on our side.' Now, they are not so afraid to come here."

Information started to filter in through the tip line, a 24-hour hotline that residents can call and expose insurgent activity and prevent harmful acts in their neighborhoods. Fowler had the tip line phone for five months and never got much from it. After arriving to JSS Thrasher, he started getting six or seven phone calls a day about issues in his sector.

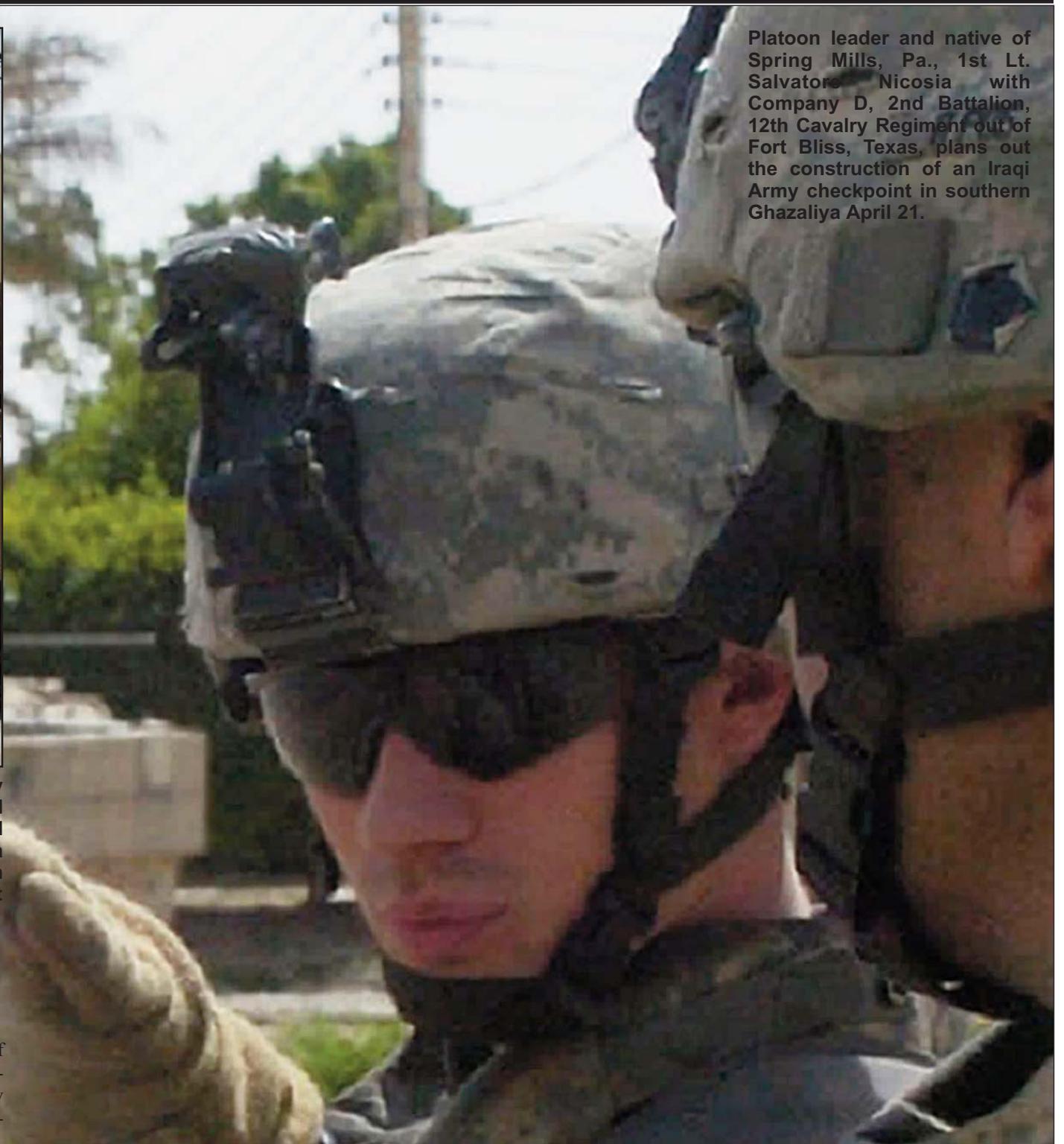
The combined command post configuration of the JSS allows coalition forces and Iraqi Army troops to conduct their planning jointly, where all parties can monitor both radios and rapidly exchange information and do everything together effectively.

Fowler said that prior to the establishment of the JSS when they were still located on separate forward operating bases, Iraqi and coalition forces had to go out to coordinate the day prior to the execution of missions.

"But, now we can say 'We got this going on,' and we can be out in less than ten minutes on a joint patrol doing things together," said Fowler. "There is no more 'Us and them'



Mike Crystal, Minn., native Pfc. Paul Yanez, a Bradley Fighting Vehicle system maintainer with Company F, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, pushes a concrete barrier into place during the construction of an Iraqi Army checkpoint in Baghdad's Ghazaliya district April 21.



Platoon leader and native of Spring Mills, Pa., 1st Lt. Salvatore Nicosia with Company D, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment out of Fort Bliss, Texas, plans out the construction of an Iraqi Army checkpoint in southern Ghazaliya April 21.

Ghazaliya Violence

Everything is executed together now.”
The tank officer said that during the last couple of months, he has slowly pushed Iraqis out into the lead on planning and executing missions with coalition forces slowly transitioning to an over-watch position on logistics and planning processes.

“(We’re) letting them do more for their own community, which puts their faces on all the projects instead of the American faces,” said Fowler, a native of Union, S.C.

Evidence of their dedication to the people of the southern region of this district, last week Lt. Col. Jabar, the commander of the 3rd Battalion, 4th Brigade, 10th Iraqi Army Division, based out of the southern Iraqi city of Basra, and Fowler sat down with sheiks, elder community leaders and other influential individuals within the Ghazaliya district.

“They explained to us their situation, what their intent is for their communities and what they would like to see happen,” Fowler said. “The first thing out of their mouths was, ‘We feel secure, finally. Thank you. Now that we have security this is what we want to see happen.’”

The two commanders took notes and they’re starting to work on prioritizing the population’s list of needs as far civil actions, water, electricity, sewage, hospital, academics, and a myriad of other projects they have not been able to focus on in the last six months due to the emphasis on the security situation.

That focus can now shift because of JSS Thrasher. Fowler is scheduled to leave his company after 24 months in command.

“If you ask me if I did a good job in establishing security in a bad situation – yes. I feel confident that we’ve done that because the attacks are down in southern Ghazaliya,” Fowler said. “The company established the JSS. We’ve done a lot of good stuff here and, truthfully, I feel confident in knowing that I’ve made a difference in Iraq.”



An Iraqi soldier with the 3rd Battalion, 4th Brigade, 10th Iraqi Army Division, based out of the southern Iraqi city of Basra, keeps watch over a primarily Sunni neighborhood of Baghdad’s Ghazaliya district from a guard tower at Joint Security Station Thrasher April 20.

Aviation Battalion Marks One-Year Anniversary

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Most one-year-olds can barely walk, but the 3rd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade has come a long way in its infancy.

The 3-227th “Spearhead” Battalion observed its one-year anniversary April 16. Although the unit’s history goes back to the early 1960s, it stood up as part of the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade a year ago at Fort Hood, Texas.

The battalion certainly had its share of growing pains in the early months, as Command Sgt. Maj. Chris Amagliani, the battalion’s top noncommissioned officer, recounted in remarks at the anniversary observance. The battalion began with about 24 Soldiers – including Amagliani – had 10 aircraft assigned with most of those in reset and had three toolboxes for the Soldiers to share. They moved into World War II era buildings that had no furniture.

“Those are just a few examples of what this battalion had to deal with in the early beginnings,” said Amagliani, who calls Fort Hood, Texas, home. “The glass is no longer half empty. As for all of our Soldiers, they had only one question on their mind. How are we going to be able to support two (training) rotations with the other battalions and then do our own battalion rotation and deploy to Iraq in less than seven months from activation?”

The Soldiers had the answer to that



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

Soldiers from the 3rd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division listen to remarks from Command Sgt. Maj. Chris Amagliani, the battalion’s top NCO, during a anniversary observance of its activation.

question within a few short months.

“We accomplished this with the mentality of being able to do more with less,” he said. “We had to establish priorities of training that were way out of the box. There were times when just about everybody wanted to say uncle, except for Uncle Sam. However, our Soldiers returned to the driving concept for which I think this battalion is well known – that concept of learning.”

The battalion’s commander, Lt. Col. Michael Shenk, Carlisle, Pa., admitted he

had his doubts about the unit being able to stand up from scratch and deploy to Iraq within six months.

“My heart fills with pride as I look back to those days,” Shenk said. “My only regret is not having complete and total confidence in our ability to achieve rightness, deploy in support of the Air Cav. Brigade and 1st Cav. Division in a record six months, and execute our currently assigned mission with such precision and care.

“I’m a believer now. Our glass is quite

surely half full.”

With the second half of the battalion’s first year spent in the skies of Iraq, the Soldiers already have become old friends – and seasoned veterans.

“I’m extremely proud to be a member of a team that assumed those challenges of activating and deploying to combat,” Shenk said

“You’ve flown over 10,200 combat flight hours. You’ve moved over 55,000 passengers; transported over 270,000 pounds of cargo; accomplished 1,700 air mission requests; safely transported the leaders of a sovereign nation, both former and current; pumped nearly 600,000 gallons of fuel; and executed 43 air assaults. You’ve reenlisted your most deserving Soldiers above established goals, you’ve maintained your assigned equipment above known standards, and you’ve complied with the known guidance and my commander’s intent.”

Amagliani said the battalion’s Soldiers still possess the mentality that got them through the battalion’s difficult beginning.

“Just look at yourselves now, knowing you are all here in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom defending this great nation of ours – never dropping a mission, doing whatever task is asked of you and then some,” Amagliani said. “I will always hold a special place in my heart for the Soldiers in the organization for which I serve. There is no other place that I’d rather be than serving right here with you for this great nation of ours.”

Lieutenant Takes on Role of Brigade Commander for a Day

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

TAJI, Iraq – It was quite a jump in position as a 1st Air Cavalry Brigade platoon leader suddenly became the brigade commander, albeit only for one day.

Hadley, Mass., native 1st Lt. Robert Massey shadowed 1st Air Cavalry Brigade Commander Col. Dan Shanahan throughout the day, beginning with physical training and going through many, many meetings into the evening in his role as brigade commander for a day.

“I think I was inspiring battalion commanders, imparting my vast experience on them,” Massey joked.

He certainly didn’t handle them with kid gloves as he talked to the commanders in the meetings.

“After the second or third meeting, I would defer to him for questions, and he would put his two cents in,” Shanahan said. “He asked those battalion commanders some tough questions. I think he had fun with it, and I think the battalion commanders had a little fun with it as well.”

Of course, the day was not meant to be all fun and games. Shanahan started the brigade commander for a day program to give a glimpse into what happens at the brigade command level and to help guide junior officers and warrant officers on their career paths, he said.

The day was jam packed with physical training, meetings, some one-on-one conferring between Shanahan and Massey in the commander’s office, meetings, visits with Soldiers on the flight line and more meetings.

“His day was full of excitement,” Shanahan said. “We started early on doing some PT, and then it was meeting after meeting and engagement after engagement. We did a little bit of [Uniform Code of Military Justice] in there as well. The goodness was that he was able to see a typical day. It was full of some things that could really help him in his career and



(Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Rick Emert, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade Public Affairs)

Col. Dan Shanahan (right), 1st Air Cavalry Brigade commander, and 1st Lt. Robert Massey (center), 3rd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, listen to Aztec, N.M. native Maj. Kevin McPherson at a battle update assessment at Camp Taji, Iraq.

also give him perspective back in his platoon to say that, hopefully, his leaders are making some pretty good decisions out there.”

And how might the young Black Hawk pilot have handled a few more meetings?

“I would have been there; I would have given the old college effort,” Massey quipped. “Really, it all goes back to having a lot of information to put out to a lot of different people. It’s overwhelming. For someone who’s focused at the tactical level, who’s focused on making air missions happen on a day-to-day basis, and – with good reason – not being completely focused on the operational strategy that we have here in Iraq, to see the interaction that actually pans out in this division – there’s a lot more to it than just going out and flying your air mission requests and your air assaults. That’s just a small piece of the bigger puzzle that’s going on with

ground units out in Baghdad.”

A look at the big picture was part of what Shanahan, who was an aide de camp to a general at one stage of his career, said he intended to get across to his brigade commander for a day, as well as letting them know that being the brigade commander isn’t always about fixing or changing things.

“I think young officers in their career, if they can be an aide, if they can do a job like that where they watch somebody, help somebody perform their job better; that’s an important aspect and kind of shows some insights that you wouldn’t get in a normal job,” Shanahan said. “The young warrant officers and young lieutenants – you hear them say every once in a while: ‘Wow, if I was brigade commander for a day, I’d change that.’”

“I’m trying to reach out to those guys – just give them a little insight on some of the stresses that happen in our day to day life in brigade command.”

That message seems to have reached Massey loud and clear.

“I took away from it that there’s an awful lot of work to do,” Massey said. “There’s a lot of organization that needs to happen, and that’s really what Col. Shanahan is doing at that level. He’s pushing information down, and he’s responding to battalion commanders who have an awful lot of issues, an awful lot of concerns – not only with personnel, but also the operational structure as a whole. When are guys redeploying? How are the operations that we’re doing now influencing ground units out in Baghdad?”

It may be like one conductor trying to lead several orchestras simultaneously, but Shanahan said he wouldn’t change a thing, and that it is something that any officer should aspire toward.

“This is something that you can look forward to,” Shanahan said. “I can’t think of any better job. In fact, I’ve said many times this is the best job in the Army, and I’m very, very fortunate to have been selected for this.”



(Photos by Capt. Christian Ruddell, 1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div.)

Soldiers from the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade's Downed Aircraft Recovery Team prepare a Black Hawk helicopter for transport back to Camp Taji, Iraq April 5. The helicopter had a forced landing southeast of Baghdad and the DART team deployed to the site to assess the damage and recover the aircraft back to Camp Taji.

Recovery Team Keeps Aerial Assets Available

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – The efforts of the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division Downed Aircraft Recovery Team will eventually put a downed UH-60 Black Hawk back in the fight.

The aircraft, which went down April 5, cannot be repaired at the level of maintenance available in theater. Where the helicopter will be sent for repairs is up to Aviation and Missile Command, but it will be back in the fight, according to Chief Warrant Officer 3 Donald Greer, Company B, 615th Aviation Support Battalion, 1st ACB.

The aviation brigade's DART team assessed the damage to the aircraft, and determined that the airframe was in good enough condition to slingload it back to Taji, said Greer, who hails from Lampasas, Texas.

According to Greer, there are three options of recovery available to the DART team when a helicopter goes down in Iraq: make repairs on site to fly the aircraft back to base, do an aerial recovery or perform a ground recovery.

There is also a fourth option, the least desirable -- destroy the aircraft at the site.

"That's obviously not something that we like to do," Greer said. "Sometimes that is determined for us."

If the condition of the aircraft is so bad that recovery is improbable, the wreckage is destroyed to prevent sensitive items and tech-



Soldiers from the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade's Downed Aircraft Recovery Team prepare a Black Hawk helicopter for a recovery mission April 5. The helicopter had a forced landing southeast of Baghdad, and the DART team deployed to the site to assess the damage and recover the aircraft back to Camp Taji, Iraq.

nology from getting into enemy hands and also to prevent its use as a propaganda tool.

"It is much better to have a black hole that's not identifiable, then the remains of an aircraft that can be identified and used in a (propaganda) campaign against coalition forces," he said.

In this case, the DART team used aerial recovery and sling-loaded the damaged Black Hawk back to Taji with a CH-47 Chinook helicopter.

The 11-person recovery team flew out to the site to assess the aircraft and determine if the Black Hawk could be evacuated back to Taji. The team consists of Soldiers trained to

do a variety of jobs including repairs to the aircraft, using a variety of saws to gain access to the aircraft and even moving sensitive equipment from the downed aircraft to one of the recovery vehicles.

"Everybody within the team has a primary function, a secondary function and even a third function," Greer said. "As much as possible, we cross level across the team. If we have to remove one member from the team, or if one member doesn't make it out there or becomes a heat casualty or some other sort of casualty, somebody else can do that job. It's a combined team out there. It doesn't matter what your job is: you're going

to be in there pulling dirt, ripping things apart, cutting things up and trying to load it up."

As the team assessed the aircraft at the site and prepared it for sling-loading, they had security from the U.S. ground forces, Greer said.

"Every time we get out there, we hit the ground, the security forces are there meeting us at the aircraft, and they escort us right to the downed aircraft," said Staff Sgt Gary Osburn, Co. B, 615th ASB, who was the noncommissioned officer in charge of the DART team April 5. "I feel very, very safe out there when those guys are there."

When it came time to prepare the Black Hawk for the sling-load, the team put its training and experience to use.

"I would say at least half on the DART team have either air assault school or are very proficient on slingloads," said Osburn, from Talala, Okla. "I've done tons of sling-loads. We give classes to the DART team on hand and arm signals, basic things to inspect on a load like fraying of a (slingload) leg. If you're in a hurry, rushing things, there are things you can't overlook. I've actually taken out some guys, hooked up the sling set and made some obvious mistakes on hooking up the shackles to see if they could spot them."

The recovery was a total success, Greer said.

"The aircraft is here in one piece, no injuries to the DART team," he said. "You can't ask for anything more than that."

“Roller-coaster Ride”

Action Never Stops for Paratroopers at COP Ford

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

BAGHDAD – Sniper fire sent Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Applegate ducking for cover behind a stack of old, rusted air conditioners. As Applegate scanned the rooftops for the shooter, a young boy came pedaling up on a bicycle.

“Get out of here, kid,” Applegate warned.

“Bomb,” the boy said, pointing down the street he had just come from.

“Great,” Applegate muttered. “Wait here,” he told the boy as he ducked around a corner to find his interpreter.

Applegate’s platoon had begun the day by investigating a storage yard full of suspicious chlorine drums. Then they were pinned down by a sniper attack. Now they had a bomb to worry about.

And they had only been on patrol for an hour.

It was just another typical day for paratroopers based at Combat Outpost Ford, in Baghdad’s Adhamiyah District.

Since the paratroopers from 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment occupied the COP in late February, the tempo of operations has been relentless. The base is located in the Al Beida area, just south of Sadr City. As allies of the legitimate government, the paratroopers pose a threat to the illegal militia dominance. As the paratroopers have pushed out into the area, cracking down on illegal activity, the militias have responded with attacks.

Confrontations can come at any time.

“You never really know what to expect. It’s the same as riding a roller coaster. It’s an adrenalin rush,” said Spc. Zachry King, from Jacksonville, Fla.

The wild day COP Ford experienced Apr. 22 was a good illustration of what the



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

Sgt. William Kok of Sacramento, Calif., a paratrooper with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, pulls security while his platoon investigates a possible roadside bomb in the Al Beida neighborhood of Baghdad's Adhamiyah District April 22.

paratroopers are facing on a daily basis.

Back at the scene of the sniper attack, Applegate brought his interpreter - a tall, gangly Iraqi nicknamed ‘Fox’ - over to find out what the boy was talking about. The boy said he had seen men planting a bomb on the

road near a mosque just down the street.

The 2nd Platoon mounted up to investigate.

“Smells like an ambush,” King said cheerfully, as he headed for his truck.

The platoon moved cautiously once they reached the mosque. They made a slow circuit around the building. Men in cafes across the street looked on with amusement.

“Seen any bombs?” one of the paratroopers asked them.

No one offered any information, and a thorough search of the area failed to turn up any explosive devices. Platoon leader 1st Lt. Paul Benfield, of Old Town, Fla., decided to call off the hunt.

Next, the platoon headed back to the chlorine storage yard to get a picture of the spot where the sniper’s bullet had impacted. They reached the site, but no sooner had they dismounted than an urgent call came in on the radio. COP Ford had just come under attack.

The paratroopers jumped back in their humvees and sped off in the direction of the COP. A siren on the lead truck wailed as the trucks pushed their way through on-coming traffic.

Inside Benfield’s vehicle, the radio crackled as details about the attack started to come in. Apparently, a man had approached one of the access gates of the COP pushing a rocket launcher disguised as a wheeled fruit stand. When he was close enough, the man ditched the fruit, fired the rocket, and fled the

scene.

Thankfully, the rocket had been stopped by protective concrete barriers around the COP. No one had been hurt.

The attacker had fired his rocket from directly in front of a corner candy shop. When 2nd Platoon arrived on the scene, they went to question the shop owners.

They pulled up in front of the shop and ordered everyone out. Though the attack had occurred in plain view, no one inside the shop claimed to know anything. The paratroopers were skeptical.

“If someone walked in front of me pushing a cart full of bananas that transformed into a rocket launcher, I’d probably remember that,” said Sgt. Patrick Donlan, of Canaioharie, N.Y.

Benfield got a description of a car seen speeding away from the scene of the attack.

The platoon spent the next hour circling around the neighborhood, checking out every car that matched the description. Nothing turned up. It looked like the attacker had fled the area.

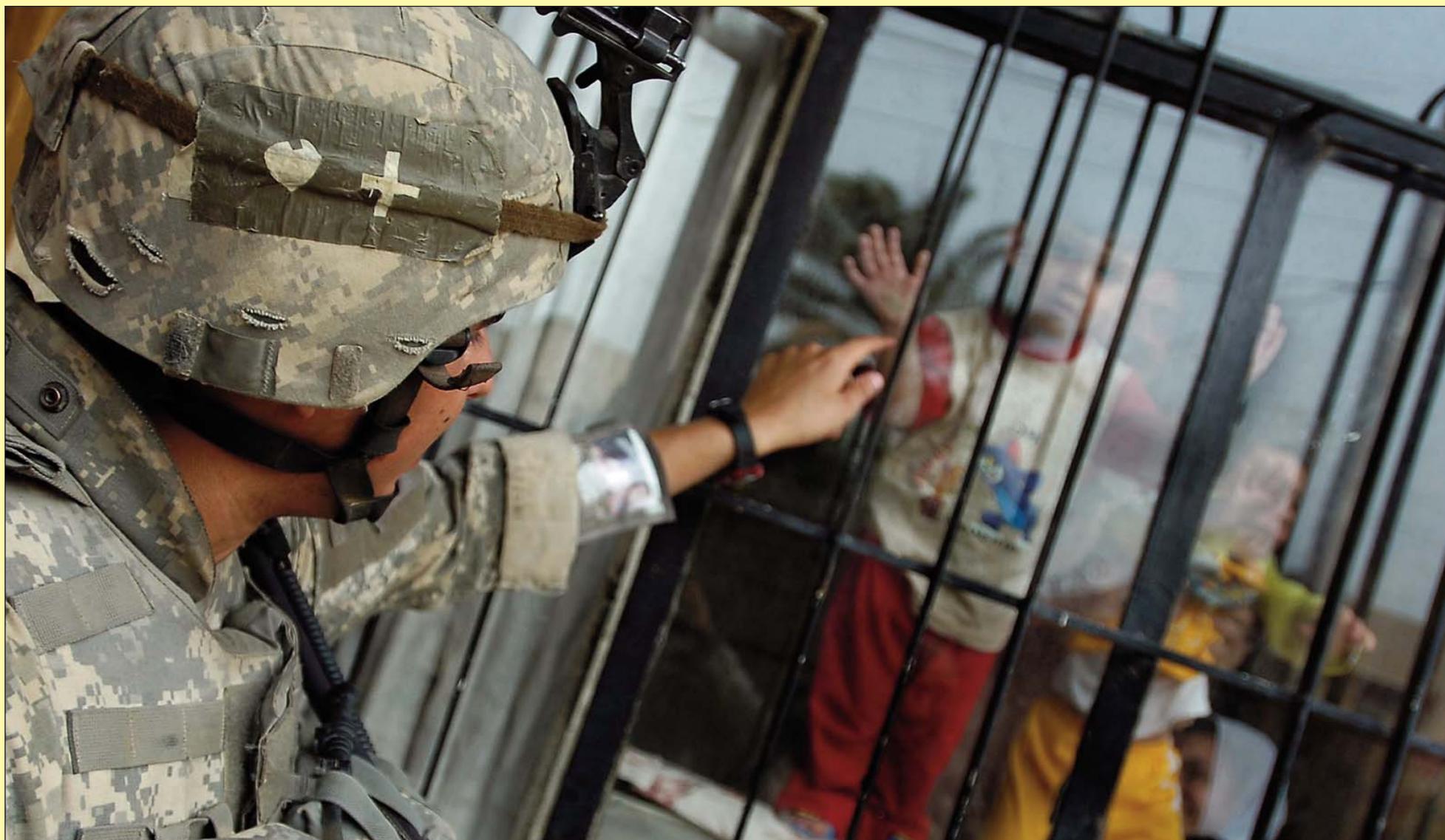
It was late afternoon when the paratroopers returned to base. King and some others went straight back to their bunks to catch up on sleep.

Less than an hour later, King was jarred out of a deep sleep by the sounds of two huge



Old Town, Fla., native 1st Lt. Paul Benfield, a platoon leader with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, questions men who may have witnessed insurgents fire a rocket at his combat outpost in the Al Beida neighborhood of Baghdad's Adhamiyah District April 22.

see *Roller Coaster* Page 19



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

Hello, Mister!

Spc. Trey McKinney, of Amarillo, Texas, a squad automatic weapon gunner with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, touches fingertips with a little boy from outside his window during a cordon and knock operation in the Al Beida neighborhood of Baghdad's Adhamiyah District April 28.

Life a Roller Coaster Ride for Paratroopers

Roller Coaster

From Page 18

explosions rattling the base. At first, it seemed the COP had been hit again, but the sounds turned out to have come from rockets passing directly overhead.

Capt. Dennis Marshall, of Hinckley, Ohio commands Company D. He was inside the operations center, hunched over a radio, trying to determine the point of origin of the rockets.

"Get me a POO!" he yelled.

King, meanwhile, had rolled over and gone back to sleep.

"That's how tired I was," he said.

Later, Delta Company's 3rd Platoon retrieved the two abandoned launchers from a lot less than half a mile from the COP. They left the launchers in the courtyard of the COP, where Spc. Charles Tisdale and Spc. David Higuera were debating if the rockets had been aimed at them. Then someone came out and told them that the rockets had impacted miles away, in the Green Zone.

"Well, I guess they weren't aiming at us," said Higuera, of Phoenix. "Or if they were, they're really bad shots."

After grabbing a quick bite, meals ready-to-eat, or MREs, 2nd Platoon was back out on the streets. Their next mission was to give a condolence payment to a local man



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

Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Applegate of Fayetteville, N.C., and Jacksonville, Fla., native Spc. Zachry King, both with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, try to pinpoint the direction of sniper fire while on patrol in the Al Beida neighborhood of Baghdad's Adhamiyah District April 22.

who had been accidentally hit by shotgun shrapnel during a door breach.

The man was propped up on a bed in his living room, his right leg in a cast. He had kept some of the buckshot in a wad of tissue paper. He showed it to the paratroopers, then quiet-

ly asked Fox a question. The interpreter translated it for Benfield.

"He wants to know if there is poison inside," he said.

"No, there is no poison," assured Benfield.

"Where do they hear this stuff?" wondered Applegate.

Benfield counted out the cash as the man's family looked on. They smiled happily.

By this point, it was getting close to midnight. 2nd Platoon had been on the move for almost 14 hours. But their night wasn't over yet.

On their way back to base, they passed a house they had raided several days earlier. The target hadn't been home then. Now there was a car parked in front. They didn't want to let the man slip through the net again.

They stacked up outside the front gate. King lowered his shoulder and rammed his way through two locked doors, and the paratroopers burst into the house. They searched it up and down, but again, the target wasn't home. A neighbor told them he had fled to Basra.

The paratroopers returned to base. They threw their body armor and helmets down and peeled off their shirts and socks, soaked with sweat. Some went out to the courtyard to rehash the day over cigarettes.

Soon, most drifted back to their bunks. They needed the sleep. It had been a long day, and who knew what tomorrow would be like?

That's how it is on a roller-coaster ride.



(U.S. Army photo)

Iraqi artists create murals out of concrete security barriers near the Abu Nuwas Market in Baghdad April 18 as part of a project to reopen shops and attract customers. More than 140 artists have been employed for this project. The concrete barriers are a temporary measure until security improves in the area.

Historic Abu Nuwas Market Project Underway

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

FORWARD OPERATING BASE LOYALTY, Iraq – The historic Abu Nuwas Market in Baghdad was once a flourishing part of the city that provided a variety of shops, restaurants, lounges and hotels that people from around the world came to see.

Recently, the street was besieged with car bomb attacks and was shut down and closed off to the populace. Shop owners and restaurateurs either left the area or stayed and watched the area slowly deteriorate.

Under Operation Fardh Al-Qanoon, also known as the Baghdad Security Plan, the Abu Nuwas Market is going to be re-opened for public use.

The rebuilding has begun. The hard work of dedicated Iraqis under the protection of Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, currently operating as part of the 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, is making this possible.

Maj. Anthony G. Judge, the executive officer for 1-504th PIR, said opening the market will help stimulate the economy by providing Iraqis with jobs and places to spend their money on various goods.

Allowing the Iraqis to create a flourishing market is something they can take pride in. The project is not a coalition project. Instead, Judge said, it is a project planned,

directed and executed by Iraqis. Coalition forces are on hand to provide protection and offer advice. Protection is also provided by commercial contractors from Dyncorp. Since the barrier project is going to allow traffic to travel down streets again, Judge said plans are in the works to create a secondary route for Dyncorp vehicles to use.

Judge said the first phase of the project is to create traffic control points where Iraqi security forces can check vehicles and where people enter. Side streets were blocked off by large cement barriers that are offset to allow pedestrians access, Judge said. The concrete barriers are a temporary measure until security improves in the area.

The project planning to get the Abu Nuwas Market up and running again pre-dated the Baghdad Operations Command, said Lt. Col. John Rudolph, the civil affairs officer for Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

“Actually, it was the Rusafa Command, Iraqi police and Iraqi Army, who has the lead for security of the Abu Nuwas Market project,” Rudolph said. “The 1-504th has area security as part of their patrol area.”

One of the important factors is things need to be done right for the Iraqi people, but with the least amount of pain for them, Judge said.

The first day of the project went smoothly as the barriers were laid in place. Once the entry control points are functioning and all the side streets blocked off to vehicles, the Iraqi people can once again feel free to walk down the street and

shop in peace without the threat of a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device.

“VBIEDs continue to hurt, but they are less frequent,” Judge said.

The next challenge lies in getting the shop and restaurant owners to come back and start up their once-lively businesses.

Many of the paratroopers in the 1-504th who have helped oversee the placement of the temporary barriers and provided security to the Iraqi workers feel good that their contributions are going to help ensure this once-flourishing market opens up again.

Cpl. Patrick A. Baker, of HHC, 1-504th, a member of the personal security detachment, said it feels great to be a part of the Baghdad Security Plan and to be able to watch the Abu Nuwas Market come back to life.

“Maybe tourists will be able to come back and I want to get pictures and show that I was there and helped,” said the Florence, S.C., native.

Spc. Will M. Hedin, also of HHC, 1-504th and another member of the PSD, said it feels good to play a part in helping bring the market back to its former state. The Chester, Conn., native said everyone would like to see the project move a little faster.

Overall, the famous Abu Nuwas Market is on its way to being open to the public and, with time, may once again become the tourist attraction it once was.



(U.S. Army Photo)

Sgt. Brennen Carter, with Battery B, 129th Field Artillery, takes the oath of re-enlistment from Camp Eggers in Kabul, Afghanistan. A video teleconference with his father, Lt. Col. Bryan Carter, linked the two men together from opposite sides of the war. The Chillicothe, Mo. native volunteered for six more years of Army service.

Troop Re-ups Long Distance

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

Camp Taji, Iraq – When the time came for Sgt. Brennen Carter to re-enlist for six more years of Army service, he needed an officer to conduct the oath.

The Heavy Equipment Transport driver from Chillicothe, Mo. chose a man whose leadership and guidance he's been following since birth; his father, Lt. Col. Bryan Carter.

"My dad has been my hero; I look up to him," said Sgt. Carter. "If anybody was going to re-enlist me, it would be my father."

Being separated by one country, two mountain ranges, and more than 1500 miles didn't stop either man from making the ceremony. Thanks to video conferencing, Sgt. Carter, stationed on Camp Eggers in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Lt. Col. Carter, on Camp Taji, Iraq, stood face to face.

"I'm very proud of him," said the elder Carter. "He's continuing a family tradition that started with his great-grandfather, back in the trenches of World War I."

Four generations of the Carter family have volunteered for service to the nation. Lt. Col. Carter's father served in Korea, his siblings have worn the uniform, and he now serves as the personnel officer for the 15th Sustainment Brigade, 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary).

The younger Carter joined the Missouri National Guard his junior year of high school and completed his basic training over the summer before his senior year. Lt. Col. Carter recalled joining the guard just three days after his graduation from the same high school in Milan, Mo.

"I was scared to death," he laughed. "I can only imagine what he felt ... especially since he went split-option."

For Sgt. Carter, deployment to Afghanistan is his first time overseas. Growing up an Army brat, he lived life watching his father pack to leave. Now, he has a better understanding of what his dad has done.

"There have been a lot of times I couldn't see him," he said. "It's been great to be able to share this with my dad."

Dad couldn't be prouder. He said his son is a huge spokesperson for the Missouri National Guard and the military in general. Even at a young age, he said, he has been an outstanding supporter. With his passion and drive, his influence prompted 20 to 30 others to join.

"I wanted to serve my country longer," said Sgt. Carter on his six-year commitment. "I love being in the Army and the National Guard."

The two talked and joked together, each watching the other from opposite sides of the war. When the elder Carter teased his son about needing half of his re-enlistment bonus, the younger countered with the pay difference between sergeant and officer.

"But if he needs it," he grinned, "He can have it."



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

An Iraqi logistics officer from the 9th IA division listens to a discussion on fuel support during an April 25 rehearsal of concept drill on Camp Taji. The two-day conference brought coalition trainers together with Iraqi Army officers from the 6th and 9th IA divisions, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Defense.

Coalition, Iraqi Conference Held on Logistical Future

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Coalition advisors, senior Iraqi Army leaders and representatives from the Iraqi Ministry of Defense concluded a two-day logistics here, April 25.

Commanders and logistical officers from the 6th and 9th Iraqi Army Divisions met with Coalition Military Assistance Training Team members to conduct rehearsals of concept drills for unit transportation, ammunition, life support and maintenance requirements.

According to Danish Navy Rear Adm. Niels Friis, CMATT deputy commanding general, the discussions are based upon a framework of logistical concepts approved March by the Iraqi joint headquarters and the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq.

"We are educating the [Iraqi Army] in what we believe is the best course of action," he said. "But, I must underline strongly, it is [designed for] their solutions; not American or European ones."

At the strategic level, the IA support structure is built upon a national depot system, with regional support units placed in key geographic locations throughout the country. This differs from what U.S. Forces are used to, but it makes good sense, said Brig. Gen. Terry Wolff, CMATT commander.

Originally, the new Iraqi Army stood up ten divisions designed for counter-insurgency. The RSU logistical system allowed for rapid support and sustainment for, essentially, 10 light-infantry divisions.

The goal is to pave the way for Iraqi forces to implement logistical concepts to re-supply and sustain their forces.

Currently, many of the maintenance, life support and supply functions for the Iraqi forces are contracted services.

Contracts were designed to bridge the gap, Wolff said. "The Iraqi Army wants to do this themselves, they desire to be self-sufficient. But, it must be done

at the right time and can not be done simultaneously; contracting buys them time..."

Participants spent the first day setting the framework of the concept drills. Day two combined coalition experts and Iraqi Ministry representatives to chair scenario based discussions designed to engage Iraqi logisticians.

It (the process) is very much designed about engagement checks; to see if they understand the procedures, Friis said. "This is just the beginning; Iraqi forces logisticians are a new community."

Wolff agrees that the Iraqis' train and re-enforce the policies, concepts and executions of their own supply and requisition for support systems.

"This is a big lesson in adaptation," he said. "They have to be comfortable with their own procedures."

Allowing junior Iraqi officers at the operational level access to strategic commanders is a change from the old, centralized system of command. CMATT hopes to use this interaction with the Iraqi joint leadership for constructive proposals to implement the supply and sustainment concepts.

"The lower we engage the units, the better understanding of the system," Wolff said. "It is a combined effort; we can not do it for them."

CMATT officials said that while Iraqi forces make improvements on a daily basis, a mature life support system is still one to two years away. However, support planners hope to see many of the life support contracts phase out next year, as the Iraqi army continues to grow and reorganize.

CMATT plans to conduct quarterly logistical concept drills again in August at all of the five RSU locations. Coalition members see these as professional development seminars; the end-state being Iraqi forces maintaining the difficult task of self-sustainment. Although the timeline is measured in months, coalition forces remain committed and optimistic.

"When the Iraqis put their mind to something, there is nothing that they can not do," Wolff said. "I'm just being flat-out honest."



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

Burns, Wyo., native Staff Sgt. Brian Long, with Company A., 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, from Fort Lewis, Wash., delivers a teddy bear to an Iraqi child in Baghdad's Mansour district April 15. The child's father, a former Iraqi police officer, was killed in action early last year. Long spoke with the child's mother and gathered information about everyday activities in the area.

Stryker Troops Continue Search, Clearing Operations

By Pfc. Benjamin Gable
7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP STYKER, Iraq – U.S. and Iraqi Army troops moved in to the eastern part of Baghdad's Mansour district to work on a mission to provide security to locals and search for illegal weapons.

Soldiers from Company A, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, from Ft. Lewis, Wash., were tasked with the deliberate clearance of homes in this area, neutralizing weapons caches and performing targeted raids.

With the IA in the lead April 14, the coalition forces moved into the city.

"These clearing operations are to enforce the security of the neighborhood and the people living here," said Staff Sgt. Brian Long, a native of Burns, Wyo., with Co. A. "We make sure we do a complete sweep of the area and gather as much information as possible."

During their search for weapons and explosives, the troops handed out flyers, tip cards with numbers to the local joint security stations and head of household forms. Long said that all of these information sheets help lead to better security for the area.

Teams of Soldiers moved through each house on their designated blocks and methodically searched every room.

"Insurgents have been known to hide things all over houses and in the smallest crevices and cracks you can imagine," said

Pfc. Derek Gress, with Co. A. "We have to do whatever is needed to make sure they don't have something they're not supposed to."

After several hours of searching and clearing, the coalition forces headed back to their respective bases to rest and start over again the next day.

The morning of April 15, coalition forces moved back to the same area as the

day before. The day's search called for a more aggressive approach in entering and clearing houses.

Many of the houses had locks on the doors. With the homeowners having migrated, Soldiers were forced to bring out the lock cutters and the battering ram to enter the homes.

One local reported to Soldiers that most of the homeowners had moved to Syria for

more safety and better job opportunities.

Coalition forces broke down doors, cut locks and made their way into the homes to be searched by any means necessary. Once inside, they searched everything from refrigerators to stand-alone freezers to boxes and closets.

Whatever the situation called for, the forces left no stone unturned.

After leaving the houses, coalition forces left damage assessment sheets and new locks for the owners of the homes, should they return.

As Iraqi children walked the streets of the neighborhood, the search continued.

Soldiers searched flower gardens, cars in driveways and anything needed.

Toward the end of the day's search, coalition forces discovered a large cache of ammunition and explosive chemicals. In this particular find, they discovered two large cans of nitric acid, five 40-pound bags of an unknown white powder substance and a stripped down car.

Long said the car could possibly be used as a vehicle-borne explosive device. An explosive ordnance disposal team was then called in to take the items for further investigation while coalition forces provided an outer cordon.

With the day's mission complete, and after the long hours moving from house to house on consecutive days, the Soldiers of Co. A., headed back to their Strykers and heard two words they love to hear- "Drop ramp."



Spc. Robert Kern, an infantryman with Co. A., 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, from Fort Lewis, Wash., uses a battering ram to force his way through a locked door in a home in Baghdad's Mansour district April 15.

Kentucky Army National Guardsmen Making Difference at Al Rasul School

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

MAKASIB, Iraq – A warm welcome met the Soldiers upon their arrival. Smiles have replaced once contemptuous stares. The typical silence gave way to a friendly dialogue. A customary hand to the heart followed every handshake. The Soldiers were greeted, not as outsiders of the community, but the heroes of the now joyous school.

The day was special for the students of the Al Rasul Primary Elementary School here, a town west of Baghdad, April 17. This was the first day students enjoyed the fully refurbished learning facility made possible by the Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry Brigade Combat Team of the Kentucky Army National Guard, assigned to 130th Field Artillery Bde., 1st Cavalry Division.

However, the day was just as special for the Soldiers as for the students, said Lt. Col. John Luttrell, the battalion commander,

“You could see the smiles on their faces. For my Soldiers that really means a lot for them. They truly get to see the fruits of their labors,” said the native of Harlan, Ky.

Just as Rome was not built in a day, the fruits of the Soldiers labor were the culmination of seven months working in the Makasib community. Work that was as much patrols as it was relationship building, Luttrell said.

“Every day we go out, we try to make some kind of difference,” he said. “What makes me proudest is going out and talking to the communities and listening to the people say how much they appreciate you.”

The Soldiers of the battalion are Army National Guardsmen from Kentucky who bring a plethora of professional experience, which aids in civil military operations and humanitarian assistance missions, as well as simple social interaction with the populace, said Maj. Chris Cline, the battalion civil military affairs operations officer.

“One of the things that Kentucky boys are good at is talking. That one-on-one relationship with the local Iraqis (is) critical because you gain trust (with one another)” said the native of Hodgenville, Ky. “Our Soldiers are really good about interacting with the students. Our Soldiers are good role models. They saw a genuine concern and care for the students.”

The school project included the addition of classrooms, the remodeling of existing structures, a complete coat of fresh paint and the erection of living quarters for the groundskeeper, Luttrell said.

In addition, the school’s 600 students were happy to receive school supplies, including pencils, notepads and erasers, from the Soldiers to mark the project’s completion and assist their studies, he said.

“It’s very rewarding to see the progress that is being made,” Luttrell explained. “If we can get the people to trust us, to respect us and to see that we have a true concern for



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

Harlan, Ky., native Lt. Col. John Luttrell, battalion commander of 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry Brigade Combat Kentucky National Guard, 130th Field Artillery Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, meets with a class of Iraqi students in the Al Rasul Primary Elementary School in the Makasib village, west of Baghdad, April 17. The visit by Soldiers of 1st Battalion was to drop off school supplies for students and tour the newly remodeled facility.

them – we’re just not out there to get information on targets, we have a concern about their wellbeing and their future - that brings stability to the entire area.”

The school is just a small piece in the bigger puzzle. Ensuring stability for Makasib is the objective for the Soldiers because their mission is force protection of Camp Slayer, which neighbors the town. Securing Makasib creates a blocking position to deter insurgent activity near the Baghdad International Airport, Cline said.

Formerly one of Saddam Hussein’s favorite towns prior to the fall of Baghdad, the strategic Makasib was neutral, dirty, and dreary until Soldiers slowly started to make a difference in the community, Cline said.

“What we try to do, is not shoot for the moon. We try to start out small and build,” Luttrell said.

Working with the Makasib Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC), the first step was to clear the streets of sewerage and garbage, which brought vendors back to the market street to resume commerce. Next the locally appointed NAC decided to improve education, which led to the school project. Now the NAC is turning its attention to bringing continuous power to the people. By next month every home in Makasib will have 20 amps of power, he said.

Infrastructure is not the only improvement to Makasib. Security is much improved since locals started manning their own checkpoints since there are no local Iraqi Security Forces in the area, Luttrell said.

Since Soldiers engaged the populace, employment is up, the economy is vibrant and the streets are cleaner. By establishing a relationship, Soldiers have successfully encouraged the emergence of local gover-



Harlan, Ky., native Lt. Col. John Luttrell, battalion commander of 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry Brigade Combat Kentucky National Guard, 130th Field Artillery Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, carries supplies into the Al Rasul Primary Elementary School in the Makasib village, west of Baghdad, April 17. The visit by Soldiers of 1st Battalion was to drop off school supplies for students and tour the newly remodeled facility.

nance, Cline said.

“People are starting to take pride in their city and they’re very pleased with themselves,” he said.

Now Soldiers do not have to seek out intelligence, so much as process it.

“If they have information, they will come forward and give that to you because they appreciate the good things that are happening to their town,” Luttrell said. “They will help you police up their own area.”

The importance of local cooperation is increasingly important since the start of Operation Fardh Al Qanoon, commonly referred to as the Baghdad Security Plan (BSP). As coalition forces crackdown on vio-

lence in Baghdad’s capital, insurgents are increasingly regrouping in less populated areas, Luttrell said.

“As the insurgents are pushed out of certain areas we do not want them to move into Makasib. Makasib does not want them,” he said.

Luttrell is hopeful his Soldiers’ success in Makasib will spread to Baghdad. He said Makasib is just one building block in the reconstruction of Iraq and his Soldiers are just trying to leave it better than they found it.

“If nothing else, those Soldiers made a difference for that community,” Luttrell said of Makasib. “We can only fix our little piece of the puzzle.”

Soldier in Heroic Battle Receives Silver Star

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

BAGHDAD – “Men, you have one second in your life where you can decide if you are going to be a coward or if you are going to fight. The time to decide is now.”

That sentence is something that Maj. James “Jim” Gant, who serves as the chief of the Iraqi National Police, Quick Reaction Force Battalion Transition Team, tells his policemen all the time, encouraging them to fight for what they believe in.

Though most the time he was talking in generic terms, this time he knew the fight was waiting for them. For six weeks his patrol of three armored high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles and 23 “soft-shelled” national police pickup trucks had been getting in fire fights with an organized insurgent force in an area between Balad and Baghdad. On Dec. 11, his patrol was finally on their way back home. Gant knew there would be a grand finale.

“We took frequent trips back and forth in the area and the engagements kept getting bigger,” the Las Cruces, N.M., native said. “They knew that we were going to leave. They are a determined enemy force. They wanted to give us a going away present, and we definitely wanted to receive it.”

His actions, during that fight, resulted in him earning the Silver Star, which was awarded on May 3 at a Iraqi National Police station near Forward Operating Base Prosperity. The Silver Star is the third highest award given for valor in the face of the enemy. It is given to American heroes.

Gant knows four Soldiers who have earned Silver Stars; two died for them. He said heroes are everywhere, it just depends on if they get the chance to show it.

“There are a lot of very good Soldiers, very brave Soldiers that have never had the opportunity to show it,” he said. “As good as you are, you don’t control the enemy. I have been blessed since 2001, since our nation has been at war to fight with incredible warriors and heroes.”

He was given his chance to prove himself on that fateful day in December.

The enemy on that stretch of road was well trained and waiting, Gant said. But he knew his crew was ready. After spending 17 years in the Army, he should know.

“I had a really well trained transition team,” he said. That confidence was also extended to his Iraqi brethren as well, with good reason.

“On Nov. 24, (insurgents) hit my vehicle (with an improvised explosive device) and it flipped three times,” said Gant, half of a dual-military couple of 11 years. His wife, Maj. Giselle Pozzerle, currently serves at Fort Bragg, N.C. “One of my Iraqis got me out of that vehicle.”

That was just a recent example, and the training and experience of the Iraqi policemen and U.S. Soldiers were about to be tested. As the patrol headed south, machine gun fire started from the west.

Gant ordered his gunner, to return fire, eventually breaking contact and moving towards Baghdad. In the initial fight, one of his Iraqi Police “Commandos” was injured with a gunshot wound to the face. Using his advanced medical skills that he gained during his time in the Special Forces, he dismounted and rushed to stabilize the Iraqi and called in a medical evacuation helicopter.

In order for a helicopter to land, an area had to be cleared. They moved into nearby palm groves on foot pushing the enemy back in a close range fire fight.

“At this point, it became very apparent to me that the (insurgent’s) intent was to destroy our patrol,” he said. “We had over 20 vehicles with us that were spread out across a large area. It is a large enemy force to have our entire patrol engaged at once.”

They moved back to their landing zone, but the fire intensity increased on both sides. If they could not clear the landing zone the helicopter would not be able to land.

“The fire was so heavy you could feel it inside; you could see and feel the shake of the gunfire, with the



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

Maj. James “Jim” Gant recalls the events of a fierce fire fight that occurred Dec. 11 between Balad and Baghdad during an interview at Camp Liberty, Iraq April 30. Gant, the Chief of the Iraqi National Police Quick Reaction Force Battalion Transition Team, earned the Silver Star for his heroism that day.

Commandos fighting just as heroically as the Americans” Gant said.

After pushing the enemy back, the bird was able to land, but before the fight took a turn for the worse, Gant wanted that helicopter out of the danger zone. They swiftly loaded up the casualties and within 15 seconds of the helicopter taking off, the landing zone started receiving mortar fire, he said.

He considered the fact that they were still in contact a good thing, though.

“We try to maintain contact with the enemy as long as possible and kill as many as we can,” Gant said. “We were going to do some serious damage that day.”

“It is easy to sit in a room in safety and talk about it,” he said. “I came here to fight. I came here to kill the enemy. I knew at the time what a huge engagement it was... I also had a huge concern for my team and my Iraqis, because I love these guys. I wanted to ensure that we didn’t take unnecessary risks or have unnecessary casualties.”

He decided that he needed to get the insurgents out of their well built positions. It was obvious to him that this complex attack was well planned. They mounted up and started to move again toward Baghdad still taking fire from both sides.

“We were receiving some sporadic machine gun fire (as we moved,) and I got word that the rear was being pinned down with intense small arms fire,” he said.

He peeled his vehicle to the rear putting him between the patrol and the incoming fire. Laying down suppressive fire, his gunner went through 18,000 rounds that day. The rear of the convoy was moving up out of the hot zone, and Gant’s humvee pushed back to the lead of the convoy.

They were moving toward an urbanized area, with the threat of improvised explosive devices and rocket-propelled grenade teams rising. This is when the heaviest fire of the day began, and in the middle of the median, was an obvious IED.

He wasn’t going to put his team in a situation where they are forced to pull security in the area, especially since they were still under small arms fire. His logic was if the IED struck one of the police vehicles that did not have any protective siding the results will be catastrophic and they would be

pinned down.

“We couldn’t get off the road. There were markets and such on the sides of the road,” Gant said. “The IED had to go off and I wanted it to be on an up-armored vehicle. I wanted it to be mine.”

He told the rest of his patrol to push left, and pulled his gunner inside of the vehicle. He told his driver to have the IED detonate on his side.

“We moved up. Nothing. (We) got closer. Nothing,” he said. “We were within about twenty feet, when (the IED) went off.”

Nobody was hurt and the vehicle was still operational. They continued on, discovering a second IED about 50 feet from the first.

“My driver was fearless that day. He didn’t even hesitate,” he said.

They started the same drill but at this point a civilian vehicle had linked up with the convoy. He knew it was there, but he still needed the second IED to go off on an armored vehicle. The passengers braced themselves for the second blast. Everyone was all right, once again.

“There was a bend in the road. We were receiving machine gun fire from the front and both flanks,” Gant said.

There was a third IED; a ploy to get them to stop and be sitting ducks for another ambush. It was a hoax.

This is when Gant received word that a woman in the civilian vehicle had been severely injured in the first blast. Still under heavy small arms fire in a hasty perimeter, he got out and tried to perform first aid on her.

“She didn’t want me touch her. She was going to die and she didn’t want me to touch her,” Gant said. His Iraqi counterpart, consoled the woman saying, “It’s OK. He is my brother.”

She then allowed him to apply tourniquets to both of her severely wounded legs. There was also a little girl in the vehicle. Gant, a family man with two kids of his own back in North Carolina, Tristen, 9, and Scout, 7, wanted to keep this child safe.

“I realized that we might all die today, but this little girl will not,” he said, talking about how he put the child in his up-armored vehicle. “We had some sporadic small arms fire after that, but we had broken their back. They wanted us to stop there.”

“I later found out that the women lived, and the little girl,” he said with a smile, “was still afraid of U.S. forces, but she was really small... maybe one. She didn’t understand; (she) just knew that someone had grabbed her from her mom and dad. She didn’t know that it was for her own protection. I hope that one day, her parents tell her what happened that day.”

They engaged the insurgents until the patrol was able to get out of the area, eventually making it into Baghdad and down a route known for explosively-formed projectiles.

When they finally made it back that day, they were met with a celebration. There were more than 200 Commandos singing and bathing the road with goat’s blood and planting bloody handprints all over there war-torn, bullet-ridden vehicles. There were celebrating.

“I will never forget them hugging and kissing us, their brothers in arms,” he said of their return. “They do this in celebration, when they think we gave our lives for them, or could be dead.”

Though nearly six months has passed since that battle occurred, Gant can tell the story of the battle like it was yesterday.

Only two Soldiers remain on his crew that were with him that day, most of the American Soldiers have rotated back to the United States, but he remembers all of his team.

“On that day, there were no Americans. There were no Iraqis, no whites and no blacks. There were no Sunnis, Shias, Christians. There was just a group of warriors working and fighting together,” he said. “All the men I fought with that day showed incredible courage and bravery. That was one of the highlights of my life; working with those men that day.”

Purple Heart Recipients Honored on Fort Hood

By Amanda Kim Stairrett
Killeen Daily Herald

FORT HOOD, Texas – Pfc. John S. Watts wishes he was still in Iraq with his buddies.

The infantryman keeps in touch with his fellow Soldiers via MySpace.com. They can't tell him about the missions they go on, but they fill him in on funny things that happen in the unit.

Watts is back in Texas after the Bradley Fighting Vehicle he was riding in Feb. 15 rolled over a roadside bomb. He was asleep in the back on the final day of a nine-day mission when the bomb detonated.

The vehicle's deck plate took most of the shrapnel and the blast forced the plate in, shattering Watts' heel. A deck plate is the door in the back of the Bradley that lowers, allowing Soldiers to dismount.

He sleeping one minute and on the ground, covered in diesel fuel the next, he said.

Watts was one of 25 1st Cavalry Division soldiers honored at a April 24 Purple Heart and volunteer recognition ceremony. He is assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, a battalion in the 3rd Brigade Combat Team. Eighteen of the recipients are assigned to the brigade, far more than any other at the ceremony.

The "Greywolf" Brigade is located in Diyala Province, north of Baghdad.

It has been hit hard because of what its commander, Col. David W. Sutherland, said was a strong offensive, during an April 20 video teleconference. Areas in the province the enemy thought were safe havens are being taken over by American and Iraqi forces, he said, calling the attacks a "systemic response" because the soldiers are easier to access.

Command Sgt. Maj. Donald R. Felt, the brigade's senior noncommissioned officer, is back from Iraq on leave and attended the ceremony. He wanted to be

there because so many of his soldiers are represented. He also attended the division's memorial ceremony April 26.

The injuries and losses are tough for the brigade, but the Soldiers are resilient.

They are holding up well, Felt said, and the loss or injury of a friend often becomes the driving force that allows troops to continue with their mission. It is admirable to see, he added.

In a taped message from Iraq, Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Fil Jr., commander of the division and Multinational Division-Baghdad, showed his appreciation for the Purple Heart recipients.

"Thank you from your brothers in arms," he said. Several others in the Bradley with Watts that day were at the ceremony, too, including his squad leader, the gunner and driver. They are all recovering from injuries sustained in the blast.

The driver and Watts are still at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, and the gunner and squad leader are back at Fort Hood. Watts said he isn't in pain anymore and has been working with a physical therapist to build muscle and gain back his range of motion. His doctors have said he'll be without crutches by June. He took right to the crutches, he said, and was up and around shortly after the explosion.

Though the Huntsville, Ala., native said he isn't one who cares much for ceremonies, it was good to see people he knew. His roommate in Iraq is home on leave and attended the Purple Heart ceremony.

Retired Lt. Gen. Don Jones pinned the medals on the soldiers' collars and said that he has no doubt the Soldiers sitting before him would do it all over again. He has spoken with injured Soldiers and said one thing they all said was that they couldn't wait to get back to their units.

Also at the ceremony, 30 volunteers from across the division were honored for their work.



(Photo by Sgt. Cheryl Cox, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Spc. Lucas Goedert, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, receives his Purple Heart from Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Don Jones, president of the Central Texas Chapter of the Association for the United States Army, during a ceremony at the Fort Hood Catering and Conference Center April 24.



(Photos by Sgt. Robert Strain, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Commander Addresses Soldiers & Families

(Above) Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Fil Jr., the commanding general of the 1st Cavalry Division and Multi-National Division – Baghdad, addresses Soldiers and family members via satellite April 25 at Fort Hood's Catering and Conference Center. Fil fielded questions from the family members about various topics, including the recent deployment extension announced by the Department of Defense, as a part of the division's monthly Town Hall Forum. (Right) Dressed like a target, Col. Larry Phelps, the rear detachment commander of the 1st Cavalry Division, takes questions from families during the division's monthly Town Hall Forum April 25 at the Fort Hood Catering and Conference Center.



Stop Getting Bugged Out

Soldiers Should Protect Against Crawling, Flying Vermin

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

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Creepy crawlers, pests, vermin, insects, bugs... whatever they are called, most people would consider them annoying but rarely think of them as being dangerous. But they can be.

Moving to a different part of the world means that there are different dangers within the bites and stings of the flying and crawling critters than in the United States.

“The biggest threats here are the mosquitoes and sand flies,” said Capt. Ruben Ortiz, an environmental science officer for Multi-National Division – Baghdad. “The mosquitoes from the Anopheles species can carry malaria, and the sand flies can carry Leishmaniasis.”

Malaria makes people ill with fevers and severe chills that could result in death, if not treated. Leishmaniasis affects the health of the skin, creating large open sores.

“When the infected sand fly bites, the parasite gets under the skin cells creating slow healing wounds that are much like ulcers,” said Maj. Chris Medellin, a preventive medicine officer with MND-B.

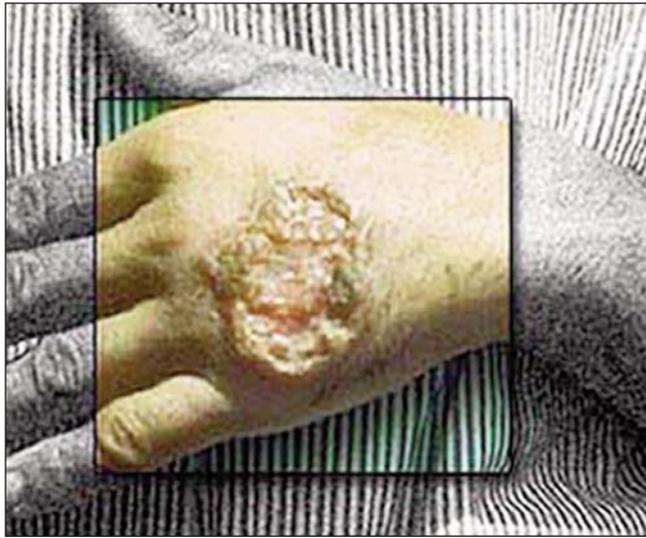
The San Antonio native stressed the importance of getting medical attention as soon as possible, noting that Leishmaniasis will leave large scars.

“As soon as you notice a fever with chills or an infected sore, it is time to come in,” Medellin said.

As the warmer months are swiftly approaching, bugs are out and active and the Soldiers living without common amenities are more vulnerable.

“Due to the surge, we have more Soldiers living in tents or in (joint security stations) instead of trailers,” Medellin said. “The threat is higher in those living conditions.”

“Many of the JSSs use (barriers made from loose sand



(Graphic by Dr. D.S. Martin, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Leishmaniasis, a disease spread by sand flies, creates ulcer-like sores on the skin. Maj. Chris Medellin, a Multi-National Division – Baghdad preventive medicine officer, said that is important to seek treatment immediately after discovering symptoms of the disease.

and rocks) and sandbags. These are great habitats for sand flies,” Ortiz added. “The standing water is an issue, too. That is a breeding ground for mosquitoes.”

Ortiz, from San Sebastian, Puerto Rico, said that it is essential for commanders to adopt and enforce the Department of Defense Insect Repellent System.

This system starts with ensuring that Soldiers treat their uniforms with Permethrin, which is the standard military insect repellent that can last for approximately 50 uniform

washes, said Ortiz. The uniform itself is a barrier against insects, too.

Next, they should apply the insect repellent DEET to all exposed skin. One application can last up to 12 hours, he said.

“The Soldiers (on the ground) need to remember that when they take off that uniform, the skin underneath is no longer protected. Applying additional DEET before going to bed can help,” said Ortiz. He also added that using bed nets or mosquito netting also deters bugs, but sand flies can still get through if the nets are not treated with an insecticide.

Other tips, he added, were trying to avoid standing water and conducting good hygiene practices including washing uniforms frequently.

For those who are lucky enough to live in trailers, he said to limit the amount of food consumed inside, clean up crumbs and try to block areas of entry.

The staff will also do their part.

“We have traps all over, and when we reach a certain threshold of bugs per trap the contractors will spray the base,” Ortiz said. On the smaller combat outposts and the joint security stations, the company field sanitation teams can spray.

The traps not only allow them to track the density of the bugs, but the collections get shipped to Europe to be tested for diseases. So, they know what the troops are facing.

Medellin, also, warned against other critters, such as snakes and scorpions.

“If you get stung, don’t try to catch it or suck the venom out,” he said. “You are just wasting valuable time. Get to the nearest medical facility.”

Avoidance and the use of insect repellent, Medellin stressed, is key to preventing vermin-related illnesses and injuries.

American Red Cross Bridging Distance Between Soldiers, Families

By Sgt. Nicole Kojetin
1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Communication can be a challenge while deployed, especially when a Soldier is living in a newly-established joint security station or combat outpost.

But there is a solution; the American Red Cross is a bridge between families and troops.

“When a birth, death or illness occurs or when a family requests financial help or a health and welfare contact, they can contact their nearest Red Cross chapter to be put in touch with a military caseworker,” said Susanne Harlandt, a Red Cross assistant station manager here.

When they contact the Red Cross they need to be prepared to provide them with the service member’s name, rank, social security number and unit both at home and deployed. According to Harlandt, who has been working with the Red Cross for six years, the ideal address would include the company, battalion, brigade, and division.

On the other side, commanders need to ensure that the Red Cross has the correct contact information for their unit, she said.

“When new units arrive, it is imperative that Red Cross is kept informed. Also it is (essential that the office) is given the unit designations and all contact numbers, for both day and night, so that we can deliver their messages as soon as we receive them,”

said Harlandt who deployed to Iraq from Kaiserslautern, Germany.

All this information assists in getting in touch with the Soldier faster.

“I have to tell you that we have become very good detectives, and have had major success in locating personnel, whose messages arrived with their military address being: ‘Somewhere in Iraq,’ Harlandt said. “Yes, we can ultimately service even those, but precious time is lost, and sometimes that time can be the difference of making it back home in time or not.”

In any sort of emergency, the Red Cross is a tool to get communications started and it can start from in theater or back in the states.

“One fact that most service members do not realize, is that they do not have to wait for a message to arrive from home,” Harlandt said. “In this day and age, where e-mail and the dissemination of news are faster than light, they often are aware of a situation before the command informs them.”

This makes it faster if the Soldier is planning on leaving the theater on emergency leave. Though the Red Cross does not make decisions about the leave, the message itself is often used in the decision making process.

One common message, that isn’t necessarily an emergency, is about the birth of a child. But when the Soldier is the father, the Red Cross can help with syncing the Soldiers leave with the event.

“If the couple is trying to arrange the

Soldiers R&R leave to coincide with the baby’s birth, we do send pre-birth messages that have a complete Doctor’s Interpretive Statement,” she said. “That is the diagnosis, prognosis, current condition, life expectancy, and the doctor’s recommendation for presence. (The DIS should) give the command and Soldier all the info they need to make the leave arrangements.”

The Red Cross doesn’t just deal with medical incidents. Family members can also request a “health and welfare contact.”

“H&Ws typically come from family members who are concerned for the safety of their loved ones,” she said. “It may stem from a lengthy, out of the ordinary, absence of contact from the Soldier, or from a need to re-establish communications after an extremely long lapse of silence.”

Harlandt said frequently H&W will be generated due to an unofficial notice from theater about an accident or injury.

“We do remind units that, if they prefer not to get so many H&Ws, all they have to do is encourage their Soldiers to contact home periodically – if nothing else, just to let family know they are alive and well,” she said.

Most messages end with Soldier contacting their family. The Red Cross also delivers emergency messages to Department of Defense contractors and civilians deployed in the theater as well.

Training for leadership is also available.

“We like to present briefs to commands

that may not be completely versed in the message process,” she said. “Many of our briefs are presented in a sidewalk situation. For example, I went to get some coffee the other day, and two KBR (Kellogg, Brown and Root) employees stopped me and asked me to explain the message process as it relates to them.”

Harlandt said she doesn’t mind those chance encounters. The Camp Liberty office conducts 24-hour operations and the three women running the shop, who call themselves “S3,” since their first names all begin with the letter ‘S’ consider themselves always on shift.

“We are on duty 24/7,” she said. “In fact, when we are off shift, we must still wear Red Cross attire like T-shirts and jackets that indicate who we are. The visibility in common areas like the (Post Exchange) allow service members to stop us any time, any place for help, or to just talk. Many of them do just that.”

The local team consisting of Harlandt; team leader Sharron Gilkey, from Fort Hood, Texas; and Suzanne Sigurdsson, a Red Cross reservist from Iceland, is located on Camp Liberty in Building E-23 A, in the Headquarters, Headquarters Company of the 1169th Engineers Battalion. They can be contacted at 242-7332. There are also four other Red Cross stations in the stations in the Central Command area of operation -- in Balad, Tikrit, Kuwait and Bagram, Afghanistan.

Tomahawk Soldier Trades in Battlefield for Class

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

BAGHDAD – Transitioning from fighting on the battlefields of the war-torn Iraqi capital to reading the pages of heavy textbooks in a college classroom is a change of scenery one Soldier is about to make.

As Pfc. Joshua Ruth, an infantryman with 2nd Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, nears the end of his first deployment, he gets ready to go back to school through the Army's "Green to Gold" program.

The program is designed to allow qualified and inspired young enlisted Soldiers, like Ruth, to return to college, receive their baccalaureate degree and earn a commission as an Army officer.

With some college under his belt, Ruth planned on going back to school to finish what he started, but during his latter days of student life he was in search of a change of pace.

The Elizabethtown, Ky., native found his higher calling and signed up to become a Soldier a couple days after Christmas 2005. Even with a brief stint in the Army, he has heard of the many opportunities the Army offers its Soldiers.

"When I heard about the Green to Gold program, I thought it was a good idea to take what enlisted guys learn and apply them as officers like the basics of working with a team, with a squad, with a platoon," Ruth said.

In addition to the living the enlisted life, he also has something not most college Army cadets have – combat experience.

He said he thinks having a deployment to add to his repertoire and all the experiences being on the ground will make him, or any cadet, a more rounded Soldier.

"It's good to have a deployment under your belt. (Ruth) will have experienced things first hand and the things he has experienced



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

Pfc. Joshua Ruth, an infantryman with 2nd Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, communicates with the driver and vehicle commander while he pulls rear security during a clearing operation in the Iraqi capital's Ghazaliyah neighborhood while the remaining members of his squad conduct searches of nearby houses March 24.

will help him in the future," said Pfc. Brandon Kroger, an infantryman in his squad.

But to get back into a college seat, there are some requirements Soldiers must meet.

A Soldier must be active duty for at least two years, as well as three months for every one month of specialized training, and be under the age of 27 on June 30 the year of their commission. An extension of up to three years can be given, based on years of service.

The Soldier must have a General Technical score of at least 110, have a minimum American College Test score of 19 or Standard Aptitude Test score of 920 for a three or four-year scholarship, have a cumulative high school or college grade point average of 2.5 and be a high school graduate

or equivalent,

In addition to scholastic requirements, all Soldiers have to maintain physical fitness standards.

The Green to Gold candidates must be able to pass the Army Physical Fitness Test and meet height and weight requirements according to AR 600-9.

If Soldiers meet the standards, they must also obtain letters of recommendation from their school of choice offering the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps program and a letter from the professor of military science of that Army ROTC battalion.

Candidates must also provide a favorable national agency check, go through a Department of Defense Medical Examination Review Board, which deems Soldiers physical capable of the tasks ahead,

and he or she must be eligible to reenlist. Soldiers wanting to go Green to Gold cannot have either Uniform Code of Military Justice or civil convictions, nor have any such actions pending, or been convicted of a domestic violence crime or be a conscientious objector.

Although the requirements seem many, some of them are wavierable. Two requirements which can be waived are the requirement to have no more than three dependents, including a spouse, and not be a single parent.

Ruth said if he is accepted into the program, all the hurdles he had to jump through to get his packet turned in will be well worth the effort.

"For the most part, it's been me running around getting stuff done. It's definitely more difficult to get stuff done here than it would have been in the rear," Ruth said. "Here, everyone is really busy and you're constantly running around doing missions and going in and out of the wire."

For this young trooper, becoming an officer is all about the responsibility that comes with it.

"I want to lead men into combat. It would be a pretty amazing thing. I want that responsibility," said Ruth. "I had good examples of what leadership should be, which has made me want to be a good leader for other Soldiers.

"(I want to be) someone who's willing to stand up for the guys they're responsible for, that looks out for them, teaches them."

Kroger said Ruth has the assertiveness and confidence it takes to take charge of other Soldiers and get the job done.

After graduating from school, Ruth will put on the gold bars of a second lieutenant and finish out his Army career as an officer.

"I think I'll like it," he said. "If I enjoy what I am doing and enjoy the life that I have, I am probably going to be a lifer, do my twenty years as an officer and retire."

In Her Shoes: Two Souls with the Same Sized Soles

Relationships are complicated.

It doesn't matter if you are married for 20 years, your relationship will never get simpler. Most guys will never understand why women despise the fact that we have to ask you to take out the trash or empty the dishwasher.

However, that is not the relationship that I want to talk about. I want to talk about sisters.

With three sisters of my own, I remember getting stuffed into the closet a time or two and getting shooed out of the kitchen, even when I said I tried to bribe them with doing the dishes. Being at least eight years younger than them, I was a pest. They had to censor what they said when I was around, because I was a little parrot.

What fun is that?

Those times were simple, though. I bugged them, and they kicked me out. Now that we are older, it isn't so simple. We compare the little things. How big is your house?

Random Reviews

Sgt. Nicole Kojetin



How clean is it? How well behaved are the kids? Who spends more time with the parents? Who is skinnier? What color are your toes? It goes on and on.

Siblings are naturally competitive. We just are.

That's brings us to our Golden Globe-nominated film, "In Her Shoes." You guessed it: it is about rivalry of sisters.

Maggie (Cameron Diaz), a free-spirited blonde who does not really have any modesty or restraint, loves to party but isn't bright enough to keep a job or a place to live.

It seems that her only asset is being able to powerfully attract the opposite sex.

Her sister, Rose (Toni Collette), is her polar opposite.

She is a Princeton-educated attorney, working at a top law firm in the city. She is mature, modest and doesn't flaunt her body to get what she wants.

The only thing that Rose and Maggie have in common is that they wear size 8 1/2 shoes, which incidentally, is the size I share with two of my sisters. Though, I think they may be shrinking due to the constant wear of combat boots.

Anyway, Maggie's out-of-control lifestyle ticks Rose off, but out of love she lets her move in, temporarily, under the condition that Maggie gets a job as soon as possible.

Well, "as soon as possible" was taking too long, and Rose decided to boot her out of her apartment only to come back to see Maggie having intimate relations with

Rose's boyfriend. (You never go after a sister's beau. I was way younger than my siblings and even I know that.)

Anyway, a fight ensues and Maggie takes off discovering a long-lost grandma (Shirley MacLaine).

The underlying theme of the movie is that love concurs all. Just like with my sisters, we may fight, torment or scold but it is all about the love. We want what is best for each other, and will do anything to make that happen even when we are spread out across the globe.

Sometimes, love takes on the form of a gallon of paint, a letter, or brightly colored socks, but it is obviously there.

If you have a sister or like pretty shoes, you will enjoy this film. If you don't and you are male, you will enjoy watching Cameron Diaz traipse around in her underwear.

I promise to veer away from chick-flick mode next time.

(4 out of 5 stars!)



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

Soccer Anyone?

Neighborhood kids scramble to collect free soccer balls distributed by paratroopers from Company D, 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division at the grand opening of a new soccer field in the Al Beida neighborhood of Baghdad's Adhamiyah district April 21.

Houston, You Have a Problem

Why Boston Will Win the Clemens Sweepstakes

May is here and Major League Baseball has completed its first month of play. Many teams are positioning themselves early for a run at the playoffs. Others are already realizing this year is a wash (see Kansas City and Washington).

Three teams in particular, though, are auditioning for the services of one of the greatest pitchers in the history of baseball, Roger Clemens. "The Rocket" is primed and ready to suit up for another run at a World Series title.

The New York Yankees, the Boston Red Sox and the Houston Astros are all in contention to land "The Rocket." Which team will he sign with next month? Glad you asked.

Hometown Houston?

Let's start with the Astros. They seemingly would have the inside track for Clemens. After all, Clemens has pitched for them the previous three years. Although he pitched well last season, the Astros struggled to give him any consistent run support. They did add left fielder Carlos Lee for additional power in the line-up, but so far the Astros have struggled, starting the season a meager 11-15. That record currently has them fifth

Trigger Pull

Pfc. Benjamin Gable



in the senior circuit's Central Division.

The Astros also drafted Cody Clemens, who is currently in their minor league system as a catcher. You know Roger would love to pitch to his son, Cody in an MLB game. This, to me, would seem to be enough to keep Roger in Houston.

The only problem here is that Houston isn't considered a contender, even for a wild card spot, in the National League. With Cody some time away from being a major league prospect, and the Astros struggling to reach .500, look for Roger to play elsewhere.

Pinstripe Party?

Then you have the mighty New York Yankees. Who doesn't love the boys in pin-stripes? (Don't answer that.) Yankee Stadium is one of the true hallowed grounds in baseball. Clemens has already won a

World Series title with the Yankees, and his close friend Andy Pettitte, made the move from Houston back to New York. Then you have "The Boss", George Steinbrenner. Steinbrenner has a \$200 million payroll and expects nothing short of a World Series ring.

The Yankees pitching this year has been terrible, though. Three of their starting five pitchers are already injured. Two are on the 15-day disabled list, and the other is out 6-8 weeks.

Even though they have future Hall of Fame players such as Alex Rodriguez, Mariano Rivera and Derek Jeter, they still stumbled through the first month with a 10-14 record.

Offense is rarely a problem for the "Bronx Bombers," and that is something Clemens needs to be able to work deep into games. But with so many injuries and so much drama in the Yankee clubhouse, Clemens will look elsewhere.

Two-hundred million dollars won't buy the Yankees a World Series, or a "Rocket."

Back to Boston

That leaves only one team, the Boston Red Sox. The "Bo-Sox" are off to a red-hot start this year. They are in first place in the

American League East with a 17-9 record.

And don't forget, Boston is where it all began for Clemens.

The Red Sox drafted Clemens 19th overall in the 1983 draft. He went on to win multiple Cy Young Awards and the Most Valuable Player Award for Boston. This is where Roger Clemens became "The Rocket."

With Boston off to a great start this year, look for them to be World Series favorites; and look for Clemens to be the game one starter.

The Red Sox have a great lineup with players such as Manny Ramirez and David Ortiz in their prime. They have a solid pitching staff and one of the best young closers in the game in Jonathan Papelbon.

One thing is clear; Clemens will only pitch for a legitimate contender. Boston is the front-runner at this time. He is 44 years old and may not have too many years left. This is his best chance to win another title.

Bostonians: get your champagne on ice because Clemens will end his Hall of Fame career in Boston where he started; and the Red Sox will once again be World Series champions.