



**"Warrior" Receives
Bronze Star for Valor**

Page 7



**Spartans Lend a Hand to
Museum**

Page 14



**Eagle Strike Troops Plan
to Play Vital Role in
Baghdad**

Page 23

Crossed Sabers

Volume I, Issue 26

Telling the MND-Baghdad Story

Monday, Nov. 26, 2007



(Photo by Sgt. Mark B. Matthews, 27th Public Affairs Detachment)

The first shipments of Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles have arrived at Camp Liberty in western Baghdad and are being fielded to units who operate in areas with the highest threat levels. These are the first of an estimated 7,000 MRAP vehicles expected in theater by early summer.

New Armored Vehicle Rolls into Baghdad

By Sgt. Mark B. Matthews
27th Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Towering high overhead and aligned one after the other in a seemingly endless row, the next generation of combat vehicles roll into Iraq.

The new Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle is currently being fielded here for the first time anywhere, and Soldiers are getting their first hands-on look at the latest development in troop protection.

"I'm really impressed by the vehicle, main-

ly because of the height, and the fact that it can drive about 20 to 30 degrees on its side without rolling over," said Brooklyn, N.Y., native, Spc. Marquis Dawkins, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division. "It is also much more comfortable. The makers of the MRAP were definitely thinking about the Soldiers."

The MRAPs come in two categories. Category one holds up to six Soldiers and will

See MRAP Page 4

Commanding General Says Efforts Make Baghdad Safer

By Pfc. April Campbell
27th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGHDAD – The Iraqi capital is a safer place than when the 1st Cavalry Division took over responsibility of the Multi-National Division - Baghdad area of operation nearly a year ago, according to its commanding general.

Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Fil Jr., commanding general of MND-B and 1st Cav. Div., met with members of the press to talk about the progress in Baghdad over lunch at Freedom Rest, a rest and recuperative resort area, in Baghdad's

International Zone, Nov. 7.

Fil, who has overseen the troop surge in Baghdad, answered questions regarding the sustainability of the reduction in violence, the city's progress toward returning displaced Iraqis to their original homes and the decreased effectiveness of al-Qaeda.

While violence spiked over the summer, Fil said it has steadily declined since then. This drop in violence is largely due to the increase in Iraqi

See Safer Page 4



(Photo by Maj. Randall Baucom, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. PAO)

New Patriots

Iraqi boys from the Taji area of northwestern Baghdad stand atop the roof of the Sheik Support Center Nov. 8. The boys observed and listened to local tribal, government and military leaders discuss security, economic and essential service issues during the Northwest Baghdad Regional Summit. (See Page 4 for article)

Sacrifices Remembered by Commander, People of Ameriyah

By Lt. Col. Dale Kuehl
Commander, 1st Bn., 5th Cav. Regt.

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Placing into perspective the loss of our Soldiers is not an easy thing to do. We have lost 17 Soldiers either assigned or attached to 1-5 Cavalry since we arrived in November last year. We lost two Soldiers in December, one in February, 11 in May, two in June and one in August.

The loss of every Soldier is hard. Each person has their own way of dealing with the death of their comrades. For the Soldiers it is very personal, for it is the buddy they are with every day. As a commander I feel the pain of each loss as if I have lost a member of my family, I feel responsible. I am the one who has decided how we would fight the insurgency in our area of operations. Any mistakes made in this approach are my responsibility. I make decisions that could lead to the death of the men and women who have placed their trust in me. When parents see their children enter the Army, they pray that their leaders will take care of them and do everything they can to keep them safe.

It is a responsibility I do not take lightly.

This responsibility hit me full in the face in May. By this time we were in a daily fight with al-Qaeda in Iraq in Ameriyah and it was getting increasingly violent. On May 2 a military policeman and an interpreter were killed by a deep-buried improvised explosive device. The MP's husband was in my personal security detachment and I had to break the news to him that his wife was killed. The next day we lost another Soldier to a deep-buried IED.

A day later I was out at Joint Security Station Bonsai when we got word that a Bradley got hit in Ameriyah. We had been getting hit with small arms fire and mortars as we conducted evacuation on previous

incidents so I ordered another platoon down to help secure the area. A Humvee from this platoon hit another deep-buried IED. A sergeant died immediately. One Soldier struggled to stay alive. I remember the doctors working feverishly on him at the Combat Support Hospital. Some of my PSD donated blood, but he finally succumbed to his wounds the next day. A third Soldier from that Humvee lost both legs and later died of his wounds.

One of the things I have had to accept is the death of three Soldiers based on an order I gave to their platoon. I probably would make the same decision today, but it still gives one pause. I banned the use of Humvees in Ameriyah on that day. A few days later we lost a staff sergeant to a sniper; a sergeant I knew very well, and was fond of.

A couple weeks later, on May 19, I was in Taji as a guest speaker at the Counterinsurgency Academy. We were waiting on a flight to get back when I found out that an IED flipped a Bradley. We lost six Soldiers and an interpreter. My command sergeant major and I managed to get an earlier flight and rolled out to the site. I went out in a Humvee, despite my own rule against it. The fire burned so long that evacuation of the dead had not been completed. I will never forget pulling out charred bodies from the wreckage. Six more Soldiers and one interpreter were killed establishing security to emplace an outpost that I ordered to be occupied.

By this time the whole command was tense. In the face of adversity such as this the natural reaction is to lash out. Officers wanted to conduct a major clearing operation of Ameriyah. Soldiers were frustrated and wanted to avenge the loss of their comrades. I knew it was important for us not to overreact. I worried about our morale and the ability of the Soldiers to maintain their discipline.



(Photo by Sgt. Jack Androski, 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment)

Soldiers from Company B, 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment take a much deserved break from guard duty at their newly-established Coalition outpost in the Ameriya neighborhood of western Baghdad.

I am not sure if they believed in what I was preaching, but to their credit they maintained their discipline which was to play a major factor in defeating Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Last week, I had lunch with one of the imams. He said that our Soldiers gained the respect and trust of the locals by the way they handled themselves in May. He said we could have come in with helicopters and tore the place up and people would have understood why we did, but we didn't. He said the people saw the sacrifices our Soldiers made for their community and will be ever grateful.

On May 29, one of the local sheiks said that they were going to go after Al-Qaeda. I'm not going to go into this in detail because plenty has already been written on it, but it was to prove to be the turning point in Ameriyah. From that day forward we went on the offensive.

We lost two more Soldiers in June while we were fighting alongside the volunteers that we now call the Forsan al-Rafidain, (which in Arabic means "knights of the river"). Both of these Soldiers were from Company A, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, a Stryker company attached to us at that time. Throughout June and July the Forsan, the 2nd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division and 1-5 Cav., rooted Al-Qaeda out of Ameriyah.

We turned the insurgency on its head with our Soldiers understanding the terrain better than the enemy. AQI had to bring in fighters from other places. It was some of these outsiders who planted another deep-buried IED that exploded Aug. 7, disabling a Bradley, killing the driver. Within 36 hours, the Forsan identified and located the cell that did this and we rolled them up.

This event was the last significant attack

we have had on our Soldiers.

Today marks exactly three full months since our last IED. We had one small arms attack on one of our patrols and a couple on the IA, but in general, the area is quiet. We have not had any indirect fire since July. We no longer have dead bodies littering the streets with no murders that we can account for through September and October.

A local council is forming helping us to prioritize our efforts in bringing services to the community. We have cleaned up the streets and just started an extensive sewage cleaning project. The city is helping to clean trash and the Ministry of Electricity is even improving the network and people are reporting improvements in available electricity. Soldier morale is also greatly improved. Soldiers who thought I was nuts in

May are now amazed with the progress they see. Local nationals seem to be friendlier. They are inviting the Soldiers into their homes for tea and food. Instead of dodging bullets, I have had to start dodging invitations to dinner because I am gaining weight. I even went to a wedding and was asked to bless the happy couple. We sat in the back of a yard in Ameriyah with our flak vests off, smoking cigars and drinking tea with the father of the groom.

The past year has been an emotional roller coaster. I have had some of the worst days of my life... but I also have felt a strong sense of accomplishment. We have had the good fortune of seeing tangible progress made in our time here. I am confident that we have established a much more secure environment for the people we have been tasked to protect.

However, a part of me is afraid to believe what we have accomplished, knowing what it has cost to get us to today.



(Photo by 1st Lt. Jason Collins, 1st Bn., 5th Cav. Reg., attached to 2nd BCT, 1st Inf. Div.)

Pfc. Sean Behan and Sgt. Clinton Rollings from, B Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, attached to 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, take cover while providing security in the Mansour district of Baghdad during a company mission in May of 2007.



Commanding General:
Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Fil, Jr.
Public Affairs Officer:
Lt. Col. Scott Bleichwehl
Command Information Supervisor:
Master Sgt. Dave Larsen
Editor: Sgt. Nicole Kojetin

Contributing Writers: Maj. Randall Baucom, Sgt. 1st Class Kap Kim, Sgt. 1st Class Robert Timmons, Sgt. 1st Class Rick Emert, Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp, Sgt. Mike Pryor, Sgt. Robert Yde, Sgt. Serena Hayden, Cpl. Nathan Hoskins, Cpl. Ben Washburn, Spc. Alexis Harrison, Spc. Ryan Stroud, Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma, Spc. Courtney Marulli, Spc. Ellyn Nieves, Spc. Angel D. Martinez, Spc. Shejail Pulivarti, Spc. Ben Fox, Pfc. April Campbell, 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.

"Freedom Rest" Leads to Poolside Reflection

"There is a pool in Jerusalem...where a great number of disabled people used to lie... one who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there... he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" - John 5

Chaplain's Corner

Chaplain (Lt. Col.)
Steve Walsh



Sgt. John Bascomb stretched out on the comfortable mat next to the Freedom Rest swimming pool. It had been a long and difficult week and he needed to relax. The stress of combat was getting to him.

This was his third tour in Iraq and he was just 90 days from redeploying. He wondered if he would survive. Forty-six of his buddies had already been killed, and only last week, Cpl. Roberts had been shot in the leg by a sniper, Pfc. Sampson had lost an arm, Spc. Bingham lost a foot in a grenade attack; and then there was Sgt. Jackson who had been killed instantly when he stepped on an improvised explosive device during a routine clearing operation.

As Bascomb rested by the cool water of the pool built during Saddam's heyday, he tried to focus his mind. It had been spinning for months but he'd kept it a secret from everyone. Slathering his body with sunscreen, he lit a cigarette and plugged in his I-Pod. His skin tingled in the burning rays of the 120-degree heat.

All around him were Soldiers completely oblivious to his mental state as they jumped from the high dive and played volleyball in the water. Yet he knew that most of them were going through the same private struggles and doubts. Nearly all of them were members of his platoon and they'd all shared the same experiences. Nevertheless, he felt alone.

He closed his eyes and tried to will himself to sleep. But he kept seeing the small American flag patch that Jackson wore on his right shoulder. It was one of the few shards of Jackson's uniform that had survived the blast. What a mess, he shuddered, recalling the gruesome scene for the ten-thousandth time.

They'd retrieved what little they could of Jackson from the water, laid the dripping mass in a crinkly black body-bag and zipped it up. Technically they couldn't even identify the body because there wasn't enough left to recognize. The poor medic had fished around in what was left of Jackson's trousers and found a wallet. Of course, everyone knew it was Jackson, but someone would have to conduct a DNA test in order for Jackson's wife and kids to get the insurance.

Bascomb lit another cigarette and turned on his side, but he couldn't get the image of Jackson's bloody American flag patch out of his mind. He thought of it when his eyes were open and he saw it when his eyes were closed. It popped into his brain like a red, white and blue ghost rising up out of the recesses of his mind. Lord, what a mess.

But what really troubled Bascomb was that he'd seen much worse. This was his third time in Iraq and he'd witnessed death in every one of its gruesome faces. Besides, it wasn't like he and Jackson were close. The kid only been assigned to the unit for a couple of months. So why was Jackson's death replayed over and over in his mind? It didn't make sense. He took a puff on the cigarette and rolled over just in time to watch Pfc. Jones and Spc. Taylor jump from the 30-foot high-dive. And for one sweet moment he laughed at their crazy antics.

Finally Bascomb dozed off in a dreamless sleep. The hours passed until he finally opened his eyes to discover he was alone. The others had drifted off to eat chow, watch TV or play video games.

He lit another cigarette, stared up at the heavens and exhaled. Dusk had turned the sky into a yellowish-blue wash. He felt empty, drained, devoid of any emotion -- flat-lined.

Ninety more days and he'd be home. Strange, he was

not even sure where home was any more. He'd been deployed for three out of the past five years. And besides, "Go home to what?" he thought. Ever since he and his wife separated there was nothing to go home to.

Taking a deep pull on the cigarette, he studied the soft white crescent moon that was rising slowly over Baghdad. It was the moon of Islam materializing out of the fading sunlight. Somewhere in the distance he heard the call to evening prayer.

He exhaled a blue cloud of smoke and wondered why he and his wife had ever separated.

What had been so important that they'd felt the need to separate? After all the human misery he'd seen in Iraq he couldn't think of anything worth bickering about. Sure, they'd both made some mistakes, but in hindsight most of it was over stupid stuff.

Anyway, he figured that about 90 percent of their problems had been due to his immaturity. He had been a tough guy with big dreams. But after three combat tours he'd realized that he was just a tough guy with "big drama."

Gazing into the heavens he silently admitted that he'd been a lousy husband and father. He'd once had the love of a good woman and of a son who adored him. His face flushed in shame and he was thankful there was no one nearby to see him.

Suddenly he felt the need to get back to work. But why, he wondered. What was so important about work? Then he realized that work was his escape. He was a junkie, addicted to work because it made him feel good; it provided him the identity and purpose that he should have found in his family. That was probably the biggest reason why his marriage failed, he thought. At least that was what his wife told him. But he knew that it was much more than that.

His drinking hadn't helped any, either. Well, now his wife and son lived in Akron with her mother and he longed to apologize to them, to say he was wrong and to somehow make it up to them.

He wasn't a religious man, but for the first time in his life he felt like saying a prayer. And just as he bowed his head to utter a few words, his eye caught a momentary twinkle high in the heavens. At first he thought it was the sun's reflection off a high flying jet. He sat up and peered skyward until he could scarcely make out a small gray dot hanging alone against the last rays of daylight. Mesmerized, he watched as it appeared to drift upwards and then slowly downwards as if in an arc. At first he couldn't tell if it was moving away from him or toward him. Perhaps it was a helicopter, but he knew they rarely flew alone. Maybe a soaring bird, but the movement was too smooth, too fast. What about an observation balloon? Too high.

He absently crushed out his cigarette, never taking his eyes off the strange sight. What the devil was it he wondered? And then something inside him clicked - he knew exactly what it was - it was a mortar round. An icy chill crept up his neck as he watched it slowly ascend to the pinnacle of its trajectory and then gradually plunge downward like a roller coaster topping its first hill.

He wondered where it would land. It was impossible to tell. He could barely see its oblong shape silhouetted against the sun's last rays. It looked like a tiny football thrown by some mythic god to an unknown receiver. He suddenly thought of how he and his son had sung the national anthem when they went to see the Dallas Cowboys. Then his mind flashed to a bizarre image of Sgt. Jackson's bloody American Flag patch waving from the flagpole above the stadium. The mortar shell gradually

drew nearer and he could make out its stabilizing fins. They reminded him of when his boy pleaded with him to help build a spaceship for his school science project.

"Ask your mother," he'd snapped. "I've got something to do at the unit." He'd lied.

He'd really gone fishing with his buddies. He felt ashamed now. Guilty and embarrassed, he knew he'd really screwed up. What the hell was he thinking? So many regrets. "God, make me well," he silently asked. "Give me another chance."

As the object grew larger, he thought of running. But in what direction? There was no telling where it would land. It might hit short or long or wide. Besides, there were no bunkers at the pool. He tried to calculate the path of its trajectory like he used to estimate infield pop-ups when he played baseball.

He began to guess where the shell would land as if he was going catch it. But he didn't want to catch it. He wanted it to go away. And he longed to be with his wife and son. If only he had another chance.

The mortar round was growing larger now and he knew it would hit nearby, maybe right on top of him. He wanted to yell, "Incoming!" but no sound came. He was completely hypnotized watching the object drop closer. "God!" he cried, expecting the shell to land right in his lap.

And then it hit. For an instant there was a blinding flash followed by an enormous concussion knocking Bascomb sprawling across the courtyard, his ears ringing, his legs in pain and his eyes looking skyward at an enormous canopy of water pouring down on him.

He tried to make sense of the shower until it dawned on him - the shell had hit in the deep end of the pool! It was unbelievable - the shell had hit in the deep end of the pool! He began laughing as he laid there clutching his side looking up at the water raining over him.

God had heard his prayer, and for one strange moment he thought he saw a man's face materialize in the watery mist. Yes, it was a man's face, a face smiling at him. And he saw for the first time what his Bible-thumping friends had tried to tell him. God was real and he had heard his prayer.

He was baptizing him, washing him clean of his guilt and shame; making him well. 'Reborn' was the word that came to his mind. Bascomb's tears streamed down his face and mingled with the cleansing water until his giddy laughter turned into great sobs of happiness.

When they found him he was struggling to get up, "Are you alright?" someone asked. Bascomb shook his head in a daze, "I saw the face of God," he muttered. And they thought that he had lost his mind. But before anyone could say another word and to everyone's astonishment Bascomb stood up and limped off saying he had to make a phone call.

When he heard the woman's voice on the other end of the phone he excitedly told her the story of a Soldier who had once lost his way, but had been found by the grace of God. Of a Soldier who had asked God to make him well, and of how the greatest victory in Iraq had been the divine forgiveness that the Soldier had received.

It is said that 90 days later when Sgt. Bascomb stepped off the plane in Dallas, he was met by an attractive woman holding the hand of his young son.

Perhaps you feel like Sgt. Bascomb - alone, empty, drained, devoid of any emotion -- flat-lined. Maybe you struggle with the sights, sounds and smells of war. Or maybe you have regrets about past mistakes or guilt over things you have done.

Perhaps you are facing marriage problems that seem insurmountable. As Sgt. Bascomb learned, with God all things are possible, and in his brief moment of prayer Bascomb's life was changed forever.

If the story of Sgt. Bascomb sounds familiar, the only question to ask yourself is: "Do you want to get well?"



(Photo by Spc. Shejal Pulivarti, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Fil Jr., commanding general of the Multi-National Division-Baghdad and 1st Cavalry Division, speaks to a tribal sheik about establishing Iraq's self-sustainment during the Northwest Baghdad Regional Summit near Taji, Iraq Nov. 8

Summit Connects Govt. to the People

By Maj. Randall Baucom
1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. PAO

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Sheiks of all tribes, Iraqi Police, Iraqi Army leaders, representatives of the Iraqi government, as well as senior leaders from the 1st “Ironhorse” Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division and Multi-National Division - Baghdad gathered at the Sheik Support Center near here to discuss bringing the region back to the government of Iraq during the Northwest Baghdad Regional Summit Nov 8.

This was the third installment of a series of reconciliation meetings that have taking place between the Sunni and Shia sheiks in the Taji area of north-west Baghdad in the last four months. This summit was the first time tribal and governmental leadership from Abu Ghraib, Taji, Tarmiyah, and the eastern portion of An Anbar province have met with senior leaders from the Baghdad provincial government, national government and the Iraqi Security Forces.

“This meeting establishes the conditions to begin the conversations [between the government, tribes, and people] that allow the population to get more services which enable them to move forward to solve their problems (without the direct influence of the Coalition),” said Col. Paul E. Funk II, commander, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div.

A key topic was the development of a sustainable security arrangement, which incorporates an integrated Iraqi-centric security approach that is linked to local government. The plan allows Coalition Forces to shift away from direct involvement in security to refocusing on the reconstruction efforts of Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team and training Iraqi Security Forces.

“We’ve provided security, now we have to focus on getting the basic services established so this area, and Iraq as a whole, can be self-sustained,” said Lt. Col. Kevin MacWatters, commander, 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div.

A highlight was the move toward Iraqi-funded contracting of the Iraqi Security Volunteers and a move toward shifting their focus to civil service initiatives. With more than volunteers in the brigade’s area, security in the region has significantly improved, with enemy attacks down almost 90 percent in some areas since the Ironhorse Brigade’s arrival in December 2006.

With sustainable security returning to the region, attributed to the combined reconciliation efforts of the Sunii and Shia tribes, thousands of displaced Iraqis are beginning to return to their homes. As this trend continues, it becomes critical to transition the Iraqi Security Volunteer labor force into civil service initiatives that are linked to the local government.

Key to these initiatives is investment from the Iraqi ministries. The summit provided the opportunity for key Iraqi government, tribal and security leaders, capable of moving these initiatives forward, to meet for the first time.

“We’ve (Coalition, ISF, and ISVs) provided the security, stability and safety in this region and now it’s time to reconnect the government to its people,” Funk said.

“It is wonderful to finally see the Baghdad government visit the safe and secure province and see firsthand the potential that now exists through reconciliation and the ability to take the next step to political stability,” said Northwest Baghdad’s Embedded Provincial Reconstruction team leader, Tom Burke.

CG Says Cooperative Efforts Make Baghdad Safer Place

Safer
From Page 1

participation. Iraqi Security Forces and the Iraqi populace are both playing a large role in this, Fil said, and there is a grass-roots effort in Baghdad communities to stop extremist violence.

“The Iraqi Security Forces, themselves, have grown, and they’ve become much, much more effective, not only the Iraqi Army, but the Iraqi National Police and the Iraqi Police,” said Fil, a Portola Valley, Calif., native. “Perhaps even (more) significantly, the Iraqi people have just decided that they’ve had it up to here with violence.

“They’re turning away from al-Qaeda,” he added. “They’re turning away from militias, and, they’re turning toward legitimate security forces patrolling their streets.”

The general said people in Baghdad are beginning to return to homes they left behind. The government is also working to make sure those moving back in are the original homeowners.

“We are excited about people moving back into their homes,” said Fil. “We are also, being cautious to make sure that the rightful owners do, in fact, return to their homes.”

The Iraqi government, Fil said, is also working to make sure that vacant homes are



(Photo by Pfc. April Campbell, 27th Public Affairs Detachment)

Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Fil Jr., commanding general of the Multi-National Division - Baghdad and 1st Cavalry Division, speaks to members of the press during a luncheon at Freedom Rest, a rest and recuperative center for Soldiers in Baghdad’s International Zone, Nov. 7.

identified and their owners found.

Fil also addressed the diminished presence of al-Qaeda in Baghdad.

“There is no area where, I would say, al-Qaeda has a foothold anymore,” he said. The Iraqi people are largely to thank for the diminished effectiveness of the terrorist organization.

“What happened is classic counterinsurgency warfare,” he said. “That is, the people turned against them. When that happens, when the base from which they’re hiding and from which they are being supported turns against them, then the movement is really hindered.”

Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles Rolling into Iraqi Capital

MRAP
From Page 1

replace the humvee. Category two is a longer version, which can hold a crew of 10 Soldiers. Both vehicles, although different, bring the same ideas of troop protection to the fight.

“The vehicle has an angled bottom shell on it so it can deflect blasts a lot,” said Colorado Springs, Colo., native, Pfc. Nicholas Lane, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division. “Hopefully, it will keep us safer out there.”

Prior to the vehicles being handed over to the units for day-to-day use, the Soldiers are given extensive training on how to operate, drive and maintain the vehicles.

This training also introduces Soldiers to some new luxuries the humvee lacked, like pneumatic doors and suspended seats.

“Throughout this week we are learning how to work on the trucks, and we’re learning how to drive them,” said Lane. “This is the first course, and the vehicles are still new so we’re just taking it step-by-step.”

This training not only familiarizes the Soldiers with the vehicles, but gives them confidence in the MRAPs, as well, by giving Soldiers the opportunity to drive the vehicles over steep hills and tight turns.

“I feel blessed,” Dawkins said. “Knowing the capabilities of the MRAP gives me reassurance that even though I have a few more months here in Baghdad that I have a much better

chance of getting home to my family.”

The MRAPs were designed to be both safe and effective for Soldiers conducting patrols, convoy security and missions throughout Iraq.

As more trucks arrive in theater these trucks should play a vital role in providing security and stability to the people of Iraq.

An estimated 7,000 MRAP vehicles are scheduled to be in theater by early summer. The MRAPs are currently being fielded to units who currently need them the most and operate in areas with the highest threat.

Although the humvee is not expected to be fully phased out anytime soon, the MRAPs will begin to take its place as a new standard vehicle for the U.S. Army.



(Photo by Sgt. Mark B. Matthews, 27th PAD)

The new Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle gets taken out for a spin during a training course at Camp Liberty in western Baghdad, Nov. 1.

General Sees 'Glimmers of Hope' in Baghdad Neighborhoods

By Carmen L. Gleason
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – Just shy of his division's one-year mark of being on the ground in Iraq, the deputy commander for Multinational Division Baghdad said he sees "measured" and "remarkable" success within the capital city.

"We can see clear glimmers of hope, but a very clear recognition that the work yet to be done may be the hardest," Brig. Gen. Vincent K. Brooks said during a conference call Nov. 6 from Baghdad. He said this work will go beyond the traditional role of security and the concentrations of U.S. troops' efforts over the last year.

"(The work will go) much more into the kinds of decisions that must be made by the government of Iraq with the support of the Iraqi people," he said. "And that can't be taken for granted by any means."

The general said that while success is in sight, it still is perhaps a bit out of reach. "We're very sober about that as we approach it," Brooks said.

Brooks said there are many indicators of real change and momentum as his troops continue forward. He attributed these positive signs to both living and working with Iraq's civilian population in addition to increased partnership with Iraqi security forces and what he called the "psychology of security."

"The whole approach to protecting the population is what is at the heart of the effort," he said.

That is why, beginning in January, the first command outpost of U.S. soldiers was placed in the heart of the population so soldiers could live where they worked, he explained.

There are currently 71 of these outposts -- made up of joint security stations and coalition outposts -- located in the midst of the Iraqi people.

"In nearly every case, it was placed in the midst of where problems existed," Brooks said. The first one, he explained, was in the area formerly referred to as the Sunni Triangle, where al Qaeda traveled into western Baghdad, which also attracted elements of the Jaysh al-Mahdi militia.

"(It was) very costly for us to take that piece of territory away from both adversary groups, protect the population expanding away from outpost and change the environment for them," the general said.

Brooks said his troops are having success primarily because they live where they work.

"The population knows we didn't leave and as a result of that, the degree of confidence has been significant," he said. "And with that comes a belief that things are getting better."

The general said Iraqi citizens are realizing that things are getting better with their own actions. "The rising up of volunteer groups who are willing to stand against whatever threat has come into their area -- that indicates the rejection of criminal groups, and certainly that rejects the dangerous and deadly hand of al Qaeda," Brooks said. "We see this



(Photo by Lt. Col. Scott Bleichwehl, MND-B PAO)

Brig. Gen. Vincent K. Brooks (center, right), the deputy commanding general for support with the Multinational Division – Baghdad and 1st Cavalry Division, stops by a fruit and vegetable merchant's stall at a market in the eastern New Baghdad District of the Iraqi capital July 18. Brooks said Iraqis are now "enjoying the peace and stability that is starting to come back (into Baghdad)."

occurring throughout the area."

Brooks said more than 9,000 citizens have volunteered to provide security to important Baghdad areas, such as key sites and road intersections. In October, 1,600 of those were incorporated as legitimate police into the Iraqi security force upon their graduation from the Abu Ghraib training center.

The general also attributes his troops' successes to the addition of two and a half brigades into Baghdad earlier this year.

By serving as a "shot in the arm," Brooks said they significantly increased the capabilities of forces in the area.

"As a result, our persistence is different, our ability to apply pressure where needed is different, and our ability to act on quality information that flows in from the population being protected is also enabled by having more forces available," he said.

The general said the pressure has been applied in such a way that it has virtually broken the capacity of al Qaeda to move with freedom and to gain footholds within the population.

"(The surge) gave enough encouragement to the population to rise up and turn against them," he said. "We think there are no longer any strongholds or sanctuaries for al

Qaeda anywhere in Baghdad."

Brooks also lauded the efforts of Iraqi security forces in partnering with U.S. forces and therefore becoming more successful in the area.

He gave examples of two times within the past few weeks when Iraqi forces have played a key role in the planning and execution of successful missions: the rescue of eight Diyala province sheiks abducted by Shiia extremists on Oct. 29 and clearing of a mosque frequently used by terrorists in the northern part of Baghdad on Nov. 3.

"We see these types of indicators that the government of Iraq is increasing in its will to take action against any maligned actors and are successful as principle actors with us as partners," he said.

He also cited several instances where the Iraqi infrastructure and neighborhoods are being rebuilt and businesses are once again thriving.

"I sense that opportunity has never been greater," Brooks said. "Not only because of security, but also there is interest rising in the population. People are looking for things and are willing to commit themselves to making a difference."

"They are enjoying the peace and stability that is starting to come back (into Baghdad)," he said.

Freedom Radio ... the Station Just for You
107.7 Baghdad Live Programing 107.3 Taji

MON-FRI:

6am-10am "The Morning Buzz"

10am-2pm "The Mid-Day Distraction"

2pm-6pm "The Afternoon Mix"

FRI Evening:

6pm-9pm "Friday Night Flava"

SAT:

7am-8am "Smooth Jazz"

8am-10am "Totally 80s"

10am-11am "Strangers With Useless Knowledge"

11am-3pm "Weekend Overdrive"

SUN:

6am-10am "The Morning Buzz"

10am-2pm "The Country Convoy"

2pm-6pm "Classic Rock"

Pilots' Valor Honored for Thwarting Ambush

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Set up in five trucks with heavy machine guns, enemy forces sat in wait for a helicopter to fly over their location west of Baghdad on the last day of May.

It appeared their plan was to strike a blow to Multi-National Division-Baghdad by taking down a U.S. Army helicopter.

The enemy forces were trained and prepared with personnel to drive the trucks, man the guns and keep a lookout for any of the U.S. helicopters that patrol the skies of Baghdad in search of roadside bomb emplacers or insurgent mortar teams.

The 1st Air Cavalry Brigade's Apache crews had become a thorn in the insurgency's side by regularly disrupting terrorist attacks on Coalition Forces and Iraqi civilians.

As they waited, four Apache pilots from 1st "Attack" Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st ACB, 1st Cavalry Division, were getting an intelligence briefing before heading out on their mission. The intelligence indicated that there were up to 30 gun trucks in a specific area, and the pilots' mission was to check it out.

With both determination and caution, 1st Lt. Brian Haas, Chief Warrant Officers 4 Steven Kilgore and Elliott Ham and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Cole Moughon took to the skies to check the validity of the report.

All four said they thought from the onset that some sort of engagement was imminent. They expected to find at least several trucks with gun mounts that could easily be modified to attack air and ground assets.

The two Apache crews, each with a pilot in command and a copilot-gunner, came up on a truck and sedan that stopped suddenly; the occupants quickly exited the vehicles and low crawled toward a ditch. The crews didn't know if this meant the people were being cautious, preparing for a possible engagement by taking cover, or if they knew that an engagement was imminent.

"That instantly heightened our awareness; something is going on out here," said Kilgore, a Portage, Ind., native. "These people aren't just scared of us. They may be a little bit, to an extent, but there's something going on out here."

It didn't take long for their suspicions to be confirmed. "I remember ... thinking this is weird; something's up," said Moughon, from Gray, Ga. "We (in the lead aircraft) heard (Kilgore) make the call over the radio: 'Hey, I'm taking fire at my rear.' We heard (Haas) say there was a big gun. I looked over to my right, and I was about to say: 'Oh, I got it.' I just got out 'oh.' I could see the flash from the muzzle. I saw a stitch of dirt in the road coming up towards us."

It was even worse than the intelligence report had predicted; the trucks had more than just weapon mounts.

"We were looking for trucks with mounts – not trucks with heavy machine guns looking to kill us," Moughon said. "At that point, it was pretty scary, because I knew – back in February, we lost an aircraft to heavy machine gun fire – we knew what the deal was right away. We knew that we were in something pretty dangerous."

Kilgore spotted a gun truck about one-and-a-half kilometers away shooting at the helicopters, but there was a much more ominous threat.

"We started taking fire from my right side about 1,500 meters away," Kilgore said. "What I didn't know is there was another gun about 300 meters away in the same line that started shooting at the same time. That rattled the aircraft. It didn't hit ... but rattled the aircraft."

A seasoned Apache pilot with multiple deployments under his belt, Kilgore initially thought his aircraft had been hit.

"We were so close to the gun that when the aircraft started to rattle, I thought I was taking hits," Kilgore said. "I actually saw muzzle flashes from it. It was about 250 to 300 meters out my right door."

Within a couple of minutes, the Apache crews had gone



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

Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, commanding general of Multi-National Corps-Iraq, speaks Oct. 28 at Camp Taji, Iraq, about the actions of four Apache pilots on May 31 that earned the pilots Distinguished Flying Crosses. The pilots are (from left to right): 1st Lt. Brian Haas, chief warrant officers 4 Elliott Ham and Steven Kilgore and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Cole Moughon.

from searching for the gun trucks to becoming the targets of a planned ambush by the enemy forces.

"I was definitely at a position of a disadvantage, and I needed to gain an advantage," Kilgore said. "That meant ... moving out away from that (gun truck) to get out of his ability to track me. I was able to put a salvo of (rockets) on that gun truck and clear that gun truck. We came back later and destroyed the gun truck."

Both aircrews broke contact safely, and then came back in to engage the trucks and insurgents.

The trail aircraft had disabled one of the trucks, and Moughon and Ham in the lead aircraft took out another one on the second pass.

"They broke off that truck, and we followed them out and then came back in. (Ham) called and said he had trucks fleeing to the north," said Haas, from Ashley, N.D. "They came around and engaged there. We came in behind them and just kind of suppressed again as they were breaking. They shot another missile. I think we made two more passes."

With nearly half of the gun trucks already disabled, the aircrews were not about to let some of them get away to launch an ambush on another aircraft.

"I saw three trucks with machine guns in the back in kind of like a straight trail formation hauling ... down the road," Moughon said. "As soon as I got the sight on them, I launched the missile. I saw the guy swing his gun around and just a bright flash of the gun firing. The (driver) braked. The missile hit right in front of the truck and didn't do anything. We broke, I think (the trail aircraft) suppressed, then we came back around and fired another missile."

"(It was) the same thing; the guy knew what he was doing. He slammed on the brakes, but this time it killed the driver. That caused him to careen into his buddy and pushed him off the road. We further engaged with the (30mm) gun and got several guys that were running away. We just started (destroying the weapon systems) from there."

During the 15 intense minutes that the engagement lasted, the Apache crews were simply more prepared than the enemy, thanks to a whole team of Soldiers from the 1st ACB who provided support back at home base, Kilgore said.

He explained that the information on the gun trucks from the brigade's intelligence report, the operational briefing from the brigade operations staff and the aircraft maintenance and armament personnel all contributed to the mission's success.

"It's really the Army aviation team that led to this win, this success. I think we can all take pride in that," Kilgore said.

For their quick and heroic actions in the chaotic scene on

May 31, the pilots were awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses – the top aviation-specific military award. The awards were presented Oct. 28 by Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, Multi-National Corps-Iraq commanding general.

"I've been an aviator my whole career, and I've always wanted to be an aviator, since I was a little kid," Kilgore said. "The Distinguished Flying Cross ... is a special award. For me to be included in that group that has received the Distinguished Flying Cross – it feels a little humbling. There have been a lot of great aviators who have received the Distinguished Flying Cross and great aviators who haven't received the Distinguished Flying Cross. How do I match up to that? I don't know; maybe it's a one fight thing, and it was something special enough that someone took notice and thought that we deserved the Distinguished Flying Cross for it."

For Moughon, it still hasn't sunk in that he earned the prestigious medal.

"When I got to the unit, my commander (for Company B, 1-227th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion) had gotten a DFC for acts in OIF II. I got to looking at it, because I wanted to know what it was," Moughon said. "Then, I realized who all had got it before him. When somebody mentioned that we might get it, I thought: 'I am not in their company.' I'm just two years out of flight school. I was just trying to stay alive. Receiving the award was a very humbling experience and almost embarrassing. There are guys out here that do just as much every day – sacrifice every day to go out there and find the enemy and kill them."

While the pilots couldn't pin down what made their actions heroic, perhaps how they approached the engagement itself is telling as to why they received Distinguished Flying Crosses. In the initial moments of the engagement, with bullets and tracers flying past their aircraft like something out of "Star Wars" – as Moughon said – and with the Apaches outnumbered nearly three to one by gun trucks on the ground, the pilots never even considered high-tailing it to safety.

"I can't say that I thought: 'We should get out of here.'" Haas said. "I don't know why, but it never crossed my mind. Maybe that's just the way we are. I didn't come here to say: 'Yep, there's bad guys out there. I'm not going out there.' I came over here to – I'm not going to be naïve and say to make a difference – but I came over here to do my job and do it to the best of my ability. There's a lot of the guys that I've flown with before, and they're the same way. The hard part is finding (the enemy). We fly around Baghdad where there are millions of people and they all look the same; unless somebody is shooting at you, you don't know. When they shoot at you first, that makes it easy."

'Warrior' Receives Bronze Star for Valor

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

BAGHDAD – Spc. Jose Reyna doesn't like to talk about June 28, yet it's a day he'll never forget. The irony is that for his actions that day, he will be called a hero for the rest of his life.

To Reyna, it was nothing special. If you ask, he'd say he just did what anyone else in his platoon would do. The Army showed it disagrees by awarding Reyna the Bronze Star Medal with "V" Device for Valor in a ceremony at the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division's headquarters building in southern Baghdad, Nov. 8.

Reyna, an infantryman with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division from San Antonio, was on patrol in southern Baghdad's Doura region on June 28 when the two-section convoy he was in was ambushed.

A truck in Reyna's section was struck by a deep-buried improvised explosive device, and immediately faced small arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades.

With one vehicle already disabled and the gunner in his truck injured read the situation and reacted by getting in the turret and fought back. He even managed to render first aid to his driver while laying down suppressive fire until reinforcements arrived to take wounded to the cache.

"I grew up in the Army. I've grown up on these stories, but never thought I'd live or see them. Every day I'm around Soldiers, I realize they're living it every day," said Col. Ricky Gibbs, commander of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, which 2-12 Inf. is currently attached to.

1st Lt. Timothy Gross, Reyna's platoon leader from Grand Junction, Colo., felt Reyna receiving the Bronze Star for valor was fitting.

"This is completely appropriate, completely deserved. He's one of those guys who pushes in any situation," Gross said. "Reyna did an outstanding job. Only one in the section of trucks that was hit who was still fully capable to return fire, suppress the enemy, and push back the enemy assault.

"It could have been a lot worse if he wasn't rocking the .50 cal, pushing back."

Reyna said it felt good to be honored, but insisted any one of his fellow Soldiers would have reacted the same under the circumstances he faced.

"I'm honored, people saying I should be awarded this,



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

Col. Ricky Gibbs, commander of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division from Harker Heights, Texas, pins the Bronze Star Medal with "V" Device for Valor on Spc. Jose Reyna, an infantryman with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division from San Antonio, in a ceremony at the 4th IBCT's headquarters in southern Baghdad, Nov. 8. The 'Warriors' of 2-12 Inf., deployed from their home station at Fort Carson, Colo., but operate in southern Baghdad attached to the 4th IBCT, who hail from Fort Riley, Kan.

and people saying I did a good job," he said, "but I know every man in my platoon and in my company would do the same thing.

"It does mean a lot to be recognized. I appreciate the award they're giving me."

Gross emphasized that while he agrees the rest of the platoon would have acted similarly, Reyna still displayed rare boldness under enemy fire.

"It brings great credit to third platoon, but the great thing about it is that everybody in third platoon would have done

the same thing, all of them would have, if they were able to do so," Gross said. "But Reyna definitely went above and beyond; it's not a common thing."

Gibbs, a native of Harker Heights, Texas, put the meaning of the award in perspective for the young Soldier.

"Years down the road, you're going to remember this, and you ought to with great pride because you have served your country with honor, dignity and you've lost some very close friends," he said. "This is in honor of those Soldiers who were lost on the battlefield that day."

First Team Soldier Stays in Iraq to Recover from Injuries

By 1st Lt. Carrie Kennedy
4th Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – The haunting sounds of "Incoming! Incoming!" will forever be ingrained in Sgt. Cindy Flores' psyche.

Flores, from Company D, 4th "Guns" Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, was wounded in the leg by shrapnel from incoming rockets a few months ago that killed two Soldiers and two foreign contracted employees and wounded five Soldiers and five foreign-contract workers.

Flores, an aircraft armament and electrical systems repair specialist who hails from Los Angeles, was taking a break from her duties repairing AH-64D Apache helicopters when the rounds hit.

Her five years in the Army taught her what to do in the event of indirect fire.

Despite incurring a wound requiring air medical evacuation to Balad for two surgeries, she quickly moved to cover inside a bunker before she knew she was hit.

She received first aid that day from a fellow Soldier from Co. D. That Soldier – Vacaville, Calif., native Staff Sgt. Sean Harris – recounted how Flores kept her cool after the rocket



(Photo by 1st Lt. Carrie Kennedy, 4th Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment)

1st Air Cavalry Brigade commander, Col. Dan Shanahan from Traverse City, Mich., returns a salute Oct. 30 from Sgt. Cindy Flores of Los Angeles. Flores, an armament and electrical systems repair specialist, was wounded earlier in the deployment by shrapnel from a rocket attack.

attack.

"She pretty much just turned to me calmly and said, 'I think I have a hole in my leg,'" Harris said.

With recognition of the fact that she was not the first to

be wounded in this war – and will likely not be the last – Flores made the difficult decision to forego rehabilitation and treatment for her wound back in the United States and instead returned to her unit at Camp Taji.

Spending that time with her unit was the best medicine for her injuries, she said.

"It was the people I work with," Flores said. "Before I even left here, they gave me so much support – I knew with their help I could pull through. They gave me the strength that I needed."

Flores' projected six-month recovery, which began when she returned to Iraq on crutches, barely able to walk, has brought her to the point that she was able to walk across an outdoor stage Oct. 30 to receive a Purple Heart from the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade commander and Traverse City, Mich., native Col. Daniel Shanahan.

Shanahan impressed upon those attending the award ceremony that Flores' life is forever changed.

"She carries the scars today...and part of that weapon is inside her and will be with her for the rest of her life," Shanahan said. He described the magnitude of the meaning of the award, and the sacrifice of the awardees.

"Those great Soldiers gave a piece of themselves for this great nation of ours," Shanahan said.



Operating from a Buffalo mine resistant vehicle, Soldiers from the 1st Brigade Special Troops Battalion see through the windows of the Buffalo that they have uncovered an improvised explosive device near Hor Al Bosh, Iraq Nov. 2.



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

Cabool, Mo., native Spc. Mike Bittle, a combat engineer with the 1st Brigade Special Troops Battalion, uses binoculars to scan a road for anything suspicious during a mission to find improvised explosive devices near Hor Al Bosh, Iraq Nov. 2.

Centurions Clear Streets for Their Fellow Ironhorse Troopers

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

HOR AL BOSH, Iraq -- Everyday a select group of Soldiers from the 1st Brigade Special Troops "Centurion" Battalion head out in their mine resistant vehicles, hitting the streets near Camp Taji, Iraq to clear routes of improvised explosive devices within the 1st "Ironhorse" Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division's area of operations.

These Soldiers come from all kinds of different backgrounds and different military occupational specialties -- everything from cooks to combat engineers, truck drivers to satellite communications specialists, and hail from all over the United States.

Like other Soldiers, this band of brothers said they have their own war stories ranging from the time that a sergeant jumped out of their mine resistant vehicle and began chasing a man who emplaced an IED to the many explosions and close calls they have survived day in and day out in the combat zone.

Yet each one of them said they have become as close as family, while also becoming very proficient at their jobs to keep the roads safe. This was no less evident than a recent mission in which they worked to clear a hardly-ever traveled road near here Nov. 2.

Prior to the mission, the 1st BSTB troopers linked up with disposal personnel and Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment and then they rolled out the gates of Camp Taji toward their destination.

Over the past year during Operation Iraqi Freedom rotation 06-08, the 1st BSTB troopers have found more than 230 IEDs, more than any other unit performing similar missions in Multi-National Division-Baghdad, according to Sacramento, Calif., native Sgt. Vincent Juarez of the 1st BSTB, who spends his days riding the roads in a Buffalo mine resistant vehicle.

"In our encounters with IEDs, we've had a 70 percent success rate in finding more IEDs than have hit vehicles in the brigade, and there's really no specific MOS for what we do," said Juarez, a truck driver by trade, as he rode out on the day's mission to clear a route near Hor Al Bosh.

All of the Soldiers on this particular mission are very seasoned and have experienced just about everything," said Sgt. Andy Cochran, a satellite communications technician, who hails from Lakeland, Fla. "We face a very adaptive, complex enemy so we have to depend upon our eyes and our ears and our experience in order to decipher the good from the bad, knowing what to look for and stopping to check as

soon as we see anything suspicious."

As they rolled down the road in their Buffalo in a slow, deliberate search scanning with binoculars for anything that could possibly be an IED, Cochran said each mission is performed with their fellow Soldiers in mind who will travel the roads after them.

"It's very gratifying and positively humbling to know you're helping the Soldiers who will be traveling this road," said Cochran.

"I have great feelings about what I'm doing here," said Juarez. "You know, it's crazy too, but I'm not so much worried about getting hurt myself but I'm more concerned about the guys in the humvees who come behind us. My worry is seeing one of them hurt. So when we come out here, I pray to God that we don't miss anything."

Once they find and positively identify an IED, they call in for disposal personnel to retrieve and destroy the found munitions and their missions can last many, many hours.

With working long hours in an extremely stressful job, the Soldiers said they find many different ways to cope with the stress after work.

"Some of the things we do include playing video games, going to the gym, taking part in poker games, and watching movies. A lot of the guys do correspondence courses," said Pfc. Miller, a 1st BSTB medic who is part of the crew.

"No one is more supportive than my wife so I usually call her," said the 21-year-old medic. "I try not to tell her too much about what happens here, she knows what I do and knows if I'm having a bad day, but she understands and deals with it much better now than she did earlier in the deployment."

Before their 15-month deployment ends, one of the main goals of these IED seekers will be to ensure that the unit which takes over for them in about two months is prepared to "carry the torch."

"When we do change over, we're going to make sure we do it right, so we're not wasting their time and keep them extremely focused on the routes here," said Juarez. "There are a lot of things that we know now that we didn't know in the beginning that we can pass on to them, things that if we could go back we would've been able to have found even more IEDs."

Each of the Soldiers who ride the Buffalo said they have their own take on what their job means to them.

"I'd much rather be the hunter than the hunted," said Juarez. "It's given me a much different outlook on the military. I think I'm good at what I do in a transportation unit, but since I've been out here with (1st BSTB) and doing some-

thing related to a combat arms MOS, I really feel that I should have been in a combat MOS all along."

"I think that's part of the reason I'm going to reenlist for the Air Assault option," added Juarez, who has a nine month old son and a fiancé back in the states.

Spc. Mike Bittle, a combat engineer who hails from Cabool, Mo., echoed many of Juarez's sentiments.

"There's nothing I'd rather be doing," said Bittle. "I like the idea of saving the lives of my fellow Soldiers and helping innocent Iraqi citizens, it gives you a true sense of accomplishment. There have been times when I've wanted to quit, because the (brigade) had some Soldiers who have died and I felt like shouldn't be alive because of all the IED explosions I've lived through."

"I understand how much it hurts to lose them, but we have an important job to do and I have no problem staying where I am so no more Soldiers have to die," added Bittle. "I love what I'm doing and I like the mission."

But since recent reconciliation efforts, the security situation within the Ironhorse Brigade's area is improving, said Bittle.

"For a while there we were finding one to two IEDs per day, but now we hardly ever find one unless we're going down a road we haven't been on in a while," said Bittle. "But you can definitely see a big difference. You can see that the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi security volunteers are getting much more involved and that they care about what they're doing, and they're helping us improve security to the point that we are seeing fewer IEDs and IED attacks."

Toward the end of the day's mission, after many hours, the team hit paydirt.

"See that, that's what it's all about," said Cochran pointing toward the window of the Buffalo to an IED in the road that they had uncovered.

"Any day we can come back and we've found something, that's a good day," said Bittle.

Shortly after the discovery of the round, disposal personnel moved in to retrieve it, and the IED hunters in the Buffalo returned to Camp Taji.

Once back on the base camp, the Centurions were already getting fuel for their next mission the following day.

"When I first got here, I road in humvees, but after riding in this thing I wouldn't want to ride in anything else," said Miller pointing to the Buffalo. "There are few vehicles that can take a blast like this one can."

The Soldiers said they all agree that they look forward to an Iraq in the not-to-distant future where the Buffalo freely roam and the IEDs are extinct.



(Photo by Spc. Shejal Pulivarti, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

First Iraqi Police Prep Class Graduates

Fort Lauderdale, Fla., native, Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Brinson, Military Police platoon sergeant for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, congratulates the graduates of the 10-day Iraqi Police preparatory class on Camp Taji, Iraq Oct. 30. The 30 Iraqi Police recruits will attend the Police Academy in order to officially be initiated as IPs.

Temporary School Opens with Help from Troops

By Spc. Shejal Pulivarti
1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – The thick red ribbon was crisply sliced with a pair of scissors signifying the official opening of the school in Al Awad, Iraq Oct. 29.

Ali Abid Abbas, the education committee chairman for Taji Qada, had the honor of cutting the ribbon establishing the temporary trailers as the consolidated school to ensure the surrounding children have a school for the upcoming school year.

The 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, the Embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team for the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division and local leaders have been working together since July to set up a school in Al Awad after Al Qaeda in Iraq destroyed four of the surrounding schools resulting in approximately 700 students without a place to learn.

“The children are the future. Working together we can give your children a future through education,” said Col. Mike Bridges, deputy team leader for Baghdad 5 EPRT, attached to the 1st BCT, 1st Cav., Div., as he addressed the school staff, Abbas and Sheikh



(Photo by Spc. Shejal Pulivarti, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Ali Abid Abbas, the education committee chairman for the Taji Qada cuts the ribbon signifying the opening of the temporary school built in Al Awad, Iraq for the local and surrounding area children Oct. 29.

Abid, the local sheik leader.

After cutting the ceremonial ribbon, the local leaders provided Bridges with a brief

tour of the school grounds during which they expressed their thanks.

“I appreciate all the help and together

we can help the people in the area,” stated Sheikh Abid.

He went on to share that the facility was momentarily sufficient but we still have work to do in order to accomplish improving the community.

“With the assemblage of local leaders working collectively, we will be able to make a permanent progression,” he added.

The members of 2nd Bn., 8th Cav. Regt., facilitated the farm land in order to build the temporary school.

In order to accommodate the amount of kids in need of schooling, there will be two separate shifts for the kids to attend school, said Bridges, an Anchorage, Alaska native.

The cavalry troops, along with EPRT, plan to work with local leaders to develop the temporary school by providing supplies and laying gravel in the courtyard.

They also plan to work with Iraq’s Ministry of Education to build a permanent structure for the kids to receive an education.

“The community came together to facilitate the project in order to ensure the kids could go to school,” Bridges said.

Baghdad Zoo Opens Iraqi Brown Bear Habitat

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

BAGHDAD – Even through they didn't have the press Ling Ling and Ming Ming had when they were given to the United States by China, Baghdad Zoo's newest residents, Sameer and Lamiyah, didn't seem to really care that more than 30 zoo officials and Coalition Forces members were on hand to official open a new exhibit.

For the two Iraqi Brown Bears, after of brief moment of fighting, they stopped long enough to sniff one another before they immediately went to eat some food placed in their newly renovated bear habitat inside the Baghdad Zoo Nov. 1.

"The opening of the new bear cage is important of the zoo," said Dr. Wasseem, Baghdad Zoo's head veterinarian. "It's also nice for the visitors but mostly for the bears."

According to Wasseem, the old bear cages were too small and that the tile floors weren't good on the bears' feet. So, the new habitat, with its dirt and grass flooring will be a better environment for its new residents. The new cage is large enough for two more bears – something zoo officials hope they can add as hope that the two may mate.

According to Sgt. 1st Class Herbert Mowery, of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 15th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, who currently serves as one of the special project officers for the Baghdad Zoo, the bear habitat project started in May with a lot of anticipation.

"The bears used to be kept in a small



Baghdad Zoo officials prepare to put 'Sameer,' a seven-year-old Iraqi Brown Bear, into the zoo's new bear habitat at its official opening Nov. 1.

enclosure; so we found an area that was suitable for them," said the Parkerdurg, W. V. native. "Today was such a good day for [Iraqis] because this is the center of Baghdad ... the zoo is a national monument."

Iraqi Brown Bears are indigenous to the northern part of Iraq. Zoo officials had the bears brought in for about \$25,000 each.

"I think this will be great because most people want to see either the cheetahs or the bears," Mowery said.

Mowery added that zoo officials hope that Sameer and Lamiyah may one day mate and give birth to some cubs.

Lamiyah, who is about four years old, has already given birth to a few cubs a couple of years ago.

Capt. Amy Cronin, 15th BSB's special projects officer for the Baghdad Zoo, said the day was "awesome."

"In Iraq, the best advertising is word-of-mouth, and when everyone came here for the



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

'Sameer,' a seven-year-old Iraqi Brown Bear, gets a feel for his new home at the Baghdad Zoo's new bear habitat during its official opening Nov. 1.

Eid holiday, visitation went up ... more than a million people came here during that holiday," Cronin said.

Cronin, who calls Carlisle, Pa., home, said she sees the zoo as "hope" for the Iraqis.

"It's an oasis ... and it's a break from the everyday strife the Iraqis have to deal with," she said. "I think anything we can do to help improve this or increase people to come here and realize that there is hope, I think that this will be a model example of that hope for the

future of Iraq."

For Dr. Adil, who has been in charge of the zoo since it was open, seeing the park in better shape than it has ever been is great for him.

"Everyone is going to see this and be happy and shocked to have the zoo open again," he said. "This is just a new opening for the rest of the zoo, and it's good to have the people here who helped us rebuild ... especially when the zoo was in really bad shape."

Residents Meet with Government Reps at Town Hall Forums

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

BAGHDAD – During Saddam Hussein's regime, complaining or brining up problems to the government usually didn't harvest the desired effect. Then it could have meant death for the person and his family who brought the claim against the tyrannical regime.

That has changed.

Residents, local council members, governmental office holders and business owners of the Karkh District have now come together on two separate occasions to hold town hall meetings in order to familiarize people to their local and national leaders and discuss just what they want and need from the people they elected.

"We are in this position because the people elected us," said Shatha Al Aobeidi, member of the Baghdad City Council and the Association of Iraqi Businesswomen. "Meeting like this is the beginning of the democratic process and everything in the neighborhoods. These are freedoms we the people have never had before."

One resident of the meeting in Kindi was Qais Al Shkarachi. He and his wife, Wasan, have lived in the area for more than 20 years. During Saddam Hussein's regime, Shkarachi and many other residents were not allowed to gather or talk freely about problems in their neighborhood.

Now, he has the freedom to not only work as the chairman of the college of engineering, but to be involved in a local government that can only improve what he calls the "best neighborhood in Baghdad."

Shkarachi said he believes that having a forum like this makes many things possible. Not only was he able to talk



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

A man raises his hand to ask a question during the first-ever town hall meeting held in a recently-renovated school in Karkh Oct. 31.

about projects that were already completed, he was able to get information on future projects.

"The neighborhood is already better than it was just five months ago," he said. "We have to look into the future and continue the progress we've made."

Shkarachi said that his neighborhood is one of the best for many reasons. They have strong ties with their security forces, both Iraqi and American, and after months of violence last winter, the people have taken it upon themselves to keep the area free of terrorists by forming neighborhood watch groups.

Shkarachi and his wife were among more than 100 other residents who came to the auditorium to discuss important issues. Raad Al Haris, the senior deputy minister of electricity, was one of several speakers who came to address the

questions asked by the attendees.

"We are working to improve electricity distribution, establish a local office and support the neighborhoods with generators and wire for their homes and businesses," he said. "This forum is a good way for people to talk directly to us to help identify problems and requirements so we can give we can to this neighborhood."

According to Lt. Col. Patrick Matlock, commander 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, parts of the district are now receiving 18 to 21 hours of electricity a day thanks to efforts by the local councils.

The second meeting was held in a similar location in Salhiya. Again, more than 100 residents attended and took full advantage of the opportunity to talk to local leaders about essential services like water, electricity and fuel.

Both meetings were held near refurbished schools. The school projects have been a strong example of progress made in the area now that eight different schools have had makeovers thanks to cooperation between troops from 4-9 and local leaders aiming for improvements.

Matlock believes that progress will continue despite his unit leaving in a few months. He said momentum and a strong local government will help make the transition almost seamless once the brigade is replaced later this year.

"Once given the resources by the provincial and national government, this community will continue to improve even once we leave," he said.

Just before the meetings kicked off, fliers were handed out with information on reconciliation projects, women's assistance programs and information on an upcoming job fair aimed at further reducing the unemployment rate in the area.



(Photo by Chief Warrant Officer 4 Daniel McClinton, 1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div.)

Mission complete

An air weapons team of two AH-64D Apaches from the 1st "Attack" Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, come in for a landing at Camp Taji, Iraq, after completing a reconnaissance mission in the skies over Baghdad Nov. 6.

Cav Troops Celebrate National American Indian Heritage

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Soldiers of the 1st Air Cavalry "Warrior" Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, got a brief glimpse into American Indian history and culture, Nov. 3.

The keynote speaker for the event was Chief Warrant Officer 4 Rick Runninghawk, a 1st ACB tactical operations officer.

Runninghawk, a Cherokee native from Abilene, Texas, talked a little about his family history to give the troopers in attendance an idea of what it was like for him growing up.

His family name, Runninghawk, was changed long ago to Newton, said Runninghawk.

"The family name was changed so that we could not use or rely on our heritage as a crutch," he said. "So everything that we had achieved, attained and accomplished was done the white man's way and therefore could not be taken away."

After many years in the Army as both an enlisted Soldier and now a warrant officer, Runninghawk felt he had proven himself worthy of taking back his family name, he said.

"I felt it was time to take back the family name and be proud of where my roots came from and who I am today because of what my predecessors, my family members and all other Native Americans have endured," said Runninghawk.

Runninghawk also discussed the history of the Trail of Tears and how his tribe was affected by it.

"In the 1830s gold was discovered in Georgia and gold fever ran rampant therefore the people began to move into Cherokee lands and wanted more and more," he said "Finally



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

Sgt. Samantha Brown, the supply sergeant for Company C, 615th Aviation Support Battalion, speaks at the National American Indian Heritage Month ceremony held at Camp Taji, Iraq, Nov. 3.

dissent and hate came upon the land and (the settlers) put into motion what is now called the Indian Removal Act of 1838 which we call the Trail of Tears."

Ironically, at that time, in the 1830's, the Cherokees were escorted along the Trail of Tears by cavalrymen. These units would later make up the 1st Cavalry Division which Runninghawk serves under.

Yet another irony was the authorization of the Indian Removal Act, said Runninghawk.

"President Andrew Jackson, his command and life, were saved by 500 Cherokee allies during the Battle of Horseshoe

Bend in 1814," said Runninghawk. "Now the irony in this whole thing is that President Andrew Jackson was the one who authorized the Indian Removal Act."

For the Cherokee Nation, the route they took on the Trail of Tears ended in Tahlequah, which is now the capital for their tribe, said Runninghawk.

Since American Indians began serving in the Army, they have made significant contributions, one of which is portrayed in the movie "Windtalkers", said Torreon, N.M., native Sgt. Samantha Brown, the supply sergeant for Company C, 615th Aviation Support "Cold Steel," Battalion, 1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div.

Brown, who proudly proclaims her full-blooded Navajo lineage, discussed how Navajos used their language to encode messages during World War II; a code which was never broken by the enemy, she said.

She also read a poem by Navajo poet Della Frank, in her native language.

Brown believes that National American Indian Heritage Month is necessary to show people what being an American Indian is all about.

"I feel people should be educated on the past of Native Americans. Half of these people don't know the (history) of Native Americans," she said.

Runninghawk closed the evening's ceremonies with a request to all who were in attendance.

"I hope through your travels ... you take a look around and you notice (the Native American Soldiers). They've done a lot; they've come a long way. The contributions, dedications and accomplishments by them were pretty substantial," he said.

Air Cav Keeps Fixing Multi-Million Dollar 'Toys'

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – When most kids get a new electronic toy, they play with it until it no longer interests them. But a small portion of those kids, when they get bored with the toy, simply grab some screw drivers and take it apart to see what makes it tick.

It's quite possible that the majority of those kids that take apart their toys end up as aircraft maintainers in the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division. Aircraft maintainers from Company B, 615th Aviation Support "Cold Steel" Battalion, 1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div., recently hit their 200th phase – a major maintenance mile stone.

That means that this unit has taken apart a combined total of 200 CH-47 Chinooks, UH-60 Black Hawks and AH-64D Apaches, and inspected every electronic, mechanical and structural piece in them, said San Diego, native Sgt. Justin Fajardo, a squad leader for the Co. B "Avengers," and phase team leader for the 200th phase.

There are two different types of phases that most helicopters go through, a preventive maintenance inspection 1 and preventive maintenance inspection 2, said Fajardo.

The difference between them is that in PMI 1 the Soldiers take the aircraft apart and visually inspect it, sometimes replacing a part here and there. For a PMI 2 they take everything apart knowing they'll be replacing certain parts and any others that might need it along the way, Fajardo said.

The Avengers have five platoons that assist with phases. First, there's the Headquarters Platoon which handles the paperwork and scheduling for every phase bird. Next is the Forward Support Platoon which disassembles, inspects, and reassembles the aircraft.

The Shops Platoon provides support to engines, hydraulics, rotor heads, and different structural pieces. Then there's the



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

Soldiers from Company B "Avengers," 615th Aviation Support Battalion, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, pose near the UH-60 Black Hawk that they worked for their 200th major scheduled maintenance task – called a phase. From left to right: Spc. James Eldridge, a hydraulics repairer; Spc. Jared Rivera, an airframe structural repairer; Spc. George Ponce, an airframe structural repairer; Sgt. Justin Fajardo, a squad leader for Co. B; Sgt. Anthony Bermudez, a line shop team leader; Sgt. Robert Evans, a Black Hawk mechanic; and Sgt. Patrick McTheny, a technical inspector.

Avionics Platoon which does inspections and repairs on aircraft radios, aviation survivability equipment and more. Last, but not least, is the Armament Platoon which removes, inspects, repairs and reinstalls all of the Apache weapon and sighting systems, and works on all of the electrical and avionics systems.

For this maintenance phase team, it is not only their 200th phase, but their last phase before they head home, he said.

The Avengers have been working around the clock since they took over the mission from the 4th Infantry Division November 2006. Most of them didn't even know they had done so many phases, said Spokane, Wash., native Capt. Christian Ruddell, a platoon leader for the Avengers.

For the 200th phase, the Co. B maintainers completed a PMI 1 on a Black Hawk.

Although they aren't flying in Apaches

and Black Hawks moving Soldiers safely through the air, they are still an integral part of the mission in Iraq, said Midwest City, Okla., native Sgt. Patrick McTheny, a technical inspector for Co. B.

"Our job is to keep aircraft flying. We reduce the footprint on the ground; we reduce IED exposure; we're saving lives by keeping them in the air," said McTheny.

And they're doing it at break-neck speeds, he said.

"Our turn around time is really good. The standard is 21 days (to complete) a PMI 2, but I'd say we're averaging them in 15 to 18 days," said McTheny.

With all these phases and numerous other jobs that come up along the way, some of the novice Avengers have matured into experts in their craft, said Milford, Ohio, native 1st Sgt. Timothy Johnson, the senior

noncommissioned officer for the Avengers.

"When we first deployed in October of 2006, we were undermanned and had a lot of troopers who were going on their first deployment; quite a few were straight out of (Advanced Individual Training) and had never performed a phase inspection before," said Johnson.

"Thanks to the experienced NCOs and officers of our company, the phase teams pushed through the rough times in the beginning of the deployment and became the quality aircraft mechanics and maintenance technicians they are today," he said.

"Rough times" is one way to put it, another way to break it down is to say that Co. B did seven years of work in one year, said Ruddell.

"I remember my first (sheet metal) job took me about six days. Now that same project would last me two hours, three hours maybe," said San Antonio native Spc. George Ponce, an airframe structural repairer for Co. B.

Contracted civilian maintainers augment the Soldiers during the phases and other maintenance missions.

"We assist the Army; that's our main function here is to assist the Army," said Lucky Luciano, a civilian contractor from L3 Vertex Aerospace.

Another L3 contractor, Charles Frye, knows the teamwork between the two groups created the right environment for 200 phases to be completed.

"To produce that many phases with minimal deficiencies is a testament to the will and the character of the (Co. B and L3) phase teams," said Frye.

"I'd compare our unit to the (National Football League's New England) Patriots right now ... because they've got more power players than they know what to do with," said Ashland, Pa., native Staff Sgt. Ron Bolinsky, an Apache technical inspector with the Avengers.

Medical Evacuation Unit Completes Relief in Place

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

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – The unit that has performed arguably the most difficult yet rewarding mission in Iraq is on its way home after 15 months.

The air medical evacuation Soldiers from Company C, 2nd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, completed a transfer of authority Nov. 8 with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division at Camp Taji.

The Company C "Witchdoctors," based out of Fort Carson, Colo., flew 3,400 MEDEVAC missions and moved about 5,500 patients in need of care that ranged from routine to urgent, according to Reno, Nev., native Lt. Col. Christopher Joslin, commander of 2nd "Lobo" Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st ACB.

"The motto of the MEDEVAC is 'So that others may live,' and it is no boast or overstatement that when they fly, Soldiers don't die," Joslin said. "They are the best of the best, fought and served valiantly in the main effort fight of Operation Iraqi Freedom, setting records in mission accomplishment that no other unit can come close to claiming."

The 84 Soldiers provided MEDEVAC support for the

Baghdad area. Although the unit is assigned to the Fort Hood-based Lobo battalion, its current home base is Fort Carson, Colo. Prior to deploying to Iraq in 2006, the unit was called the 571st Medical Company (Air Ambulance).

The 1st ACB and 3rd Inf. Div. MEDEVAC companies conducted a nontraditional relief in place since the 3rd Inf. Div. unit had been in Iraq for several months conducting the MEDEVAC mission in a different area.

"They are assuming our battle space and extending their lines of coverage," said Corpus Christi, Texas, native Maj. Guy Gierhart, commander of Co. C, 2-227th General Support Aviation Battalion. "We transferred property and took some of their pilots on duty with us."

Additionally, the 3rd Inf. Div. had covered for the 1st Cav. Div. MEDEVAC unit earlier in the year when several of the latter's aircraft sustained battle damage and could not fly.

"We have been pulling MEDEVAC duty (in Iraq) for five months, and we picked up the mission for this area for a week previously," said Maj. Scott Prescott, commander of Co. C, 2-3 Aviation Regiment, based out of Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah, Ga. "We worked with them during that time. Our pilots trained with their pilots to assume the mission then."

It was a long, difficult year for the 1st ACB MEDEVAC

Soldiers.

"The extension hit us all pretty hard," said Gierhart, who performed the MEDEVAC mission on two other deployments in Iraq as well. "I think this deployment was harder because I was the commander this time."

The unit, which spent all of its days saving the lives of critically injured service members and civilians, lost one of its Soldiers in an indirect fire attack on Camp Taji.

"The most difficult part of the deployment and I think what we will all remember the most about the deployment was the loss of Sgt. William Brown," Gierhart said. "When you have to pick up one of your own (on a MEDEVAC mission), it's difficult."

Despite the difficult mission, Gierhart said he wouldn't trade places with anyone.

"I'm really proud to be part of this unit," he said. "All of the people that were part of this unit made it happen. The mission was difficult at times, but they always made it happen."

For Joslin, their departure is bittersweet.

"They are heroes – they deserve a hero's a welcome, a handshake and a thank you," Joslin said. "While I am so proud of them and so glad that they will be home for Thanksgiving, they've become part of my family, and I am going to miss them when they leave."



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

Manmade Dust Storm

Spc. William McGregor, an infantryman with 1st Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, attached to the 82nd Airborne Division's 2nd BCT, shields himself from the dust kicked up by a medical evacuation helicopter as takes off from a Coalition outpost in Baghdad with a wounded Soldier inside Oct. 31.

Local Leaders Finding Solutions at District Advisory Council

By Spc. Elvyn Nieves
113th Mobile Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – Representatives from neighborhoods throughout the Adhamiyah District got together for a District Advisory Council meeting Nov. 6, providing an opportunity for all the Sunni and Shia sheiks from the district to work on problems affecting the community.

"It's a very big deal because we're bringing the Sunni and the Shia sheiks together for the first time to talk about the political situation within Adhamiyah itself," said military transition training team chief Lt. Col. Edwin Fiske, 2nd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division. "So they come together and work on solutions that affect the life of Iraqi citizens."

Among the topics discussed were reconciliation between the Shia and Sunni.

The Iraqi military also gave a briefing on the Iraqi Security Volunteer program.

Fiske, a native of Gary, Ind., said the ISV program takes local volunteers from communities and helps train them to work as security guards at gas stations, schools, hospitals and wherever needed.

"It's similar to the community watch



(Photo by Spc. Elvyn Nieves, 113th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

Sunni and Shia sheiks sit together to talk about issues in their communities at a district advisory council meeting in Baghdad's Adhamiyah District Nov. 6

program we have back in the States," said Fiske.

"What they would like to do is to take people in this program and eventually make them Iraqi Police officers. At some point they get to go to the academy and get their

badge," he added.

Iraqi generals also briefed representatives on the security situation in Adhamiyah.

"It's very helpful to bring these leaders together since this is only the second time we've got the Sunni and the Shia Sheiks to

sit down together," said Fiske.

The Iraqi military and Coalition Forces functioned as facilitators in this meeting providing a neutral ground for them to meet. Part of the problem was Sunni sheiks didn't feel comfortable going into the Shia neighborhood to meet the Shia and vice versa.

Fiske said the military wants the sheiks to do all the talking and that the Coalition only gave an initial push to get it started but the Iraqis are taking over. The military is stepping back and letting the civilian and local government function.

"The Coalition Forces and Iraqi Security Forces work very closely with the neighborhood's council sheiks, but what we have not done is meet them with more frequency in a district advisory council. That is important since the district advisory council represents the city," said Fayetteville, N.C., native Lt. Col. Wilson Shoffner, commander of 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment.

Fiske said he's seen significant improvement at the DAC meetings.

"I have seen progress," he said. "Definitely, the government is now starting to carry the load more and taking away the burden from the military."



Rialto, Calif., native Sgt. Cynthia White, a medic assigned to the 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, looks at an ancient relief sculpture during a tour of exhibits inside the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad Oct. 31.



In the first meeting with museum officials, the general director, Dr. Amira, gives Lt. Col. Kenneth Crawford, commander of 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, and the U.S. State Department culture heritage liaison officer, Diane Siebrandt a tour of the exhibits inside the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad Oct. 31.



Spartans Learn

Story and photos by Sgt. 1st Class Kap Kim
2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – When what was supposed to be simply a short meeting turned into a grand tour of the National Museum of Iraq, some 1st Cavalry Division Soldiers got to see a part of early civilization that was beyond their imagination ... in some cases, artifacts which dated back to more than 5,000 years ago.

Lt. Col. Kenneth Crawford, commander of the “Spartan” Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, and Diane Siebrandt, a U.S. State Department culture heritage liaison officer, set up the “monumental” meeting with Dr. Amira, the museum’s newly-appointed general director, Oct. 31.

“What we did was huge,” said Siebrandt who worked closely with Iraq’s Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities.

After a meeting with Dr. Amira and her other director generals, Crawford and a few lucky Soldiers from his p



Many of the artifacts inside the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad, Iraq go back to the Mesopotamian era.

Dr. Amira (right), the general director of the Iraqi National Museum, gives San Antonio native, Lt. Col. Kenneth Crawford, commander of the 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, a tour of the museum exhibits in Baghdad Oct. 31.

and a Hand to Museum

sonal security detail received the first tour of the museum and its exhibits since the early part of the war. The doors were closed to visitors April 23, 2003.

"I was in awe on what I saw in there," said Crawford, a San Antonio native. "I don't know - in my life - aside from the Ishtar Gate in Berlin, which was the oldest thing I've seen - this was even more special. You come here, and you're in the cradle of society."

During the Ottoman Empire, archeologists and fortune finders were granted digging permits and were able to keep any find.

According to Siebrandt, it was during that time when most of the Mesopotamia artifacts left the country. After World War I, and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, it was a British traveler, Gertrude Bell, who started supervising many of the excavation sites and brought to light the importance of having a sense of cultural awareness.

The museum, which was originally opened in the early 1900's by Bell, was known then as The Baghdad Archaeological Museum. Many of the exhibits contain arti-

facts once belonging to her private collection.

The museum was open to the general public until 2003, when looters and vandals used the war to steal many priceless items, according to Siebrandt. Since then, the museum and its staff have closed its doors to almost everyone. So, the meeting and subsequent tour of the exhibits currently under construction was a surprising treat for the few who were able to see it.

Since December 2006, the State Department and Coalition Forces tried to start the dialog that might start the process of reopening the museum to the Iraqi people.

"We just were never able to get dialog started," said Siebrandt. "With Doctor Amira, I met with her and talked about [Lt.] Colonel Crawford (coming to the museum). It was all about getting the right person in."

For Crawford, whose unit does a lot of civic projects throughout the Karkh Security District, getting to help the museum reopen to the public is important.

"It's an icon ... not just for Karkh or Baghdad, but for

Iraq."

Crawford said. "This showed a big step toward joint relations. It was nice to just get our foot in the door to ID areas of the facility we can maybe help with - the end state of getting the museum open to the public."

Crawford said that there is a "plethora" of things his battalion could do to maybe help with reopening efforts. During his time in the museum, Amira and her staff addressed issues such as the water damage caused by water leaks, security, dedicated power source, and some others he and Amira planned to discuss in future meetings.



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

All Better

Newport News, Va., native Spc. Bryanna Suarez, a medic with Company C, 610th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, wraps an Iraqi child's foot while on a mission in southern Baghdad's Doura region, Oct. 30. Suarez was on a battlefield circulation with Col. Ricky Gibbs, commander of the 4th IBCT, when the child was seen limping down the street by members of his personal security detachment who alerted the medic.

Economic Revival Stimulating Southern Baghdad

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

BAGHDAD – Bullet holes attest to the battleground that was this two-block portion of Doura. Just a few months ago, the residents were afraid to step outside leaving their neighborhood riddled with garbage, without power and most of their shops closed.

That was until the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Inf. Div., made a concerted effort to weed out insurgents and put the citizens of the two neighborhoods on



Two neighborhoods in Doura have shown a recent economic revival after years of fighting. Here citizens go into a corner market to buy food stuffs. The store is one of 138 that are currently open. Three months ago there were only 10.

Doura's east side on the track to success.

"When we first arrived here there were 10 stores open on the entire street," said Lt. Col. Jim Crider, the squadron commander as he toured the peaceful streets with members of the Iraqi media. "There were several attacks, improvised explosive devices every day and no one wanted to cooperate. Initially we stayed on the street to protect the people 24 hours a day, seven days a week, until we became friends with the people."

On Oct. 27 there were 138 stores open, Crider added.

Staying out on the streets and erecting barriers to prevent gunfire from entering the area began to pay off – in more ways than one.

The citizens began to slowly come back outside and a National Police checkpoint was relocated because it was deemed unnecessary to protect that portion of town.

"This is one of the safest places in Doura," said Pvt. David Polasek, a Lawrenceville, Ga., native serving with Troop A, 1-4 Cav. as he watched Iraqis laying new concrete on the street median. "More people are coming out everyday because they feel safer."

Once the citizens began to feel more secure the insurgent threat began to ebb.

"Once we began to trust each other and share information the insurgents could no longer hide," Crider, a native of Hopkinsville, Ky., said. "At the same time we began to work on essential services projects such as trash pick up and street lights. Once they saw they had good power and jobs the area began to look much nicer and the insurgents began to disappear. And things got



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

Iraqis mix concrete as they prepare to fix the roads median Oct. 29.

really good."

Great strides in the past few months with many projects aimed at helping the citizens were being completed.

"We suffered a lack of security and essential services in (this area) until three months ago, when the citizens and local contractors were able to complete 22 projects together," said Dr. Moayyad, who lives in the neighborhood.

Some of the citizens said the area hasn't been as good since before Saddam left power.

"The situation got worse after the fall (of Baghdad) until this moment," said A'alaq Eldien Salim, a butcher, whose shop was one of the few that remained open during the tough times the neighborhoods endured. "The security gradually started to return to

the area because of the presence of Coalition Forces in the area. They are rescuing us from the saboteur's elements. The lighting in the area is important for the shops."

Salim said he was able to keep in business because of monetary help.

"I had damages in my shop due to other explosions around my shop," he said. "I received a grant which help me to fix the windows, but I still need to buy some stuff for the shop like freezer."

The streets were once empty but for a few stores, now they are vibrant with the activity of a garbage truck making routine rounds to pick up trash; workers placing multi-colored bricks down as a new sidewalk; men pumping iron at the Arnold Gym; children playing and people visiting the Doura Clinic for all their medical needs.



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

An Iraqi Red Crescent Society member helps an Iraqi into his new wheelchair in Rashid's Jihad neighborhood, Nov. 1. The wheelchairs were provided by the Iraqi Ministry of Health.

Iraqi Govt. Reps Meet with Rashid Leaders, Residents

4th IBCT, 1st Inf. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – Iraqi government representatives and Multi-National Division-Baghdad commanders visited the Rashid District together, Nov. 1.

Various Iraqi deputy ministers from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Education toured the Jihad neighborhood with Col. Ricky D. Gibbs, commander of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division from Harker Heights, Texas, and Lt. Col. Patrick Frank, commander of the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 4th IBCT from Cuba, N.Y.

Over the course of the visit, the ministers met with local leaders of the Rashid District, as well as talking with residents on the streets.

After discussing security and economic concerns with civic leaders in formal meetings, the ministers visited the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, handing out wheelchairs to disabled citizens, a school under construction, and a vibrant market that may not have been so before 1-28 Inf., arrived in the area.

The multi-faceted Iraqi and Coalition strategy to defeat extremists in Rashid includes rebuilding the country's infrastructure and providing essential services for its citizens. The decrease in violence across the area has allowed for more humanitarian missions throughout the southern Baghdad district.



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

Maj. Eric Timmerman, the operations officer of the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division from Charlotte, N.C., greets an Iraqi Army soldier while on a battlefield circulation in the Saydiyah region of southern Baghdad's Rashid District, Oct. 4.

Saying Farewell to Vanguard

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

BAGHDAD – It's been 15 months since the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment entered a combat zone, answering its nation's call to serve.

In a rural area of southern Baghdad, the mechanized infantrymen set out on a mission to corral terrorism and protect the people of West Rashid.

Now, the Army has one message for the Soldiers out of Schweinfurt, Germany:

Mission complete.

The Soldiers of 1-18 Inf. are set to return to their home station in November after having been deployed since August of 2006.

The challenges are not over for the troops, as now they have to convey what they've been through here in terms that their families will understand.

While the deployment was long and full of challenges, as are all, Command Sgt. Maj. Israr Choudhri, the senior noncommissioned officer of the 'Vanguards,' said the thought of his daughter made it all worth it.

"It was worth it because every day she went to school, I never worried that someone would attack my wife's car with an (improvised explosive device) or (rocket-propelled grenade)," he said. "In order to prevent that from happening to any one of our kids, if I was in Iraq for 15 months, it was all worth it."

Maj. Eric Timmerman, the operations officer for Task Force Vanguard, volunteered to join the unit after it had already deployed because he felt it was worth it as well.

The Charlotte, N.C., native, who had already served as a battalion-level operations officer, actually worked with 1-18 Inf. in training the Soldiers to deploy, and he said being with the troops was one reason he volunteered to be in the position again.

For Choudhri, it had always been about the Soldiers. The Karachi, Pakistan, native deployed with a military intelligence company as a first sergeant to Samarra and Mosul, and despite the change of position, his job was still the same: ensuring the welfare of his troops.

Now that the Vanguards are returning, the question arises, how will the troops tell their families what they went through in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Timmerman learned from his father, who served in Vietnam, about how to explain to his three boys,

ages 9, 11 and 13, the trials and triumphs he and his troops endured.

"I remember he never really talked a whole lot about it. With my sons, I think for each one of them I'm going to have to sort of talk about things in a different manner. That will evolve over time as they get older," he said. "I'm not going to talk about the horrors of war with them at such an early age, but they need to know that. I want to be able to paint the experience on the good and the bad side as truthfully as possible."

Timmerman said one of the most difficult things to get his family to understand will be the conflict going on in Iraq.

"When you come to enforce the nation's political decisions, there are a lot of aspects to that. There's a whole range of dimensions of things you do, from killing to handing out school books," he said. "... It's not as clean as shoot and kill, bad guy down, done."

One thing Timmerman feels is important for his kids to understand is the versatility of America's fighting forces.

"I think their country has trained an Army to be able to go and do these things that I don't think any other army in the world really does to the extent that we do or takes the amount of care we do to fix a school, to deliver school books and desks, to get packages from family members, and distribute those items to kids on the street; to try and have a positive outcome to this thing that we're doing," he said. "Hopefully, it transitions more to fixing and helping a country stand on its own as a democratic society so we have to do less killing."

Ultimately, Timmerman said his troops' ability to react to the complex set of circumstances they faced every day in the Rashid District is a point of pride.

"War isn't like a movie. War isn't like Band of Brothers. There're so many more dimensions to it. By us being here, in probably one of the most violent places in all of Iraq, we touched a lot of people and we made a difference. We always sought ways to go about helping people. Even though we had our game faces on every day and we were ready to deal death, our Soldiers are good enough nowadays they can almost turn on and off like a switch. That's an incredible testament to the guys that are wearing this uniform at all levels. We have a lot to be proud of. I attribute that to discipline and the leadership that we have in this organization. The desire to make every place we went better every time was always there."





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

Maj. Tracy Wing, 3rd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division's Military Transition Team, talks to a local shop owner who recently saw his business get back to normal after security and economic improvements in Jamia and Adel in a market Nov. 4.



Vegetables are among the many things being purchased since the shops in Baghdad's Jamia neighborhood have begun re-opening due to security and economic improvements in the area.

Coalition Forces See Jamia Neighborhood Markets Flourish

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

BAGHDAD – Just a few months ago, Operation Rogue Thunder kicked off to reclaim the streets of Jamia and Adel from the grip of violence. Fast forward to today and the streets are no longer empty.

Without fanfare, celebration or any ribbon-cutting ceremonies, the markets of Jamia have begun to open up after a new life was breathed into the area by Iraqi and American Soldiers this summer.

Troops from the 3rd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division Military Transition Team, the 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment and their Iraqi counterparts have seen what was once a community gripped by fear come out of hiding and begin living for the first time in a long time.

Before the joint operation in July took place, many residents were being oppressed by militia activity in the area, according to Maj. Chris Norrie, the transition team's former chief.

Many homes were abandoned in what was once a white-collar area of the capital. It used to be home to many well-educated residents until violence broke out and forced hundreds to leave their homes.

The empty houses gave an opportunity to terrorists from outside the area to move in and set up shop according to Capt. Peter Kilpatrick.

These empty homes were used as factories and staging areas for attacks on Iraqi security forces and American Soldiers.

After the Iraqi battalion and Soldiers



An Iraq woman buys groceries at one of the many shops that have re-opened thanks to security and economical improvements in the Jamia and Adel neighborhoods of eastern Baghdad Nov. 4.

from two companies from the 1-64th entered the area, several caches of homemade explosives and weapons were taken off the street and out of the hands of would-be terrorists responsible for planting deep-buried roadside bombs in the area.

These bombs made from crude components were used in attacks that killed Soldiers from the 1-64th Armor last summer.

In more recent times, the streets remain

quiet except for the clamor of busy streets and steady business that's given new hope to people who have just started to come back to work without fear of harm.

Ahnam Padush has lived in the area for years.

She's even held the same job at the same store for many years until violence and fear began preventing her from going to the shop or even allow the store she worked at to

open.

It's already been two months since she's come back to her normal routine, she said. Two months of feeling just a little more normal.

"People are very happy now that the neighborhoods have gotten better," she said. "We feel safe enough to travel and come to work. We all just want life to go back to normal, and the past two months have been a good sign that life is allowing that to happen."

According to Maj. William Hickok, the present-day chief of the 3-5-6 Military Transition Team, attributes much of the success to the great strides the Iraqi Army has taken since the troops from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, arrived late last year.

Among other successes in the community were the allocations of micro-grants to people interested in opening, reopening or refurbishing their small businesses.

While the store that Padush works in didn't get any grant money, the customers keep coming in to buy the clothes, food and other necessities they need.

She admits that she still has worries, but hopes the neighborhood stays quiet thanks to work by the security forces in the area.

The transition team composed of troops from Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd BCT, 1st Cavalry Division, continues to work closely with their native counterparts even though they are due to redeploy back to their home station of Fort Hood, Texas, in just a few months.

Checkpoints Help Keep Ameriyah Safe

By Spc. Angel D. Martinez
113th Military Public Affairs Detachment

BAGHDAD – Checkpoints are a vital tool in maintaining security in an area, and thanks to the joint efforts of U.S. and Iraqi forces another checkpoint was opened to maintain the security in a western neighborhood in the Iraqi capital.

Soldiers from Company D, 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry

Regiment out of Fort Hood, Texas, are in charge of the security of Ameriyah.

The newest checkpoint established in Ameriyah is an exit-only checkpoint for vehicular traffic.

Vehicles entering this area of Ameriyah have to go through the other checkpoint with the proper paperwork.

Even though it is an exit-only checkpoint, vehicles leaving the neighborhood get searched for contraband. The

checkpoint is also open to pedestrians, giving another option to local citizens to get to their destinations.

“They (pedestrians) still have to be searched, but it basically provides another way for people to get in and out of Ameriyah,” said Jefferson City native 1st Lt. Tyler Stegeman, the platoon leader of 2nd Platoon, Co. D, whose battalion operates in western Baghdad attached to the 2nd Infantry Division, 1st Infantry Division. “For people living in one side of Ameriyah it was kind of a hassle to go from one side to the other, so this convenience them a little bit.”

At first, there was only one entry/exit checkpoint, and this caused a problem for the security in Ameriyah.

“You have people in this checkpoint, but if you don’t have people in the other one, then you have a lot of things that slip through the cracks,” said Stegeman.

Another feature of the newest checkpoint is the women’s search team.

All the women in the team are part of the local volunteer group, Forsan Al Rafideen (which, in Arabic means “knights of the river”), who are area residents united for a better Ameriyah.

“That’s one way the Iraqis have stepped up,” said Stegeman. “In other checkpoints, we have one U.S. Army female searcher and a couple of Iraqi female searchers.”

For merchants who want to pass merchandise in through the exit checkpoint, for whatever the reason, they can do it by hand trucks, and after the merchandise gets inspected, they can put it in a vehicle within Ameriyah and drive it to their respective shops.

“The people of Ameriyah are enjoying this freedom, this peace,” said Stegeman. “Right now, they’re content. Obviously there’re some people who aren’t happy with it, however, even those people understand, after talking to them, this is providing them a peace they haven’t seen in months or even years.”



(Photo by Spc Angel D. Martinez, 113th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

A local merchant waits while an Iraqi Army soldier inspects his hand truck packed with soft drinks at a checkpoint in the western Baghdad Ameriyah neighborhood, Nov. 9.

Iraqi Army, Volunteers, Cavalry Troops Celebrate Success

By Pfc. April Campbell
27th Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – The 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division hosted a social gathering, including a cookout and a soccer tournament, for Iraqi Army troops and a volunteer group from Ameriya, a neighborhood in the Al Mansour District of western Baghdad here, Oct. 28.

“Today is a chance for us to get together with our partners in Ameriya,” said Huntsville, Ala. native, Lt. Col. Dale Kuehl, commander of the 1-5 Cav., whose unit operates in Ameriya attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division.

Those partners include the 2nd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 6th Division Iraqi Army, and the Forsan Al Rafadeen (FAR), which in Arabic means “knights of the river.” FAR is a group of local volunteers who have come forward to work with security forces to provide safer conditions to Ameriya, added Kuehl, who hails from Huntsville, Ala.

“Ameriya was a battlefield for most of the summer,” said Kuehl. “At this time, al-Qaeda is defeated. We thought it was a good time to recognize that and get together and have a good time.”

With three well-played games in the morning, the soccer tournament was the main activity of the gathering. The 1-5 Cav. team played hard, but ended up being overtaken by

both the Iraqi Army team, 2-1, and the FAR team, 5-1. In the end, the FAR players were able to beat the Iraqi Army team 2-0.

While the gathering did have a competitive edge to it with the round-robin tournament, most participants just seemed to want to have fun.

“We came to enjoy ourselves and play a game, not to win,” said Iraqi Army Maj. Emad Kareem, commander of Company A, 2/1/6 IA and their team coach. “Playing sports helps to build relationships in the field.”

After the soccer tournament, trophies were handed out. The Iraqis were then invited to head over to the East Logistics Support Area mayor cell to join the cavalry troops in a cookout. Being able to play a friendly game of soccer and eat steak and burgers with the Iraqis from Ameriya is quite a change from last year, when 1-5 Cav. was just getting here.

“We just didn’t have that close of a relationship with the community,” said Kuehl. “Now we do, and I think that’s a sign of progress not just for us, but for all of Baghdad.”

One reason for this success in Ameriya seems to be the importance the 1-5 Cav. has placed on developing working relationships with the Iraqi Army and the residents of Ameriya.

“Here, it’s not so much how many doors you knock down, but how many neighbors you are able to end up with at the end of the



(Photo by Pfc. April Campbell, 27th Public Affairs Detachment)

Huntsville, Ala., native, Lt. Col. Dale Kuehl, commander of the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, presents Iraqi Army Lt. Col. Wail Mohamed Hussain, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 6th Division Iraqi Army, with a gift in appreciation of their cooperation in the Ameriya neighborhood of Baghdad’s Al Mansour District at the end of a soccer tournament at Camp Liberty Oct. 28.

day,” said Bakersfield, Calif. native, Command Sgt. Maj. Fidel Gomez, 1-5’s senior noncommissioned officer.

Much has changed in Ameriya since the FAR volunteers began working with Coalition Forces and the IA, said Saad Abo Abid, the FAR commander. With enhanced security in the area, he said businesses are

beginning to reopen, improving the economic future of the area, as well.

Overall, the gathering seemed to be focused on fellowship and success, which these three groups have had with their cooperation and willingness to work together to make Ameriya a better and safer place for those who live there.

Cav Soldiers Help Provide Medical Aid

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

FORWARD OPERATING BASE HOPE, Iraq — In an area where clinics are scarce and a trip to the hospital is too far, residents in the New Baghdad District of eastern Baghdad were helped when the Iraqi National Police provided security and joined Soldiers from Company B, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, attached to 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, providing medical care on Oct. 29.

After they were seen by a doctor, residents were allowed to choose from clothing, soccer balls and other items for their family as they left with over 329 of them seeing a doctor.

Capt. Cindi J. Schuler, the physician's assistant for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd IBCT, said more patients were able to be seen during this operation due to the increase in the number of medics working with each doctor.

Schuler, a native of Houston, treated the women and some children, and said the people were anxious to see a doctor.

1st Lt. Jamison E. Gaddy, the battalion physician assistant for 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, said the only medical attention the locals receive is through nurses offering medical care from their homes, and even that isn't on a constant basis and lacks follow up care. However, one patient Gaddy attended said the people are happy to receive help and wanted to help secure the area so they stopped two locals from planting improvised explosive devices in the area.

Gaddy, a native of Camden, Del., treated men and older boys, and he said the most common ailment he saw was battle-related injuries. Many patients had bullet wounds, burns and shrapnel from explosions.

"There were more combat wounds here than at the other ones," he said of past medical operations. Many patients were afflicted



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

On Oct. 29, Lt. Col. David Fontaine, a native of New Orleans, and the battalion surgeon for 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, attached to 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, listens to the internal workings of an Iraqi child to try and determine what is causing problems for the children in the New Baghdad District of eastern Baghdad. Fontaine gave the mother of the child multi-vitamins in order to increase his nutritional intake.

with ailments unable to be treated through a medical mission, but that was only part of the challenge. Schuler said there isn't a continuing medical education program.

"Some of the ways we operate, we take healing time and cosmetics into mind," he said. "But, they are antiquated in their knowledge so they don't think about scars."

Numerous patients coming to receive aid had large scars on their bodies from operations such as kidney surgeries and Cesarean sections. Schuler said 2IBCT bought medical books to be handed out to the local clinics to enable doctors to gain more knowledge and catch up to what is going on in the medical community. The

Ministry of Health is trying to do continuous education programs, Schuler said, so the primary focus of the medical operations is to give health care to the local populace.

Gaddy said some members of the Ministry of Health came to receive free medical care.

Many people who came had major surgeries in their past and Gaddy said they were searching for more answers concerning their condition.

Lt. Col. David Fontaine, a native of New Orleans, and the battalion surgeon for 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, is a pediatrician, and was on hand to treat the children.

Fontaine, who had a private practice in

pediatrics for 10 years and who now works at the pediatrics clinic in the hospital at Fort Hood, Texas, said many of the ailments plaguing the Iraqi children were textbook cases of illnesses that are easily treated in the United States. Some of the problems also stemmed from malnutrition.

"I did a little bit of good for those who were seen," he said.

Fontaine said the severity of the problems is rarely seen in the United States, such as iodine deficiency goiter.

He said the affliction used to affect children in the United States until iodine was added to table salt and now it's virtually unheard of.

"There were a number of items I saw that were nutritionally related," he said. "A number of the children have spina bifida, which in the Western world has been dramatically reduced by the addition of folate to the maternal diet."

Fontaine said he handed out multi-vitamins for the families to help with nutrition.

"The typical nutritional problems of feeding children in general, along with the usual social and economic problems that exist in the Third World, causes malnutrition and nutritional related diseases," he said.

Throughout the day, the medics were able to see ailments they wouldn't find in the states and learned how to treat patients with the medicines they had available, Schuler said. She said the range of ages they see during a medical operation vary greatly from the 18 to 40 year old healthy adults they typically see at the aid stations and hospitals.

"My experience with medics who come out for the first time, is that they learn a lot and learn how easy healthcare is where we are," she said.

Gaddy said the experience makes medics more independent through confidence and knowledge, which enables them to identify things they wouldn't have been able to before.

Deputy Prime Minister Visits Al Mutanabi Street

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

FORWARD OPERATING BASE LOYALTY, Iraq— Crowds flooded the streets and alleyways of Al Mutanabi Street as Iraqi's tried to catch a glimpse of Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih as he officially unveiled the beginning of a 180-day rehabilitation project for the historical Al Mutanabi Book Market in eastern Baghdad Nov. 4.

Iraqi media members swarmed to get the shots and quotes they needed, while the regular citizens waved and called out to their government official. Salih arrived with other members of parliament and came to tell the citizens they should be proud of being in Baghdad and proud to live in the oldest, intellectual area of the city.

"The Baghdad people are the example, the potential," Salih said to a crowd of onlookers. "We have to be loyal to our people in each area and neighborhood, to bring Baghdad all the way up."

Iraqi Army soldiers provided security for Salih's visit, assisted by members of the 1st Battalion, 504th Parachute



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

Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih makes his way through the crowd during a ceremony marking the beginning of a 180-day rehabilitation project for the historical Al Mutanabi Book Market Nov. 4.

Infantry Regiment, out of Fort Bragg, N.C., and currently attached to 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division looked on.

"I am not going into detail, but 2008 is going to be very

important for economic construction for the services in Baghdad," Salih said. "I don't want to talk about numbers, but the committee and the Prime Minister have budgeted for services in Baghdad."

Salih said he feels sorry for the people who were killed in March when a car bomb was detonated in the historical market. Today, many shops in the area have opened back up with grants donated from the Coalition Forces.

Salih said the insurgency that caused the destruction of the market will be hunted down as the people want to make Iraq safe and have the intellectual crowd once again flourish in its streets.

"We're going to do this street and bring it back again for the artists, for everyone," he said.

After Salih spoke, Lt. Gen. Abud Qanbar, the commander of the Baghdad Operations Command, condemned the terrorists and said Baghdad is going to be called the capital of peace, intellectuals and culture.

"We want to save Iraq and the people of Iraq," he said, "to bring Iraq up and be on the same level as the world states."



(Photo by Spc. Shejal Pulivarti, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs)

Say, "Aaaaaaah!"

Capt. Aaron Dewees, a doctor with the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, checks a Iraqi man's throat while assisting the Fires Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, currently attached to 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, during a combined medical effort in Horse Village, Iraq Nov. 7. The Manhattan, Kan., native helped treat about 170 Iraqis with minor ailments during the event.

Soldiers, Iraqi National Police Improve Sadr City Schools

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

BAGHDAD – The students in Shala Mikla's class were supposed to be learning about biology. Instead, they got a lesson in cooperation.

That was what was on display when U.S. Soldiers and Iraqi National Police officers visited Mikla's classroom at the Al-Andalus Girl's School in Baghdad's Sadr City neighborhood to view recently completed renovations at the school Oct. 31.

The renovations were part of a joint effort by the Ministry of Education, the local neighborhood councils, school officials, the Iraqi National Police and the 1st Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, which operates in the Sadr City area of eastern Baghdad as part of the 82nd Airborne Division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team.

The students got to see that partnership in action as the Soldiers and police officers, led by Iraqi Brig. Gen. Ali Ibrahim Daboun, commander of the 8th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi

National Police Division, and Lt. Col. Dan Barnett, commander of the 1-2 SCR, went from classroom to classroom to talk with the children and hand out free backpacks.

"Gen. Ali is a great partner. We have a very strong relationship," said Barnett, a Willard, Ohio native.

That relationship has helped the national police and the 1-2 SCR, whose home station is Vilseck, Germany, complete a project to improve nine schools in the Sadr City area.

At the Al-Andalus school, the renovations included a new roof, a new gate, repairs to cracks in the pavement and stairs, and a paint-job, said Glen Allen, Va., native Capt. Alex Carter, a civil affairs team chief who helped oversee the project. All told, contractors put \$200,000 worth of work into fixing up the school, Carter said.

The students in Mikla's class showed their appreciation by giving Barnett a big "Thank you!" in English when he stopped by the classroom.

"We are very grateful," Mikla said. "For the children, every little bit helps."



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

Willard, Ohio native Lt. Col. Dan Barnett (foreground), commander of the 1st Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, 2nd BCT, 82nd Airborne Division, and Brig. Gen. Ali Ibrahim Daboun (background), commander of the 8th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division hand out backpacks to students at the Al Andalus Girl's School in Baghdad's Sadr City neighborhood during an Oct. 31 visit to the school to see improvements made during a recent renovation effort sponsored by the Iraqi Government, the INP, and the U.S. military.

Troops Loading Up, Prepping to Head Home

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

BAQOUBA, Iraq - It was a mild fall season in October 2006 when the Soldiers of the 3rd "Grey Wolf" Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, packed their gear, kissed their families goodbye and headed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 06-08.

Thirteen months later and counting, these Soldiers are once again packing their gear and getting ready to deploy once more, this time back to their families in the United States.

Now in the phase of packing their shipment containers, two Soldiers from 1-12 Combined Arms Battalion, are taking the time to reflect on their experiences in Iraq and what they have to look forward to back home.

"We were a major part in the effort out here to provide a safer and securer life to the people of Diyala," said Cpl. Norton Ronald, Company D, 1-12 CAB, and a native of Buffalo, N.Y.

"We were a part of Arrowhead Ripper, Dover Clearance, which was a big part of keeping [an important route] from improvised explosive devices. We cleared Buhriz of all al-Quida and set up an outpost keeping the whole area clear and helping take care of the people out there," he said.

According to a CNN broadcast in February, Baqouba was dubbed the most dangerous city in Iraq. Now, many months and countless hours of effort later, CNN has commented that Diyala has made a drastic change and is now on its way to one of the safest provinces in Iraq.

"It feels great!" said an elated Spc. Adamm Creel, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, attached to Co. D,



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

Spc. Adamm Creel, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, attached to Co. D, 1-12 Combined Arms Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, works with his buddy to lift supplies into a shipping container as they prepare for redeployment from Baqouba, Iraq, Nov. 4.

and a native of Portland, Ore..

"Before, when you would go into the cities, you'd get shot at," he said. "Now when we go back, people are happy to see us, kids are out playing, and it's becoming trash free. The people are starting to take care of their city. The cities are looking really nice."

"It feels good knowing that when we first got here, the streets were bare, no people ever came out, and now you can go down the streets and see all the kids out playing soccer and all the people going to the market," added Ronald.

And these two Soldiers know what they're talking about. They saw the streets of Baqouba in the early part of their deployment, and they were there for all the changes.

"I went on missions all the time," said Creel. "I've done a little bit of everything

out here - gunned, dismount, drove. I even helped load tanks. I've seen everything you could imagine seeing."

"I helped take the commander, the [executive officer] and first sergeants out to all their meetings at the outpost," added Ronald. "We also supplied rations, food, water and all other supplies they needed to the surrounding areas. Going back and forth, seeing the changes, it's really amazing and we were a part of that."

Now these Soldiers have completed their mission, they now look forward to going home and spending some well-deserved family time with those who know them best.

"I definitely plan on spending lots of time with my family," laughed Ronald. "I have two kids, a daughter that's six and a son

that's three; and I haven't been a part of their lives in the past year, so it's time for some quality family time."

"Once I get home, I'm picking up my new car - a '97 Mustang," Creel said. "Then I plan to fly back home and see my family. Hopefully I will get to see my brother who's in Afghanistan right now. He's supposed to be getting home around the same time frame as me, so hopefully we'll get to see each other."

Though many things have changed out here in Iraq for these Soldiers and they're ready to head home, they say there are a few things they will miss about being out here.

"One thing I will miss is being close with all the Soldiers out here," said Ronald. "With the living conditions, you're always around and get to know people really well, making good friends. I know the friendships will pull apart a little bit once we're at home with not living together. But that's okay because we will have our families again."

"One thing I will miss out here is the lack of 'home' stress," added Creel. "There's not many things to worry about out here that you would worry about back at home. You just have to focus on your team and yourself, getting the mission accomplished."

Both Soldiers said they are satisfied with their deployment to Iraq and very happy it's almost over.

"I feel our time out here was alright," Creel said. "You know, you don't want to be away from family and friends, but we accomplished our mission out here and that alone feels good. Not all was bad out here, I did meet and get to hang out with some good people and work with many different groups of people. But I'm happy to be going home. I'm looking forward to being done."

Baqouba Troopers Maintain Cav Tradition; Earn Spurs

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

BAQOUBA, Iraq - Soldiers from both the 215th Brigade Support Battalion and 3rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 3rd "Grey Wolf" Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, celebrated the close end of their deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 06-08, with the honorary spur ceremony, an old Cavalry tradition, Nov. 2 and 3.

The Soldiers piled into Salie Gym on Forward Operating Base Warhorse, outside Baqouba, Iraq, for the ceremony where they received their gold combat spurs, spur certificates and end-of-tour awards.

"Every Cavalry unit offers its Soldiers the opportunity to earn their spurs," Lt. Col. Ronald Kirklin, commander of 215th BSB, said to his Soldiers during the ceremony. "They can be awarded to Soldiers serving in a combat zone or in peacetime to Soldiers who participate in a 'Spur Ride.'"

"Many of you have already earned your gold spurs from combat before, and now the rest of you have joined the distinct group today," he said.

"Throughout history, Cavalry units have readily been identified by their Stetson and spurs," Kirklin continued. "They have become a reminder of the Cavalry's glorious past and tend to set apart the Cavalry trooper from his more traditional brother."

"The spurs evolved into a source of distinction, to recognize the best of the Cavalry, and you ride among the best," he said. "I've had other units here come and ask me who they



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

A Soldier receives her combat spurs during the 215th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, spur ceremony, Nov. 2. Gold spurs are awarded to Cavalry Soldiers who have completed a tour of duty in combat.

could get the spurs. I told them, it's not that easy, you have to earn them. You earned them today and over the past 14 months."

"The right to wear the spurs is a privilege," added Col. David Sutherland, commander of 3rd BCT. "Tradition, honor, courage on the battlefield is what gives us our spurs."

"You all have earned your spurs, you all understand the saying, 'No task too tough,'" he continued. "Hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq owe their lives to the Soldiers

standing in front of me."

As the Soldiers accepted their awards, Sutherland made his way through the ranks of Soldiers, personally thanking each and every one of them for their service.

"For the rest of your lives, when others talk to you about your experiences in the war, you can tell them stories of the truth of your honor and your privilege to serve with the people surrounding you," said Sutherland to the elated crowd. "That instant family, that family you earned your spurs with, that family who you felt the sting of battle. You enabled, you allowed, you encouraged and you produced."

"This province has gone from the most dangerous province in the world, according to CNN in February, to the most changed, most secure province in Iraq, because of your ability to support, to execute and to coordinate - those things throughout history that American Soldiers have always done, what U.S. Cavalrymen have done," he said.

"What a privilege, what an honor to have served with you Soldiers," Sutherland concluded.

As the award ceremony came to an end, Kirklin left the Soldier with a few last thoughts and thanks.

"Many of you... will leave here with gold spurs, walking a lot taller, your shoulders square, and bragging about how you earned them," he said. "You are now a part of an extended family and it is a privilege to have served with you. You represent the best of the best and embody all that have been, and is and will be great in the future of the United States Cavalry."

"I am proud to serve and ride by your side," Kirklin concluded.

Fort Campbell Troops Plan to Play Vital Role in Baghdad

By Sgt. James P. Hunter
2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – “Thirty-two hundred years of invaders and oppression in this land,” said Maj. Timothy E. Collier, civil affairs officer, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). “From Genghis Khan on, this part of the world has been invaded time and time again.”

This area has been devastated and destroyed from years of destruction. For nearly the last five years, as Coalition forces try to reconstruct and revitalize the Iraqi government, terrorists and insurgents have wreaked havoc throughout the area, not enabling the government, the economy and the people to move forward with their lives.

To achieve the goal of a stable, self-controlled government and economy, those responsible for the destruction needed to be weeded out.

The 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, ran counter-insurgency operations – such as joint patrols, cordon and searches, house clearing, and cordon and knocks – to weed out these insurgent forces responsible for the violence.

“When I look at the history of this brigade combat team in northwest Baghdad from February of this year to September of this year, it’s what I label as the battle for northwest Baghdad,” said Col. J.B. Burton, commander, 2nd BCT, 1st Inf. Div. “In that, we saw some very high rates of violence.”

Starting in January, preceding this battle to control northwest Baghdad, they placed joint security stations out in the neighborhoods, and established safe neighborhoods with the gated communities through controlled entry and exit points to these communities, Burton said.

The JSSs are patrol bases within the Iraqi communities, where U.S. and Iraqi Security Forces run combat patrols and dismantled presence patrols out of to get face-to-face with the Iraqi people, said 1st Lt. Kurtis Larson, executive officer, Company B, 2nd Squadron, 12th Cavalry Regiment.

In March, the surge in Baghdad began, Burton said. This is where they began to see a significant increase in violent indicators, especially in May and June.

Burton attributes that to his Dagger Soldiers, the ISF and local volunteers being more active on the battlefield, 24-



The commander of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Col. William B. Hickman, prepares to conduct a movement to Forward Operating Base Justice. The Strike Brigade will take over combat operations from the 2nd BCT, 1st Infantry Division, and continue to work toward improving the essential services within their area of operations in western Baghdad.



(Photos by Sgt. James P. Hunter, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. Public Affairs)

Soldiers with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), talk with a security guard at an electrical power plant, Oct. 11.

hours a day in areas where the enemy was determined to control.

“A lot of people sacrificed (their lives) to get this city where it is right now,” said Collier.

The surge in Baghdad seemed to push out the terrorists and thwart their activity. The volunteers can take much credit for the decreased activity in the area.

“The single most dramatic thing that has happened I think is what we call the concerned local citizens, or the Ameriyah freedom fighters, or the Ghazaliyan Guardians, or some of the Sunni citizens groups—a lot of them former al-Qaeda, former anti-Coalition fighters—that have decided that nothing good is coming of Al-Qaeda,” Collier continued, “and nothing good is coming of further extremism and violence after four and-a-half, five years. They’ve seen enough death and destruction.”

These volunteers stepped-up and paved the way for economic growth, volunteering themselves for the greater good by providing safety, justice, peace and order to their friends and neighbors, Collier said.

“Nobody wants to see their neighbor suffer,” he added.

So the U.S. troops had to adapt and become ever-changing. Instead of focusing solely on insurgent forces, their focus now became improving the essential services of the Iraqi people. This was always a focus, but became the essential, main focus.

Baghdad is an old city—it’s an ancient city, with its municipal services laid in between the fifties and seventies. It is critical these repairs get into the areas and fix these essential services.

“Essential services absolutely cannot go forward unless the municipal workers can go across the city and do their jobs,” said Collier. “A trash collector or utility repair guy isn’t going to go into a hostile war zone because he’s not trained as a Soldier. Unless there is security in an area, the trash doesn’t get picked up, the sewer lines don’t get fixed, the water lines don’t get fixed, the electrical lines don’t get repaired, then the neighborhood falls apart.”

Since July, power went from one-to-two hours a day to six to eight hours a day.

The Dora Thermal Power Plant brought all its boilers on line, and Al-Qaeda is no longer targeting the high-tension electrical cables coming into the city. Repairs are proceeding on all the substations and transformers and a lot of that is because of security, Collier said.

Now with the Dagger Brigade’s deployment on its final leg, it’s up to the Soldiers of the 2nd BCT, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) to continue the success of the Dagger

troops.

“So now we’ve hit a turning point. Now (the Strike) brigade is taking over where it’s pretty critical,” said Maj. Henry Delacruz, civil affairs officer, 2nd BCT, 1st Inf. Div. “The (government of Iraq) has got to take advantage of the improved security and help provide essential services, help create employment through various means, whether through essential services or through economic needs.

“This is the hard part,” he continued. “As Soldiers, we know how to fight; we know how to find the bad guys. The hard part is this nation building piece. It’s helping facilitate governance in an area. It’s tough trying to revitalize the northwest Baghdad economy, and it’s tough trying to revitalize essential services, especially something that has been broke for the last three, four or five years.”

It will take time, hard work and dedication from all to improve the economic capacity.

“If we could get 20 hours of electrical services across the city, that would be immense. You would see a greater boom of prosperity, and people able to educate themselves,” Collier said. “The industry can get back on their feet much easier.”

First they will have to take care of the essential services, the physical structures and get the markets and the economic physical stores open again, said Collier. This, up to this point, seems to be happening. When the security was set, it sparked a dramatic turn-around. Of the eight of 10 markets open, 90% of the shops within are operational.

“The next piece is building some of the economic structures that nations and economies have,” said Collier. “People need money to start a business.”

Iraqis need to deposit money and get a loan from a bank; write business plans and manage their money, all of which would be based on the Islamic traditions, he added. The third step is the continual expansion of markets, and building associations, and increasing the amount of business that goes through the neighborhoods.

They strive to bring these aspects together and bring society back on line again.

Also, the Iraqi government needs to play a larger role in securing Iraq’s future. Thus far, there is a huge gap between the government and the people of Iraq, said Collier.

“We want to bring the government to the people,” he continued. “We want to broker a relationship between the government and the people.”

The government has to act for the benefit of the people, said Collier. Strike Soldiers will help them and support them, but ultimately it will be the Iraqis who will make this happen.

Lone Sentinel Out, Superstars Move In

Multi-National Corps – Iraq PAO

BAGHDAD –The 95th Military Police Battalion ‘Superstars’ in from Mannheim, Germany officially took over military police operations in East Baghdad today at Forward Operating Base Rustamiyah here during a Transfer of Authority Ceremony.

“Lone Sentinel your mission is complete,” said Lt. Col. Chad McRee, commander, 759th MP Battalion, to his 759th Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment Soldiers who will complete their 15-month deployment in the upcoming days.

The 759th MP Battalion mission consisted of MP operations in the Rusafa District of Baghdad.

Their missions had them supporting over seventeen MP companies throughout the 15 month deployment which resulted in coverage of over two million miles on the roads of Iraq during mission support activities in support of the Iraqi Police.

The mission of the 759th focused on training Iraqi Police at the police station and district levels.

Throughout the Battalion’s deployment the 759th went on a combined seventeen thousand combat missions in Iraq, which includes one hundred twenty-eight Iraqi Police missions.

To add to the unit’s mission successes, Task Force Lone Sentinel put one and a half million dollars towards force protection for improvements to support Iraqi Police functions during their tour here.

The 95th MP Battalion, who will now serve in their second rotation in Iraq, is ready to continue the MP mission in the Rusafa District.

“We are open for business, and prepared to push forward until completion,” said Lt. Col. John Bogdan, commander,



(Photo by Sgt. Daniel D. Blottenberger, 18th Military Police Brigade Public Affairs)

Lt. Col. John Bogdan, commander 95th Military Police Battalion and Command Sgt. Maj. Brenda Curfman, command sergeant major 95th Military Police Battalion uncasing the battalion’s colors in a Transfer of Authority Ceremony at FOB Rustamiyah here today.

95th MP Battalion.

In the past weeks, the 95th had an opportunity to transition with the 759th to ensure there was no gap in service and as of today the mission responsibility is turned over to the 95th MP Battalion and it is time a new chapter is opened here

in Baghdad. Presiding over the ceremony was the 18th MP Brigade Commander, Col. Mark Spindler.

While recognizing the successes of the 759th, Spindler added, “The mission carries on and the Superstar Battalion is the right team at the right time.”

Teamwork Helps Find Answers About Cache Find

Multi-National Corps – Iraq PAO

BAGHDAD – The 18th Military Police Brigade and Multi-National Division – Baghdad troops worked together to find



Soldiers from the 4th Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 1ST Cavalry Division, stand beside a crater where part of a weapons cache was destroyed earlier in the day Nov. 5 in a stadium in the Saliyah neighborhood of Baghdad.

answers about a weapons cache discovered near the Provincial Directorate of Police headquarters building in Baghdad Nov. 5.

Soldiers from the 4th Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division searched a soccer field across from police headquarters.

They discovered two caches on the grounds consisting of ten 120mm mortar rounds, 13 60mm mortar rounds, one hand grenade, six hundred AK-47 rounds, 45 blocks of C4, one rocket propelled grenade, 4,000 PKC rounds, ten 82mm Mortars and two sniper rifles.

Not knowing who was responsible for the caches, a Baghdad police chief emphasized the importance of knowing about everyone working near the police headquarters.

“We need to pay better attention in the future. The people who did this have no loyalty to their country,” said the police chief.

The Iraqi Police had no knowledge of



(Photos by Sgt. Daniel D. Blottenberger, 18th MP BDE Public Affairs).

Soldiers from the 4th Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 1ST Cavalry Division, secure an area around a soccer stadium in the Saliyah neighborhood of Baghdad after finding a weapons cache.

the cache near the police headquarters until the discovery..

The joint operation held between the

two units and local police continued to demonstrate the importance of working together to eliminate caches.



Thermogenics and the Desert; A Potentially Deadly Combination

THE THERMOGENIC PRODUCTS INCLUDED IN SPORTS SUPPLEMENTS WORK BY RAISING THE USERS METABOLIC RATE WHICH PLACES THEM MORE AT RISK FOR HEAT RELATED INJURIES.

From One Mean Street to Another

Camden, N.J., to Baghdad, One Soldier Shares his Story of Success

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

FORWARD OPERATING BASE PROSPERITY, Iraq – Anyone who has gone to a Soldier of the Month or promotion board, knows how intense and intimidating it can be, no matter how much studying and prior preparation.

For Sgt. Chris Thomas, it wasn't just one board, two, or even three. He achieved what only one Soldier in an entire brigade could do: win five boards en route to being crowned the 2nd "Black Jack" Brigade Combat Team's Soldier of the Year.

Reflecting on the victory, Thomas remembers what it took to get to where he is today.

The Thomas family began in Brooklyn, N.Y. Chris was the oldest of four boys. At age seven, Thomas and his family moved from Brooklyn to Camden, N.J.

Here, Thomas would grow up being what he considered the leader of the family. His father, a former Marine, would give him the orders and Thomas would let the other brothers know just what Dad needed done.

"Being a leader kind of came easy to me," he said. "I was the oldest, so I had to take on a lot more responsibility and be the front runner for me and my brothers."

Growing up in Camden, Thomas was introduced to the competitive nature that would later push him to become the Black Jack's top Soldier and a noncommissioned officer.

"Everything was a competition where I grew up," he said. "Didn't matter what it was. Who could throw a football the farthest or who could run the fastest; it was all about being the best in the neighborhood."

During his junior year in high school, Thomas was approached by an Army recruiter. He didn't take it too seriously at first, but knew that if he didn't have a plan, he'd be stuck in Camden going nowhere.

"I've always felt that if you don't have a plan right after high school, you're just standing still," he said. "I joined the Army to do something while I make a plan and figure out just what I want to do."

Within weeks of graduating, Thomas was on a plane to go to basic training, and then advanced individual training to become an Apache helicopter systems repairer.

During his advanced individual training, Thomas received news that would change his life forever; his mother called him in the middle of the night to tell him that his brother, Joseph, had been fatally shot.

Although it was a heart-breaking experience to have to go through, Thomas wouldn't allow himself to forget the brother that was always closest to him in age.

The jersey he uses for flag football, the tank top for the boxing tournaments and even his full arm tattoo are adorned with the nickname "Baby J" to remember and honor his lost sibling.

After Completing AIT, Thomas went on to his first tour in Iraq with the 601st Aviation Battalion, 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division.

While with the 1st Infantry Division in Germany, Thomas entered and won a boxing tournament that would crown him the United States Army Europe champion. He'd use this new-found skill later in his career to stay fit and continue his winning ways.

Even after a successful rotation through Iraq, Thomas felt a need to learn something new and make himself more useful as a Soldier. He decided to change jobs and become a medic.

This would be the job that took him to Iraq again as part of a Military Transition Team sliced off the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd BCT, 1st Cav. Div.

While stationed at Forward Operating Base Union III with the transition team, the troops from the 3rd Battalion,



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

Camden, N.J., native Sgt. Chris Thomas of the 1st Battalion, 5th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Military Transition Team sliced from Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, recently won the 2nd "Black Jack" Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division's Soldier of the Year competition.

82nd Field Artillery Regiment held a boxing smoker to test the troops and civilians who work in the 2nd Brigade's area of operations.

Thomas jumped at the opportunity to box again. He increased his training and stepped into the ring eventually

going undefeated yet again to claim a lightweight crown for the second time in his five-year career.

After punishing his opponents in the ring, Thomas decided to try to take on another challenge that wouldn't depend on muscular strength, endurance or speed. He set his sights on winning the 1-5 Battalion's Soldier-of-the-Month competition.

He and Columbus, Ohio, native, Spc. Brian Schlicher, began studying at break-neck pace to make sure they would have an edge over everyone else in the competition.

"He really went out of his way to expand his knowledge base and took lots of initiative to study," Schlicher said. "There were nights I'd say 'I don't feel like studying,' but he'd keep asking and bugging me to study with him; even after going to the gym or late at night, he'd be reading and going over the study guides."

After Thomas won the monthly competition for his battalion, he found himself vying for battalion-level Soldier of the Quarter, then brigade-level quarterly honor.

"I can't remember too many times when I didn't know the answer," Schlicher said. "[Command] Sergeant Major [James] Daniels from 4-9 Cav., asked me, like, six or seven questions in a row until I finally got one wrong. I think it's just their way of testing your reaction to the question, not necessarily if you get it wrong."

Instead of going straight to the Soldier-of-the-Year board, Thomas went to a promotion board and easily passed. Shortly after winning the Soldier of the Year competition, he was promoted to sergeant.

Thomas admits that winning was great, but he also reflects back on another tour in Iraq and what may come next for his career.

Sometimes he looks back on his time in the military, his early life and his family, Thomas said he can't help but look to the future to find more challenges worthy of his effort.

"I reenlisted and one of my options was to get an additional skill identifier," he said. "At first, I didn't think I'd be in this long, but I plan to make a career out of it."

Soon after redeploying back to America, Thomas said he will be going to school to become an orthopedic specialist making casts and braces in Army hospitals.



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

Sgt. Chris Thomas (right) plugs his opponent with a right hand during a boxing smoker earlier this year. He would go undefeated and win the lightweight title. More recently, Thomas won the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division's Soldier of the Year award after winning five consecutive boards.



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

Welcome Home

(Above) Hundreds of friends and family members cheer as 1st Cavalry Division Soldiers walk across Fort Hood's Cooper Field Nov. 5 during a Welcome Home Ceremony. Soldiers from the division's 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 15th Sustainment Brigade and the Division Special Troops Battalion returned home to Fort Hood after serving 15 months in Iraq. (Left) Two-year-old Ryan Burke races to greet his father, Sgt. Maj. Ricardo Burke, a Penbroke Pines, Fla., native with the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade's Headquarters and Headquarters Company, during a Welcome Home ceremony for 1st Cavalry Division Soldiers returning home to Fort Hood, Texas Nov. 5. Approximately 150 First Team troopers returned to Central Texas after more than a year in Iraq.

Air Cavalry Prepares Spouses for Reunion, Reintegration

By Sgt. Cheryl Cox
1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs

FORT HOOD, Texas – As the families of the 1st Cavalry Division's 15th Sustainment Brigade welcome their Soldiers home, the rest of the First Team spouses are spending time learning what to expect and how to prepare for the reunion with their loved ones.

Spouses, from the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, came together to learn what to expect from their returning troop during Reunion and Reintegration Training Oct. 25 at the Oveta Culp Hobby Soldier and Family Readiness Center here.

Mary Prater, a representative of the Family Advocacy Program, spoke to spouses about how to slowly reintegrate their Soldier back into family life.

"This is a stressful time for not only the families here, but for the Soldiers as well," said Prater. "There have been many changes for both the Soldiers and the families in the last year."

It can also be difficult for the children to adjust.

"Many children may have a lot of questions. They may act out for attention, or be resentful to the parent for leaving," Prater said. "Continue with the current routines, discipline and activities, and slowly integrate your spouse back into these areas of life."

Following family advocacy, a representative from Army Community Service discussed how to correctly plan for reintegrating the deploying parent back into the family.

"It's important to communicate with Soldier – both now and when they get home," said Dave Gretscht, the ACS representative. "There will be obvious changes. Time changes everything – take the time to take in these changes before reacting to them."

During the open discussion with the spouses, Bridgit Lawson, wife of Staff Sgt. Darren Lawson, 4th Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, explained what she has learned about the "C2" of reunion.

"We can't come together and have a successful reunion

if we don't communicate and compromise," she said. "The Army has a version of C2 – command and control. But in reunion you can't have command and control if you want it to work. You have to communicate and compromise through the hard times and changes that have happen while you have been apart."

Also, Stacy Nelson, a social work case manager originally from Holland, Mich., took time to discuss how the stresses of the deployment may affect the Soldiers and how to tell the difference between Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and post-deployment (combat) stress.

"One-hundred percent of Soldiers returning from Iraq will have some form of PTSD and combat stress. Everyone in this room will have combat stress," she said. "However, only five to ten percent of the returning Soldiers will develop full PTSD."

Nelson gave them an idea of what to expect.

"Many of your husbands will not want to talk about what they have experienced, others will have family or friends tell them to not think about it," she continued. "But not talking about it and holding everything in can be harmful."

Nelson explained that the mind is like a filing cabinet and sometimes it takes a while for it to figure out where everything goes.

"When people hold in bad experiences and don't talk about what they have seen, done or been through, the mind doesn't have a chance to process the information and put it away so that it no longer affects day-to-day activities," she said. "Talk to your spouse, and remember that you don't need full details to communicate and help them through this process."

As the briefing came to a close, Maj. Shane Curtis, the 1st Air Cav. Bde. rear detachment commander from McMinnville, Tenn., spoke about how they will find out their Soldier is on the way home.

"A 'green suiter' will call each Family letting them know the date and codename for the flight that their Soldier is on," he explained. "For security reasons, we will not give the fam-

ilies the time for the flight or the flight number. However, they will be given the time for the reunion ceremony, which will be held once the Soldiers have completed the first portion of the reintegration process and signed out for a three-day pass."

Once the Families have been contacted letting them their Soldier is on their way home from Kuwait, the family will receive up to three more phone calls updating them with the progress of their Soldiers flight.

"The only call that a family may not receive before their Soldier lands is a call stating that the flight has left its final stop before arriving here at Ft. Hood depending on the location of the final stop, and how close they are to Ft. Hood," Curtis explained. "To ensure we are able to contact all families, please make sure your Soldier and the rear-detachment has updated phone numbers for where you will be."

Curtis went on to explain the process that the Soldiers and families will go through once the Soldiers have completed their three-day pass.

"Reintegration is not only for the Soldiers," he said. "There is also a portion of the training that is for the Spouses and both the Soldiers and spouses are encouraged to attend."

When the Reunion Training and Reception Brief were completed each spouse walked away with a few key comments at the forefront of their minds.

The first of these comments was made by Prater, who said "The key to the reunion and reintegration process is communication and using your resources."

Another important fact to remember was made by Gretscht, "Readjustment takes time. Things will start to feel normal in 30-90 days."

But all spouses and families need to remember that there have been major changes made at home and abroad during the past year. Things will never be as they were before the deployment.

Nelson made the final key comment. "There will be a new normal. Give yourself and your spouse time to adjust, reunite and reintegrate."



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

The Singing Cowboy Visits Baghdad Troops

Freddie Fuller, a Saledo, Texas, performs at Forward Operating Base Prosperity in central Baghdad for Soldiers of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division Nov. 10.

Lil' Chef Works With More Than Cheese

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – As many of us are working our way back to the U.S., I am throwing in another children's flick that can be used as a bonding tool with the little ones when we get back home. (Plus, sometimes I need excuses to watch cartoons because I don't have any babies.) Disney's new film "Ratatouille" is warm tale about trying to be all you can be (just like the old school Army motto.)

Remy, our main character, is in an awkward position.

He has mad culinary skills but one major factor is keeping him from his dream job as a chef. He's a rat.

Remy (voiced by Patton Oswalt) has a fantastic sniffer even for a critter. His nose has landed him the official job as poison inspector for his extended family.

He hates his job. He aspires to greatness, not the typical rat role. Most of these aspirations come from watching his hero, Auguste Gusteau, on television. Gusteau always tells his audience that anyone can cook.

Remy took that little line to heart and started making his own recipes.

Digging in the trash to get ingredients in the French countryside just wasn't cutting it. Instead, he started getting fresh food by scampering into the kitchen.

Rats are expected to be in the trash, but not in the kitchen. Kitchens are supposed to be no rodent zones.

The last time Remy was in the kitchen, he caught a Gusteau documentary, discovering his legendary chef hero is dead. He let his guard down in his sorrow and made a little squeak, waking up the human resident of the house.

The cute little old lady, who seemed harmless, went a little crazy with a shot gun, and ended up discovering the entire rat's nest.

Sadly, the whole clan had to escape before being peppered with bullet holes, but it actually worked out better for little Remy. During the escape, Remy gets separated from his human-hating family, but ended up in the heart of Paris at Gusteau's old restaurant.

Unable to control himself, he sneaks (once again) into the kitchen and ends up in an unlikely alliance with the trash boy named Linguini who is trying unsuccessfully to cook.

Remy hides under his big chef's hat and controls him like a marionette puppet with his hair making wonderful culinary concoctions and pushing them both toward success. (Is any one else craving cheese?)

Of course, everything comes to a squeaking halt when a mean, old food critic comes to squish the restaurant's success like a proverbial bug.

This flick is adorable and safe for the kiddos. The bad guys aren't really scary and the humor is tasteful and creative.

I especially liked the fact that there were no cheap gastro-intestinal, flatulent (aka fart) jokes. Plus, it teaches children not to eat things that are in the trash (very important.)

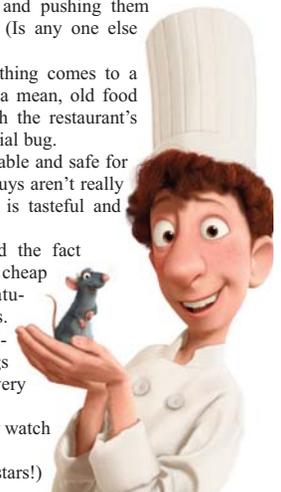
I would definitely watch it again!

(Four out of five stars!)



Random Reviews

Sgt. Nicole Kojetin



Cavalry Sergeant Has Sights Set on NBA

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

FORWARD OPERATING BASE PROSPERITY, Iraq – Of the hundreds of rooms inside the main palace on Forward Operating Base Prosperity, there is one in particular, a room that emits that kind of sound that sounds like muffled club-like music just before you enter.

The sign outside the door reads, “Boom Boom Room.” In fact, it’s merely a supply room, but it’s considered one of the best in the brigade. It’s the best because the person who runs it says it’s the best, and he says it the loudest.

Staff Sgt. Jessie L. Jackson Jr., is the supply sergeant for Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. Though his 6-foot-5 frame is striking, it stands subordinate to his ability to make heads turn as his voice carries itself throughout whatever room he is in.

During his deployment, Jackson has been spending almost every night officiating FOB Prosperity’s intramural flag football games, but with all his achievements on and off the field, he’s learned that all the guidance and advice he’s been given through many of the contacts in his vast network of family, friends and colleagues is starting to pay off.

He was asked to help out when 1st Sgt. Kenneth Patrick, Co. E, 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, saw him as a basketball referee, and what began is possibly a new career path for him.

Growing up in Shreveport, La., Jackson spent almost his entire life surrounded by basketball. While attending Captain Shreve High School, in Shreveport, he and his team won the Louisiana State High School basketball championship. His talents on the court took him to Louisiana State University-Shreveport, where he played on their team as a small forward. Yet, it wasn’t long until he succumbed to life on the streets.

After only a semester at LSU-Shreveport, he quickly found himself in a courtroom rather than a basketball court.

“I was in jail for 30 days waiting on my court date,” he recounted. “The judge gave me a choice to join the military or go to prison. So, at 17 years old, my parents went with me to the Marine Corps recruiting station; that’s how my military career started.”

As a Marine, he was also in the supply world. He spent



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

Staff Sgt. Jessie Jackson Jr., Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, officiates a flag football game at Forward Operating Base Prosperity in central Baghdad.

some of that time playing on the All-Marine Basketball Team, but after eight years, he left as a corporal and decided to transition into the Army. He arrived at Fort Hood, Texas in 2001 and started as a supply clerk with 2nd Squadron, 12th Cavalry Regiment, which was then a 2nd BCT battalion.

“As a young clerk, he had a busy supply room there,” said Sgt. 1st Class Kendrick Jones, 4-9 Cav.’s S-4 Logistics noncommissioned officer-in-charge. “He was just the loud guy in the corner. He wasn’t as knowledgeable in supply as he should have been at that time.”

When Jones, of Longview, Texas, first came to the squadron, he felt that, although Jackson had the potential, he wasn’t working to his full capacity.

“When I first arrived to the unit, there was a bunch of supply NCOs who didn’t care. I’m not going to lie, I was one of them,” admits Jackson. “I have to give credit to my ... ‘circle of trust’ ... like Sergeant First Class (Kendrick) Jones.”

Jackson, who refers to Jones as his mentor, calls him the “king” because of his experience and knowledge of not only the supply realm but also the countless life lessons he’s

passed onto him. Jones, who is on his way to retiring, said that today, Jackson is one of their best supply sergeants, and that he sees the mentoring and guidance he’s passing onto other supply clerk in the squadron and around the brigade.

“He’s one of our top guys – I mean, all my guys are sharp. He’s a mentor; a lot go to him for help,” Jones said. “He’s got a lot of the young Soldiers around him; they are supply sergeants and clerks. They look at him as a mentor – the same thing I did with him, he does with them.”

Jackson is the first to say that he has in fact come a long way – not only in the military but more importantly in life. His fast living days have all been a thing of the past since the birth of his son. He claims that more than anything, he wants to be not only a father-figure in his son’s life but a daddy.

“I live for him. Everything I do is for him,” he said. “I don’t want him to experience what I had to.”

Although he is currently working on his personal goals, he can never really escape his upbringing of wanting to help others. Growing up with five other siblings taught him to take care of others. His upbringing was received from a former Marine Corps first sergeant in his father.

“My father ruled with an iron fist,” he said. “He was very strict, but he was very compassionate... When I was growing up, my father had a saying. My father said, ‘if you want to gain anything, you have to give.’”

Jackson spends most of his time giving back to the Soldiers through both his day and his night job as a referee. Although Jackson has spent most of his time as a flag football referee, he hopes to move up to the NBA as basketball is his first love.

Upon his return to Texas, where he and his 8-year-old son Jessie III call home now, he plans on going to a sporting official seminar in Austin. Since he’s already taken his certification test online and received his license to call games, he’s a step closer to meeting his goal of taking on high school basketball games, but for now, he’s happy just giving his time as the “ref,” as he loves to be called, out on a dusty piece of real estate Soldiers play football on.

“I’d like to take it as far as I can go. My goal is trying to get to the NBA,” he said. “For now, I change and go out to the games because I know how important sports are to these Soldiers.”

Columnist Still Digesting Week 10 ‘Humble Pie’

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – In the last issue of the paper, I touted my near-perfect prognostications of National Football League games in the Daily Charge and Fort Hood Sentinel. I was on a roll! But a Week 10 meltdown has me choking down a heaping helping of humble pie.

After weeks of correctly predicting road wins for the majority of the NFL, I went with the home cooking in Week 10 and missed on nine of 14 games! Some of the more egregious home losses that weekend were the New Orleans Saints fumbling away a game against the previously winless St. Louis Rams, 37-29; the Arizona Cardinals taking out the visiting Detroit Lions, 31-21; and the Kansas City Chiefs dropping one at Arrowhead Stadium to Denver for the first time since 2002, 27-11!

What’s up with that?!

Rookie of the Year

This one is a no-brainer: the Minnesota Vikings’ Adrian Peterson just broke the single-game rushing record by blasting the San Diego Chargers with 296 yards and three touchdowns. The former Oklahoma Sooners standout has already broken the 1,000-yard

Trigger Pull

Master Sgt.
Dave Larsen



mark, even though he was sharing carries with Chester Taylor earlier on in the year.

Peterson was injury prone in college, and Vikings fans have to continue to worry about that fact, but he has the size to break tackles and the speed to outdistance even the fastest defensive back. I thought Peterson ran a bit too high in college, not squaring up enough to take a hit, but if nobody can lay a hand on him – like the entire Charger defense last weekend – does it really matter if he’s an upright runner?

Minnesota manhandled the Chargers at home, too, 35-17. Their record, though, is a long way off from post season consideration. Adrian got banged up in Lambeau Field, losing 34-0 to the Packers and leaving the game

in the third quarter.

For my money, even if he doesn’t take another snap this season he’s still a lock for rookie of the year honors.

Most Valuable Player

If the season were to end today, this would be a no-brainer pick. New England quarterback Tom Brady leads the league in touchdown passes and his quarterback rating is head and shoulders above his closest competition. He’s still on pace to throw nearly 60 touchdowns this year. On top of all of that, his team is undefeated (at press time, 9-0) and could stay that way unless they have a let-down performance against inferior competition.

Some sports writers are already calling the New England Patriots better than the perfect 1972 Miami Dolphins. While that could be true, I still think the Pats will stumble, at least once, before the season comes to a close. I said earlier that a Monday Night Football showdown at Baltimore Dec. 3 could be the Patriots undoing, but as bad as the Ravens looked losing 38-7 to Pittsburgh, it may be up to the Giants to knock down a 15-0 New England club in Week 17.

No matter what, I still don’t see the

Patriots going unbeaten this season, though they are still everyone’s favorite to win the Super Bowl.

Comeback Player of the Year

The fact that Vinnie Testaverde is even in the league at age 43, let alone getting a starting nod or two makes him a candidate, but honestly, this award has already been won, too. Randy Moss was absent without leave for his two years in Oakland. In New England, Moss is again an all-pro who makes amazing catches.

I’ve never liked Randy Moss – since his days in Minnesota and the faux-mooning he laid on Packer fans at Lambeau a few years back. Still, he’s found a home with the Patriots and a heretofore unheard of team-first mentality. He’s fun to watch catching passes from Tom Terrific (Brady).

Pigskin Pickin’

The 5-9 drubbing I took attempting to predict the victors in Week 10 dropped my overall season tally to 89-55; still more than respectable. On a positive note, at least I got the one home win right that counted that week: Green Bay stayed even with Dallas at 8-1! Go Packers!