



First Troopers Return Home

Page 26



Infantry Soldiers Make a Difference in Local Baghdad Community

Page 14



Dragons Fire More Than 4,700 Rounds in Support of Combat Operations

Page 5

Crossed Sabers

Volume I, Issue 22

Telling the MND-Baghdad Story

Monday, Oct. 1, 2007



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

Iraqi Police celebrate their graduation from the Baghdad Police College in the Rusafa District Sept. 20. The first class of its kind graduated 744 IPs of Abu Ghraib from the 30-day course, which provides training before returning the local police officers to their communities.

Abu Ghraib IPs Graduate

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

BAGHDAD - Iraq's capital gained 744 more Police officers as the newest members of the Iraqi Security Force graduated from the Baghdad Police College in the Rusafa District Sept. 20.

The graduation ceremony followed 30 days of training in which the Iraqi Police learned the basics of providing security and the importance of reconciliation.

"These guys are the first class to go through the reconciliation process," said Brig. Gen. John F. Campbell, the deputy commanding general for maneuver for Multi-National Division-Baghdad and the 1st Cavalry Division. "It's a great success story. These guys were volunteers, initially. They fought against al-Qaeda in Iraq in Abu Ghraib, under the condition they would have to join the Iraqi Security Forces."

True to their word the IPs joined the ISF, adding to a trend of cooperation in Abu Ghraib, where an "Awakening" of Sunni sheiks sparked the growth of a homegrown security force, dubbed the volunteers. These citizens grew tired of the violence of Sunni extremists in the area and took up arms with the Coalition.

Now full-fledged members of the ISF, the former volunteers are headed home as IPs to police their neighborhoods.

Yet, this was not always the case. Previously, IPs were assigned without consideration for their neighborhoods.

However, after completing the course, which includes

See **Graduation** Page 3

First Team Earns First in Retention

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

CAMP LIBERTY, Baghdad - The 1st Cavalry Division is the number one division in retaining Soldiers within the U.S. Army Forces Command in fiscal year 2007.

With more than 4,600 Soldiers reenlisted with the fiscal year not complete, the Cav has a firm hold on the title as the top division in FORSCOM for retention. Currently the 2nd Infantry Division is a distant second, trailing by approximately 2,500 reenlistments, said Sgt. Maj. Derek Dahlke, the 1st Cav. Div. retention sergeant major.

More than 1,900 Soldiers signed on to

stay with the First Team. Soldiers signing new contracts earned more than \$ 48 million in bonuses, said Dahlke, a native Houston.

"The deployment has helped the number of Soldiers reenlisting for a number of reasons. One, we have better bonuses while deployed. They're tax free. Also, we've had some Soldiers wait to do this in a tax free zone, as well as a lot of Soldiers like performing their actual job in the combat zone and doing what they do best," Dahlke explained.

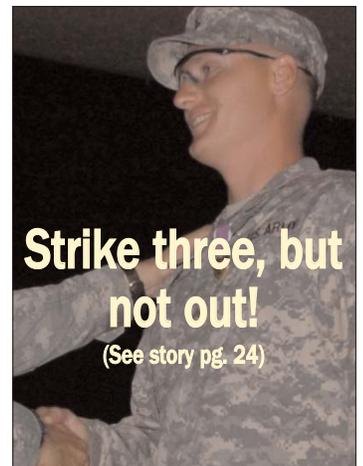
Typically, deployment bonuses are significantly higher than reenlistment incentives while in garrison.

"The highest individual bonus I've

seen to date is \$37,500," Dahlke said. That lump sum went to a noncommissioned officer working as a linguist in the division headquarters, who reenlisted to attend the Defense Language Institute in Monterrey, Calif., he said.

However, even with greater bonuses, making Soldiers aware of their options is a difficult task in a war zone, Dahlke said. Part of the challenge of retention in a war zone is reaching Soldiers in outlying locations such as joint security stations and Coalition outposts. Retention counselors ensure every Soldier is aware of his or her

see **Retention** Page 4



Division's Special Troops Battalion Commander Connects with Fort Hood Families Via Satellite

By Master Sgt. Dave Larsen
1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq - "The answer to the next question is 'Don't count on it,'" joked Lt. Col. Daniel Garcia as he consulted his "special advisor" at the tail end of a live satellite feed Family Readiness Group meeting with more than 150 Family members and rear detachment troops at the Fort Hood Catering and Conference Center.

The 6:30 p.m. start time in Central Texas brought Garcia and his company commanders into the Media Operation Center here early Sept. 19 - 3:30 a.m.

Despite the "oh-dark-thirty" show time, Garcia, the commander of the 1st Cavalry Division's Special Troops Battalion, answered every question and concern of the assembled First Team Families, without the aid of his "special advisor," and discussed the redeployment and reintegration processes at length.

He detailed the much-anticipated homecoming.

"All Soldiers will be flown into the West Fort Hood airfield. They will turn in their equipment at that location and will be bussed to Cooper Field in front of the 1st Cavalry Division headquarters," explained the Long Island, N.Y.,



(Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Richard Lewis, 1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs)

Long Island, N.Y., native Lt. Col. Daniel Garcia, commander of the 1st Cavalry Division's Special Troops Battalion, "consults" with his trusted advisor, his "Magic 8-Ball" at the conclusion of a question and answer session with his battalion's rear detachment and Family Readiness Group via satellite from the Media Operations Center at Camp Liberty in western Baghdad Sept. 19. More than 150 Soldiers and Family members met for the live satellite meeting at the Fort Hood Catering and Conference Center.

native. "It is at that location that Soldiers will be reunited with their Families. We anticipate this taking two hours."

When the First Team's DSTB returns home, they will have completed a 15-month deployment.

Garcia said that because of the extended time away, reintegration training is extremely important - for

Soldiers and for their Family members.

He said Soldiers will be given a three or four-day pass immediately upon their return, and while he said every Soldier will be excited to return the wear of the past 15-months will catch up with everyone.

"We'll have had the 'on-switch' flipped on for more than 15 months," he said. "They (Soldiers) will be excited the first three days, but after that, they're going to be tired."

Garcia invited Families to take part in the reintegration process when their Soldiers return, noting that the instruction is based on lessons learned from past deployments.

Noting that his battalion has reached the "two-digit midget" status on short-timer calendars in the unit, Garcia said he continues to stress to Soldiers to keep up their guard and not become complacent in the final few months here.

For Family members, Garcia said they should stay "plugged in" with the battalion's rear detachment, as flight information for each Soldier will be made available as soon as possible. Staying involved means staying informed, he said, and helps dispel rumors.

"Like we've always said, if it doesn't come from the rear detachment command, it's a rumor," he reminded the Families.

Commanding General:

Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Fil, Jr.

Public Affairs Officer:

Lt. Col. Scott Bleichwehl

Command Information Supervisor:

Master Sgt. Dave Larsen

NCOIC, Print Production:

Sgt. 1st Class Bryan Beach

Editor:

Spc. Shea Butler

Contributing Writers:

Sgt 1st Class Kap Kim, Sgt. 1st

Class Robert Timmons, Sgt. 1st

Class Nicholas Conner, Sgt. 1st

Class Rick Emert, Staff Sgt. Jon

Cupp, Sgt. Mike Pryor, Sgt.

Robert Yde, Spc. Alexis Harrison,

Spc. Nathan Hoskins, Spc. L.B.

Edgar, Spc. Ryan Stroud, Spc.

Karly Cooper, Spc. Jeffrey

Ledesma, Spc. Courtney Marulli,

Spc. William Hatton, Spc.

Benjamin Gable, Pfc. Ben Fox,

Pfc. Nathaniel Smith

Contact the *Crossed Sabers* at

VOIP 242-4093, DSN 318-847-

2855 or e-mail

david.j.larsen@mnd-b.army.mil.

The *Crossed Sabers* is an authorized

publication for members of the U.S.

Army. Contents of the *Crossed Sabers*

are not necessarily official views of, or

endorsed by, the U.S. Government,

Department of Defense, Department of

the Army or the 1st Cavalry Division. All

editorial content of the *Crossed Sabers* is

prepared, edited, provided and approved

by 1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs

Office.



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

Senators Visit Sab Al Bor

U.S. Sen. Olympia Snowe of Maine shakes the hand of one of her constituents, Spc. Seth Cote, a driver on a 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. personal security detachment team, who hails from Windham, Maine, at a joint security station near Sab Al Bor, Iraq Sept. 15.

Baghdad News Briefs

Iraqi Boy Leads Troops to Weapons Cache

By 1st Lt. Brian Cooke
2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery

BAGHDAD - A Multi-National Division-Baghdad unit discovered a cache of explosives and improvised explosive device-making materials in a western neighborhood of the Iraqi capital following a tip from a local boy Sept. 15.

A platoon from Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment (Task Force Patriot), was conducting a census operation in the western Baghdad neighborhood of Yarmouk when an 11-year-old Iraqi boy pointed out an abandoned house and suggested that insurgents had used it as a base of operations in previous months.

The Soldiers discovered two cache sites within the house after a detailed search. The contents of the two caches included four RPG-7 rockets, nine 57mm rockets, two 82mm mortars, one 130mm artillery round, one 122mm artillery round, one block of TNT, a foot of detonation cord, 52 AK-47 magazines and assortment of IED-detonating devices.

An explosive ordnance disposal team responded to the scene and removed the explosives for detonation later in a controlled environment.

"We're encouraged by the fact that a tip from an Iraqi child led us to this cache," said Capt. Jayson Morgan, commander of Battery B and a Munday, Texas native.

"It's just another sign that our efforts in this community are paying dividends," he said.

Morgan said he will return to the neighborhood later this week to pay the family of the young boy a reward for providing such valuable information.



(Photo by Capt. Jayson Morgan, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment)

A weapons cache discovered in the Yarmouk neighborhood of western Baghdad is laid out for inventory Sept. 15. Soldiers from Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, discovered two caches in an abandoned house thanks to a tip from an 11-year-old Iraqi boy from the neighborhood.



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

Iraqi Police celebrate their graduation from the Baghdad Police College in the Rusafa District Sept. 20. The first class of its kind graduated 744 IPs of Abu Ghraib from the 30-day course, which provides training before returning the local police officers to their communities.

Celebration on Graduation Day

Graduation

From Page 1

vehicle and building search techniques, hand-to-hand combat and use of weapons, the IPs are heading home to fight terrorists in their backyards.

According to one of the new IPs, Sufyan Taha Sarhar, this is a marked improvement because residents know who belongs in their neighborhoods and can, therefore, provide better security than outsiders.

"I will be literally implementing all the training in order to defeat the terrorists," he said through an interpreter.

Abu Ghraib is an especially important area for ISF to have a strong presence because traditionally it's been a hot bed of insurgent activity, said Lt. Ahmed Shihab.

"It is very important to educate the students of security concerns since they live so close to Fallujah and Ramadi," said Shihab, one of the IPs' Iraqi Army trainers.

Although this is the first class to graduate the course, another class of 800 is scheduled to graduate Sept. 25, and the goal is to train 12,000 more IPs over the next six months, Campbell explained.

The strategy of putting ISF in the neighborhoods in which they live is a hallmark of the Baghdad Security Plan. In January, the command-

ing general of Multi-National Forces-Iraq, Gen. David H. Petraeus, sought more Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces in order to bolster security. By allowing residents to join the ISF and then serve their own community, the hope is the ISF members and residents will be more comfortable with one another as well as more willing to join the ranks of the ISF, Campbell said.

"The intent from Gen. Petraeus was to hire locals who would watch their neighborhoods. These guys are all out of Abu Ghraib and they will go back to Abu Ghraib," Campbell said.

Once they return to the Abu Ghraib, where three new police stations wait to accommodate the new IPs, the partnership of the past will need to continue. The IPs of Abu Ghraib routinely partner with the 89th Military Police Group and 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, as well as other Coalition Forces in the area.

"I think partnership really makes a huge difference. As they spend time around (Coalition Forces), they want to be just like their Coalition partners," Campbell said.

The goal is for this class to be the first of many, allowing the strategy to spread throughout Baghdad, he said.

"We're seeing the fruits of the labor here today," Campbell said. "We're going to see much more of this over the next year."



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

Spc. Amanda Arick of Starkville, Miss., and Spc. Chandler Arick of Opelika, Ala., re-enlist together at Forward Operating Base Falcon, Sep. 20. The husband and wife are both medics, Amanda with Company A, Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division and Chandler with Company B, 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 4th IBCT, 1st Inf. Div.

First Cav Retains the Best of the Best

Retention

From Page 1

options by counseling them on the incentives and benefits available in a timely manner, he said.

"We have overcome that challenge. We have counselors and retention NCOs who rotate out to those bases frequently. And that's one reason our reenlistment rates are so high," Dahlke said.

Soldiers in their reenlistment windows may choose from five options: the regular Army reenlistment option, current station stabilization, training, overseas assignment or continental United States station of choice.

If a Soldier is not in his window for reenlistment, but deployed, he may reenlist under the regular Army reenlistment option or the current station stabilization option, he said.

"One of the big incentives of being deployed is while we're deployed Soldiers can reenlist outside of the 24-month window. Once we redeploy they can't do that," Dahlke said. "We've had a lot of the Soldiers taking advantage of the bonuses and reenlisting outside their windows."

Soldiers who are eligible for reenlistment may choose the option, which best suits their needs. Almost half of Soldiers reenlist for stabilization, while near one quarter choose the regular Army reenlistment option and

an equal number pick military training, overseas assignment or continental United States station of choice, he said.

"The trend would show most people reenlist for stabilization and to stay with the 1st Cav. The only reason Soldiers reenlist to stay with a unit is because of great leadership and that's what I attribute that to - the leaders of the First Team!" Dahlke said.

Though the fiscal year is drawing to a close, generally, the options for Soldiers interested in reenlisting will remain the same with one important exception, Dahlke said.

"We are going to see a change in the indefinite reenlistment program, which impacts our careerists - Soldiers who are staff sergeant and above with over ten years of active, federal service," he said.

Now Soldiers may reenlist for terms instead of committing to serve indefinitely, Dahlke said.

"The change is Soldiers are now going to be able to choose a term of two, three, four, five or six years," he said.

Previously Soldiers were required to reenlist indefinitely after ten years, Dahlke said.

"Some Soldiers are hesitant to reenlist for the indefinite reenlistment program. The word 'indefinite' scares them and they think the Army is not going to allow them to get out. This is a misconception. Soldiers who reenlist for the indefinite reenlistment program may request separa-

tion as soon as they have fulfilled their required service period," he said.

According to Dahlke, Soldiers tend to reenlist into a variety of MOSs and the retention NCOs try to match the needs of the Soldier with available options.

"All of the military occupational specialties are comparable in terms of reenlistment numbers," Dahlke said.

"Every Soldier is different and every Soldier has different needs, want and desires. When they come in to see their counselor we look at their specific needs, what MOSs are available and then we work that issue for the Soldier. Due to that we see Soldiers reenlisting for Army training into a variety of MOSs," he said.

However, time for taking advantage of the favorable conditions for reenlistment is running out.

"Once we redeploy Soldiers can no longer get the enhanced bonus. They can no longer get the deployed bonus and they can't reenlist outside of their window. So it's imperative all Soldiers and leaders understand if they're going to reenlist, now is the time to act," Dahlke said.

"Now is the time they're going to have higher bonuses. Now is the time when they're going to have more reenlistment options. Now is the time when they're going to be able to reenlist outside of their window. Once we redeploy a lot of that should stop," he said.

Dragons Fire More Than 4,700 Rounds in Support of Combat Operations

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- Since arriving in theater a little more than ten months ago, Soldiers from the 1st "Dragon" Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment have fired more than 4,700 rounds from their M109A6 Paladin howitzers in support of combat operations here.

For the month of August alone, the battalion's Paladins fired over 1,000 rounds--more rounds fired than any other artillery unit in a given month in theater over the course of Operation Iraqi Freedom - Rotation 06-08, according to Las Vegas native Capt. Ken Heebner, battalion fire directions officer, 1st Bn., 82nd FA Regt.

But only a select few Soldiers in the battalion have actually had the opportunity to do the job that they were trained for as artillerymen-- firing the big guns as well as coordinating those fires.

"We have some hand-picked Soldiers here who are doing what they were trained to do in (Advanced Individual Training)," said Staff Sgt. Joshua Shackelford, a fire direction noncommissioned officer for the Dragon's fire direction center who hails from Charleston, S.C. "The last time I was here I mainly did force protection for a whole year in a guard tower. I stayed professional by reading my manuals but it wasn't the same as actually doing the real field artillery job of shooting field artillery. The last time I was in

theater, I only fired five rounds but that was just for training."

"Here, we've fired more rounds in theater than any other Paladins in real combat operations," added Shackelford. "I'm ecstatic for our Soldiers and I tell them in their counseling that (here in combat in Iraq) they ought to be proud because they are making artillery history everyday."

During their ten months on Taji, the battalion has supported everything from counterfire missions to suppressive fire missions as well as hitting pre-planned targets. They have cleared routes for combat missions along with providing security and standing guard in the towers located on the base camp here.

The battalion has also seen its share of firsts for the deployment, said Heebner, with being the first-ever hot gun battery in theater to fire the Excalibur precision munitions in combat along with being the first to use the Modular Artillery Charge System. Both, said Heebner, are new technologies that vastly improve the accuracy of Paladin fires.

For about six months troops from Battery A, 1st Bn. 82nd FA Regt. fired the Paladins while troops from Battery B conducted force protection. Now the roles have been reversed with Btry. B firing the Paladins and Btry. A taking the base camp security role.

Troops working from the Dragon fire direction center

control Paladin fires by coordinating with the Paladins on the firing line. In describing how each component operates, Heebner said the way the various elements function together is much like the organs of a body working in unison.

"Everybody always wants to see the Paladins, the big guns and the big show, but we're (the fire directions center is) the part of the team behind the scenes that serves as the brain of the operation," said Heebner, explaining that in comparison, the Paladin crews are much like the heart and soul of field artillery.

From the time the fire direction center receives a fire mission from a brigade to the time the howitzers fire can take as little time as 57 seconds to a couple of minutes, according to Douglas.

The fire direction center relays up to date target information from a brigade to the Paladin crews. The fire direction center also ensures that elevation and altitudes have been verified and that things such as weather conditions are right for firing.

Once information has been sent to the Paladin crews, they read the information back to the fire directions center to ensure that they are both on the same page.

"Our guns are always ready to execute any live missions that come down," said Staff Sgt. Walter Douglas, senior fire direction noncommissioned officer for the 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment and a native of Honolulu, Hawaii. "We always check safety first and then fire on the guys who may be on the ground attacking our brethren."

Currently, the Dragons support fires for battalions within both the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division and the 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division.

"We're essentially supporting fires for two divisions," said Heebner. "We've taken on missions where we were firing for 4-2 and the 1st BCT at the same time with the tubes of the Paladins pointing in two different directions."

The Dragon's hot gun battery has effectively assisted in minimizing both indirect fire threats and improvised explosive devices (IED), according to Douglas, while also explaining that being fired upon by a Paladin's 155 millimeter rounds can be a very convincing deterrent.

"We've taken out a lot of mortar teams and it feels good knowing that those guys won't be able to send mortars onto our camp," said Douglas. "We've also been very effective at lessening improvised explosive devices (IED) by hitting insurgents while they were emplacing IEDs. Once we have the guns laid on them, we'll take them out the best we can, and we know they won't be doing it again."

"It's very exhilarating and it's good to know that we're supporting the troops out there on patrols who are pounding the ground. I get excited every time I hear them say 'we need your assistance and we need it now.'"

Douglas said that the fire direction center's success is due mainly to the fact that it is manned with a very capable crew.

"I couldn't do this without my Soldiers," said Douglas. "Anyone of them at anytime could execute the missions on their own. They could step in and do my job if they had to."

When it comes to firing the Paladins, Heebner said he believes that the unit will break more milestones as the deployment continues.

"We can see ourselves quite easily reaching more than 6,500 rounds by the time we redeploy," said Heebner. "What we've seen here is that artillery still drives the battle field and is still the king of battle. It was always needed in the past and it will always be needed in the future."



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

During an actual combat operation in which rounds were fired against enemy targets, Capt. Ken Heebner (left), fire directions officer for the 1st "Dragon" Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment; New Washington, Ohio native Spc. Andrew Krebs (center) and Staff Sgt. Joshua Shackelford, a fire direction noncommissioned officer who hails from Charleston, S.C. verify targeting information which is then sent via computer to the crew of an M109A6 Paladin howitzer on Camp Taji, Iraq Sept. 2 prior to the howitzer firing.

First Class Graduates from Iraqi Air Force Academy on Taji

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- The first-ever graduating class of the Iraqi Air Force Academy at Taji, designated Class 67, walked across the auditorium stage of the newly opened Iraqi Training School here Sept. 12 to receive their diplomas and commissions as Iraqi Air Force officers.

The 11 new second lieutenants -four of whom will soon be going to pilot school in Kirkuk while the other seven pursue Air Force careers as engineering and operations support officers-have spent a little more than six months studying at the academy.

U.S. Air Force officers trained the cadets in fundamentals of flight and basic officer indoctrination courses while enlisted Air Force instructors taught them about drill and ceremony and other basic military training skills.

Prior to coming to the academy, their journey towards becoming officers began with seven months of English language training.

"Despite challenges and hardships, they remained in the program with a desire and commitment to help rebuild the Iraqi Air Force," said Air Force Lt. Col. Kim 'Felix' Hawthorne, commander for the 370th Expeditionary Training Squadron which is part of the Coalition Air Force Transition Team, during opening remarks at the graduation ceremony. "Their efforts have helped form a solid foundation for training the next generation of Iraqi leaders."

"They're now the first line of Iraqi Air Force leaders in the new Iraqi Air Force who will get to write chapters in the history of the Iraqi Air Force," added Hawthorne, then he addressed the graduating class directly.

"You are truly pioneering leaders. As you graduate, I encourage you to apply what you learned and go serve



An Iraqi Air Force brigadier general who serves as the chief of staff of the Iraqi Air Force (right) passes the Iraqi national colors from a graduating cadet in Class 67 to a cadet from Class 68 during an Iraqi Air Force Academy graduation ceremony on Camp Taji, Iraq Sept. 12. Eleven cadets from Class 67 graduated, receiving their commission as second lieutenants in the Iraqi Air Force.



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

Newly commissioned Iraqi Air Force lieutenants stand with their diplomas in hand during their graduation from the Iraqi Air Force Academy at Camp Taji, Iraq Sept. 12. The new Iraqi Air Force officers were the first-ever class of cadets to receive commissions and graduate from the Taji-based academy.

with honor and make a difference in your Air Force," he said.

The commander of the Iraqi Air Force, Lt. Gen. Kamal Brazanjy gave the keynote address.

"This is a great day, there's a new, bright future for the Iraqi Air Force," said Kamal, looking over at the members of Class 67, and then imparting advice.

"Be loyal to your country and the Iraqi people. Loyalty to your country is the secret of success for any nation. The person who is not loyal to his country, is not loyal to his family or his religion. Be loyal to Iraq and not to any other power," he said.

Before ending his speech, Kamal expressed his gratitude to the new class.

"Each one of you are like a fortune to the Iraqi Air Force," added Kamal. "...and I would like to thank you all for your efforts."

Once the speeches were done, the official party presented an award to the distinguished graduate of Class 67.

Then, in an Iraqi Air Force tradition symbolizing a passing of the torch from one generation of Iraqi Air Force leaders to the next, a member of Class 67 passed the Iraqi national colors to a cadet in Class 68.

Air Force Capt. Alisa Thomas, an instructor at the academy, who hails from Lancaster, Ohio, said the graduates have made a great deal of sacrifices to attend their classes and eventually graduate.

"They have a lot of courage and although their lives and their families have been threatened, they still came back here to train," said Thomas. "Not only are they rebuilding the Air Force, but they're helping to make their nation a better country."

Thomas said building a new corps of Iraqi pilots will be vital to helping in the overall goal of transitioning the Iraqi Air Force.

"There is a severe shortage of pilots," said Thomas. "Once they get through their English language training, take our curriculum and complete pilot training in Kirkuk, we will be funneling them into the pipeline of pilots. That's what will be truly critical to turning over security operations-they need pilots capable of conducting counterinsurgency pilot operations."

Air Force Col. J.C. Penny, commander of the 370th Expeditionary Advisory Group, whose officers and Airmen train the Iraqi cadets, said witnessing the graduation was a momentous occasion.

"This is huge," said Penny. "It's a new day, a new

beginning for a great Iraqi Air Force, and I was extremely proud watching them walk across the stage."

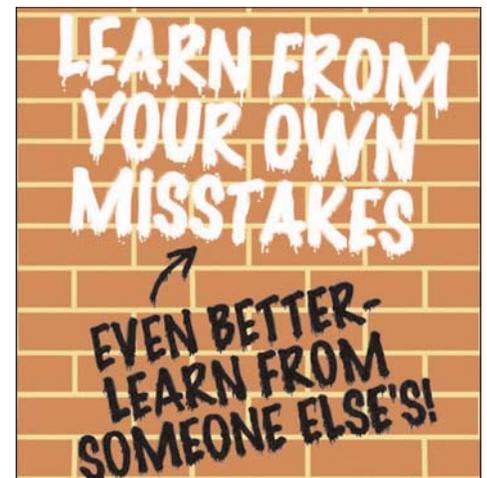
"The more leadership and well-trained personnel they have, the more they can do," said Penny, looking in the direction of where the new Iraqi officers were standing. "They are the future."

An hour prior to the graduation ceremony, a dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony was held for the new Iraqi Air Force Training School on Taji which encompasses several different levels of Air Force schools. These include the Iraqi Air Force Academy, a military specialty training school for enlisted Iraqi Airmen and a school for Iraqi Air Force warrant officers.

The large campus of the school has newly constructed parade grounds and several buildings.

"Getting to this moment is a victory for the Iraqi people," said Hawthorne at the dedication. "Our old facility served us well and we are excited to dedicate these beautiful, spacious buildings. We now have a campus with sufficient capacity to enhance the basic technical training for the Air Force Academy and the other schools."

Whereas the most recent cadet graduates trained in the old Iraqi Air Force academy building, the new upcoming Iraqi Air Force cadets in Class 68 will be attending classes in the new facility.



Ironhorse Brigade Assisting Villagers Rebuild Their Lives

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

FALAHAT, Iraq - Soldiers from "Dagger" Troop D, 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 1st "Ironhorse" Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division joined with members of the brigade's Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team and Company A, 492nd Civil Affairs Battalion to assist local tribal sheiks and villagers here with several construction projects Sept. 16.

Working side by side, villagers and Soldiers moved construction supplies to include wheel barrows, shovels, and wood among other building materials from a truck provided by Dagger Troop that transported the materials to a site where a store is being built. Additionally, the troops delivered a brand new generator to be used once the store is completed.

Dagger Troop coordinated the effort which will donate the store to a local family that has no source of income due to the sole bread winner being disabled. Building supplies delivered to the site will also be used to build a house for a Falahat family, currently living in a mud hut, and to repair a second house in the village that was damaged during an insurgent attack nearly five months ago.

"We're glad to see that security has improved enough to where we can begin reconstruction here and it's especially important to do this during Ramadan because it ties in well with the Islamic principle of Zakarat which means charity," said Capt. Martin Wohlgenuth, Dagger Troop commander and a native of



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

An Iraqi boy (right) assists a local Iraqi construction worker with preparing a building foundation for bricks to be emplaced in Falahat, Iraq Sept. 16 during a construction project to build a store in the village.

Anchorage, Alaska. "All of the families we're helping are poor so it makes this just that much more special."

"It's helping us to build better collaboration and improve our relations with the locals here," said 1st Lt. Mike Blake, a platoon leader in Dagger Troop and a native of Baltimore. "We've gotten to know the people extremely well and they trust us. During events like this the whole

community comes together to help each other and they treat us just like we're part of their community."

A few days prior to this particular event, Soldiers from Dagger Troop had already transported 4,000 bricks and 26 tons of mortar to the building site.

A local Iraqi contractor is providing the labor and overseeing the building projects.

The Ironhorse EPRT paid for the building supplies with quick reaction funds from the U.S. State Department which are funds the department sets aside for non-profit organizations, businesses and for special construction projects such as those in Falahat.

"It's all about facilitating Iraqi efforts to promote accelerated social and economic development," said Maj. David Parker, an EPRT transition officer and a native of Savannah, Ga., explaining the purpose of the funds.

"This is a great opportunity to help them rebuild their own country and see them take pride in ownership," said Maj. Jesse Larson, Ironhorse EPRT civil affairs officer, who hails from Kansas City, Kansas. "Eventually as the security situation continues improving, the Iraqi government will step up and be taking over these types of projects."

After all the supplies had been delivered to the site, the Iraqi contractor began working with laborers--who he hired to work on the project-- to create a foundation for the store.

They dug trenches in which to emplace bricks for the walls of the structure and set several of the bricks in place.

According to Wohlgenuth, it should only take about five to seven days for the

contractor to complete the store with the construction and repairs on the two houses to be completed over a period of several weeks.

Recent successful reconciliation efforts in the area have helped to accelerate projects in the village and Soldiers said they have been amazed by the village's transformation.

"There's been a very dramatic change, it's been four months since we've had a major attack, and we used to be attacked nearly everyday," said Staff Sgt. Nicholas Lien, an acting platoon sergeant in Dagger Troop who hails from Whitewater, Wisc.

"We've worked closely with local tribal sheiks and the (Iraqi Security volunteers) to kick out insurgents and the difference has been like night and day," he said.

"It's pretty fantastic to see that the people here are showing their support for reconciliation efforts in the area, and this has been an incredible success when you compare it with how things were before," said Pfc. Warren Griffen, a Dagger troop forward observer and a native of Rochester, N.Y.

So far, the combined efforts of Dagger troops working with the Iraqi Security volunteers have led to the finding of many improvised explosive devices, weapons caches and the detaining of several Al Qaeda in Iraq fighters greatly improving the security situation, said Blake.

Future projects for the village, said Wohlgenuth include the refurbishing of schools, the fixing of water lines and the pursuit of more projects, similar to the construction effort, that will put the villagers back to work.



Staff Sgt. Nicholas Lien (left), an acting platoon sergeant who hails from Whitewater, Wisc. and Phoenix native Staff Sgt. Kevin Sartor (center), a forward observer, both from Dagger Troop, 1st Bn., 82nd FA Regt. offload building supplies with the help of a local Iraqi man in Falahat, Iraq Sept. 16 as part of a humanitarian effort to rebuild the socio-economic infrastructure of the village.

Black Jack Brings Power to the People

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

BAGHDAD - With most Iraqi families living on only one hour of electricity per day, life's been tough for Karkh District resident Rawaa and her family,

but with a new generator and better security in her neighborhood, the future looks a little brighter as a new 1.75-megawatt generator was kicked on near their home in central Baghdad Sept. 12.

"Electricity is very important for their lives," the mother of eight told Lt.

Col. Kenneth Crawford, commander of the 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2nd "Black Jack" Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. "We used to get one hour a day ... for their school ... for their studies ... we are happy about it."

The project, estimated to cost \$355,000, started in July 2007 and included not only bringing up the generator, but also constructing a building to house the generator and electrical wiring to nearly 300 homes.

The project also called for a new electrical network - a new grid system in place of the old national power grid they once had.

According to the lead project manager, Capt. Marc Motyleski, of the 2nd BSTB's Infrastructure Coordination Element, the generator will be able to feed the 300 homes it is connected to with more than 10 amps per household.

"It should be enough to power a refrigerator, fan, TV, and lights ... basic necessities for an Iraqi household for 14 hours a day," the Woodbridge, Va. native said.

There have been several generator projects throughout their area of operations, but this one is "huge" in comparison, Motyleski added.

"On average, most of the generators we've put in have been around 250 kilowatts. [This one], at 1.75-megawatts is almost seven times greater than the aver-

age generator," he said.

"Just think, getting electricity done means a lot for them; electricity is an essential service. You need electricity to run water. It's the base of essential services," he said.

As Karkh Neighborhood Advisory Council and District Advisory Council members were present with member of the 4th Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment to officially turn on the generator, one member said it should give service to approximately 2,000 people throughout the 300 homes.

Motyleski said there are a few more generator projects in the works and that soon, there will be a time when most Karkh residents have the same power for more than half the day, but that it could not be a reality if not for the security forces ensuring that the generators keep running.

"That is the big difference here," he said. "Our security is better than other districts because there are a lot of ISF (Iraqi Security Forces) out there."

The generator's upkeep and maintenance will be handled by a contractor who will charge a nominal fee to the users while the Karkh NAC will have someone who will come by to check on it weekly.

"I feel like we're doing something worthwhile," he said. "It makes me feel like I have a significant impact on people's lives."



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

Lt. Col. Kenneth Crawford (center), commander of the 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, makes sure one of the houses near a new generator in central Baghdad's Karkh District is receiving the regulated amount of power Sept. 12.

Trust Built by Helping People One Operation at a Time

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

BAGHDAD - When the 3rd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment first started patrolling Qadisiyah a few months ago, they immediately noticed something wasn't right in one neighborhood.

Although not uncommon, the Soldiers were not immediately accepted into the Jaysh Al Mahdi-controlled neighborhood of Shi'a residents.

Through persistence, the area has begun to flourish thanks to hard work by the artillerymen from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. Now that the foundations of trust have been created by the troops, the time to start giving back to the more impoverished people was upon them.

In an operation that combined the might of the Battery A, "Gators" of 3-82 FA, a team of Civil Affairs Soldiers from the 422nd Civil Affairs Battalion currently attached to the field artillery unit and the Black Jack Brigade's surgeon, the residents of the poorest area in Qadisiyah were given a chance to get the much-needed medical help they needed.

The troops located a narrow strip of road running along a brick wall known as "squatters' alley", named aptly because of its composition of makeshift huts inhabited by people with nowhere else to go.

The battery of artillerymen, a few members of the Black Jack Brigade and the small team of civil affairs practitioners set up a small clinic to not only treat a few people but to ensure future operations can go on without incident.

"There have been no hostile actions against us in this area," said Maj. Wes Stewart, a team leader with the 422nd Civil Affairs Battalion attached to the field artillery regiment. "The battalion has a good rapport with these people and we want to keep it that

way by providing these types of services from time-to-time."

Almost 80 people ranging from newborn babies to elderly residents were seen by members of the Black Jack Brigade. The brigade's surgeon, Lt. Col. Margret Merino and Capt. Leon Richardson, the 3-82 "Red Dragons" physician's assistant, were the primary caregivers for the operation.

Merino, a Buffalo, N.Y., native, specializes in pediatrics, therefore allowing her to give the young children seen a little more specialized care.

"The kids that were seen had minor eye, ear, throat and respiratory infections," said Merino. "A few had malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies. For this operation there were more kids than past operations that I have been on. The ailments were similar though."

For many of the people who arrived to the makeshift clinic, this was a rare opportunity to be seen by someone in the medical field. Many can't afford the cost of health care and even if they could, the local hospitals are overflowing with patients.

"Those who need serious attention we have to refer to the hospitals to get further testing," Merino said. "Some people had come with test results from hospitals and were asking for another opinion. Some people asked about medication to help with grief and shock from violence. Many of the women said their husbands had been killed."

"It is very difficult to get into hospitals here," said one person waiting in line to be seen. "Even if we make the journey to the hospital, we might not be seen because we are Shi'a and there are sometimes terrorists waiting for us. The Americans are helping our communities when they come. We are thankful for them."

While many inside the small house were being seen, dozens of curious children from the neighborhood gathered around the Soldiers to ask for candy or a football.

The battery commander, Capt. Don Cherry, said that having



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

Lt. Col. Margret Merino, a Buffalo, N.Y. native and the brigade surgeon for the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, holds an Iraqi child and talks to its mother about its health during a medical operation in Qadisiyah Aug. 31.

operations like the medical clinic and humanitarian aid missions done in the past are good ways to influence the people in the neighborhoods to help the coalition forces root out terrorists and bring higher-level projects into the area like water, electricity and general neighborhood improvements.

Many thanks were given to the troops who came out for the small medical mission by people in the neighborhood and people who had been seen.

Black Jack Soldiers Find Release Through Arts and Crafts

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

FORWARD OPERATING BASE PROSPERITY, Iraq - It's Saturday night in Baghdad and after yet another long week, Soldiers are looking to unwind. So just how does a group of battle-weary, combat veterans blow off steam? Well, with arts and crafts, of course.

"It's just a fun, relaxing time," explained 1st Lt. Erin Barrett, who is originally from Cartersville, Ga. and is assigned to the 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division. "All week I'm really, really busy doing a lot of crazy stuff -- don't really have any free time, and it's just relaxing to come her with friends, hang out ... be creative."

The event, which has been held three times so far, is hosted by Spc. Alicia Cummings, who is assigned to Headquarters Company, 15th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div., and she said it has transcended both rank and gender.

"It's about half enlisted, half officer and half male, half female; so it's usually a mixed group," the Palmdale, Calif. native said. "NCOs, officers and Soldiers alike, everybody enjoys coming in here."

Cummings said that the idea to host an arts and crafts event came to her a few months ago when she was cleaning up her room and trying to figure out how to store her growing supply of crafting items.

"It started out as kind of a personal hobby for me," Cummings explained. "I started ordering a lot of things offline - mostly in wholesale because it was cheaper that way, and I had crafts to last me through the deployment. I was so interested in so many different crafts. I had boxes and boxes in my room, and it was just taking up so much space. Finally, I was like, I need to clear all this out."

As a child, Cummings used arts and crafts to help her through difficult times, and she thought that it would have the same soothing

effect on her fellow Soldiers.

"I got into arts and crafts through therapy counseling," she said. "I went through a lot when I was a child. I had a very good therapist and during each session she'd have a different craft or something for me to do, and I always enjoyed it. It's very calming, and it takes a lot of concentration so you forget about everything else around you."

Arts and crafts night is not exactly a class, although Cummings will provide assistance to anyone who asks. Instead, she said it's a chance for Soldiers to come in and discover something new.

"It's more of like an open layout," she said. "There's different stations and people come in, see what catches their eye, go sit down and enjoy themselves."

From the moment you walk into the room, the entire event is designed to be a much needed break from the daily grind. Before even entering the room, Soldiers must dip a plastic wand in bubble formula and blow bubbles, which serves as an entry fee of sorts and emphasizes that they are now entering a stress-free zone.

There are several options Soldiers can choose from when deciding which activity to take advantage of, to include: watercolor and finger painting; sun catcher painting; a dream catcher making station; cross stitching; drawing and sketching; jewelry making; and the popular fuse beads.

"I think it's mostly because it takes a lot of patience and energy, and they're very bright and colorful," Cummings said of the fuse beads. "It's kind of like, for instance, a unit. No individual person stands out; no individual bead stands out, but when you put them all together in an organized group and fuse them together, they make something really beautiful."

Staff Sgt. Ludmila Walsh attended her second arts and crafts night Sept. 8 and made her first attempt at fuse beading.

"They've got a bunch of books here and a



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

Capt. Jamie Cook, the personnel officer for the 15th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, irons wax paper over a heart made out of fuse beads during crafts night at Forward Operating Base Prosperity in central Baghdad Sept. 8.

lot of different design ideas with it," the Marinette, Wis. native said. "All you do is pick the diagram that fits your design, and you just start putting the colors in according to the diagram."

Walsh, who said she is working on a garden theme to display in her office, made a turtle to go along with the butterfly she drew last time.

"It's very nice to just come here and have some nice music playing and just be able to get absorbed in a project that has nothing to do at all with work, and be around people who just came here to do the same thing," she said.

Other Soldiers use the opportunity to make gifts for loved ones back home.

"The first two times I made something for my wife and my baby, Savannah," explained, regular, 1st Lt. Steve Purdy with HHC, 15th

BSB.

Purdy, a native of Plantation, Fla., has attended every craft night that has been offered so far, and said that he has focused on learning about a different craft each time. His latest project was a keychain lanyard he craft-laced out of plastic. He said it's been fun learning how to do these various crafts, and that hopefully he will be able to teach some of what he has learned to his daughter once she gets a little older.

"It's good, fun stuff to occupy your time, so I enjoy it, and I think she'd enjoy it too," he said. "She's a little too small right now; she's only 11 months."

Whatever their reason for coming or craft of choice, Cummings said crafts night is just a chance for Soldiers to express themselves and work on something in their own way without having to be worry about it being told that it's right or wrong.

"Everybody does kind of their own really unique thing, and that's kind of what the point of arts and crafts night is," she said. "They can be themselves, and they can do their own thing without having the bossman sitting over the shoulder saying, 'hey, no, you've got to do this.'"

This theme of personal creativity seems to resonate with the participants, as the numbers of those attending continues to grow each time Cummings hosts the event. She said that's due to the popularity of crafts night, she plans to host one every other Saturday night, right up until redeployment.

"It's real nice to have everybody come in and relax and forget about what's outside of these walls for a few hours and enjoy themselves and have a happy time," she said. "That makes me feel good, making other people happy."

It's not necessarily the happiness that crafting provides that keeps the Soldiers coming back though, but rather it's the few hours of normalcy that lets them reconnect with a different part of themselves.

"I have three young nieces so, you know, you really miss them," Barrett said. "So you come to things like this and you think of all the little cute things you can do to send back home to still be a part of your family's lives."



1st Lt. Steve Purdy, 15th BSB, creates a keychain lanyard during craft night at Forward Operating Base Prosperity in Sept. 8.

Non-Headless 'Chickens' Run TOC in Baqouba

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

BAQOUBA, Iraq (Sept. 4, 2007) -- When you watch a modern-age military movie with high explosives and crazy doomsday-like machinery running around the battle field, there are always scenes of commanders and their staff running around like chickens with their heads cut off in a dark, secret-looking room with maps on all the walls and glowing computer screens on every table.

Also, there always seems to be one young Soldier who turns to the acting commander and spouts a line like, "Sir, we have a real big problem here."

That's exactly the scene inside the tactical operations center for the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, only, instead of everyone freaking out and running around like headless chickens, the Soldiers inside of "Grey Wolf's" intelligence-driven TOC runs smoothly and professionally, just as a big-budget Hollywood movie wouldn't want it to.

"The TOC is the brigade's tactical operations center, which enables the commander to gather information from his subordinate units, correlate that information and present it to him in a manner he easily understands and make rational decisions when it comes to combat operations," said Greywolf's operations sergeant major, Sgt. Major Darryl Gill, a native of Springfield, Ohio.

"The TOC is the fusion cell where all the battle information comes in for the brigade commander," adds Capt. Mike Laramore, Brigade Chief of Operations - Battle Major



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

Members of the 3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. tactical operations center pose for a group photo. The TOC is the center of operations for the "Grey Wolf" Brigade during their deployment to Diyala province in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 06-08.

for Grey Wolf.

"We process all reports and information on everything that's happening in the battle space, consolidate it and get it to the commander, giving him a clear and concise picture of what's going on in his battle space throughout the day so he can make the right decisions to help keep the Diyala province moving," Laramore said.

"It also allows us to make tactical deci-

sions and send indirect fire [and other support elements] to the battalion level so they can exploit the enemy with those systems," Gill said.

"If we didn't have an operation center like this, we might as well pack up and go home," he added. "There's no way that we could take the fight to the enemy."

And taking the fight to the enemy is a strenuous, arduous job which takes the right Soldiers to properly handle every aspect of battle.

"My job is to ensure those Soldiers whose boots are on the ground outside the wire have the assets available to destroy the enemy," said Gill. "That's what we do; we help them destroy the enemy."

"[The Soldiers inside the TOC] help plan missions; we help coordinate the assets needed for those missions," he continued. "We are in everything. This is a 24 hour-a-day operation that needs top-notch Soldiers behind the scenes running the show."

And with every Soldier in the TOC standing behind every mission, giving their all, when a Soldier loses their life, it is felt by all.

"There isn't one Soldier inside this TOC that hasn't been affected by the loss of another Soldier," said Gill. "As hard as those losses are, my guys have to share those losses with the units. All those losses affect us directly."

Many of these Soldiers inside the TOC are in the midst of their second deployment to the Middle East. A vast array of them were in combat-related jobs, going out on many dangerous missions, making their understanding of mission successfulness inside the TOC a must. But before their trek into the TOC, many of these Soldiers didn't fully understand its importance.

"Before I started working in the TOC, I never really understood why we had one in the first place," said Spc. Jason Maher,

Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 3rd BCT, and a native of Penn State, Pa.

"Now that I see both sides of the mission, it's a lot more important than I thought back in my last deployment," he continued. "There are a lot of steps that you have to go through to make sure the missions which are ongoing move smoothly."

"As an 11B [infantryman], I've gotten to see both sides of deployment," said Staff Sgt. Larry Green, daytime battle NCO, and a native Gainesville, Fl.

"The side I didn't get to see in the beginning [of the first deployment] was the moving pieces of the battlefield that was handled by the brigade in the TOC to help out our missions," said the member of HHT, 3rd BCT.

"The coordination of air assets and other essential assets to make the battlefield what it is and properly work, without the TOC, none of our engagements would move fluently or be successful," Green added.

"Seeing both sides, being on an [infantry] line and being in the TOC, you see everything that has to happen to make sure thing go off without a hitch," added Sgt. Michael Hudson, HHT, 3rd BCT. "You see why certain decisions are made that you might not fully understand while on the ground."

"Being in a brigade TOC is like being a head coach or general manager of a football team," Hudson explained. "We call all the shots, make all the plays and pass all the information to the surrounding units and battalions, otherwise known as the players on the team, so that the game, also known as the overall mission, is won."

Overall, Gill says he's proud of his guys working with him and for the brigade.

"This is a great bunch of guys who are incredibly dedicated to what they're doing who work hard to make sure all the missions are a success."



Pfc. Marcus Hester, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, receives a report via radio while working in the Fires and Effects Coordination Cell inside the tactical operations center for 3rd BCT.

A Slice of Home, a Welcome Sight for Soldiers in Diyala

By Maj. Raul E. Marquez
3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div.

BAQOUBA, Iraq - Pizza - the quintessential food for most Americans, especially Soldiers. "That pizza pie," as it's known in New York, with it's cheesy and saucy goodness, has made it's way to one of the smallest Forward Operating Bases in Iraq - FOB Warhorse, outside Baqouba.

Pizza Hut, one of the most famous fast-food restaurants in the U.S. that is partnered with Army and Air Force Exchange Service and the military's Morale, Welfare and Recreation program, caters to Soldiers throughout most major FOBs in Iraq. On Warhorse, it has joined another Soldiers' favorite, the Green Bean Coffee Shop, when it opened one of its short-order shacks, Sept. 10. And as expected, it has become a favorite for Soldiers throughout the day and night.

According to the local Pizza Hut manager, Charles D'Souza, a native of Karnataka, India, who has managed restaurants for the past three years throughout Iraq, his restaurant has sold over 1,500 pizzas in the three days the restaurant has been open.

Spc. Travis Neal, a Soldier with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st

Cavalry Division, and a native of Gainesville, Texas, said he loves Italian food, but especially the Chicago-style pizza.

Regardless, he, as well as hundreds of other Soldiers, have purchased the pizza and said it is pretty good.

"It is a good morale booster for the Soldiers here," said Neal, who would also like to see other fast-food chains making it to the FOB in the future. "I would like to see a good Taco Bell or Sonic...I love Sonic. Arby's! Definitely Arby's."

Capt. Jennifer S. Karim, Headquarters and Headquarters Company commander, 215th Brigade Support Battalion, is the FOB mayor and was instrumental in the establishment of this restaurant, as well as other new amenities now offered to Soldiers assigned to Warhorse.

"We initially requested for the Pizza Hut in January," said Karim, a Houston native. "The major issue we encountered was getting the food across the Kuwaiti border. It took more than three months to finally get the food to our FOB."

Karim's next project is to bring a Turkish restaurant to the FOB.

Most Soldiers believe that having a franchise of fast-

food restaurants, regardless of the company it comes from, is beneficial for the Soldiers.

"Even if you miss lunch or dinner, you can still get something to eat," said Spc. Jessica Rafanan, 571st Military Police, and a native of San Diego. "I would love to see a McDonalds here too."

Staff Sgt. Darryl Reaves, 2nd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery, and a native of Philadelphia, also agrees with Neal and Rafanan, and would like to see a McDonalds like in Ali Al Salem, Kuwait.

Other Soldiers view this new addition to the FOB as a step toward a more permanent presence in Diyala - a sign that Coalition Forces will remain in the province for a long time.

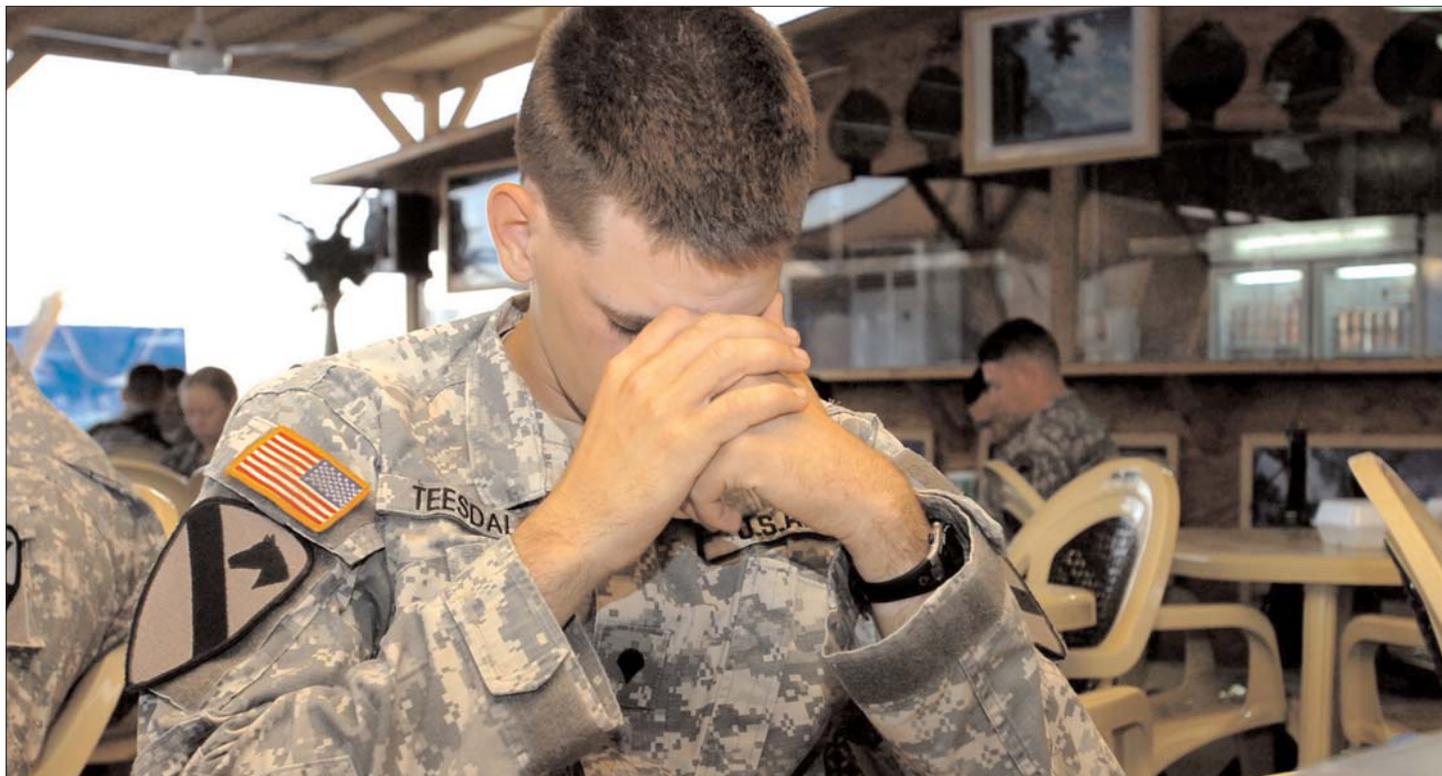
At one point, FOB Warhorse was scheduled to close, along with other smaller FOBs throughout Diyala. However, due to the increased violence created by al-Qaida earlier this year, and the surge of troops sent to quell this violence, those plans were scratched. Now, the FOB is in continuous growth.

In spite of those who feel this is a sign of a more permanent stay in Diyala, and what a Pizza Hut represents to them, everyone still enjoys a slice of home.



(Photo by Maj. Raul Marquez, 3rd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs Officer)

Spc. Jessica Rafanan, from 571st Military Police, and a native of San Diego, Calif., enjoys an early lunch thanks to the new addition to Forward Operating Base Warhorse-Pizza Hut. She would like to see other fast-food restaurants, like McDonalds, come to the FOB.



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

Lynnwood, Wash., native Spc. Alex Teesdale, a chaplains assistant for 4th Bn., 227th Avn. Regt., 1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div., bows his head in prayer during a prayer breakfast, Sept. 11 at Camp Taji, Iraq. Dozens of Soldiers gathered to pay tribute and remember those who lost their lives Sept. 11, 2001 and in the war on terror.

Air Cav Remembers 9/11 at Prayer Breakfast

By Spc. Nathan Hoskins
1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

CAMP TAJI, Iraq - It isn't a day of celebration, but of remembrance. It isn't a day of happiness, but a day of somber contemplation.

Many Soldiers can recount exactly what they were doing and what they were thinking the moment they saw or heard the news of the terrorist attacks, Sept. 11, 2001.

And that is exactly what was being discussed during the 1st Air Cavalry "Warrior" Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, 9/11 prayer breakfast here, Sept. 11.

Part of the morning's events included reflections of what individual Soldiers went through on that day six years ago.

Little Rock, Ark., native Sgt. Brian Jones, the chaplain's assistant for 2nd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div., recalled working at Fort Jackson, S.C. - a hub for new recruits in basic training.

"Before (Sept. 11), you would see a lot of people joining the Army, they want to do great things for their country, but the majority ... joined for college and wanted to do things for themselves," he said to the crowd gathered in the Command Sergeant Major Cooke Dining Facility outdoor pavilion.

Jones alluded to the fact that pride in country shot through the roof after that day.

"After (Sept. 11), you would kind of expect that the (enlistment) numbers would go down because no one would want to join an Army that's about to go to war, but that didn't

happen," said Jones.

"More and more people started flooding into Fort Jackson. The surge went past summer and into winter. We had a surge and people wanted to come and join the Army," Jones said.

This flood of patriotic troops touched Jones to his core. He said he recalls the feeling of seeing how not only the nation reacted to such a tragedy, but how the U.S. Army reacted.

"So the most beautiful thing I saw was our Army stand tall at that moment we were attacked and young people wanting to join the Army, not for college, but so they could protect this great nation," Jones said as tears welled up in his eyes.

The keynote speaker for the prayer breakfast was Chap. (Maj.) Mark Penfold, the Warrior brigade's chaplain, who hails from Michigan City, Ind.

Penfold made the assertion that the 1st Cav. Div. had historical ties to the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City, he said.

He told the story of Richard Rescorla who was not only a young, motivated officer during the first major offensive in Vietnam in the Ia Drang Valley with the 1st Cav. Div., but also the head of security for Morgan Stanley's Individual Investor Group at the World Trade Center later in life.

While pushing through that first night in the Ia Drang Valley, he walked through the ranks of his Soldiers and kept them motivated. He even sang old Cornish mining songs to raise their spirits, said Penfold.

Then, after sneaking to the enemy's side

and doing some reconnaissance of his troops' positions, he came back and had them reposition to better survive the fight at day break, Penfold said.

The next day his Soldiers held up well under fire and many of them can recount how the leadership and motivation of Rescorla kept them alive, said the Warrior chaplain.

Many years later, on Sept. 11, 2001, Rescorla continued to show his true colors by saving thousands of employees of Morgan Stanley's Individual Investor Group, said Penfold.

Rescorla was seen on security cameras within the World Trade Center with a bull horn directing human traffic and singing the same songs he did back in the Ia Drang Valley - motivating the people to stay motivated and stay alive, Penfold said.

Rescorla would later die in the collapse of the World Trade Center, leaving a legacy of heroism, selfless service and an example to all Soldiers and Americans, Penfold said.

"I think there are two critical lessons to learn from Rescorla's life," Penfold said. "The first one is that selfless service is not just an Army value. It doesn't start when you come into the Army and go through basic training and end when you leave."

"In fact, for many of us and for many of you here, selfless service precedes being in the Army and it will go on and transcend your Army experience," he continued.

"(Rescorla) was willing to risk his life in combat. He didn't shirk his responsibilities.

And he embraced the value of selfless service and it became a part of who he was," Penfold said.

"The second example that comes out of Rescorla's life, for me at least, was the power of example," said Penfold.

Rescorla, born in England at the start of World War II, later would watch as the U.S. troops moved through his town, impressing on him how extraordinary these forces were - leaving an example to follow later in life, said Penfold.

Penfold contemplated whether this wasn't occurring in Iraq with the young and impressionable children and the U.S. forces.

"(Do) our Soldiers ... as we interact with people, leave that kind of influence on (young Iraqis) lives? Is our example such that it captures their hearts and minds and burns within them so that when they grow up they want to be something else?" asked Penfold in closing.

Afterwards, Chap. (Capt.) Ben Clark, chaplain for 4th "Guns" Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div., gave a charge to those in attendance. He wanted them to know the meaning behind the prayer breakfast that day.

"Our purpose today is not to make you to go away sad thinking about the events of that day," he said. "It's to make you go away today holding your head a little bit higher and maybe walking taller to understand the country you represent and the flag you wear on your shoulder."

Attack Aviation Units Welcome New NCOs

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq - Soldiers deployed to Iraq may be too busy to think about Army traditions. The leadership from two attack aviation battalions, however, ensured that two dozen Soldiers' recent induction into the Noncommissioned Officers' Corps was something they would remember throughout their careers.

The new noncommissioned officers from 1st "Attack" and 4th "Guns" Battalions,

227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, were inducted into the Noncommissioned Officer Corps in an Aug. 25 ceremony at Camp Taji, Iraq.

The guest speaker for the event, Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Joseph, the senior noncommissioned officer for the 15th Sustainment Brigade, told the new leaders that they had taken a big step.

"Soldiers will look to you, their leader - their sergeant, for direction," Joseph said. "This induction ceremony is indicative that you have entered the Noncommissioned

Officer Corps."

By becoming sergeants the Soldiers had gone from being led to being leaders, and the promotion means more than a raise in pay, Joseph said.

"You're responsible for America's sons and daughters, and it is a sacred trust the American people charge us with," he said. "We must always be a Noncommissioned Officer Corps that leads by example, trains from experience, enforces the standards, takes care of our Soldiers and equipment and (adapts) to the change in environment.

"We must train our Soldiers in wartime and in peace. We must coach and mentor Soldiers for their next level of responsibility, and we must care for them and their families," he said. "You are charged with building and strengthening the team and accomplishing your assigned mission."

The tradition and formality of the induction ceremony brought to light the significance of becoming a sergeant, said Sgt. Jeremy Stallard, 4-227th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion.

"It was a great way to welcome Soldiers to the NCO Corps," the native of Clintwood, Va., said. "It really showed me the level of responsibility given to a sergeant. This is your senior officers' and senior NCOs' way of saying how much responsibility they have given you and how much they trust you."

Stallard said he didn't take Joseph's words lightly.

"An NCO's main responsibility is to teach Soldiers and take care of Soldiers,"

Stallard said. "A lot of my NCOs had a big impact on me, and now it is my job to help younger Soldiers."

The ceremony was an honor that not all Soldiers get when they become sergeants, according to Sgt. Raeanne Rodriguez, 1-227th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, a native of Simi Valley, Calif.

"I got a lot of feedback from my NCOs about the ceremony, and many of them said they didn't get something like this when they became NCOs," she said.

Reaching the rank of sergeant wasn't always one of Rodriguez's goals.

"I was a trouble maker," she said. "After a while of seeing my peers have more responsibility placed on them, I realized I had to straighten up."

When she earned her stripes in April, her life changed immediately.

"Being an NCO is challenging," she said. "You go from being lower enlisted to the next day being an NCO with more responsibilities. Some days you have to make split decisions. I enjoy taking care of Soldiers and training them to be our next leaders."

The role of the noncommissioned officer hasn't changed much over the years, and it's a role that Stallard said he is excited about taking on.

"I like military history - the history that the NCO Corps has," Stallard said. "It goes all the way back to the beginning of the Army. It's great that I and other NCOs are part of something that has been going for hundreds of years and will continue for many more."



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

Soldiers from 1st "Attack" and 4th "Guns" battalions, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, recite the Noncommissioned Officer Creed at their NCO induction ceremony Aug. 25 at Camp Taji, Iraq. More than two dozen Soldiers were welcomed to the NCO ranks during the ceremony.

NCO Climbs to New Heights Supporting Air Missions in Iraq

By 1st Lt. Jenny Wright
1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment

CAMP TAJI, Iraq - While her platoon normally would provide fuel for only one attack aviation battalion, a 1st Air



(U.S. Army photo)

Sgt. 1st Class Cecilia Hernandez-Sanchez, Company E, 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division.

Cavalry Brigade noncommissioned officer is responsible for managing refueling operations for an entire theater of helicopters.

As a platoon sergeant for Company E, 1st "Attack" Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st ACB, 1st Cavalry Division, Sgt. 1st Class Cecilia Hernandez-Sanchez has been the senior enlisted Soldier overseeing the Baghdad International Airport Forward Arming and Refueling Point since September 2006.

The Lubbock, Texas, native is in charge of 52 Soldiers and is responsible for the training, discipline and mission accomplishment of one of the busiest platoons in Iraq, according to Capt. Mike Martin, commander of the Forward Support Company of 1-227th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion.

"Her success in being a good NCO and leader directly allowed all of Iraq to accomplish the BIAP FARP mission safely," said Martin, who calls Killeen, Texas, home.

Hernandez-Sanchez, a petroleum handler, was recognized by Col. Dan Shanahan, the 1st ACB commander, Aug. 27 for her efforts to ensure that all Coalition aircraft got the fuel service they needed at BIAP to complete their missions.

The enormous challenge of running the BIAP FARP was nothing new to this high-caliber woman.

After earning an associate degree in law enforcement at South Plains College in Levelland, Texas, Hernandez-Sanchez joined the Army in Amarillo, Texas, in February 1992.

"My family didn't even know ... I left on February

27, and I called them in the middle of March," she said.

Hernandez-Sanchez has served the Army all over the world, but she said her favorite duty station was Fort Greely, Alaska, where she served as a Northern Warfare School instructor and taught cold weather survival and mountaineering.

The position normally is reserved for an infantryman.

She had no trouble keeping up with her male counterparts, she said.

"My favorite memory was when all the cadre climbed to the top of Mount Rainier (a 14,410-foot volcano in Washington)," she said. Climbing volcanoes isn't the only lofty sight Hernandez-Sanchez has set before herself.

"Becoming a first sergeant was the first goal I set for myself when I came in the Army," Hernandez-Sanchez said. "I'm still working on it."

Once she serves her time in the Army, she plans to continue to serve her community as a hazardous material duty officer for the Environmental Protection Agency.

In the meantime, she wants to take more college classes towards an environmental engineering degree to help her towards her long term goal, she said.

One of the many lessons Hernandez-Sanchez plans on applying to the civilian world is keeping in mind that everyone is unique.

"Everyone has a different personality," she said, noting that working with people is something that will make or break a job.

Infantry Soldiers Make a Difference in Local Baghdad Community

By Staff Sgt. Jon Soucy
58th IBCT, Public Affairs

CAMP SLAYER, Iraq - The call came across the radio as the humvee rattled and shook down a dirt road in the Al Furat section of Baghdad-activity in a nearby abandoned building directed at Soldiers manning guard towers of nearby Camp Slayer. Immediately the Soldiers in the patrol turned their vehicles around and headed toward the building. The block was cordoned off, and with turret gunners providing overwatch, the Soldiers in the vehicles dismounted and moved quickly across the grounds of the building.

Once inside, the Soldiers moved with practiced ease down the separate corridors of the building clearing each room as they went. Swiftly and aggressively they swept the building, their footprints disturbing the fine accumulation of dirt and dust on smooth floor.

In the end, the building was empty. However, a room with a view of one of the towers contained evidence of recent activity. For the Soldiers, assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry Regiment, kicking in doors and clearing rooms was something they hadn't done since their first days patrolling this section of western Baghdad, a section of the capital that, since then, has seen a dramatic turnaround.

When the unit first arrived in Iraq in late 2006, kicking in doors in Al Furat, which is the unit's main area of responsibility, was nearly all they did.

"The area we're in now, when we first got here was, I don't want to say unpatrolled, but it was kind of left alone by U.S. forces," said Sgt. Dustin Thompson, a scout with the unit. "We were the first ones to patrol there in a long time. So, it was pretty rowdy when we first got here. We were getting shot at every day."

Others described it differently.

"We called it the Wild West, because that's what it was like," said Lt. Col. John Luttrell, battalion commander. "There was a gunfight everyday."

The problems facing the area, unit members said, could be traced back to one source-sectarian violence between Sunni and Shi'a gangs, to include some with links to Al Qaeda and other violent factions. Al Furat, which has a largely Sunni population, is separated from neighboring Al Jihad, a mostly Shi'a area, by a canal. Buildings that line the roadway along the canal on both sides bear the scars of factional violence in the form of bullet holes, shattered windows and blackened areas from rocket-propelled grenade attacks. Many who live in the area have been injured or killed or they know someone who has been. Though attacks were mainly sectarian in nature, U.S. forces were targeted as well.

The question for the unit was how to overcome those odds and

return Al Furat, a once stable and prosperous area, to how it once was.

Building relationships was the answer, said Luttrell, a former schoolteacher. Through dismounted patrols and talking with various people in the area the Soldiers in the unit worked with local sheiks and tribal leaders as well as other key members of the community who had unofficially taken on leadership roles.

Through those connections a city council was formed. Initially the leadership positions of the council were filled with the individuals the Soldiers first talked with, but recently elections were held and community members elected those they felt would best serve those functions, said Luttrell.

While the Soldiers were able to largely keep violence down in the area through both routine presence patrols and working with Iraqi army and national police units who manned checkpoints in the area, the area's economic and infrastructure needs had to be met.

"We've had several projects," said Thompson. "We're building markets and improving schools, roads." The projects are funded by the U.S., but employ those in the area to do the actual work. One of the first areas to be rebuilt was the local market place, where local vendors offer everything from tennis shoes to fresh meat-the animals having been slaughtered that morning.

"The goal of our's has been to boost the economy and allow the locals to sustain themselves and not depend on us," said 1st Lt. Martin Schafer, a platoon leader with the unit. "One way of doing that is to allow them trade to make money."

Most mornings find the open-air market area packed with those doing daily shopping. So much so an expansion is being constructed.

"As we progressed through the year (the unit has been here) we've had a bigger and bigger presence," said Schafer. "And that market, as we've increased our presence, has increased as well and at this point we're funding an addition to the market. We hope this addition continues to grow and continues to make it an economic boost for the community." Other projects include a pharmacy, a coffee shop and refurbishing local secondary schools. The unit and the Al Furat Council have also been working with the Iraq Ministry of Education to turn a now vacant building into a university, which many may say is fitting as it once housed a meteorological technical school.

While refurbishing the building to house a university may be a future event, the Soldiers of the unit are quick to point out the changes that have happened in the area currently.

"Primarily, at this present time, we don't get shot at as often," said Spc. Leonard Pitman, a tracked-vehicle mechanic assigned to the unit as a driver. "The neighborhood has gotten a lot safer for the residents."

And that feeling of safety is evident in other ways.

"Certain areas of the town are not occupied anymore, but (the

local residents) are starting to come back in because people are starting to feel safe," said Pitman.

Those who live in the area expressed similar feelings.

"Today we find ourselves much more stable," said Ahmed Selman Abbas, chairman of the Al Furat City Council, through an interpreter. "And definitely at the end of 149th (Inf. Regt.) service in Furat, they will leave their fingerprint on the community."

That fingerprint, in part, came from working with the local community.

"He (Luttrell) invited us to share in the responsibilities and to make the neighborhood much more safe and much more stable," said Dr. Tahrir Aldelaimi, a dentist in Al Furat and also a member of the city council.

While military expertise factored greatly into rebuilding the area, it was also Luttrell's civilian experience as a high school teacher that rang a bell with many in Al Furat.

"I think we are very lucky to find a commander, a teacher, like (Lt.) Col. Luttrell," said Abbas. "His personal background, his academic teaching, because he is so close to the community by teaching secondary school."

While the Soldiers of the unit assisted with the establishment of the city council, the council itself has established other means to better the neighborhood. One of which is the Furat Advisory Board for Reconstruction, which draws on the experiences of those in the area to oversee rebuilding efforts.

"This board consists of 10 members presented by Furat City Council and the engineering staff of the neighborhood," said Abbas. "This will take the opportunity to assist, to design, to monitor and give the whole picture of any project that is going to proceed in the neighborhood. It's like quality control for engineering work, actually."

The advisory board would not have seen the light of day if it wasn't for the efforts of the Soldiers of the unit, said Abbas, who added that the unit's work in the neighborhood has set the standard for other units throughout Iraq.

"We hope that the 149th (Inf. Regt.) experience in Furat should be a model or example to be adopted for other Coalition Forces or units," said Abbas.

And the unit's efforts in Al Furat have been felt in other areas in Baghdad.

"Steps and procedures taken by our city council have been adapted by other city councils in Baghdad," said Abbas.

But for the Soldiers in the unit, it really comes down to one thing.

"We just have to make it a better place for the children to grow up in," said Pitman.



As Soldiers from Co. A, 1st Bn., 149th Inf. Regt. pass by on a routine presence patrol, a local resident of the Al Furat neighborhood of Baghdad pushes an empty wheelbarrow after emptying debris from a section of an area school damaged by fighting between Sunni and Shi'a rivals Aug. 29.



Lt. Col. John Luttrell (left), commander of 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry Regiment, talks with Ahmed Selman Abbas, gesturing with hand, chairman of the Al Furat Council, during a weekly council meeting in the Al Furat neighborhood of western Baghdad, Aug. 20.



1st Lt. Martin Schafer (center), a platoon leader with Company A, 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry Regiment, speaks with a company commander, (left), of an Iraqi Army unit at a checkpoint in the Al Furat neighborhood of western Baghdad, Aug. 20.



Soldiers from Company A, 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry Regiment, joke with a local Iraqi girl while on patrol in the Al Furat neighborhood of western Baghdad Aug. 29. Soldiers from the unit have been working with local officials to assist with rebuilding schools and other facilities in the area.

(Photos by Staff Sgt. Jon Soucy, 58th IBCT Public Affairs)



Sgt. Dustin Thompson, a Somerset, Ky., native and scout assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry Regiment, looks over an abandoned vehicle to check for explosives or weapons during a routine presence patrol through the Al Furat neighborhood of western Baghdad Aug. 29. Soldiers from the unit have been working with local officials to assist with rebuilding schools and other facilities in the area.

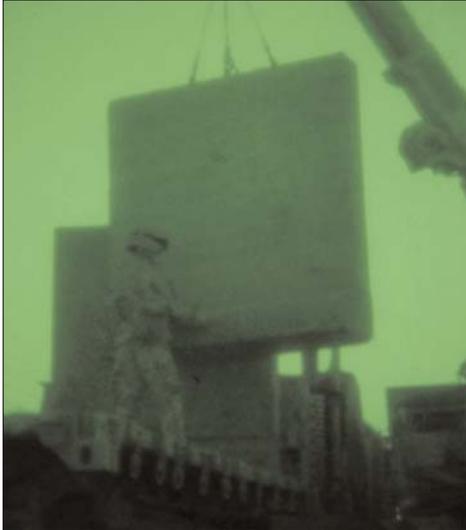


Soldiers from Company A, 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry Regiment scan their surroundings as they patrol through the Al Furat neighborhood of western Baghdad, Aug. 20. The unit conducts patrols through the area several times each day and has built a relationship with those who live in the area. Through those relationships, they have helped rebuild marketplaces and other key places in the area.

Combat Engineers Shoulder the Load in Barrier Placement Operations

By Spc. Benjamin Gable
7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

BAGHDAD - Soldiers have been trying to slow these illegal activities as part of the safe neighborhood project, by



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

A Soldier with Company E., 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, guides a temporary barrier as it is placed onto a heavy equipment transporter (HET) in the late-night hours of Sept. 6, in Ghazaliyah, a western Baghdad neighborhood.

emplacing temporary barriers of all sizes throughout the Iraqi capital to route traffic through checkpoints.

Since January, this has been the main mission for troops with Company E., 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division.

These combat engineers from Fort Bliss, Texas have moved and emplaced every type of temporary barrier there is in the country. From the smallest, Jersey barriers, to the largest, Alaska barriers, they have done it all.

Soldiers with Co. E helped move and emplace the tallest Alaska barriers that encircle the four joint security stations in their area of operation, the western Baghdad neighborhood of Ghazaliyah.

They have also been tasked with smaller barrier missions such as placing Jersey barriers which help funnel traffic to Iraqi Army check points.

Other operations have called for them to place protection around the entrances to main streets in Ghazaliyah to help secure the areas.

According to 1st Sgt. Robert Spivey, the combat engineers have emplaced more than 52,000 short tons of concrete since January.

"That's a lot of barriers and it's only possible because of the hard work of the Soldiers on the ground," he added.

All those tons of concrete represent approximately 30,000 temporary barriers.

Most of these were moved using "nontraditional" methods. Instead of contracting cranes and forklifts, the troops of Co. E have used M-88 tracked vehicles, sometimes known as "Hercules" for their ability to lift extremely heavy objects, and heavy expanded mobility tactical trucks, or HEMTTs, with the capabilities of hauling heavy loads.

The security impact of placing the temporary barriers around neighborhoods and on main streets shows in the dwindling number of hostile activities in the area.

"We've seen attacks in our area go down and it's a much

safer place for us and the locals," said Sgt. Joseph Pena, a combat engineer and platoon leader with Co. E. "It's been a win, win situation."

The combat engineers have seen a marked improvement in the overall quality of life in their area.

Markets have opened, kids are playing soccer outside their houses and residents are moving freely in the streets. They have even started to clean up the trash in the area to make it a more livable neighborhood.

"It's been a drastic change since we arrived and started securing the area," said Spivey.

"You can see the overall attitudes have really changed with the locals," he said.



Soldiers with Co. E., 2nd Bn., 12th Cav. Regt., position a cable on a temporary barrier after it has been hooked to a crane, Sept. 6, in the western Baghdad Ghazaliyah neighborhood.

Ameriya Citizens Confident in their Community Development

By Sgt. Jack Androski
1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment

BAGHDAD - Multi-National Division - Baghdad Soldiers received hopeful responses from local citizens about the area's economic development during an assessment patrol Aug. 30.

Members of the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, known as the "Black Knights," conducted its first economic assessment in the neighborhood of Ameriya since February.

Three teams were sent through Ameriya to reconnoiter the improvements in local businesses. Soldiers posed a series of atmospheric questions to residents and the overall results showed a higher than expected level of confidence in community development.

Due to the increased violence between the local volunteer force and al-Qaeda operatives, local businesses have suffered for the last seven months. Essential services have always been a priority for Coalition Forces in

the area, but until the assessment patrol, the actual economic state of the local citizens has been in question.

This economic assessment is part of a larger emphasis by Task Force 1-5 Cavalry to increase public services and to aid the local business economy; to help Ameriyans help themselves. The spearhead of this operation is the civil military operations section, which is responsible for initiating and overseeing all essential services improvement projects throughout the area.

Thus far, CMO projects have included large-scale road projects to micro-loan improvement initiatives helping the local business owners. Currently, the battalion's CMO has 13 ongoing projects within the Black Knight's operations area. Because of the increased activity of the local volunteer force and better security, the CMO section is better able to operate within Ameriya.

A second assessment patrol is already scheduled.



(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jack Androski, 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment)

An interpreter pauses while talking with Ameriya residents in western Baghdad during an economic assessment patrol Aug. 30 by Soldiers from 1st "Black Knights" Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment from Fort Hood, Texas but operating in the Iraqi capital under the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division to have a photo taken with local children in a market area. Soldiers posed a series of atmospheric questions to residents and the overall results showed a higher than expected level of confidence in community development.

Yarmouk NAC Re-Opens After Renovation Project

By Capt. Christina Martin
299th Forward Support Battalion

BAGHDAD - Multi-National Division - Baghdad Soldiers, in conjunction with the Iraqi local government and Iraqi contractors, renovated and re-opened the Yarmouk Neighborhood Advisory Counsel building and conducted a medical aid project on Sept. 5.

Two medics from the 299th Forward Support Battalion joined members of 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment on the medical aid mission and to conduct a ribbon cutting ceremony celebrating the opening of the newly-renovated NAC hall in the western Baghdad Yarmouk area.

The purpose of this mission was to provide residents with medical assistance to support essential services and promote the NAC's legitimacy among the people and government.

This operation was a combined effort in coordination with the Iraqi

Security Forces, which provided security for special guests and government officials attending the ceremony.

After the ribbon cutting ceremony, the two medics from Company C, 299th FSB, Spc. Stephanie Defreest and Pfc. Eliza Sabo, worked with a local pharmacist to help supply medication to the Iraqi citizens.

In a combined effort, the two medics treated approximately 40 Iraqi women and children. Male medics from 2-32nd FA treated approximately 50 Iraqi men.

Throughout the operation, there were many toys handed out which allowed for all Soldiers to have an opportunity to interact with the Iraqi people.

Located near the newly renovated NAC hall, a local clinic used the attention of the American presence to promote awareness of their location and enlist support of the local citizens for their facility.



(U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Eliza Sabo, 299th FSB)

Spc. Stephanie Defreest a medic with Company C, 299th Forward Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, holds a 22-day-old Iraqi baby during a cooperative medical engagement in the western Baghdad Yarmouk neighborhood Sept. 5.

Cavalry Troops Work to Bring Electricity to Western Baghdad

By 1st Lt. Moonerah Lao
2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment

BAGHDAD - Multi-National Division - Baghdad Soldiers continue to work in conjunction with local Iraqi government to provide power and other essential services to the citizens of western Baghdad.

In the neighborhood of Al-Katieb, in the northwestern region of Baghdad, a major project for providing electricity has been on-going since 2004 to help provide much needed electricity.

"This project is one of eight throughout Iraq, which are focused on restoring electricity to the people" said 1st Lt. Mike Gilotti, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment's fire support officer.

The station incorporates the use of 10 generators powered by 137-ton engines. The project was contracted through a Lebanese company and incorporates multiple ministries within the Iraqi government to provide this vital essential service.

"During reconnaissance patrols conducted by Alpha Company ...interest in this project developed as the patrols began assessing the infrastructure of its area of operation" said Gilotti.

The Alpha Company essential services team began making the project a main effort in providing visibility to higher headquarters.

Pfc. Ryan Kitchens, the field specialist in charge of consolidating information on the project, identified gaps in necessary deliveries and problems in the civil construction capabilities necessary for forward progress. Gilotti and Kitchens revisited the project site in order to build a relationship with the project engineers and obtain technical knowledge of design and project structure. The team then used their findings to make the next step in the project.

Recently, due to the team's interest and reporting capabilities, visibility has been brought to the Joint Projects Management Office. This group works directly with the government of Iraq in order to provide guidance in providing and sustaining central services to Iraq.

The JPMO then sent in a team of specialists, Capt. Christian Thompson and Bob Perry, to conduct an expert analysis of the



(Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Miguel Sanchez, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment)

(Left to right) 1st Lt. Mike Gilotti, the fire support officer for Company A, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment; Naseer, Jawadine, electrical power plant mechanical engineer manager; Bob Perry, Joint Project Management Office (JPMO) Analyst; Capt. Christian Thompson, JPMO specialist; Kaeel, Jawadine, electrical power plant physical engineer manager; and Pfc. Ryan Kitchens, Co. A fire support team member, all stop for a photo at the Jawadine electrical power plant during their visit to the plant in early August.

project and finalize the assistance the U.S. Army would provide. Gilotti and Kitchens spoke with Thompson and Perry on their findings and were able to set an appointment for them to speak with engineers whom they had already established a working relationship. At the meeting, Thompson and Perry spoke with the physical and mechanical engineer on issues regarding timelines and milestones of the project.

"Alpha Company has done a tremendous job with this project and bringing it to the attention of JPMO. Because of them, a lot of people in Al-Katieb and neighboring areas are going to get the help they need," said Perry.

Proposals for needed assets and ideas of what the Army

could provide were addressed.

"It is a good feeling and a personal accomplishment to be able to provide this assistance. I joined the army to be a forward observer, a job whose purpose is the destruction of targets. Now my job is reversed to aiding the construction and restoration of targets" said Gilotti.

"Every day is a new challenge to engage and help the community that we work with, helping the people of Baghdad doesn't always mean finding and shooting up insurgents," Kitchens said.

"Sometimes it is about the little things we do that matters the most," he said.

"Willingness and Skill" Keep 'Felons' on Top of Their Work Load

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

BAGHDAD - When a Soldier is outnumbered, the typical image that comes to mind is a combatant beset on all sides by enemy troops, but Soldiers of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division out of Fort Carson, Colo., are outnumbered by something different: vehicles.

"Felon" Company, attached to the Fort Riley, Kan.-based 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Inf. Div., is responsible for maintaining all of 2-12 Inf.'s vehicles, in addition to all other equipment from generators to night vision goggles.

The company has been supporting the 'Warriors' for almost a year now with a ratio of 10 vehicles for every one mechanic in the unit.

In a warehouse across the street from their battalion's headquarters, the unit accomplishes this daunting task under cover of darkness. The facility has a variety of trucks with a variety of problems. Some look like nothing is wrong with them; others are in obvious need of repair.

Staff Sgt. Lance Scott, a motor sergeant with Felon Co. from Redding, Calif., said getting the job done takes two ingredients from everybody: willingness and skill.

"We cover down in a lot of directions all the time," he said. "Everybody's got to be willing to do the job below them and have

the ability to do the job above them."

Light infantry companies are not typically assigned as many vehicles as they have now. As a result, forward support companies such as the Felons do not have the equipment or personnel to take care of an entire battalion.

"The (modified table of organization and equipment) was set up for our mechanics to maintain what an infantry battalion would be, which is probably 25 percent of what we currently maintain," Scott said. "That's how we're geared for our mechanics that we have currently. We're well over what we're supposed to be maintaining."

To counter this challenge, the Felons taught preventive maintenance checks and services classes to the companies they're responsible for, hoping to prevent a deluge of work.

"You've got to hold them to a standard. Something as basic as them not putting oil in the vehicle, can cause us to have to replace an engine," said 1st Lt. Shawn Trout, the battalion maintenance officer of Felon Co., 2-12 Inf. from Manchester, Vt. "Something as simple as that, can cause us four days of work."

For leaders in a unit as undermanned as theirs, avoiding creating anymore work for their Soldiers and finding a way to keep them fresh are challenges, but Trout and his non-commissioned officers have managed through rotating their troops on different shifts and giving them time off.

As tough as keeping up with all the



Spc. Scott Case, a truck driver with Company F, 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment from Valinda, Calif., works on a humvee during the unit's weekly preventive maintenance checks and services at the unit's motor pool at Forward Operating Base Falcon in southern Baghdad, Sept. 3.

equipment of a battalion way over its limit, that's only half of Felon Co.'s mission. The other half is making sure the units at the Coalition Outposts have everything they need.

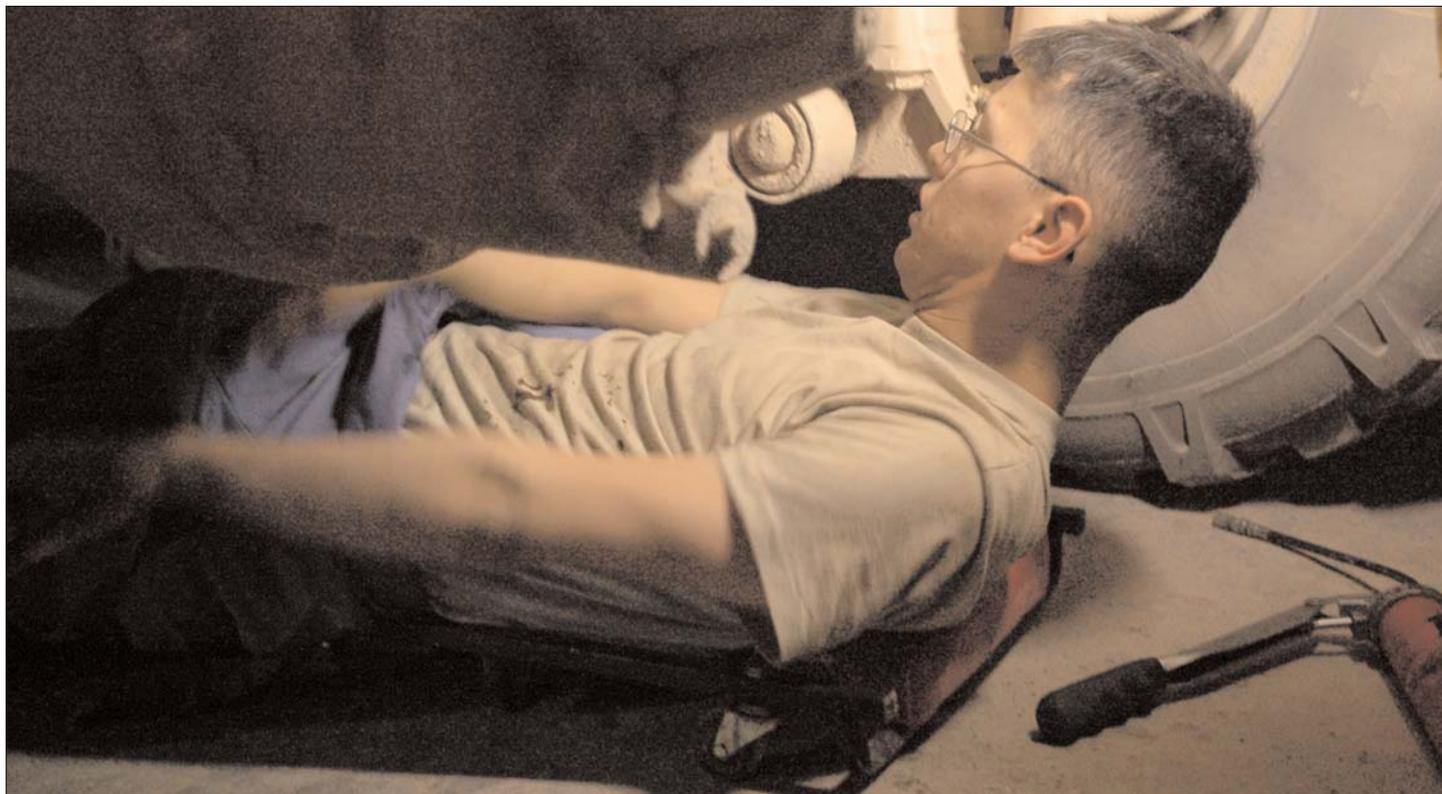
The distribution platoon does that, and more. In addition to supplying the COPs, they escort explosive ordnance disposal teams, run recovery missions, and give up Soldiers for base security.

"We're kind of stretched out all over the

place," said Staff Sgt. Freddie Hicks, the distribution platoon sergeant from Garrett, Ky.

"It's been a learning curve, every day over here. There's not a lot of training that goes on out here, it's all real-world. You don't have the luxury of a lot of time to teach them how to do stuff," he said.

"You just have to tell them, 'Hey, you've got a job to do,' and they get it done," Hicks said. "I've got a great platoon."



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

Spc. Michael Godwin, a cook with Company F, 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, from Bowie, Md., inspects the bottom of a light medium tactical vehicle during the unit's preventive maintenance checks and services at Forward Operating Base Falcon in southern Baghdad Sept. 3.

Captain Honored in Army-Wide Photo Contest

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

BAGHDAD - 'Combat Camera' is a term reserved for members of the U.S. Army Signal Corps who document the history of their service through still and video images.

The commander of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division's Signal Company is not a com-

bat cameraman, but he has been recognized for his skills in still photography recently in a service-wide competition.

Capt. Kollin Taylor, commander of Company C "Cobras," Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 4th IBCT from Miami, received honorable mention in a Department of the Army photography competition.

For a man whose interest in photography was first realized at the age of 10, receiving the distinction was a hum-

bling experience.

"Looking at the awards of other people, it was in good company," the Jamaica-born Taylor said. "When I say 'honorable mention,' I am honored to be mentioned in their company."

For the annual competition, there are two groups, civilian and military, with five sub-categories: people, places, objects, experimental and military life.

Taylor's submissions went through contests at Fort Riley, Kan., the U.S. Army Forces Command and at the Department of the Army levels. The photographs had to finish in the top five of each round.

Taylor's award-winning photos were in the places and people categories in the military group, one of a Soldier at 4-1 BSTB's force protection lanes at Fort Riley, Kan., and the other during the 4th IBCT's rotation at the National Training Center of Fort Irwin, Calif.

"The good thing about it is it's a Soldier from 1st ID," Taylor said of his photo entitled 'Big Red One.' "I've been in the unit for the last six years, basically, and everything's in black and white except for the red in the patch. That's a great source of pride for me."

While 'Captain Snap Shot,' as some call him, is satisfied with the plaudits he has received, he does not plan on relishing in the success he's had; instead, he'll be back next year, looking for more.

"I'm a competitor. When I compete, I want to win," he said. "When I look at it, I submitted 50 photos and only two were selected for honorable mention. The two that were selected weren't among my favorites to win."

Taylor has come a long way from when he first picked up a camera as a 10-year-old displaying a knack for getting good pictures. Along the way, he's learned lessons he doesn't mind sharing with aspiring photographers.

"Practice makes perfect; the more you shoot, the better you get. Never be afraid to challenge yourself," Taylor said. "If you look at what other people are doing, don't necessarily try to copy them, but they may give you good ideas."



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

Capt. Kollin Taylor, commander of Company C, Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division from Miami, is a regular at events around Forward Operating Base Falcon in southern Baghdad, such as a change of command ceremony, June 21.

'Phoenix' Feeds the Masses at FOB Falcon

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

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FALCON, Iraq - When most Soldiers here enter the "Dragon's Lair" Dining Facility, they may not understand the importance of why they must have proper identification to get inside. They also may not understand the gravity of their job when they're tasked with guard duty at the dining hall or why the Soldiers working there take their jobs so seriously.

Sgt. Antonio Williams understands.

Williams, an assistant contracting officer technical representative at FOB Falcon's dining facility with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 610th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, and his Soldiers are responsible for ensuring health standards are maintained in the kitchen and all necessary force protection measures are taken.

The Wisner, La., native said Soldiers may think the dining facility staff's job is easy, but they should look again.

"It's more than what the eye can see; when you come in during mealtime, you see us walking around monitoring, doing regular force protection, and adjusting any issues cus-

tomers may have," Williams said. "That's just on the outside. It's pretty demanding at times, but we manage."

In December of 2004, the dining facility at Forward Operating Base Marez was attacked by a suicide bomber dressed as a member of the Iraqi Security Forces, killing more than 20 people and wounding almost 70 more. The burden of preventing a similar attack at FOB Falcon falls squarely on the shoulders of the 'Phoenix' of 610th BSB.

Pfc. Lakrisha Kendrick said her fellow Soldiers help her with the weight of this responsibility.

"My NCO keeps me motivated, and if you need help, you can talk to him about anything, and my fellow section members also," she said. "You know there's always someone around to help you, and all you have to do is ask."

With the Soldiers operating the dining facility responsible for force protection, maintaining sanitary standards, a 24-hour takeout area, monitoring employees coming and going, and ensuring proper storage of food, the troops rely on each other a lot to complete their mission for the sake of every resident of FOB Falcon.

In Williams' eyes, the Soldiers' most



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

Soldiers get lunch at the 'Dragon's Lair' Dining Facility at Forward Operating Base Falcon in southern Baghdad Sept. 13.

important task is maintaining their focus while monitoring who enters the facility.

"Everything that you do, you have to pay attention to what you're doing. It could be that one time that you miss, the one time you're not paying attention to detail and that guy slips through and you don't check him properly, he may have something on him and something happens in the dining facility," Williams said.

"Then you're going to look at it as 'that may have been the guy that I let through.' That's how you look at it as a big responsibility.

"Every little part might be so small, you may have got 50 right, but it could be that one guy on my watch that I let get through, that I did not check properly," she said.

Cleaning up Baghdad Streets, One IED at a Time

By Maj. Sean Ryan
2nd IBCT, 2nd Inf. Div. PAO

FORWARD OPERATING BASE LOYALTY, Iraq - When Soldiers from Company A, Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division based out of Colorado Springs, Colo., needed a third Husky driver, one of the most critical jobs for clearing the streets of Baghdad, they used the old fail-safe method to determine the next operator: rock, paper and scissors.

Despite the stiff competition, Sgt. Nicholas Denning overcame the odds and won the job.

While it may sound like a joke, Company A has so many qualified Soldiers to do the job, since so many are on equal footing.

But make no mistake, the company nicknamed the "Assassins" takes its trade very seriously and definitely walks the walk, as they lead all companies in Baghdad with 48 improvised explosive devices found, more than doubling up their closest competition.

Denning, from Keokuk, Iowa, peruses the streets of Baghdad looking for the evil that has been responsible for nearly 70 percent of the casualties within his brigade's area of responsibility - improvised explosive devices. To date, Denning has found an amazing 22 IEDs, saving countless lives -- U.S. troops, Iraqi Security Forces and innocent Iraqi civilians.

The seven-year veteran is no stranger to the streets of Baghdad, as he first started working as a Buffalo operator, another type of mine-clearing vehicle.

Denning has well over 300 missions



(Photos by Maj. Sean Ryan 2nd IBCT, 2nd Inf. Div. PAO)
Sgt. Nicholas Denning, Co. A. STB, 2nd IBCT, checks the mechanical arm on his Husky vehicle before going on a mission in eastern Baghdad Sept. 10. Denning has found 22 improvised explosive devices during his deployment and his company has been credited with finding 48, leading all companies in the Iraqi capital.

under his belt and is on his third deployment, two on active duty and one with the Iowa National Guard.

"The success comes from paying close attention to detail and never underestimating the enemy," Denning said.

"It is also comes from knowing your

equipment, the threat and great leadership," he said.

Despite his personal success, Denning is far from boastful and quickly points out it is a team effort and due to the constant training his platoon and company receives from his leadership,

which ensures every Soldier knows and understands the battlefield.

"It's also about not being afraid to stop the entire convoy if you think you see something," he said. "Sometimes it's worth the wait, but you can't expect to find something every time."

Capt. Robert Gordon, the Company A commander, called Denning "an outstanding Soldier and his vast background from previous deployments is different from everyone else's." Gordon agreed that the company's success comes from a team effort.

"The Soldiers can tell you everything about the vehicles' capabilities and what to look for on the streets," said Gordon, a resident of Colorado Springs, Colo.,

"On some levels, Sgt. Denning is no different than any Soldier we have. Everyone has to pay attention to detail. But, he is the lead guy and has a lot of pressure on him to navigate, push traffic (and) keep everyone else aware. I'm very happy we have such seasoned NCOs. His record of finding IEDs speaks for itself," he said.

Indeed, the job of looking for bombs on a daily basis is no easy task. Despite the risks of his work Denning said having the support of his family back home helps, and so does having great equipment.

"My family is real supportive and happy for all of our successes," he said.

"Without a doubt, the Army has supplied us with great equipment and the opportunity to save lives by conducting route clearance," Denning said.



Sgt. Nicholas Denning, from Keokuk, Iowa, a member of Company A. Special Troops Battalion, checks the mechanical arm on his Husky vehicle before going out on a mission in eastern Baghdad Sept. 10. Denning, part of the 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team from Fort Carson, Colo., has found 22 improvised explosive devices so far during his deployment and his company has been credited with finding 48, leading all companies in the Iraqi capital.

Colorado Eagle Scout Hopeful Energizes Community; 'Adopts' Fort Carson Troops in Eastern Baghdad

By Staff Sgt. W. Wayne Marlow
2nd IBCT, 2nd Inf. Div. Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE LOYALTY, Iraq - Soldiers with the 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division have received an unusually large number of

care packages from residents of Vail, Colo., as Eagle Scout hopeful Jeremy Windham organized the drive as part of his qualifying project.

Windham's high school football coach, Jason Sedlak, previously served in the Army with Maj. John Crean, the brigade's civil affairs officer, and native of Colorado Springs,

Colo. That led to Crean acting as a conduit between Windham and the brigade for the project.

Crean had experience with this before, as he had worked with adopt-a-platoon programs.

"They get companies and organizations connected with deployed units," Crean explained. But while he had done this type of work before, Crean was unaware how extensive this project would be. "I had no clue, none."

It would turn out to be an astounding 250 boxes crammed with snacks, lotion, toiletries, clothing, games, books, and almost anything else the donors could think of.

"Jeremy just went to work," Crean said. "The next time I heard from him, he said, 'We're working on it and have some boxes ready to send.'"

The packages were for all 2nd IBCT Soldiers, but were addressed to Crean.

"I saw the boxes lined up next to the wall and thought, 'Oh my God!'" Crean recalled. With help from the civil affairs noncommissioned officer-in-charge, Crean "...found some tables and started placing products on them, along with Jeremy's contact information."

Crean said the overwhelming response reflects on Windham determination, as well as the generosity of his hometown.

"You never know what you're going to get when a community gets energized like Vail did," he said.

"This is a record, I think. This really has been above and beyond. It was a tremendous effort. I won't ever forget it," he said.

There are so many packages that they are opened a few at a time, then replenished as supplies dwindle.

"I know people appreciate it," Crean said. "Some people just right out tell you, 'This is great!' Others, you can see as they're walking away from the table, they're pretty happy."

The shipping costs totaled approximately \$2,000.

"I can't even fathom that," Crean said. "This was just an exceptional effort by that kid, family, and community to support 2-2 Infantry."



(Photo by Staff Sgt. W. Wayne Marlow, 2nd IBCT, 2nd Inf. Div. PAO)

Staff Sgt. Reynaldo Torres of Dallas, Company C, Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, sifts through some of the goods delivered to the brigade as a result of Vail, Colo., resident Jeremy Windham's Eagle Scout project.

Soldiers Take Citizenship Oath

2nd IBCT, 2nd Inf. Div. Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE LOYALTY, Iraq - Nine Soldiers who have been serving the United States are now officially part of it.

The Soldiers, assigned or attached to the 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, took their citizenship oaths Sept. 9 in Balad, Iraq.

Some waited more than a year; others were able to raise their right hands after just five months of paperwork. All of the new citizens seemed equally happy with the end result.

Since the new citizens are Soldiers, the Immigration and Naturalization Service waived the citizenship application fees. Officials traveled from Rome to administer the oaths.

The Soldiers and their home countries are: Pfc. Liang Cao, China; Pfc. Guillermo Velandia, Colombia; Spc. Maria Andrin, Philippines; Pfc. Rene Adamos, Philippines; Spc. Esquipula Andrade, Nicaragua; Spc. Richard Chacon, Colombia; Pfc. Pierre Exilhomme, Haiti; Spc. Valentin Ramirez, Mexico; and Sgt. Kou Yang, Thailand.



(Photo by Sgt. Lilia Ramos, 2nd IBCT, 2nd Inf. Div.)

Nine Soldiers serving with the 2nd IBCT, 2nd Inf. Div. took their U.S. citizenship oaths in Balad, Iraq Sept. 9. (Front row, from left) Pfc. Liang Cao, Pfc. Guillermo Velandia, and Sgt. Kou Yang. (Back row) Spc. Richard Chacon, Pfc. Rene Adamos, Spc. Maria Andrin, Spc. Esquipula Andrade, Spc. Valentin Ramirez and Pfc. Pierre Exilhomme.

Commitment Pays Off for Paratroopers in Adhamiyah

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

BAGHDAD - Staff Sgt. Shane Glowcheski is normally a man of few words. Out on patrol, the platoon sergeant with the 82nd Airborne Division is all business, dark sunglasses and an unreadable expression on his face.

But on a recent afternoon, as he described the renovations his unit was helping to make on a girls' school in the northern section of Baghdad's Adhamiyah District, Glowcheski's poker face suddenly lit up with enthusiasm.

"We got marble floors. We got computers. We got art work up on the walls. We've even got gardens. It's Beverly Hills!" boasted the Rapid City, S.D., native.

Glowcheski and the rest of his platoon from Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, have good reason to feel proud about their achievements.

With the new Iraqi school year just around the corner, the platoon has six school renovation projects on the verge of completion. Even so, when his deployment began eight months ago, he never imagined he would care so much about a flower garden at a girls' school, Glowcheski said.

"We've done stuff I never thought we would do, let alone be excited about," said Glowcheski.

Early this year, the 2-319th "Black Falcons" became one of the first units to push into Baghdad as part of the "surge," an influx of thousands of troops into Baghdad neighborhoods to improve security and give the government breathing room to get on its feet.

They know they are making an impact on this community, one they think will be sustainable. And, in some surprising ways, the community is making a lasting impact on them.

"If you're only here for six months, you can just say, 'OK, let me just do my time and go home.' But 15 months? It's a commitment. We're going to have guys who have lived in Iraq longer than they've been in the Army," said Fayetteville, N.C., native 1st Lt. Larry Pitts, Battery B's commander.

"It's hard for the Soldiers and it's hard for their families back home, but in the long run, with this 15-month, stable operation - not moving around from sector to sector - we've been able to provide exactly what the surge was intended to do: security and transition," Pitts said.

Stabilizing the security situation was the first priority when the Black Falcons moved into the northern portion of Adhamiyah in February and established their headquarters at Coalition Outpost War Eagle, a joint U.S.-Iraqi Army compound straddling the east bank of the Tigris River.

The immediate task was to clear the area of hardcore insurgent cells responsi-

ble for attacks on Coalition and Iraqi forces. The first few months were a blur of constant foot patrols and nighttime raids, Pitts said.

"In the beginning, the most important thing was to make the people feel secure," said Staff Sgt. Antonio Alvarado, a squad leader from Edcouch, Texas.

The aggressive stance the battalion took early on allowed it to dismantle the major explosively-formed penetrator, improvised explosive device and weapons smuggling cells in the area, said Capt. Andrew Woodward, of Baltimore, the battalion's assistant intelligence officer.

By removing the major threats to the area's security forces, the battalion freed up more combat power for other tasks, Woodward said.

The improved security situation left the Black Falcons with what was, in many ways, an even more difficult challenge: rebuilding the local community's shattered political and economic infrastructure.

As spring turned into summer, the battalion's officers found themselves struggling with purchase requests and work contracts, instead of operation orders.

Nineteen-year-old artillerymen were suddenly acting as social workers. For many of the paratroopers in the battalion, this was uncharted territory.

"I've been trained how to do things like enter and clear a room, react to contact, give first aid to a casualty, but there's no way to train someone how to build a school, or get the Iraqi government to pave a road. You just have to figure it out," said Warner Robbins, Ga., native Capt. Joe Miller, a military transition team advisor attached to the Black Falcons.

Still, the paratroopers approached their new mission as professionals, Glowcheski said.

"Regardless of the task you get, you want to make sure you do the best job possible," he said. To get the job done, the paratroopers had to overcome some initial distrust from Adhamiyah residents.

"In the beginning, we didn't believe them, because there have been a lot of promises made by the Coalition Forces," said Gahenyah Sinshehab, the headmistress at a local school who has worked closely with the Black Falcons on improvement projects.

But Gahenyah was eventually won over by the commitment she saw from the paratroopers.

With each of Battery B's school renovation projects, for example, the paratroopers were involved in every step, inspecting the sites on a regular basis with the contractors to make sure the work was on track. During a visit to one of the schools recently, Pitts checked every classroom.

At one point, he stood in a doorway, poking chunks of loose plaster out of the wall with a massive, gloved finger.

"Is this first class? This is not what I



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

Rapid City, S.D., native Staff Sgt. Shane Glowcheski (right), a platoon sergeant with Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, and Sgt. Hector Hernandez (top), a squad leader, are joined by a young student while taking a breather on the steps of an elementary school being renovated in the Gray'a neighborhood of Baghdad's Adhamiyah District Sept. 9.

call first class," Pitts told the contactor, as the plaster dropped to the ground. Before he left, he made the contractor promise to fix the problems.

That same level of commitment has been displayed in projects ranging from the creation of a new water pumping station, to the rehabilitation of a local park, to hiring contractors to suck up the rivers of waste water that flooded the streets, and more.

More than 35 projects have been completed so far and more than \$3 million paid out to local workers, said Wichita, Kan., native 1st Lt. Brook Carrier, the assistant civil-military operations officer for the battalion.

The projects have had a ripple effect, Pitts said.

"It's provided the community a sense of pride, it's put people back to work, the markets are busy thanks to the new income. There have been a lot of benefits," he said.

In time, the people were won over.

"People didn't trust the U.S. Soldiers, at first, but now there is a bond,"

Gahenyah said. "Now, we don't want them to go."

One of the most unexpected benefits, at least for some of the paratroopers, has been the personal stake they developed in making the area better.

"You try not to put a personal touch on it, but eventually it wears on you. You see the kids, and you see their faces - how happy they are. It's a good feeling," said Pitts.

As the projects go forward, the paratroopers have noticed a new sense of optimism in the community.

"I don't think you can change people over night, but we've definitely made an impression," said Pvt. Todd Thomas, of Hillsboro, Ohio, a radio operator with Battery B. "There's definitely a new sense of pride."

Even for an old-school paratrooper like Glowcheski, that's something to feel good about.

"Our area is really going somewhere," Glowcheski said. "A lot of people didn't believe in us, but now they are seeing it with their own eyes."

Program Integrates Iraqi Soldiers into U.S. Units in Northern Adhamiyah

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

BAGHDAD -It was late in the afternoon, and the paratroopers from 2nd Platoon were pulling security at the end of a quiet residential street. Their interpreter was inside one of the houses, helping the platoon leader interview a source.

Before long, a group of women clad in black approached, shouting and causing a scene. Normally, with no interpreter on hand, it would be hard for the paratroopers to figure out why the women were upset. But in this instance, there was an easy solution.

"Sal, go talk to them," suggested squad leader Staff Sgt. Antonio Alvarado to the Soldier next to him.

'Sal' got up off a knee and strolled over to the women. Conversing easily in Arabic, he quickly calmed them down and had them describe the problem. As they spoke, he jotted down the information in a green notepad to give to the platoon leader later.

How is a Soldier in a U.S. platoon able to communicate with Iraqis so well? Simple - he isn't a U.S. Soldier at all. 'Sal' is actually Hanni Sadoon, a sergeant from the Iraqi Army embedded with the 82nd Airborne Division.

In the northern Adhamiyah area of eastern Baghdad, Sadoon and more than 20 other soldiers from the 3rd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 11th Iraqi Army Division are embedding with paratroopers from the 2nd "Black Falcon" Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment in a new program designed to foster partnership and expose the Iraqis to U.S. military techniques.

Currently each of the Black Falcon platoons has four embedded Iraqi soldiers. The soldiers stay with the platoons for 60 days, and then return to their own units. The first group of embeds is about halfway through the program.

The program has advantages for both sides. The Iraqi soldiers learn new techniques and tactics, while the American platoons get the benefit of the embedded soldiers' cultural



Sgt. Yasser Ahmed, from the Iraqi Army's 3rd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 11th Infantry Division, talks with local women during a patrol in the Grayat area of Baghdad's Adhamiyah District Sept. 5. Yasser is currently taking part in a program that embeds Iraqi troops for two months with platoons from the 82nd Airborne Division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team.



(Photo by Sgt. Mike Pryor, 2nd BCT, 82nd Airborne Division Public Affairs)

Staff Sgt. Julian Romo (right), a squad leader with B Battery, 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division from Los Angeles, shares a few pointers with Sgt. Yasser Ahmed, an embedded counterpart from the Iraqi Army's 3rd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 11th Infantry Division, during a patrol in the Grayat area of Baghdad's Adhamiyah District Sept. 5.

knowledge.

"It's a great advantage to me as a squad leader, because it's like having an extra soldier and an extra interpreter at the same time," said Alvarado, an Edcouch, Texas native.

Day in and day out, the Iraqi and U.S. troops pull guard duty together, listen to the same briefings, and go out on the same raids and patrols. The paratroopers have given all the Iraqis friendly nicknames, as well as "Double-A" 82nd Airborne patches to sew onto their uniforms. Basically, the embeds are like replacement soldiers who happen to be Iraqis.

"Once we're out on the street, we treat them just like a 'Joe.' They're just another Soldier," said Staff Sgt. Shane Glowcheski, a Rapid City, S.D., native acting as a platoon leader for Battery B, 2-319th AFAR. Glowcheski currently has four Iraqi troops embedded in his platoon.

On a recent patrol, Sadoon and Alvarado took the point together, leading the patrol down winding streets and talking with local merchants along the way. At one point, Alvarado stopped to talk to a man sitting sprawled-out on a curb. After a while, Sadoon came over. He listened for a while, then turned to Alvarado.

"Majnoon," he said, pointing a finger at his head and wiggling it in a circle: "Crazy." The man was apparently deranged.

"Oh, I thought he was trying to tell me something," Alvarado said as they continued the patrol.

For the paratroopers, walking several miles a day on patrol is routine. The Black Falcons conduct engagement patrols constantly throughout the area, building a rapport with the community.

"That's why we're so good in this sector, because we got the trust of the people," said Glowcheski.

For the Iraqi Army, gaining that trust has proven more difficult. Because the IA is required to man so many check-

points, the Soldiers have little time to do the kind of dismounted engagement patrols that have proven successful for the Black Falcons.

The embed program gives selected members of the IA that opportunity, said Lt. Col. Al Shoffner, the battalion commander.

For the embeds, it means learning to use a softer touch when dealing with the local people. Glowcheski said that under Saddam Hussein the Iraqi Army never did peacekeeping operations; it was strictly a fighting force. Some of that attitude still lingers, he said.

"They're very aggressive. We're trying to tame that down and show them that they only have to be aggressive when they need to be aggressive," Glowcheski said.

It's an attitude that the paratroopers believe is crucial to success in a counter-insurgency fight and to the long term ability of the IA to be successful.

"We're trying to guide them to interact with the people more, so the people will trust them and come to them first, so that when we're out of Iraq they'll be able to depend on the IA forces," said Alvarado.

After several weeks of patrolling with the Americans, Iraqi soldiers like Sadoon say the message is starting to sink in. The most important thing, he said, is to take an active role in the life of the community.

"We keep in touch with the locals and see what their needs are, what they are suffering from, like the power and electricity, and also the security issues," Sadoon said.

The next step for the embeds is to return to the Iraqi Army with their new skills and teach them to their fellow soldiers, Glowcheski said.

"They need to take all the things we're teaching them, from the battle drills to the counter insurgency stuff, and take it back to their unit," he said. "That's really the point of all this."

Stryker Soldier is Still "At Bat" After Three Strikes

By Spc. Shea Butler
7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP STRIKER, Iraq - Imagine being a wife at home back in the states with your husband far away in a war zone. You go about your life filling every minute of your day with anything to keep your mind off of the inevitable, when suddenly you get a phone call. The voice on the other end says, "I'm at the hospital. I've been injured. Don't worry I am fine." Your heart sinks and you are helpless. There is no way to assure yourself that he is OK.

Sgt. Gregory Rayho's wife has taken that dreaded phone call not once, but three times since July 2006.

Rayho, a team leader with 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, received his second Purple Heart on Sept. 12. He is waiting to be presented with his third when he gets back to Fort Lewis some time later this month. He earned all three during his 15-month deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 06-08.

The phone calls to his wife never got any easier, he said. It got to the point where she didn't believe him. She always thought it was worse than it was.

The first incident occurred in Mosul in October, 2006.

"We were patrolling a road they call the 'wall of death' when an IED (improvised explosive device) hanging from a tree detonated," the Collinsville, Ill., native said. "The armor in the Stryker soaked up most of the blast, but the force was still strong enough to sheer all my back teeth out of my mouth."

"I felt like I got hit with a shovel, it knocked me out pretty good," Rayho, 30, said. "You don't realize how many nerves you have in your mouth until they are all exposed and throbbing."

Rayho had to get temporary teeth all through out his mouth. He said that they have held up surprisingly well.

"I had to relearn my entire mouth again," Rayho said. "That's something you take for granted. One day everything is fine and the next you are teaching yourself to eat without food falling out of your mouth."

When Rayho made it to the medical station he had to make the phone call home to his wife and let her know what

happened.

"I down played what happened because I didn't want her to worry and I knew she wouldn't understand," he said. "I did call my Dad and tell him the whole story. He is a colonel in the Air Force and I knew he would understand."

Word of the full story eventually got back to his wife and it worried her, he said. From then on, she made Rayho's commander call to confirm all injuries for extra assurance.

The second incident happened in May just outside of Sadr City. This incident came as a surprise to Rayho and his troops, he said.

"The truck behind us got hit with two IEDs," he said. "Time just stopped because all my buddies were back there and I didn't know how bad it was."

Rayho and his battle buddy immediately started returning fire. It was a complex attack with sniper and rocket-propelled grenade teams opening fire after the IEDs went off, Rayho recalled.

"They started assaulting us after they hit us with the IEDs. That was the first time I had ever seen anything like that," Rayho said. "They thought we were in a lot worse shape than we were, but we put up a good fight."

"I remember turning to another guy in the truck and his face was covered in blood. We came down from the hatches to reload our weapons and examine ourselves, he said. "My arm started to go numb and I realized the blood on his face was from my wrist."

Rayho still doesn't know if it was shrapnel or a bullet, but whatever it was is still in his wrist to this day, he said.

"After the fight I got taken to Taji to get medically evaluated," he explained. "They took x-rays and said that it hit a major nerve. They adjusted the object out of the nerve cluster to help him get feeling back."

This incident took him out of the fight for 10 days, the first incident had only taken him out for three days. Rayho was anxious to get back on the battle field, he said.

"I didn't want to get gun shy, so I try to get back out there as soon as I can," Rayho said. "I have to be out there for my guys. If something happened to one of them I don't know what I would do. They keep me going out there day after day."

The final incident was enough to take him off of the



(Photo by Spc. Shea Butler, 7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

Sgt. Gregory Rayho, a native of Collinsville, Ill., and a team leader with 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, receives his second Purple Heart on Sept. 12 from Col. Steve Townsend, his brigade commander, and a native of Griffin, Ga. Rayho will be presented his third Purple Heart when he returns with his unit to Fort Lewis.

battle field, he said.

It was July in East Rashid when Rayho and his battle buddy were pulling concertina wire off of the back of the truck when a deep-buried IED went off, he recalled.

"My gunner miraculously only got a concussion and I got rocked pretty hard," he said. "I broke two ribs and there was nothing we could do. There was no enemy so we just had to roll out."

"There isn't much you can do with broken ribs," he said, "and as much as it killed me, that injury finally took me out of the fight."

Most people would be nervous to go outside the wire after being injured so many times, but not Rayho. You just have to go out there and conquer your fears and set a good example for your Soldiers, he said.

"The first days back after an injury you find yourself riding a lot lower in the hatch," he said. "You might not be as good as you were before the injury but it doesn't take long to get back in the swing of things."

Rayho advises others who have been injured to conquer their fears and get back on the horse, he said.

"My Soldiers keep me on the road. I don't know what I would do without them," he said. "Also, our combat medics are amazing they have come to my rescue every time."

"I know my medics would fight like hell to get to me and get me better," he said.

"Just short of instantaneous death, I know I am coming back alive because of them," he said.

He said that he's tried to explain all of this to his wife, and even though she doesn't understand it, she is still very supportive.

Rayho will be reunited with his wife and two step-children at the end of this month, he said, where she can finally examine him for herself. This time, she won't need his commander to tell her how he is doing.



(Courtesy photo)

Sgt. Gregory Rayho, a native of Collinsville, Ill., and a team leader with 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, received his second Purple Heart on Sept. 12. He is waiting to be presented with his third when he gets back to Fort Lewis some time later this month. He earned all three during his 15 month deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 06-08.

1st Cav Celebrates 86th Birthday in Iraq

By Spc. Benjamin Gable
7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq - The 1st Cavalry Division celebrated its 86th birthday with a cake cutting ceremony and a few words from Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Fil, Jr., commanding general of the First Team and Multi-National Division-Baghdad at the Pegasus Dining Facility here Sept. 13.

"To all the troopers, the friends and family members of the First Team, I thank you all for your selfless service and sacrifice, and I wish you all a very happy birthday!" Fil told a stand-room-only crowd.

With those words, the cake cutting was underway.

During the birthday celebration, troopers with 1st Cavalry Division enjoyed a cake resembling the large patch they wear so proudly.

The 1st Cavalry Division Band was on hand serenading those in attendance with birthday music.

Fil chose the youngest Soldier in attendance to help with the ceremonial cutting of the cake. The Soldier, and his father, teamed with Fil to do the honors.

"That was pretty exciting," said 19-year-old Spc. Thomas Rogers, a native of Jackson, Mo., and an automated logistics specialist with the 35th Engineer Brigade (Corps), a National Guard unit based out of Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

"We just got here a couple of weeks ago, and I can see the tradition already," said Rogers' father, Lt. Col. Andrew Rogers, also with the 35th Engineer Brigade.

The tradition of the First Team ties it



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

Brig. Gen. Vincent K. Brooks, deputy commanding general for support for Multi-National Division-Baghdad and the 1st Cavalry Division, serves dinner to a Soldier at the Pegasus Dining Facility Sept. 13 at Camp Liberty in western Baghdad. The First Team celebrated its 86th birthday with a large cake resembling the division's patch and by donning their Stetsons.

to the days of the old west.

The division was formed in 1921. That year, a legacy of tradition, pride and heritage was born with its formal activation at Fort Bliss, Texas Sept. 13.

However, 1st Cavalry Division units have served the nation since 1855. The division was originally set up to patrol the

Mexican border.

The cavalry, which worked mostly on horseback, was called on to put an end to illegal smuggling along the Mexican border.

Since those early days, the 1st Cavalry Division has seen action in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War, a deployment to Bosnia-Herzegovina and is currently serving in its second deployment Operation Iraq Freedom.

During the rich history of the division, 37 First Team Soldiers have received the Medal of Honor for their heroic actions in

combat.

Maj. Gen. Robert L. Howze served as the first commander of the First Team from 1921-1925.

In 2003, 1st Cavalry Division aviators were part of the main push into Baghdad, and the entire division deployed in 2004, helping to set the stage for national elections in January 2005.

The 1st Cavalry Division's tenth deployment in its 86 year history is coming to an end, and First Team Soldiers will soon be returning home.



Spc. William Morgan, a member of the 1st Cavalry Division's Honor Guard, presents a sword to Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Fil, Jr., commanding general of the 1st Cavalry Division and Multi-National Division-Baghdad, before the ceremonial cutting of a birthday cake Sept. 13 at the Pegasus Dining Facility at Camp Liberty in western Baghdad. The First Team celebrated its 86th birthday at the filled dining facility, complete with balloons, Stetsons and steaks.



A cake in the shape of the 1st Cavalry Division shoulder patch was part of the 86th birthday celebration for the division at the Pegasus Dining Facility at Camp Liberty in western Baghdad Sept. 13.

First Troopers Return Home

By Sgt. Robert Strain
1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs

KILLEEN, TEXAS - The first three troopers from the 1st Cavalry Division's 15th Sustainment Brigade arrived to the Killeen-Fort Hood Regional Airport Sept. 17 to waiting family members and fellow troopers.

The Soldiers are the first of the brigade's advance party and are the first of the division's troopers to return to Central Texas, said Maj. Carl Womack, the rear detachment commander of the 15th SB.

One of the Soldiers on the flight was Honolulu native Sgt. Pomaikai Garza, a radio operator with the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 15th SB.

Garza said he had been looking forward to getting home and seeing his wife Tanya, instead of just talking to her on the phone. But that would have to wait a few more minutes.

Tanya, a Los Angeles native, was running a few minutes late because she had prepared some lunch for him and had struggled with some balloons she had brought for him, which were the very first thing Garza noticed about his wife of seven years.

For her, the very first thing she noticed was that he had lost weight since he was home last.

In order to pass the time until Garza returned home,

Tanya said she became more active in her work as a real estate agent, volunteering more of her time and helping out with fund raisers.

She also said that during the deployment, which was his second since he arrived at Fort Hood in 1999, she had become more independent, learning to do things on her own.

Tanya explained that a couple of weeks ago, when she had found out her husband was coming home, she had to prepare for his arrival by putting all of his stuff back where it was before he left.

She had also redone one of the floors in their house, and had to ensure that all the furniture was back in place.

Eventually, when it came time for his flight to arrive, she explained that she was so nervous that she needed her sister, who lives in Killeen, to come to the airport with her.

All of the Soldiers who arrived on the flight received a three-day pass before beginning their reintegration training, said Capt. Stephanie Harris, the rear detachment commander of the Brigade Troops Battalion.

Harris explained that although only three troopers came home on this flight, the flow has begun, and more troopers won't be too far behind.

"I think they're happy to see people coming home," Harris said.



(Photo by Sgt. Robert Strain, 1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs)

Sgt. Pomaikai Garza, with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 15th Sustainment Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, greets his wife, Tanya, at the Killeen-Fort Hood Regional Airport Sept. 17 after returning from his second deployment to Iraq.

Couple Gets High-Tech Help Exchanging Wedding Vows

By Janna Lewis
Fort Hood Sentinel Staff

FORT HOOD, Texas - Sometimes a marriage just doesn't need a big, fancy wedding. But it may need a little high-tech help to make it happen.

Spc. Craig Bowes, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, and his fiancée, Rachel Holmes, used all the modern amenities of the 21st Century in a

video teleconference wedding at the division's headquarters here Sept. 7.

"For a variety of reasons, couples decide not to wait to get married," said Chap. (Maj.) Daniel Kinjorski of the 1st Cav. Div.

"Even in the middle of a war, life goes on. A VTC wedding is a viable option to accommodate Soldiers and their Families," he said.

VTC weddings require witnesses and chaplains on both ends of the camera, but they're just as legal as if the bride and

groom were in the same room together, Kinjorski said.

The VTC allows them to see each other via a television monitor and camera and hear each other through a microphone and speaker with only a five-second audio delay.

Bowes and Holmes were able to see and speak to each other through the entire ceremony and after. The first words Bowes said to his fiancée via the connection were, "You look so beautiful, Rachel."

"All I cared about was becoming Mrs. Craig Bowes," the bride said after her wedding. "I don't need the big ceremony or the big white dress. But I do need Craig."

The couple met 18 months ago in Austin. They started talking about getting married a year ago.

"We were driving in the car and we just started talking about it," Holmes said.

"So there really wasn't a formal proposal. We just decided together to get married. I can't imagine my life without him now," she said.

The couple had planned to marry earlier, but a death in Bowes' Family forced them to postpone wedding plans until later.

"We decided six weeks ago to just do it," Holmes said.

"We wanted to get married and decided to worry about a ceremony later. He's been gone since October of last year. I miss him so much," she said.

Holmes wore a simple white dress and carried a single pink carnation. She was attended by friend, Cassandra Ramsey.

"Rachel didn't want a whole lot of fuss," Ramsey said. "This day means a lot



Rachel Holmes stands with a single pink carnation during her marriage to Spc. Craig Bowes, a HHC, 2nd Bn., 8th Cav. Regt., 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div., who is currently serving in Iraq. They were wed via video teleconference Sept. 7.

to her and Craig. It's cool that they could still do this even with him in Iraq."



(Courtesy photos)

Rachel Holmes stands with a single pink carnation during her marriage to Spc. Craig Bowes, a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, who is currently serving in Iraq. They were wed via video teleconference Sept. 7.

Spc. Bowes returns from Iraq in January.

Soldiers Show Greater Strengths than Superman

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

BAQOUBA, Iraq -- Superman was known for his daring feats of greatness, his ability to fly as fast as a locomotive and his ability to exhort unbelievable amounts of strength when the citizens of Metropolis needed to be saved.

While the Soldiers of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, are not aliens from the planet Krypton, nor can they fly as fast as a speeding train - or fly at all, they do possess the same amounts of physical strength Superman does - a feat they proved at the Forward Operating Base Warhorse Strongman Competition, Sept. 9.

With events like the tire flip and the humvee pull, where the Soldiers flip a tire just under their height and drag a humvee down a road across a finish line, these Soldiers stationed in Baqouba, Iraq, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 06-08, proved they are just as strong, if not even stronger, than the great "Man of Steel."

"We are here participating in the FOB Warhorse Strongman Competition to help build morale and let loose and have some fun," said Capt. Michael Anderson, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 215th Brigade Support Battalion, and a native of Griffith, Ind.

"It's a mixture of Soldiers, NCOs and officers joining in a day of camaraderie, showing off our physical strength and endurance, and just hanging out together and having a good time," he continued.

"This is all about teams and competition," added Spc. Joseph Armstrong, HHC 3rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion. "It's also about individuals trying to prove who the best of the best is. It's just everyone trying to be all that they can be."

"I'm competing in the individual competition. I'm competing in the tire flip, the chain pull... and the humvee pull," said the Freeport, Texas native.

All the competitors were in top physical shape, ready for both the physical and mental challenges that lie ahead of them.

"This is the first time I've ever done an event like this," Armstrong said. "I think they're all going to be tough and mentally challenging. You really have to go out there and push yourself to give it your all."

In pushing himself to his max capabilities, Armstrong spoke about the burning pain one can feel in their muscles and how to overcome those circumstances.

"I don't think of the pain," he said after completing the chain drag event. "When I get out there, it's an adrenaline rush. With



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

As his buddies look on for safety reasons, a Soldier with the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, pulls a military humvee down a long stretch of road during the Forward Operating Base Warhorse Strongman Competition, Sept. 9. The event was a chance for Soldiers to show their strengths and build morale during their deployment to Iraq.

your adrenaline pumping, all the pain goes away.

"When I'm getting ready for an event, I don't think about nothing but me and accomplishing my objective," he continued. "I don't focus on anything else out there, just me."

With Soldiers from all over Warhorse attending the event as spectators, proudly cheering on their fellow battle buddies as they performed feats of strength, Soldier morale was highly on display, helping the competing Soldiers to push themselves further to achieve a higher goal.

Events like these that raise morale are just what Armstrong and Anderson said they enjoy about competing.

"Events like these do help morale because it gets the athletes and the [spectators] pumped up," said Armstrong. "You got your brothers and sisters competing so you root for them just as much as you root for yourself."

"You want to see people succeed in events like these," he continued. "Everyone's giving their all and you have to respect

that; and that's why you support and root for everybody."

"These events are very important because all day we are trapped inside these gates of the FOB and we get to go out on the road and hangout outside the wire for a little bit, but this is still nothing like being back at home," said Anderson.

"This is important because this brings Soldiers together, gives them an event that they may watch or participate in back at home, and gives them a chance to let loose a little and have fun," he said.

"I think it would be very good to have more events like these out here because you're not just challenging others, you are challenging yourself and what you can accomplish," said Armstrong. "It helps improve your mind, body and spirit."

"All these events are great for the Soldiers and I'm very happy that we are able to let go of some steam today," Anderson agreed.

"Sometimes, this is what's needed to help us get by," he said.

Rapper from 'Bel-Air' Making Big Mark on Big Screen

I've been told recently that my reviews have too many clichés in them. We all have our favorite sayings and I guess when it comes to talking about movies, I have a few redundant phrases I repeat.

The whole situation of catch phrases and clichés made me think of a "Saturday Night Live" skit with Ray Romano and Tim Meadows. The skit is a parody of a typical sportscast on ESPN.

Meadows' character starts the show talking about current sporting events and great highlights. With each amazing play or performance he would say common sports catch phrases like "Booyah!" or "Who's your daddy?"

When Romano's character started talking about different sports segments, he would say off-the-wall comments.

A few of my favorites were, "Sweet Sassy Molassy" and "You better show up to White Castle before the weird dudes show up."

The skit was a great parody of a typical



day watching "Sports Center."

The reason I bring this up is that I promise to, a) try to stay clear of common crutch clichés; and b) not to use any off-the-wall, silly phrases.

So, here goes a cliché-free review. I promise.

The movie I watched this week was "Pursuit of Happyness," and yes, the "y" is supposed to be there.

This film stars Will Smith, a salesman who is trying to simply survive and support his son and girlfriend. One bad incident after another sees Smith's girlfriend dumping him, getting kicked out of his home and still try-

ing raise his son at the same time.

With his life seeming unbearable, Smith is given the opportunity to participate in a fast-paced internship with a lucrative stock brokerage firm.

The catch is that it's a 30-day course which pays nothing.

With sheer determination to make something of his life, Smith pushed himself to great lengths to succeed during the internship, while taking care of his son.

It's a classic tale of an underdog trying to overcome adversity. Everyone can relate with that type of character.

I truly feel that Will Smith has established himself over the years. He was outstanding in this film. I have come to love his films, but what really did it for me was his performance in "Legend of Bagger Vance."

I'll admit that I like probably 90 percent of the movies I see. Some I like more than others, but this film really stood out to me.

I think I really liked this movie

because of its main message: don't give up. At one point in the film, Will Smith tells his son to never, ever let anyone tell him he wasn't good enough to do something, even him.

After this movie was over, I just felt an energy that a great movie can produce. I felt like I could take on the world and that my problems were mere pebbles in my hand. That is what made this movie so great.

Over the years I have considered a lot of films to be a five out of five-caliber, but when a movie just stands out over others, I feel that they shouldn't be graded in the same league. I consider these movies "Superior Gold"

I felt that this film truly stood above most. I would consider this film to be higher caliber than most.

If you're in the mood for a great uplifting movie, this is your film. I give it five out of five Golden Spurs and stamp it with a Superior Gold label, too.



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

Sweat and Stamina In Remembrance of Sept. 11

Runners take off on a five-kilometer run, Sept. 11, dedicated to those who lost their lives in the terrorist attacks Sept. 11, 2001. The Camp Taji, Iraq run marked the sixth anniversary of the day in American history which eventually brought these Soldiers, Airmen and civilians to Iraq to fight the global war on terror.

Letters Home

Columnist Reminisces About the Year in Sports

With less than a month before my redeployment, it's time to recognize those who made this year at war worthwhile.

Thank you, Atlanta Falcons, for signing quarterback Byron Leftwich. This is right on par for the organization. They were on their way to losing 13 games and thereby guaranteeing themselves the number one pick in the National Football League draft. I see Leftwich starting by week eight, and leading the Falcons to at least four wins, thereby falling out of the number one slot. Just tank the season already!

I'm sorry Rory Sabbatini. Tiger Woods just won more tournaments in six weeks than you have in your entire nine-year career. Earlier this year Sabbatini, when asked about Tiger's dominance, said he was "beatable this year." Insert foot into mouth. Tiger finished the year by winning four of his last five starts and taking home the first-ever FedEx Cup trophy. Face it Rory, Tiger is the greatest golfer to ever live, and he doesn't even know who

Trigger Pull

Spc. Benjamin Gable



you are.

I love you Britney Spears. You are single-handedly making us all look so much better. You're so stupid and sure of yourself. Who would have ever thought Kevin Federline was the responsible one? And to think, you used to be America's sweetheart. (Note: Britney, if you are actually reading this; Forgive me? Call me?)

Congratulations to Tuesday Morning Quarterback on ESPN. After reading their predictions for week two in the NFL, I did exactly what they said. Start the Cincinnati Bengals defense versus the Cleveland Browns. Cleveland went on to score 51 points and totaled 554 yards.

Now instead of being 2-0 in the office fantasy football league and talking trash to my co-workers, I'm 1-1 and staring directly at 1-3 after this week's match up. Come on, Sgt. Cauley, trade me wide receiver Steve Smith for LaDainian Tomlinson, straight up.

I miss you WNBA. Well, not really. The Women's National Basketball Association season is finally over. The Phoenix Mercury defeated the Detroit Shock in game five of the finals. Who cares, right? I've said all along, lower the goals to eight feet and let the chicks start dunking. I'd buy floor seats for that.

Get well soon, Notre Dame. Last year's run at the Bowl Championship Series has turned into this year's "From Justin to Kelly." Honestly, I love the Fightin' Irish. My first favorite sports team was their 1988-89 national championship team, with my first favorite athlete, Raghib "Rocket" Ismail. Lou Holtz, former head coach at Notre Dame once said, "On this team, we are all united in a common goal;

to keep my job." I miss those days.

Farewell to Atlanta Braves center fielder Andruw Jones. His .220 batting average is approaching the Mendoza line. Andruw hasn't helped the Braves playoff push, or my fantasy baseball team. He is a free agent after this year, so this should also fall under "Congrats on your promotion" category. Jones will end up in pin-stripes next year, helping the "Bronx Bombers" chase another World Series title.

So, here's to the last year in sports - signed, sealed and delivered. For me, I'm looking forward to a graduation letter from the Professional Golf Association, the one that says I've graduated from amateur to pro status on my PGA member's card. That's not likely to happen soon, or ever.

Either way, I'll be on the Courses of Clear Creek after redeployment doing what I love most, playing (i.e. making mammoth divots, four putting and hitting perfect drives into the side of someone's home) golf.