

DESERT



VOICE

SPRING 2016

An aerial photograph of two divers in the Persian Gulf. One diver is in a black wetsuit and the other is in a green wetsuit. Both are wearing scuba gear and carrying red floats. The water is a deep blue-green color.

SAREX in the Persian Gulf

pg 18

From the 'Dash' to Daesh

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Kuwait, US remember liberation 25 years later

pg 14

Desert Voice

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On the Cover Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Marvin Masa, a rescue diver with Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 26, hooks Army Staff Sgt. Ian Kummer, the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade public affairs noncommissioned officer-in-charge, onto a hoist during a search and rescue exercise in the Persian Gulf on Feb. 3. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. David N. Beckstrom, 19th Public Affairs Detachment, U.S. Army Central)

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CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO

I'd like to begin by saying again how truly honored I am to command U.S. Army Central. Since I assumed command in November, I have made a concerted effort to meet as many of you as possible as I travel throughout the region. I am always amazed by your efforts and your dedication to our mission. It is clear our Soldiers are dedicated and are working exceedingly hard to execute our responsibilities in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

As most of you know, I recently released my initial assessment and observations from my first 45 days in command. I'm not going to reiterate everything here, but I would like to provide some additional insight into what I conveyed in my assessment. The command is doing some pretty impressive things, but I also believe we have significant room to improve. With the impending military table of organization and equipment 5.4 reductions, we have an opportunity to not only change, but to truly transform this organization – to make it stronger and better.

As we implement changes in the coming months, I want us to take a careful look at the way we do business. We need to critically analyze the current tasks we perform and attempt to streamline these processes whenever and wherever possible. And I want to personally challenge every one of our leaders to question the status quo in everything we do. I don't expect us to do 'more with less.' I expect us to do what is required of us as an Army Service Component Command/Theater Army with the resources we have. So, we will need to work smarter.

Also included in my recent assessment were four key attributes that I believe will define USARCENT as a high-performing orga-

nization – agility, discipline, synchronization and fitness. As both individual and collective attributes, they will guide my thoughts as I develop my vision for the organization and refine our enduring priorities in the near future, and I'd like to expand on each one.

First, I believe simplicity can lead to USARCENT becoming a more agile organization. When I look at our current priorities, I think we can find a way to reduce that number to perhaps three or four simple, clear priorities that everyone understands and that will help us focus our efforts. Further, we shouldn't be tied to cumbersome, bureaucratic processes solely because that's the way we've always done things. We need to think boldly and creatively in order to find ways that will enable us to perform our tasks more efficiently and with fewer resources. We need to be open to new ways of doing things. For example, our more junior Soldiers may have ideas for how to be leaner, more efficient and more innovative and we should welcome those ideas.

Additionally, one of our greatest challenges with a geographically dispersed command is ensuring we remain synchronized. To that end, we have work to do in clarifying the roles of multiple command posts while developing and extending our knowledge management capabilities. This synchronization also extends to working with our regional partners. We need to ensure our actions in fostering strategic relationships are nested with our higher headquarters' actions and demonstrate our commitment to our partners at every level. All of these investments will bring us closer to long-term security and stability in the region.

I'd also like to emphasize discipline and

its importance in how we conduct ourselves. I believe discipline defines us as a profession. Individually, I expect leaders to uphold Soldier standards, and organizationally, staffs should have sound systems and processes that allow routine actions to be performed routinely. Discipline also includes maintaining physical, mental and spiritual fitness and I fully expect leaders to lead by example and inspire their Soldiers to maintain fitness across all three of those dimensions.

Another subject of critical importance to me and an indicator of indiscipline in the organization is the high number of sexual assaults. To be sure, USARCENT faces a daunting task in our efforts to stop sexual assault. Every act of sexual assault erodes the trust so vital to our profession and fundamentally undermines our values. Stated simply, sexist behaviors, sexual harassment and sexual assault will not be tolerated, condoned or ignored. Leaders at all levels must take an active approach toward ensuring a safe and healthy environment for all of our Soldiers and civilians.

I'd like to close by saying we are facing uncertain times with diminishing resources, yet I remain optimistic. I am certain that USARCENT, at the end of the day, will succeed because of the talents and abilities of its people, our most valued resource. For us to succeed, leaders need to critically analyze our processes and challenge the status quo. In the near future, I will provide my vision for the organization and those enduring priorities that will serve to focus all of our actions and resources. Finally, USARCENT has a proud legacy to uphold and I am confident that each of you will do your part to ensure our success. **THIRD, ALWAYS FIRST!** ★



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Kummer



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Kummer



Courtesy photo

Top Left - Staff Sgt. Jesus Romero, a sheet metal mechanic in Company B, 640th Aviation Support Battalion, 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, from Mesa, Arizona, inspects damage to an AH-64 Apache airframe at Camp Buehring, Kuwait.

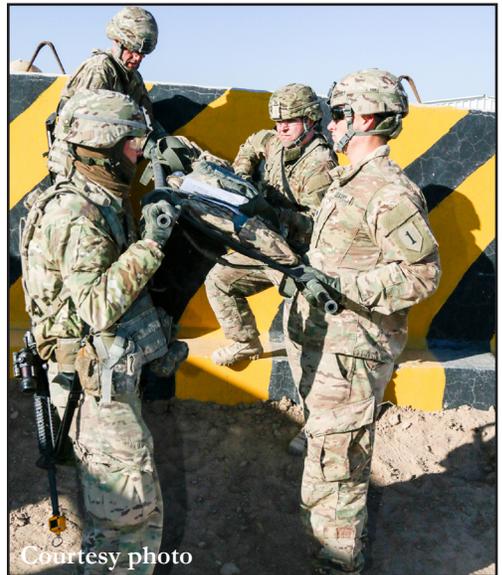
Top Right - Maj. Gen. Paul C. Hurley, the commanding general of 1st Theater Sustainment Command, leads participants in a professional development session at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

Left - A Soldier from 1st Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, competes at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, to become the brigade's Best Fire Support Team.

Right - Several U.S. Army Central medics receive Expert Field Medical Badge training from Soldiers with 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, at Camp Buehring, Kuwait.

Bottom Left - Soldiers with 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, provided Expert Infantryman Badge training to candidates from multiple units at Camp Buehring, Kuwait.

Bottom Right - Members of Shockwave, the 1st Armored Division Rock Band, perform before a standing room only crowd at the Music Unites Us cultural event at Al-Shaheed Park, Kuwait City.



Courtesy photo



Courtesy photo



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. David Beckstrom

From the ‘Dash’ to Daesh

Story By:
Sgt. 1st Class Luke Graziani



In 1990, Third Army was sent to the Middle East to command Army units during Operation Desert Shield/Storm. Third Army provided command and control and sustainment for two Army corps and took on overall land component planning responsibilities, which led to the liberation of Kuwait on Feb. 26, 1991. A company of Soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division march across the flightline to board the aircraft that will carry the unit to Saudi Arabia for Operation Desert Shield. (U.S. Army photo)

U.S. Army Central, ‘Patton’s Own,’ Third Army, has a long and distinguished history in and out of battles and conflicts all over the world. Headquartered at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina, with a forward element at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, it is the Army service component command for U.S. Central Command.

USARCENT, a forward positioned land power presence, shapes the CENTCOM area of responsibility in order to support operations against extremists, assure access, build partner capacity, develop relationships, and deter adversaries while providing a mission command capability that can set the theater and execute unified land operations in support of commander requirements. The vast area of responsibility, spanning some 20 different countries in Africa, Asia, and the Arabian Peninsula, is arguably the largest and most critical to current and future military operations.

“In accordance with the Unified Command Plan, the AOR extends from Egypt in the west to Pakistan in the east, and from Yemen in the south to the former Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan in the north,” said Col.

Terry Cook, USARCENT assistant chief of staff G3. “It includes key countries that are often in the news – Syria, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, and Afghanistan.”

What is currently known as USARCENT began with the designation as The Third United States Army, which it held for many years. Throughout its history, the organization was tasked with several different types of missions, became deactivated and then reactivated more than once, fought long battles in times of war, served as an occupying force and at one time or another, acted as a training force.

The 1918 winter activation order during World War I moved Third Army to central Germany as an occupation force. It conducted operations and contingency training until being disbanded in the summer of 1919.

Prior to World War II, Third Army was activated once again in 1932 and remained largely a ‘paper formation,’ which meant that primary duties were to hold periodic and less than adequate training exercises. Nevertheless, it was after this brief respite that Third Army would be commanded by Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, claim the designation of

‘Patton’s Own,’ and turn the tide of the war by taking the offensive and dashing across France. History was made, blood was shed, and ‘Patton’s Own’ helped make the Battle of the Bulge an allied victory.

Third Army again was designated as an occupational force and took on the challenge rebuilding postwar Germany until being called back to the U.S. in 1947. The organization’s focus returned to acting as a command and training force for units within the U.S. until 1974 when its books were closed, yet again.

Near the end of 1982, Third Army returned to active status with a new headquarters based at Fort McPherson, Georgia. It was at this stage of the organization’s evolution that most closely resembles its current state. The mission was to serve as the Army component in a unified command, which it still does presently.

“We are the land force professionals in the most volatile region of the world.”

Col. Terry Cook



Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, speaks to Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe, January 1945. Patton led Third Army in a sweep across France and played an instrumental role in defeating the German counter offensive in the Ardennes. Patton commanded Third Army from 1944 to 1945. Third Army's unit motto 'Patton's Own - Third, Always First' is in honor of General Patton. (U.S. Army photo)

Many operations over the years have firmly cemented Third Army's presence in the AOR. Following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the organization planned, supported and controlled the ground operations that defeated the Taliban government and later toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein. Now, formally designated as USARCENT, the organization maintains flexibility to change and adapt to any threats as they arise.

"Three times, since 2000, the nation has called upon CENTCOM to establish a joint force for operations in its area of responsibility," said Cook. "Each of these three times, CENTCOM has called upon USARCENT to lead the effort - under Lt. Gen. PT. Mikoloshuk, at the start of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in 2001, under Lt. Gen. David McKiernan at the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom in Kuwait and Iraq in 2003, and most recently under Lt. Gen. James L. Terry, as the Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve.

"No other Army service component command has led a joint force in the last decade," Cook explained. "We are the land force professionals in the most volatile region of the world. While the attacks in France actually occurred in the European Theater of Operations, in fact those responsible emanated from the Islamic State, in Syria and Iraq."

USARCENT is currently operating in an

extremely volatile area. With an ever growing threat of radical militant opposition all over the AOR, it's a heavy burden on the organization to maintain healthy and active relationships with partner nations and allied forces. Cook affirms that the intent is not to step on their toes and take the lead, but "build the capacity in their land forces in order to ensure they are capable of securing their own territories and assisting in regional defense."

The military forces of the U.S. are no strangers to taking the fight to the enemy or standing strong against any threat, foreign or domestic. Battles are won with strength and the will to fight, but wars are often won with the ability to build partnerships and develop strong friendships with allies.

"We are affecting positive

change through our partnerships, including some very key allies: Jordan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Qatar," said Cook. "It's key that these countries step-up their game in terms of security, as they face the threats from the Islamic State and Iran.

"We are also teaming with our sister services on some key initiatives that have been ongoing for several years - most especially in building a fires capability and an air/mis- sile defense in the region. Air Forces Central Command, which is also based at Shaw, is a key partner in both efforts. The 4th Battle- field Coordination Detachment, one of our enabling commands, lives and works with AFCENT in the Combined Air and Space Operations Center, and the 32nd Air Missile Defense Command is co-located with AFCENT in Qatar."

USARCENT's mission is far from complete. Along with continuing operations around the globe, recurring training exercises around the AOR, and other missions, the organization is also adapting to a shrinking pool of manpower. The

reduction of forces across the entire military infrastructure plays a big part in how the future of USARCENT will develop.

"I think we are at a crossroads. The political environment is trying to account for the fact that, while it wants less forward deployed forces, less Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and Marines in harm's way," said Cook, adding, "the reality is that we are seeing threats to U.S. interests abroad grow, and we are hearing from our partners that they rely on us for stability and security."

Although there are challenges, it will not stop USARCENT from achieving its mission. Throughout the years, 'Patton's Own' have faced many obstacles and overcame each of them. The organization met them head on by adapting to an ever evolving battlefield.

"It's going to be a challenge," said Col. Charles Krumwiede, USARCENT deputy operations officer. "The Army's drawing down, but Daesh didn't get the memo. We can't let personnel reductions be an excuse for not getting the work done. If you look at the history of the Army - probably back in Patton's day as well - these are the same challenges the Army always had."

The corridors of Patton Hall - USARCENT HQ at Shaw AFB - will, over time, become quieter as the days go by. The work that is being done in the offices and meeting rooms within these walls will carry on. The decisions that are made and the ideas that are created affect what's happening in the AOR.

"It's tangible. It's not some contingency, or a 'what if,' or... a staff action for something that could happen," Krumwiede said. "You're actually involved in real-world activities. You realize that what you do will have an impact and it's important. There are people counting on you." ★



A paratrooper (right) with 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, demonstrates how to walk and shoot while an Iraqi army soldier with the 72nd Brigade, 15th Division, mimics his technique during a close-quarters marksmanship range at Camp Taji, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Cody Quinn)



Capt. Musab Mubarak (left), a dental officer in the Kuwait National Guard, and Capt. Brandon Mendez (right), a dental officer for 299th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Armor Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division are extracting a wisdom tooth of a KNG soldier at the KNG Hospital in Kuwait City. 'Lifeline' battalion is partnered with the KNG in support of the brigade's mission in Southwest Asia. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jin Nakamura)

Building partnerships, enhancing smiles

Story by: **Sgt. Jin Nakamura and Staff Sgt. Tamika Dillard**

What started out as a routine visit to a partner-nation hospital turned out to be more for Capt. Brandon Mendez, a 'Crimson Knight' dental officer, as he scrubbed in with his partners.

"The purpose of the visit was to meet the Kuwaiti National Guard dental officers and discuss future combined joint dental procedures," said Mendez, with 299th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division. "But what actually happened was partnership, two dentists working together for a common good. I assisted on a couple of dental procedures and then took the lead on a few."

"As Captain Mendez walked in, I felt it would be better for us to work on patients together rather than sit down and talk about it," said Capt. Musab Mubarak, a Kuwait National Guard dental officer. "He was not expecting it, but he did not hesitate to join us."

"When Captain Mubarak asked me to join him and his team I was a bit worried, but

excited at the same time," Mendez said with a smile. "I enjoy oral surgery so I jumped right in."

Mendez, a native of Pittsburg, Kansas, is a graduate of the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Dentistry and a graduate of the Fort Campbell Army Advanced Education in General Dentistry-1 year program.

"The closest experience I have had to this was during my undergraduate studies," said Mendez.

"I went to Peru for two weeks on a medical mission and got the opportunity to assist the Peruvian dentists while they treated patients," he added.

Mendez said the visit at the hospital was a unique experience for him.

"The language and culture barrier was the biggest difference for me," said Mendez. "I had to use an interpreter to communicate with my patient and I'm not used to that."

Mendez said that with U.S. Soldiers, he can clearly communicate what the procedure will entail, easily ask if more anesthetics are necessary, and tell the patient what he can

expect to feel.

"The different cultures have different expectations of what dental treatment should be, how to respond to medical professionals and different ideas on how pain should be tolerated," said Mendez. "I had to trust that the KNG guardsmen knew I was a dentist, that the procedure had been explained to him, that I had used sufficient anesthesia and that he would let me know if there was a problem."

Both Mendez and Mubarak said that experiences like these are the biggest benefit from this type of partnership.

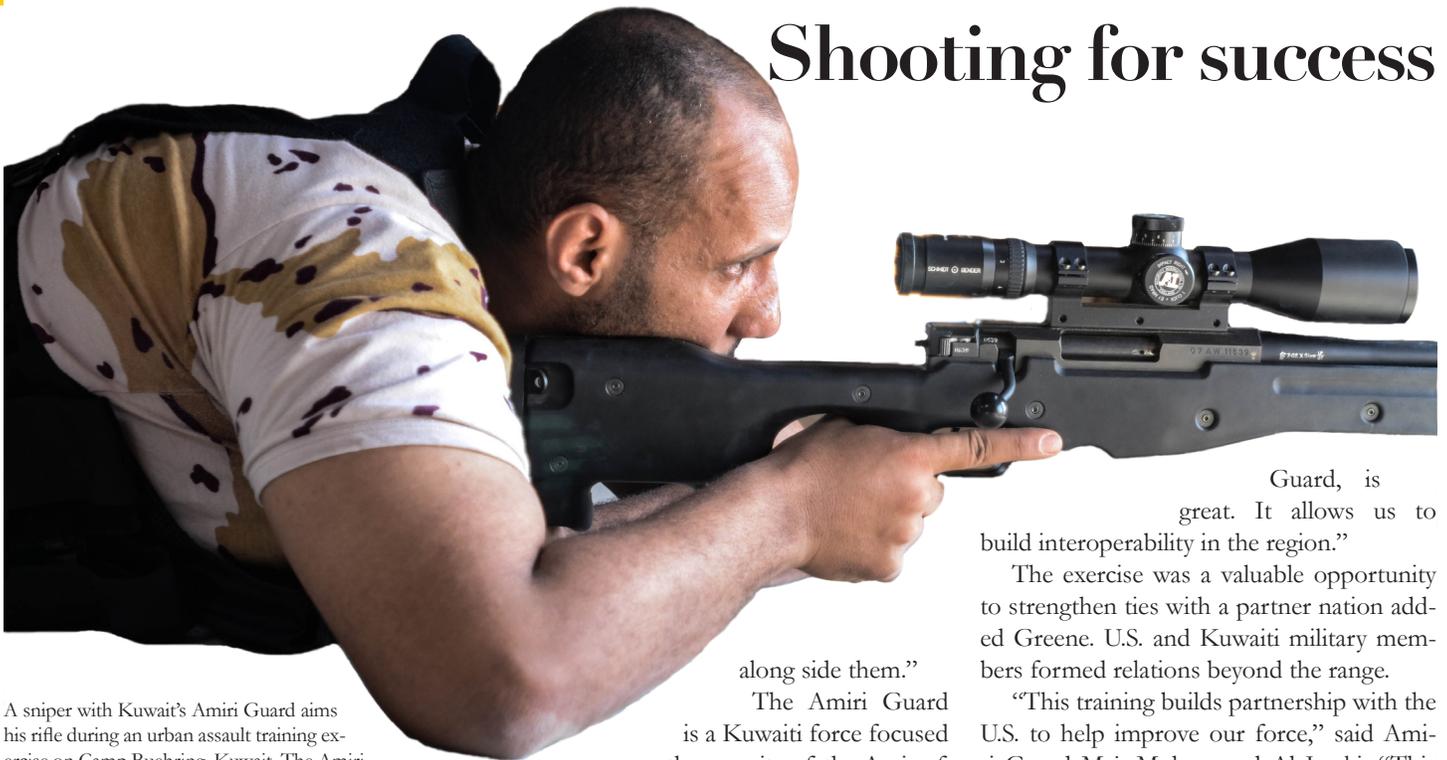
"It's the type of exchange that you can't get anywhere else," said Mubarak.

"I graduated from school in Egypt, where Mendez graduated from the United States. Information exchange is critical in our field to become better dentists," Mubarak added.

Mendez agreed, adding that he is looking forward to working with Mubarak and other KNG dental officers in the future.

"They have invited me back whenever I would like," said Mendez. "Another trip is definitely in the works." ★

Shooting for success



A sniper with Kuwait's Amiri Guard aims his rifle during an urban assault training exercise on Camp Buehring, Kuwait. The Amiri Guard is a Kuwaiti land force unit in charge of protecting the Amir of Kuwait and rescuing hostages.

Story and photos by:
Sgt. James Bunn

Partner nations strengthen their unity by focusing on integrating the capabilities of their combined forces.

As equal partners Soldiers assigned to 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, and Kuwait's Amiri Guard conducted an interoperability exercise that focused on realistic training in urban assault tactics, including building clearance and sniper over-watch, to help the partner units improve their training methods and readiness.

"Working together is important," said 1st Lt. James Greene, a platoon leader with 1st Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3-4 ABCT. "You never know where or what our next battle will be and when we strengthen our strategic partners we strengthen regional security."

Training together allowed the two forces to observe tactics and techniques important in building and maintaining a responsive joint force, said Greene.

"Working together with the Amiri Guard has been great," said Greene. "Knowing their tactics, techniques and procedures allows us to integrate better with them if we fight

"They are equal to us in their professionalism and ability."

Sgt. 1st Class Jason Sypherd

along side them."

The Amiri Guard is a Kuwaiti force focused on the security of the Amir of Kuwait and also trains for special missions.

During the training Amiri Guard forces, under supervision of scouts and snipers with 1-68 Armor, assaulted a building, clearing each room as they went. Once the building was cleared Amiri Guard snipers rushed into the building and began engaging targets down range.

"This exercise was good for our Soldiers," said Greene. "It was the highlight of our deployment. Any time you can work with a foreign partner, in particular a unit like the Amiri

Guard, is great. It allows us to build interoperability in the region."

The exercise was a valuable opportunity to strengthen ties with a partner nation added Greene. U.S. and Kuwaiti military members formed relations beyond the range.

"This training builds partnership with the U.S. to help improve our force," said Amiri Guard Maj. Mohammad Al Jareki. "This training is good because it breaks our normal routine to improve our training."

The two forces thanked each other at the end of the training. Sgt. 1st Class Jason Sypherd, a platoon sergeant with 1-68 Armor, said working with the Amiri Guard was a great opportunity for both forces to learn from each other.

"The Amiri Guard are professional soldiers," added Sypherd. "Getting to work with them has been mutually beneficial; they are equal to us in their professionalism and ability." ★



Members of Kuwait's Amiri Guard approach a building during an urban assault training exercise on Camp Buehring, Kuwait.



Lt. Gen. Michael X. Garrett (second from left), the commanding general of U.S. Army Central, and Command Sgt. Maj. Ronnie R. Kelley, the senior enlisted adviser of USARCENT, confer with Maj. Gen. Mukhamedzhan Talasov, the deputy chairman of the general staff for the armed forces of Kazakhstan during a visit at USARCENT's headquarters. (U.S. Army photo by Master Sgt. Gary L. Qualls, Jr.)

Kazak Army Visits USARCENT

Story by:

Master Sgt. Gary L. Qualls, Jr.

A contingent from the Kazak armed forces visited U.S. Army Central and South Carolina to learn ways to build its military forces as they transition from a conscript to an all-volunteer army.

The Kazakhstan contingent toured Fort Sumter National Monument, Fort Jackson, USARCENT, and Shaw Air Force Base to see how the Army and Air Force take care of and train Soldiers and Airmen as well as how the armed forces compete with corporate America to attract the best of the best to wear the uniform.

The Kazakhstani visit specifically entailed seeing how the American Civil War began, observing the basic training process, seeing how Soldiers live in the barracks, watching them train on the ranges and becoming familiar with resources, such as Army Community Services, Army Emergency Relief, Master Resiliency Training, Suicide Prevention,

the Chaplaincy Directorate and the Morale, Welfare and Recreation program.

Maj. Gen. Mukhamedzhan Talasov, deputy chairman of the general staff, and the Kazakhstan contingent said while at Fort Sumter National Monument, they were impressed with how Maj. Robert Anderson and his men fought valiantly to the very last moment until having to succumb to the much larger Confederate forces. Talasov described Anderson as, "A role model of a warrior."

"From this experience I understood where the strong spirit of the American Army comes from," he said.

The members of the Kazakhstan contingent were especially impressed with the ACS program, particularly the support the agency gives Families while Soldiers are deployed.

"The main thing is that every time a Soldier is deployed, he is given the opportunity to perform his mission without having to think

about problems at home, so that he is 100 percent focused on his mission," Talasov said.

Chaplains, who escorted the contingent throughout its visit, explained to the group that most Soldiers did not have Families 25 years ago. That is not the case anymore, for example in USARCENT, 51 percent of enlisted Soldiers and 73 percent of officers are married.

Another highlight of the trip noted by the Kazakhstanis is the great respect they observed from the civilian population toward the military.

The group, whose country celebrated 25 years of independence Dec. 16, 2015, was also impressed with the quality and level of

"Our great NCO corps is definitely empowered by great officers."

Command Sgt. Maj. Ronnie R. Kelley



A drill instructor assists Maj. Gen. Mukhamedzhan Talasov at a Fort Jackson, South Carolina, range. Mukhamedzhan led a Kazakhstan contingent that visited to learn about all aspects of U.S. Armed Forces as Kazakhstan transitions from a conscript to an all-volunteer fighting force. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Geczal Rivera)

infrastructure and facilities they saw at the locations along their weeklong tour.

“Everything was in very logical order,” Talasov noted.

In conferring with Lt. Gen. Michael X. Garrett, the USARCENT commanding general, and Command Sgt. Maj. Ronnie R. Kelley, conveyed the critical importance of the noncommissioned officer corps.

Most challenges faced by the Army can be attributed to leadership, Garrett noted, pointing to the all-important link in the chain of command, the first non-commissioned officer in that command structure.

“When people are asked what they are most impressed with about the Army or USARCENT, it has never been our generals,” Garrett said. “It has never been the brilliant plans our colonels come up with. I think they are mildly impressed with our equipment, but they question the cost of it. The one thing that cannot be duplicated is the amount of trust we have in our noncommissioned officers.”

“Our great NCO corps is definitely empowered by

great officers,” Kelley added. “There’s an NCO who can make decisions at the most basic level. They can see indicators for suicide, for example, or whatever. And they have a great support structure called the NCO Support Channel to back them up.”

Talasov agreed on the importance of the NCO corps, pointing out that Kazakhstan was the first Eastern Bloc country since the breakup of the former Soviet Union to im-

plement the NCO corps and raise its image within the armed forces.

Talasov expressed gratitude and admiration to Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev for his open-mindedness about looking for new ideas to better the nation. He also expressed gratitude to Garrett and Kelley for being “very open to us” in helping Kazakhstan armed forces find their way and add to their strengths, such as patriotism and the “fire of our warriors” for the future.

Leadership from Kazakhstan and USARCENT agreed that raising and maintaining an all-volunteer army is

very difficult. Still, the U.S. Army has successfully done it since 1973 and Talasov expressed confidence the Kazak army can do it as well.

“A successful transition (from a conscript to an all-volunteer force) did not happen overnight for the U.S. and it will probably not happen overnight for us,” Talasov said. “That’s why we’re here ... because we know we have a lot to learn from you.” ★



Maj. Gen. Mukhamedzhan Talasov checks out an F-16 Fighter Jet at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina, during a visit by a Kazakhstan contingent. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Geczal Rivera)



Maj. Daniel Toven, a music liaison officer with U.S. Army Central, directs a combined grades band at the American International School in Kuwait City, as part of USARCENT's effort to build strong and long-lasting partnerships in its area of responsibility. Toven worked with the band over a five-week period, which culminated with the concert at the school attended by faculty, parents, friends and Servicemembers. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Youtoy Martin)

Music bridges language barrier

Story by:

Sgt. Christopher Prows

An orchestra needs many talented musicians, just like a coalition needs talented Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen from many nations to forge enduring partnerships and accomplish any mission.

The U.S. Army Central music program is one asset that is able to reach across cultural and language barriers to form relationships and lasting partnerships.

"Music is the most effective form of communication, especially when it comes to emotions," said Maj. Dan Toven, a music liaison officer with USARCENT. "If we want to communicate things, like friendship and patriotism, we can do that through words and pictures, but music is the most effective way to communicate those things."

Toven, a professional with advanced degrees in music performance and conducting, spent five weeks with students of the American International School-Kuwait, in Kuwait City, and provided instrumental instruction and directed several numbers to continue building international bonds.

"I always relish the opportunity to go back and work with young musicians," said Toven, a native of Union City, Pennsylvania. "It is exciting in this context because we accomplish two things, we build up young musicians and we build relationships with these students. Music is a great vehicle to build relationships and that is one of our chief objectives in USARCENT."

When facilitating key leader engagements with foreign militaries or governments, a musical performance is the perfect setting. It is a non-threatening event, puts everybody in a good mood and you create an environment that helps people work together, said Toven.

"Music is a way (the Army) can take the professionalism, technical expertise, and world class abilities of our (Soldiers) and put them on public display," Toven said.

"The more we can work together, the more these students understand American culture," said Dan Massoth, the high school instrumental music director at the American International School-Kuwait. "Being able to meet someone in the U.S. Armed Forces is an important way to build bridges between cultures and communities and that is some-

thing we really want to make sure we do more of at the school."

According to Massoth, a native of St. Paul, Minnesota, the students were excited to work with a professional who has accomplished so much and liked hearing about his life experiences.

"If we only communicate battle plans and troop strengths with our partners, we leave out a whole side of the communication process," said Toven.

"What music does, is it enables us to engage that other side of people and creates positive environments, which then helps us achieve our strategic defense goals," Toven added.

Toven emphasized how important these collaborations are and how the international nature of music can be a bridge, a language that anybody can understand. He said this concert was a wonderful way to highlight our continuing partnership.

"The kids are going to take this memory with them and somewhere down the road they are going to remember that U.S. Army guy and what was taught, that is what is important," said Toven. ★

Army adjutant general emphasizes new NCOER



Brig. Gen. James Iacocca, the Adjutant General of the U.S. Army, discusses the importance of the new noncommissioned officer evaluation report with leaders of U.S. Army Central on Camp Arifan, Kuwait, as part of his worldwide tour. Iacocca said each individual is supposed to get training on the new NCOER.

Story and photo by: Sgt. David Beckstrom

Since hard work pays off, the newly revised Army noncommissioned officer evaluation report, designed to identify the top-tier noncommissioned officers, will be the inked certification for those NCOs separating themselves from their peers.

Brig. Gen. James Iacocca, the adjutant general of the U.S. Army, discussed the importance of the new NCOER with U.S. Army Central leaders as part of his worldwide tour.

“Each individual is supposed to get training on the new NCOER, but I want Servicemembers to hear these ideas from my perspective and why we chose this style of rating,” said Iacocca.

The new NCOER system replaced the previous version at the beginning of 2016.

“The NCOER had to change in order to stay relevant,” said Iacocca. “We have implemented a system that only allows the top 24 percent to receive the highest rating, this

ensures that we separate the wheat from the chafe.”

According to Iacocca, under the old NCOER system, about 90 percent of all ratings were submitted to the Army Human Resources Center with the highest rating.

“We had to look more in depth through each of the Soldiers files to figure out who to promote from that 90 percent,” said Iacocca. “I am sure that there was some incredible talent that had been passed up because the selection boards were saturated with the top ratings.”

According to a 2010 review of the previous version of the NCOER, this saturation caused a stigma of people being promoted because of friends rather than merit.

“This system is designed to break the ‘good old boy’ mentality,” said Sgt. Maj. Lonnie Allen, the USARCENT safety sergeant major.

“Restricting the highest rating to Soldiers that truly stand-out, we will be able to show the next generation of Servicemembers that hard work and dedication is

what is needed to be successful, rather than who you know,” added Allen.

The new system and support forms are about aligning the qualities of an Army leader with current Army doctrine of leadership, said Iacocca. If NCOs demonstrate the characteristics and competencies described in Army doctrine, the Army’s corps of NCOs will be made that much better.

The NCOER is designed to help leaders mentor their subordinates through developmental counseling throughout the year.

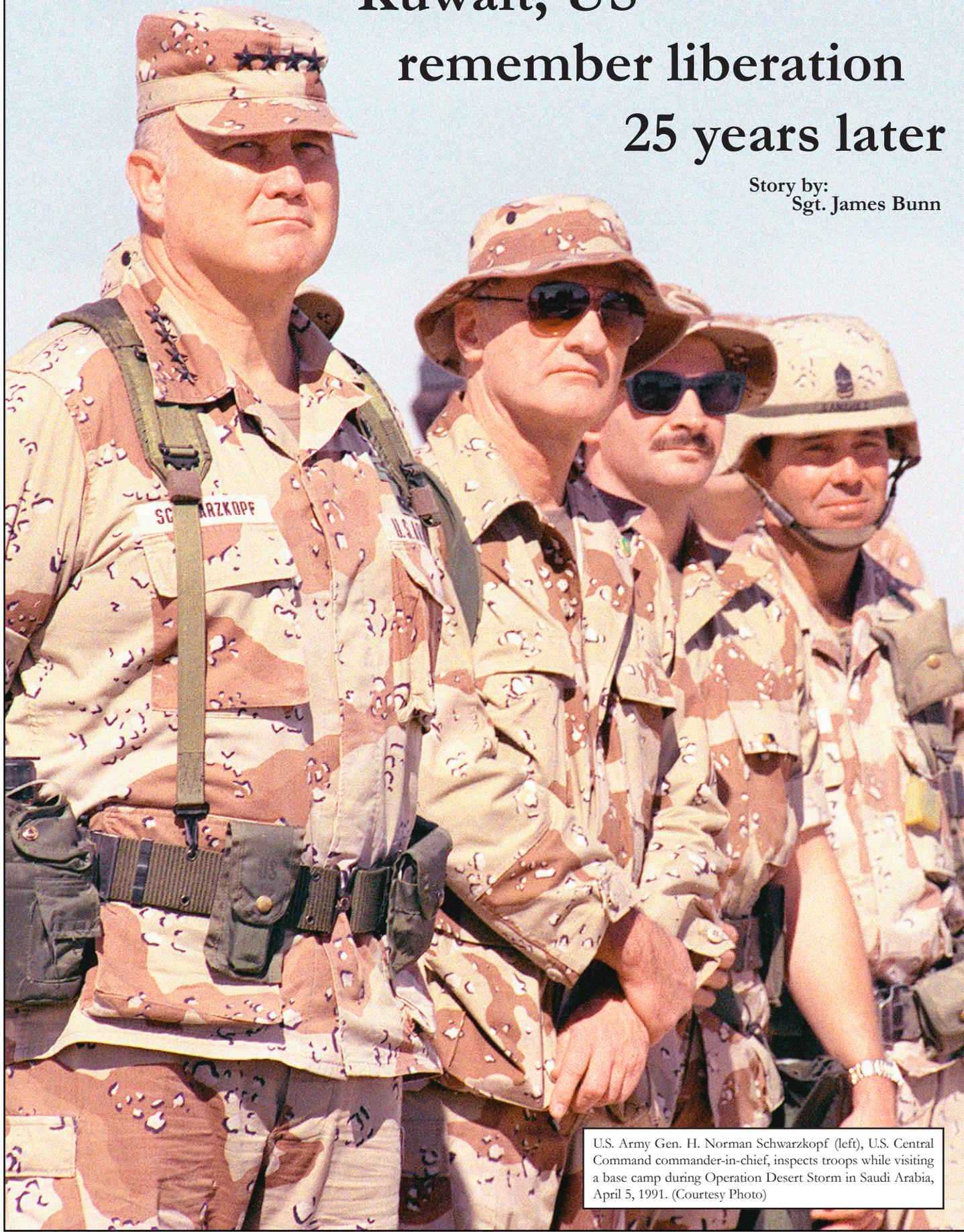
“Leaders will be shaping NCOs in a more active setting by using the counseling,” said Allen, a native of Fayetteville, North Carolina. “This will help the individual understand what is expected of them and what their strengths and weaknesses are.”

“These changes to the NCOER will not only make our NCO Corps better and more proficient, but it will make the Army much more effective,” said Iacocca. “If these individuals strive to be the best at everything they do, we will continue to be the best fighting force in the world.”



Kuwait, US remember liberation 25 years later

Story by:
Sgt. James Bunn



U.S. Army Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf (left), U.S. Central Command commander-in-chief, inspects troops while visiting a base camp during Operation Desert Storm in Saudi Arabia, April 5, 1991. (Courtesy Photo)



A 401st Tactical Fighter Wing F-16C Fighting Falcon aircraft prepares to take off on a mission during Operation Desert Storm. (Courtesy Photo)

Twenty five years after Desert Storm, Americans and Kuwaitis are pausing to reflect on the role the coalition played in Kuwait's liberation and are continuing to reaffirm their commitment to safety and security in the region.

On Aug. 2, 1990, Saddam Hussein's forces invaded Kuwait. Following the initial invasion, the U.S. led efforts to form a multinational coalition to work with the United Nations Security Council to help liberate Kuwait. Coalition forces began mobilizing in nearby Saudi Arabia in response to the invasion.

The multinational force included 38 other countries from around the world; including Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, Italy, Kuwait, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Syria, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates.

Saddam's aggression continued as he refused to remove his forces from Kuwait. On Jan. 17, 1991, U.S. and coalition forces began an air campaign to protect the Arabian Peninsula and secure Kuwait's sovereignty.

Within 24-hours, coalition forces controlled the airspace over Kuwait. In an attempt at retaliation, Saddam launched missile attacks against Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Hours after the air campaign began, former President George H. W. Bush gave a speech describing the U.S.-led coalition's efforts to liberate Kuwait from Saddam's regime.

"Just two hours ago, allied air forces began an attack on military targets in Iraq and

Kuwait," said Bush. "Our objectives are clear: Saddam Hussein's forces will leave Kuwait. The legitimate government of Kuwait will be restored to its rightful place, and Kuwait will once again be free. Iraq will eventually comply with all relevant United Nations resolutions, and then, when peace is restored, it is our hope that Iraq will live as a peaceful and cooperative member of the

family of nations, thus enhancing the security and stability of the Gulf."

On Feb. 24, 1991, the coalition's ground assault began. Within four days of the assault Saddam's forces were driven from Kuwait and the occupation was over.

Recently, some U.S. Servicemembers shared their experiences from the liberation.

Michael Hightower, a former armor crewmember of the 2nd Armor Division, reflected on the way Kuwaitis showed their appreciation after the liberation.

"(The Kuwaitis) were very grateful," said Hightower. "They came to us in the streets and thanked us. Being a 20-year-old at the time going through a war, and actually seeing those we helped, I felt really good about what we had done."

Command Sgt. Maj. Dannie Bergeron, also shared an experience he had when he initially arrived to support the liberation efforts.

As a newly promoted sergeant, Bergeron was assigned to the 812th Medical Detachment Air Ambulance at the King Khalid Medical Center in Saudi Arabia.

"I was terrified when I first landed at the KKMC," said Bergeron. "We circled around looking for a place to land and set up base camp. There was nothing in the area but a clamshell hangar. As soon as we landed, a Scud missile flew overhead and was intercepted by a Patriot

missile just a few hundred feet above us. I saw it tumble and impact the ground behind us and thought: this is not going to be fun."

During the liberation, Kuwaiti and U.S. Soldiers fought side by side for the freedom of Kuwait. One of these U.S. Soldiers, also a Kuwaiti citizen, Dr. Bader Nasser Al Hajji, attended one of the remembrance events.

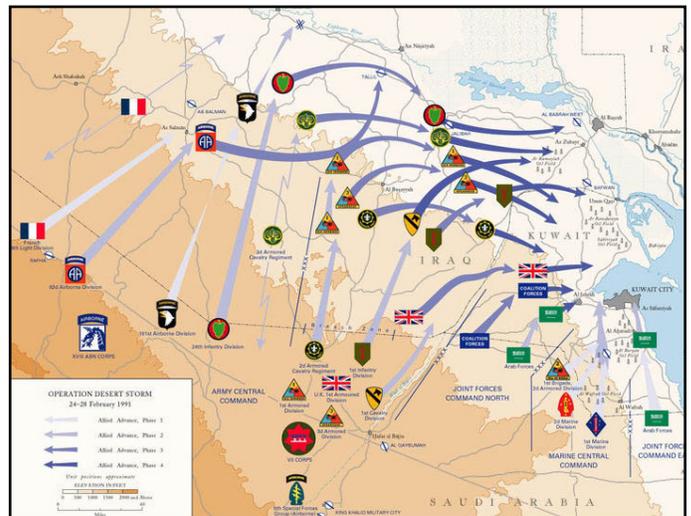
"When I was in the U.S., Iraq took over Kuwait and I said to myself, 'I can't forgive myself if I don't volunteer,'" said Nasser Al Hajji. "For me it's an honor (to have served with the U.S.), because the U.S. is one of the major forces that liberated Kuwait."

To mark the liberation, Kuwait's Ministry of Education, along with the U.S. Embassy -Kuwait and U.S. Army Central, held events around Kuwait City to reflect and remember the sacrifices made by the coalition in the early months of 1991.

One of the remembrance events was at Fatima Bint Al-Waleed Girl's High School. Principal Khaleda Al-Shurai'an said it was important for her students to remember the U.S.-Kuwaiti partnership and the shared history between the two countries.

"Since the liberation, the U.S. and Kuwait have had a great relationship," she said. "We are great friends and (this friendship) shows in all aspects from commercial to educational. (Our school) wanted to show appreciation for the role that the U.S. played to liberate our country, as well as the role that the U.S. government played in bringing together the coalition countries."

USARCENT, in cooperation with the U.S. Embassy-Kuwait and the Kuwaiti people, will continue building a lasting partnership dedicated to the safety and security of the people in the region. ★



Units under U.S. Army Central command threatened to completely close off northern escape routes, forcing the Iraqi surrender. (Courtesy Image)

Gulf veteran recalls ‘Storm in the Desert’



A young 1st Lt. Don Taylor stands next to a destroyed Russian-made BMP, an amphibious infantry fighting vehicle used by Saddam's forces, during Operation Desert Storm between January and February 1991. During Operation Desert Storm, Taylor was a platoon leader assigned to 2nd Squadron, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division. (Courtesy photo)

Story by:

Master Sgt. Gary L. Qualls, Jr.

When young 2nd Lt. Don Taylor and his fellow Troopers in Company A, 2nd Squadron, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, arrived at the Abdul Aziz Port to join the Persian Gulf War effort, he recalled a dark, billowing desert storm. Not only was it a storm of ferocious wind, sand and physical obscurity during the mechanized road march movement north in Saudi Arabia but it was a storm of uncertainty and apprehension of danger, not from nature, but from an enemy force in an impending larger than life gun battle that included the eerie threat of a nerve agent.

The Soldiers of 2-5 Cav. Regt. were confident in their ability, but didn't know what we were up against, he said. "There hadn't been armor warfare of this magnitude since World War II."

Taylor's unit was part of Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf's, commander of coalition forces, "Hail Mary left hook" up through Saudi Arabia with the purpose of deception and as a reserve, if needed by the main effort, Taylor explained.

Jan. 17 marked the 25th anniversary of the start of the Persian Gulf War also known as Operation Desert Storm.

As a young platoon leader, Taylor joined his company on one evening on a mission

into the Neutral Zone where a firefight erupted. The threat of getting hit with the nerve agent sarin was always on the Soldier's minds, Taylor recalled.

"We thought we were going to get slimed, especially due to recent in-coming Scud false alarms," he said.

Taylor and his men also saw some carnage during the war and had to help transport dead bodies discovered along the way. He recalled that he and his men had to take makeshift showers during maneuvers and operations. On one particular operation the platoon was hurried to do their combat checks with their weapons and equipment because the word came down "Time now!" for the impending operation. At one time he remembered looking across the great expanse and seeing the brigade's formation spread across the desert. He also remembered at times the best intelligence available was through the British Broadcasting Company through a satellite radio. He recollected how his men had feelings of angst due to many of them being separated from family for the first time.

Taylor said after the coalition had driven Saddam's forces out of Kuwait he was glad it was over.

He felt like he and his men contributed to the fight, and said it was a great experience training and fighting with his brothers, who depended on each other and came through for each other.

"They were a great bunch of men and I wouldn't trade it for anything," he said. ★



Col. Don Taylor, chief of information operations, U.S. Army Central, was a young lieutenant 25 years ago in the storm of uncertainty that existed at the onset of the Gulf War. (U.S. Army photo by Master Sgt. Gary L. Qualls, Jr.)

Military service: a family tradition



Sgt. Jonathan Taylor (green belt), a Soldier with C Troop, 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, works with soldiers from the Jordanian Armed Forces during a mission readiness exercise near the Joint Training Center, Jordan.

Story and photos by:
Sgt. Youtoy Martin

Cavalry scouts are responsible for being the eyes and ears of the commander during battle. They engage the enemy in the field while reporting the enemies activities back to the unit.

Sgt. Jonathan Taylor is a cavalry scout section sergeant with 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, who excels at what he does for the military.

“There is a saying we have in the scout world; we are the jack-of-all-trades,” said Taylor, a native of Junction City, Kansas. “We can do a lot of what an infantry

platoon, a tank platoon and combat engineers do, but we are the only ones that really do any kind of reconnaissance for the command.”

For Taylor, service to his country runs in the family. His great-grandfather served during World War II, his grandfather served in Korea, and his father served in Iraq.

“I know the military, I’m good at it. I chose to be a scout because my father was a scout. Plus, I didn’t want to be infantry,” he said jokingly.

Lt. Col. Brad Duplessis, the commander of 5-4 Cav, made mention during a joint training exercise at the Jordanian Training Center, Jordan, that some of his junior Soldiers and noncommissioned officers, to include Taylor, were constantly gaining valuable experience and doing jobs that were two levels above their grades or position that they would normally fill five to ten years down the road.

“He is one of the more tactically savvy scouts that I have in my platoon,” said Sgt. 1st Class Todd Aeverman, a platoon sergeant with C Troop, 5-4 Cav. “Taylor possesses all the skills I look for in a leader. If we need to motivate a Soldier, he gets the job done. He is one of our most

competent NCOs.”

According to Aeverman, Taylor wants to broaden his knowledge, which is what drives him. He dives into work gathering whatever knowledge he can and uses it to better himself.

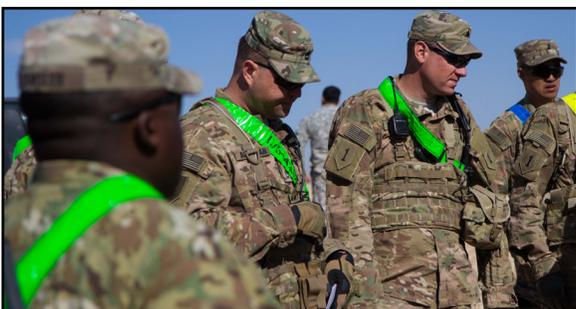
“His adaptability, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills put him right up there with the best of them. What makes him stand out is he loves what he does, that kind of person is hard to find nowadays,” Aeverman added.

Within the Troop, Taylor is regarded as one of the best NCO’s said Staff Sgt. Felix Molina, a section sergeant with 5-4 Cav, who has worked with Taylor for more than a year.

“Taylor is one of the muscles in our platoon,” said Molina. “He is pretty knowledgeable on everything. When things need to get done, he gets it done. You don’t have to go behind him to double check if a task was completed.”

The ability to motivate and inspire is what Army leaders do. Taylor said his commitment to his craft is building up and mentoring Soldiers, but supporting his wife and daughter are the fuel for it.

“Everything I do to progress further in the Army is based on my family,” said Taylor. “I was raised to always take care and provide for my family. No matter what, my family always comes first.”



Sgt. 1st Class Todd Aeverman (center), a platoon sergeant with C Troop, 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, and Sgt. Jonathan Taylor (right), a cavalry scout with C Troop, 5-4 Cav, huddle-up for an after action report following a mission readiness exercise.

SAREX in the Persian Gulf



U.S. Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Marvin Masa, a rescue diver with Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 26, is lowered to a life raft during a search and rescue exercise in the Persian Gulf on Feb. 3. The exercise tested the joint cooperation techniques of U.S. Army Central aviators during personnel recovery in a downed aircraft scenario. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Christopher E. Prows)



U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Jordan Dalfrey, an aviation warfare systems operator with Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 26, pulls Army Sgt. Angel Ortiz, a flight crew instructor with Company B, 1st Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment, into a Navy MH-60S Seahawk during a search and rescue exercise in the Persian Gulf. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. David N. Beckstrom)

Story by: Sgt. David Beckstrom

U.S. Army Central Soldiers partnered with Sailors from Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 26, U.S. Navy Command, during a search and rescue exercise in the Persian Gulf. The unit tested their ability to cooperate in a joint personnel recovery effort during a downed aircraft scenario.

The exercise put the Soldiers in an isolated state, using a carefully controlled environment to ensure their safety, while still making the training as realistic as possible, said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Robert Metoyer, the brigade aviation mission survivability officer with 1st Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment, 40th Combat Aviation Brigade. The unit simulated an UH-60 Black Hawk crew that crashed in the Persian Gulf.

In preparation for the mission, the crew from the 1-140th Aviation Regiment trained on the operation of survival radios, signaling equipment and life raft procedures in both dry and pool training. The crew needed to deploy the life raft and climb in while properly maintaining their equipment during the pool training.

“We familiarized ourselves with the equipment and the procedures we will use in the simulated emergency with classroom and practical exercises,” said Sgt. Angel Ortiz, a flight crew instructor with Company B, 1-140th Aviation Regiment. “This allowed us to understand all facets of the mission.”

The 1-140th Aviation Regiment worked with a ship from the 1st Theater Sustainment Command, the U.S. Army Vessel Corinth, to transport the isolated crew to the training

site. The Squadron 26 sent an MH-60S Seahawk to act as the rescue helicopter and hoist the crew out of the water.

Not only are the people in the downed aircraft portion of the training doing their piece, the 1-140th Aviation Regiment worked with the Navy and other Army units to complete the training, said Metoyer. As the units work together in a training environment they will be able to synchronize their efforts better in a real-world scenario.

The Squadron 26 helicopter arrived at the training site and the rescue diver, Petty Officer 3rd Class Marvin Masa, dove right in. He ensured that the crew in the life raft were safe and then assessed which Soldiers would be hoisted out first.

As Masa swam back and forth from the

life raft to the hoist rig of the Seahawk, the people in the raft were blasted by sea spray from the helicopter’s wash.

“Once the helicopter got there, it was more intense than I had anticipated,” said Ortiz. “The spray from the helicopter hurt my face and after I was connected to the hoist I started spinning much faster than I thought I would, but the feeling of relief of being pulled into the Seahawk was awesome.”

The military uses training exercises as a way for unit commanders to gauge the readiness and capabilities of their Soldiers. US-ARCENT uses consistent training, like this exercise, to polish tactics and procedures, allowing its units to remain ready and responsive for future missions.

“We normally focus our training on our flying abilities, but training for the worst-case scenario is just as important,” said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Douglas Martine, a pilot with Co. B, 1-140th Aviation Regiment.

“We are conducting a lot of over-water training to help our pilots and crews understand how mission tactics and procedures are different with the potential of a water landing,” Martine added.

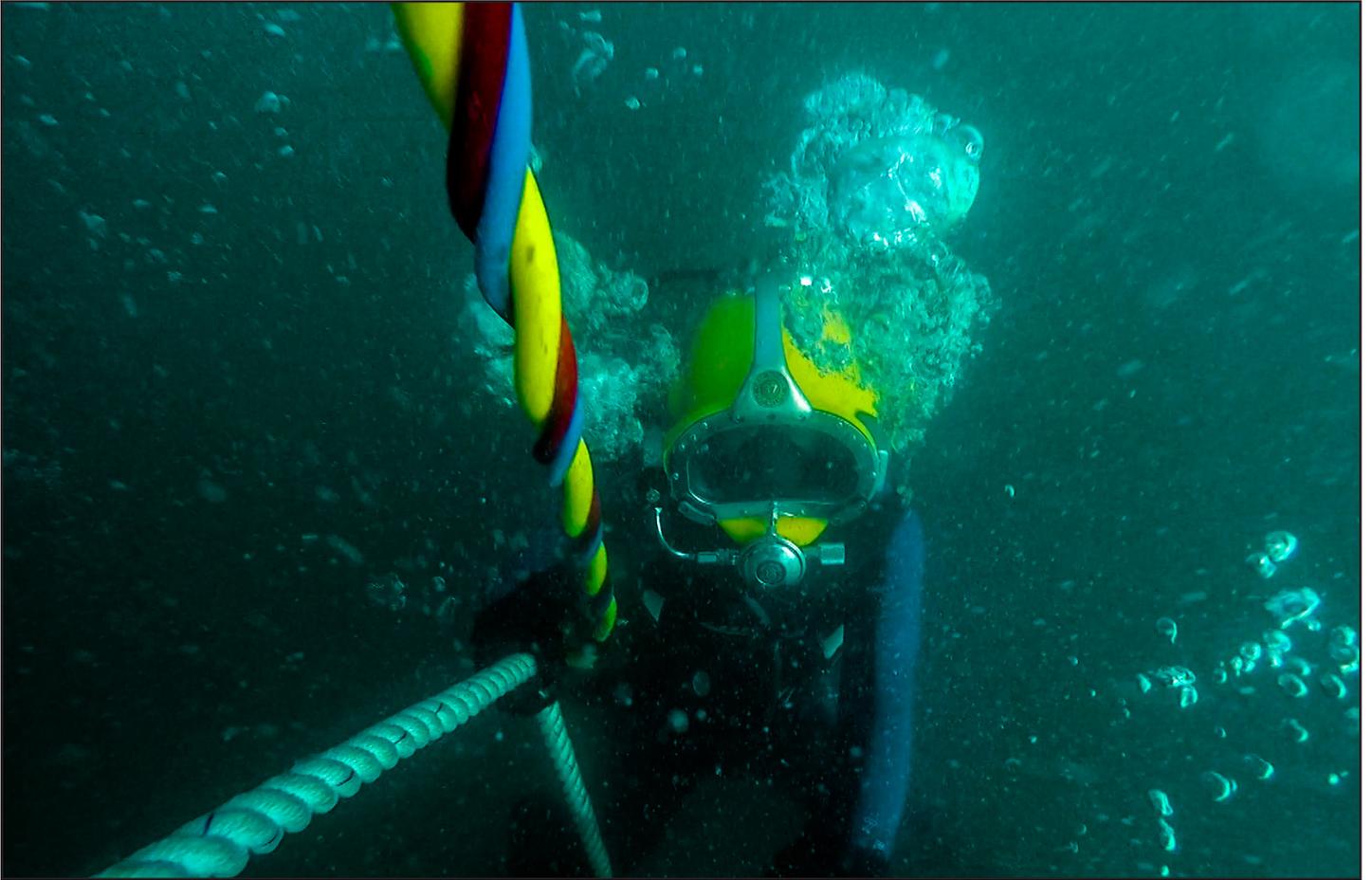
When personnel recovery missions are done effectively, it can mean the difference between life and death.

Being familiar with the equipment and procedures needed in a water rescue allows units to react better in a real-life scenario, said Martine.

“This is not something that the military wants to be reactive to,” Martine added. “Planning ahead and having this training will make real-life rescues easier and more efficient.” 



U.S. Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Marvin Masa, a rescue diver with Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 26, jumps out of a Navy MH-60S Seahawk during a search and rescue exercise in the Persian Gulf. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Christopher E. Prows)



Spc. Cesar Rodríguez, a diver with the 74th Engineer Dive Detachment, participates in their annual Deep Blue training exercise off the coast of Kuwait. The primary focus of the training was to evaluate and maintain proficiency on all diving skills by conducting surface supplied diving, scuba and decompression chamber operations. (Courtesy Photo)

DEEP BLUE

Story by:
Staff Sgt. Jared Crain

Every year the 74th Engineer Dive Detachment conduct their Deep Blue training exercise in waters of up to 190 feet.

The exercise serves to certify leaders in diving medicine, emergency protocol and mission essential tasks. This year the unit conducted the mission in the waters of the Persian Gulf off the coast of Kuwait.

During the exercise, divers trained on surface-supplied deep-water dives and scuba scenarios at depths of more than 90 feet.

The primary focus of the training was to evaluate and maintain proficiency on all diving skill levels by conducting surface-supplied diving, scuba and decompression chamber operations, said Capt. Peter Doblár, the commander of the 74th EDD and Woodinville, Washington, native.

The Army employs surface-supplied and

scuba diving methods to a maximum depth of 190 feet.

The increased risk associated with deep water diving missions means the divers need a complete understanding of their equipment, conduct rigorous inspections on the equipment, and have a complete understanding of the operation.

The exercise also served as a way to evaluate dive supervisors on their leadership skills and dive medicine knowledge.

“What we’re doing here prepares us as a supervisor, to go out and be competent and know that we can handle situations if they arise in remote locations,” said Staff Sgt. David Gills, a diving supervisor with the 74th EDD and native of Elmhurst, Illinois.

“It gets you thinking about the things that you need to be concerned with as a supervisor when you’re in those situations,” he added.

“Deep Blue allows us to evaluate and test our dive supervisors and divers through sce-

narios to help them handle any emergency situation at any time,” said 1st Sgt. Christopher Green, a native of Waynesville, North Carolina, and master diving supervisor with the 74th EDD.

“I’ve done several scenarios before, but I’ve never done scenarios where I’ve been in charge and had such a wide variety of problems present themselves during the dive,” said Gills.

“I felt pretty comfortable through most of it,” he added. “There are some decisions that you make on the fly that you wish you hadn’t, but overall I felt pretty good about the whole thing.”

“The 74th EDD is the U.S. Army Central dive asset to the entire U.S. Central Command’s area of operation and we are ready to respond to any of the dive requirements that are needed for USARCENT,” said Doblár.

Through exercises like Deep Blue, USARCENT Soldiers are preparing to sustain the fight not only by land, but also underwater. ★

Thunder Soldiers participate in interoperability



Engineers of 1st Platoon, Company B, 82nd Engineer Battalion, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, provide the initial breach of an enemy minefield obstacle with their Assault Breacher Vehicle in an interoperability exercise at the Udairi Range Complex, Kuwait.

Story and photo by: Capt. Ed Alvarado

Thunder Soldiers struck a new working relationship with officers of the Kuwaiti Land Forces Institute by gaining a better understanding of how both armies function as they build on a continued partnership through a series of combined military training exercises.

Soldiers of 2nd Battalion, 70th Armored Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division conducted an interoperability exercise showcasing a company combined-arms breach of a minefield to officers of the KLF at the Udairi Range Complex, Kuwait.

Though the mines at the site were replicas, the purpose of the event was to provide a showcase of real-world military operations to students of the KLF, the source of instruction for the Kuwait Land Forces current and future officers.

“This is the first time that the KLF has partnered with U.S. forces in Kuwait on a large scale,” said Capt. Zachary Bailey, battalion planner for the 2-70th Armor Regt. “We were afforded the opportunity to meet with the KLF commander and discuss a possible partnership opportunity with them. He told us what he was imagining as

a partnership and we worked alongside him and his staff to generate options on how to integrate U.S. forces into their training and testing.”

Thunder Soldiers conducted the exercise which supports the brigade’s commitment to its Kuwaiti partners in increasing partnership capabilities between the two nations.

“It gives the U.S. and KLF a chance to train interoperability in the institutional environment, where new officers to the KLF can start thinking big picture on how they will integrate into a coalition force in the future,” said Bailey. “It also helps train U.S. Soldiers, who may not have deployed as part of a coalition, to start thinking about our interoperability with our coalition partners.”

The KLF officers watched the tanks of Company D, 2-70th Armor Regt. breach their objective, which served as the culmination of weeks of training and accomplished through many iterations of rehearsals.

“By conducting this exercise with the Kuwaitis, Deadly Company was given almost two full weeks of field time to refine our craft and get some much needed maneuver training,” said Capt. Jared Kassulke, commander of Company D.

Kassulke continued, “the time in between

partnership exercises was invaluable in getting Deadly Company to a solid training foundation that we can build upon in the future.”

The rehearsals of the exercise also provided training value to the Kuwaitis, as it served to rid the stigma that U.S. forces are expected to do everything perfectly the first time, said Kassulke.

After the completion of the exercise, the KLF officers and Thunder Soldiers conducted a combined after action review and discussed tactics used during the breach.

“I feel that our ability to demonstrate our capabilities for partner nations causes us to refine our methods to be as efficient and effective as possible,” said 1st Lt. Ethan Kish, an engineer platoon leader with Company B, 82nd En. Bn., 2nd ABCT, 1st ID.

Kish said fostering relationships with partner nations causes them to show the Soldiers their techniques, which gives the Soldiers the opportunity to think more broadly and refine tactics, techniques and procedures.

The combined-arms breach was one of three interoperability exercises conducted within three days between the KLF and Thunder Battalion, which also included a casualty evacuation and a combined-arms attack with U.S. attack weapons team integration exercise. ★



Lt. Col. Greg Jones, a Servicemember with the Office of Military Cooperation - Kuwait, makes the initial cut for his next project at the Camp Arifjan Woodshop. The shop gives Servicemembers and Department of Defense civilians the chance to hone their woodworking skills.

NOT JUST WHITTIN’

Story and photos by:

Sgt. David Beckstrom

Inside a building on Sledgehammer Loop, the smell of sawdust wafts through the air as patrons’ sand their projects and others make the initial cut for their newest item. Near the back of the shop, various projects dry on a table after being stained or painted.

The U.S. Army operates the Camp Arifjan Woodshop program as a morale-boosting outlet for Servicemembers and Department of Defense civilians to gain new skills.

“The woodshop is a great way to relax and unwind, especially after a busy or stressful day,” said Staff Sgt. Victoria Manigault, a contract manager with 408th Con-

tract Support Brigade, Regional Contract Command – Kuwait. “When I am working on my project, I am able to block out the rest of the world and focus on something that I really enjoy.”

Servicemembers and DoD civilians are eligible to utilize the facility free of charge.

Patrons of the wood shop are not required to have extensive knowledge of the tools or techniques of carpentry. A basic idea of what they want to create is all that is requested by the staff.

“I have never created anything from wood before I came to the woodshop,” said Manigault.

“In fact I had never even touched wood like this before. With the help of the staff, I

have been able to make a lot of really nice things. I have created a couple of boxes with inlays for my husband, a mosaic jewelry box for my daughter and a vase for fake flowers for my desk, all because I found out about the woodshop,” Manigault added.

The military encourages its personnel to do self-development. The mission of this shop gives the opportunity for Servicemembers and DoD civilians to learn new skills by providing classes on woodworking tools and equipment.

Learning new skills is something that should be highly encouraged, said Sgt. 1st Class Parker Wiley, an operations noncommissioned officer with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 244th Engineer Bat-

talion. Going to the woodshop allows Servicemembers the chance to get out of the barracks. Being productive will not only help the time go by faster, but it can also increase morale.

“I have seen many people come into the workshop and gain confidence in themselves,” said Robert McAllister, the self help/wood shop supervisor. “They start to ask questions, wanting to understand more about how to shape the wood. Utilizing the workshop builds self-satisfaction and patrons are able to appreciate the hard work and effort they have put into the project.”

Kuwait is a non-accompanied tour or deployment. This is normally a nine to twelve month separation for Soldiers. The woodshop is one of many activities offered to Servicemembers to ease this separation.

“Working at the woodshop has made the time go by much faster,” said Wiley. “Picking up a new skill and creating things helps me cope with the separation from my family and friends.”

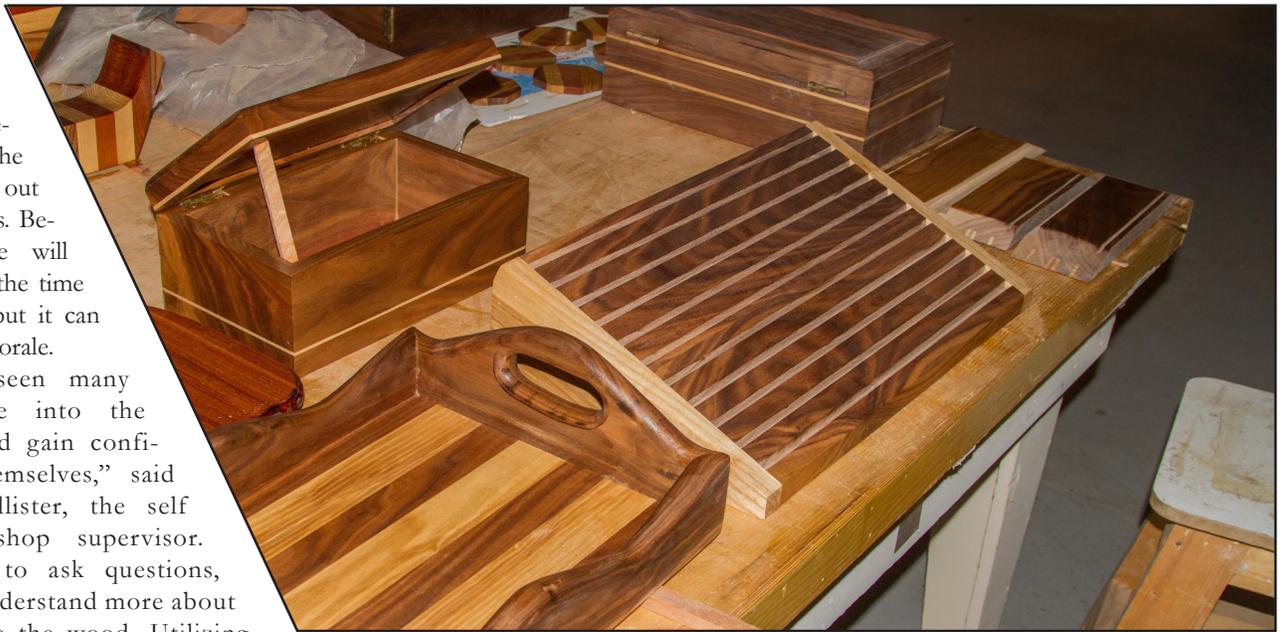
“Servicemembers are usually out here by themselves,” said McAllister. “Being able to come to the woodshop and socialize with others, who also want to create, can put them in a better mood.”

The woodshop’s policy states that the patrons take the projects with them upon completion to send the item home or to place it in their rooms or offices.

“When I get home, I will be able to show my projects to my family and friends and tell them that while I was in Kuwait, this is what I did,” said Manigault. “Now I have a skill that I will be able to continue to practice and use after I return home.”

“Patrons can create simple items or intricate items, it’s up to them,” said McAllister. “As they become more proficient with the wood, patrons tend to want to create items that require more skills and techniques. We are here to assist them and we also have woodworking books that will enable them to get ideas for their future projects.”

Servicemembers and DoD civilians are required to attend a class before utilizing the woodshop. The class is offered every



(Above) projects dry after being stained and painted at the Camp Arifjan Woodshop. The shop gives Servicemembers and Department of Defense civilians the chance to hone their woodworking skills.



Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 4-8 p.m.

“I heard about the woodshop from one of my coworkers, so I decided to go and check it out and see what it was all about,” said Manigault. “I lucked out and happened to attend the same day as the orientation class.”

The woodshop is open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. from Wednesday to Sunday. The staff is available to help patrons create their project and 10 feet of wood is provided free of charge once a month.

For more information about the Camp Arifjan Woodshop go to building number 313 Sledgehammer Loop or call 430-3131. ★

Mukhtar Nakhwa (left), a carpenter with the Camp Arifjan Woodshop, helps Staff Sgt. Phillip Miller, a production non-commissioned officer with 1108th Theater Aviation Support Maintenance Group, with his project at the woodworking shop.

(Above) Staff Sgt. Victoria Manigault, a contract manager with 408th Contract Support Brigade, Regional Contract Command – Kuwait, sands her project with a disk sander at the Camp Arifjan Woodshop.





Soldiers with the 82nd Engineer Battalion, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, play tug-of-war to decide the winner of the battalion's Ox Pull Physical Fitness Competition at Kuwait Naval Base, Kuwait. The Ox Pull is a unit tradition that promotes esprit de corps and dates back to 1943 when the unit was attached to the Darby's Rangers in Sicily, Italy, before they stormed the beaches of Normandy, France. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Youtoy Martin)

Camaraderie through competition

Story by:

Sgt. David Beckstrom

Soldiers of 82nd Engineer Battalion, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, also known as the Blue Babes, participated in their monthly Ox Pull Physical Fitness Competition on Kuwait Naval Base, Kuwait.

The Ox Pull is a tradition that dates back to 1943 when they were attached to Darby's Rangers in Sicily, Italy, before assaulting the beaches of Normandy, France. The unit held a physical fitness competition at that time to determine which platoons and squads would be storming the beaches during D-Day.

"Since its origin, we have held the Ox Pull competition on beaches and fields to test the endurance and innovation of our Soldiers," said Lt. Col. Xander Bullock, the commander of Blue Babe Battalion. "The event is a proactive measure to build teamwork and esprit de corps. I want my Soldiers to think on their feet while they are in the event, because that will translate to their missions as well."

The competition included a Humvee pull, tire roll relay, equipment drag and tug-of-war tournament. These events were geared toward functional strength rather than brute force.

The Blue Babes call the event an Ox Pull because their unit's mascot is Babe the Blue Ox from the Paul Bunyan Folktale, said Bullock, a native of Snoqualmie, Washington. Because of this, they have incorporated pull-

ing and carrying events in their competition; from pushing Humvees or boats to tire flips and equipment drags, they train to bear the burden of any mission that comes along.

Each portion of the event had to be completed by different people within the team to ensure that each participant had a chance to compete. The teammates not actively participating in the challenge had to do a variety of exercises, such as air squats or pushups, as they waited for their team to finish each portion.

"It's great getting the whole unit out here every month to compete against each other and seeing the cohesion of the teams as they work together to become the victors of the day," said 1st Lt. Nick Olszewski, the Blue Babe Battalion logistics officer. "This is the ultimate feat of team strength, because it makes us think outside the box on how to accomplish the tasks."

The military uses physical readiness training as one of the ways to prepare and maintain the fitness level of Servicemembers. The Ox Pull aims at giving the participants the same workout in an environment of friendly competition.

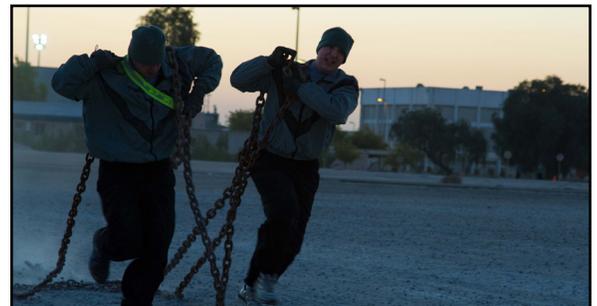
"Events such as these are nice breaks from doing PRT every day," said Olszewski, a native of Syracuse, New York. "Getting involved in the event and

not taking everything so seriously is a great way to relax."

A study conducted by the Army's Installation Management Command in 2009 found units that have high morale and esprit de corps tend to have higher mission readiness and retention rates.

"I really enjoyed the tug-of-war challenge," said Spc. Shante Fuller, a personnel clerk with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 82nd Eng. Bn., and Columbia, South Carolina native. "These competitions build morale within the unit by making us count on our buddies while still having fun. It also gives us a way to relax, which is highly needed in a deployed environment."

The Blue Babes plan to continue this tradition for the foreseeable future and they use it to build pride in themselves and their unit, Bullock added. ★



Soldiers with the 82nd Engineer Battalion, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, compete in equipment drag during the battalion's Ox Pull Physical Fitness Competition. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Youtoy Martin)



Maj. Gen. William Hickman, U.S. Army Central's deputy commanding general – operations, and USARCENT captains are oriented to the Kuwaiti Land Forces 35th Brigade's sand table of Kuwait, a scale model of their country, during a leader development seminar at the headquarters of the 35th Bde. The day's events focused on the role the 35th Bde. played at the Battle of the Bridges, a large battle at the beginning of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait 25 years ago.

Partnering for leadership

Story and photo by:
Sgt. David Beckstrom

Maj. Gen. William Hickman, U.S. Army Central's deputy commanding general – operations, and USARCENT captains partnered with officers from the Kuwaiti 35th Armored Brigade for a leader professional development conference at the 35th Bde. headquarters.

The leaders learned about the Battle of the Bridges, a battle at the beginning of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait 25-years ago, and the part the 35th Bde. played in the battle as a way to show the history and pride the Kuwaiti servicemembers have in their unit.

"Learning about the history of the 35th Bde. gave me an understanding of where they are coming from and I can understand the pride they have for their unit," said U.S. Army Capt. Jesse Hougnon, a battle captain with USARCENT. "Understanding someone's past will make it easier to work together in the future."

U.S. Soldiers were given the opportunity to see a 36 meter by 36 meter sand table that the 35th Bde. uses to plan training missions and exercises.

"The sand table they use is an important tool and great resource for the defense of Kuwait," said U.S. Army Capt. Reid Seiler, the executive officer to the deputy chief of staff for USARCENT. "It is large enough to walk through and see how the Kuwaiti military can use the terrain to help defend their country."

Developing and training leaders is one of many ways the U.S. Army has maintained its fighting force throughout the generations. By learning about partner militaries within the region, USARCENT hopes to foster lasting partnerships.

"We are able to improve our relationship and exchange experiences and knowledge through events like these," said Kuwaiti army Maj. Bader Alotaibi, a company commander with 7th Battalion, 35th Bde. "As we learn from our U.S. friends, we can become better in our operations and tactics. Being able to work together, helping our officers, we will be able to make our country safer and better."

A mission of Soldiers in USARCENT is to integrate coalition nations into its battle plan. Learning leadership techniques from each other is one way they

accomplish this mission.

"As we educate both parties on our day-to-day operations we will be able to improve how we operate with each other in the future," said Hougnon. "Incorporating the Kuwaitis in this LPD allows us to have a strategic partner in the Middle East as well as a strong ally for future endeavors."

The Soldiers said they enjoyed the opportunity to build comradery with servicemembers from other militaries.

"Going to other nation's military facilities is really interesting," said Seiler, an Anderson, South Carolina, native. "Seeing that certain things are the same while others are different gives us a way to connect through these similarities."

By working closely with leaders and servicemembers of coalition nations, USARCENT aims to reinforce the partnership by forming lasting bonds with their counterparts from other nations.

"As we go forward, if we keep working together in the field and ranges, we will be able to make my country a safer place and the world," said Alotaibi. "Our U.S. friends are very well trained and if we learn from them, we will also be better." ★

'Pacesetters' provide Iraq with heavy protection



Soldiers with 541st Combat Sustainment Support Battalion and 419th Movement Control Battalion deliver 28 mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles to the Iraqi government as part of the Iraqi Security Forces Development and Equipping program.

Story and photos by: Master Sgt. Dave Thompson,

A large convoy of tractor-trailer rigs breaks on the early morning horizon and slowly makes its way down a dusty, unimproved road along Kuwait's northern border. The trucks, driven by a mixture of U.S. Soldiers and contracted civilians, each carry a mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle destined for the Iraqi government as part of the Iraqi Security Forces Development and Equipping Program.

The tractor-trailers, all 28 of them, pull into an expansive parking lot at the Kuwait-Iraqi border known as K-Crossing and file into five even columns. Lt. Col. Ronnie Anderson Jr., commanding officer of the 541st Combat Sustainment Support Battalion known as Pacesetters, exits the lead vehicle and rallies his Soldiers around him to go over their execution plan. Within minutes, the entire scene is transformed into a beehive of activity as the Soldiers offload the massive 15-ton Caiman MRAPs and position them for the short drive toward the outer gate where Iraqi government officials will take delivery by loading them onto tractor-trailers driven down from Baghdad by Iraqi contractors.

"Today is a great opportunity for us and this is one of the things we can do to make a huge impact for the Iraqis that are fighting to

take their hometowns back," said Anderson. "We are delivering about 28 of these MRAPs to go to the Iraqi forces to be trained on for them to put back in the fight."

The MRAP is a formidable fighting platform that incorporates a "V"-shaped hull and armor plating designed to provide protection against mines and improvised explosive devices. This capability is projected to give the Iraqi military an edge in the fight to defeat the Islamic State. The MRAPs are part of a wide ranging, U.S.-led delivery package to the Iraqis, managed and executed by the 1st Theater Sustainment Command and its down trace units like the 541st CSSB. The 1st TSC is responsible for sustaining coalition warfighters in Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries throughout the U. S. Central Command's area of responsibility.

"A lot of planning and coordination goes into play to make all this happen," said 1st Lt. Albert Kuehne, liaison officer with the 419th Movement Control Battalion. Kuehne, a stocky built man with an easy go-

ing confident nature, is the conduit between the Kuwaiti Customs, Kuwaiti Border Patrol and the Iraqi government. Since his arrival six months ago and almost daily trips from Camp Arifjan to K-Crossing, he has built a rapport with the various players and has streamlined the delivery process like a well-oiled machine. "Whether it's retrograde equipment coming in from Afghanistan or pushing equipment up to Iraq, I'm always here to facilitate the exchange. They know me and trust me and that has made things go much smoother than when we began doing this," added Kuehne.

As the Kuwaiti Border Patrol officials

"It makes me feel good that we're contributing to someone else's freedom by delivering these machines."

Pfc. Nathan Hayes



An Iraqi tractor-trailer convoy heads back to Baghdad after receiving 28 Caiman MRAPs from the 541st CSSB.



Iraqi trucks line up as U.S. Soldiers load Caiman MRAPs on their trailers. The delivery of 28 MRAPs to the Iraqi government is part of the U.S.-led Iraqi Security Forces Development and Equipping Program.

open the massive gates that separate the two countries, the Iraqi trucks are driven through one by one and loaded up with the MRAPs. The Soldiers from the 541st CSSB along with troops assigned to the 1450th Composite Truck Company, drive the MRAPs onto the trailers and assist the Iraqi truckers by securing them with tie-down chains before sending them safely across the border.

“These are high speed machines that are really maneuverable,” said Pfc. Nathan Hayes, a truck driver with the 1450th CTC and native of Boone, North Carolina. “You can transport a lot of people in them and still have protection and security. It makes me feel good that we’re contributing to someone else’s freedom by delivering these machines.”

Amidst the sounds of clanging chains, whining turbo-diesel engines and the barking of orders in several languages, Anderson paces back and forth surveying it all with keen involvement, making sure his troops are drinking water and keeping things safe.

What may look like

confusion to some with so many moving parts, results in a plan executed to perfection, said Anderson.

With the exchange complete, the border gates are slammed shut as the last tractor-trailer rumbles through and links up with the other 27. The Soldiers circle around their

shakes hands with the Kuwaiti Border Patrol officials and flashes a sharp salute before boarding his SUV for the 200 km drive back to Camp Arifjan.

“Today was a good day,” he said in his easy, relaxed drawl. “Tomorrow, we get to do it all over again.”

commander for a quick after action review and watch as the long line of trucks disappear behind plumes of dust in the distance.

“I can’t tell you enough how proud I am of each of you and the way you all performed today in getting this important mission done,” said Anderson to his Soldiers.

“You all are writing history. Ten...fifteen years from now when you read that the 75th Iraqi Brigade took back their homeland from a bunch of ruthless thugs, you’ll be able to tell your sons and daughters that you gave them the equipment it took to do it!”

Meanwhile, Kuehne completes his business,



1st Lt. Albert Kuehne, 419th MCB liaison officer, gives instructions to troops from 541st CSSB on delivering 28 MRAPs to the Iraqi government.

Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention

April

ELIMINATE SEXUAL ASSAULT

For additional information:
sapr.mil safehelpline.org

May

May is National Military
Appreciation Month

