



The Heart Beat

2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault)
Volume III, Issue 3
Jan. 2007



Sunni, Shia's come together for peace march, pg. 6

Volunteers stepping up in Northwest Baghdad

Strike 6



Col. William B. Hickman

Strike Soldiers, families and friends. I wish everyone the best in the New

Year. The holidays are now behind us. I hope everyone had the opportunity to celebrate the season in their own way. We appreciate all the letters and support from those who sent items. Your thoughtfulness added to the spirit of the season.

We have completed our first complete calendar month and have integrated several new units to the Strike team, including, 4-2 SCR and 4-10 CAV. These are truly exciting times, critical to the future of Iraq. Many local citizens in our area have come forward and pledged to fight al-Qaida, the hate, and repression that they bring. Many neighborhoods have experienced great improvements in security due to the partnership with Iraqi Army, Police, volunteers and Strike Soldiers. It is good to see the values of democracy and the spirit of liberty take hold. I believe we will see more of this as the Iraqi government and Iraqi Security

Forces gain capability and provide protection for the people in our area.

The security conditions here can change rapidly. We must remain vigilant and do all we can to partner with Iraqis to keep the momentum going in the right direction. I have traveled to many areas and have seen the progress. The markets are bustling and many Iraqis are working hard to improve their conditions. It is promising and I trust the people and government of Iraq will make Baghdad a better place.

The Soldiers of this brigade will make a difference in the following year. This is a critical time for Iraq and our Army. I am certain each member of the Strike brigade will play their part in achieving success.

Col. William B. Hickman
Strike 6

Strike 7



Command Sgt. Maj. Scott Schroeder

Everything is going great. I am proud of what the 2nd Brigade Combat Team and its

attached units are doing.

At all levels, people seem to be comfortable with how events are unfolding in Baghdad. I, for one, am extremely pleased with the current situation. We all need to understand this is like "Driving on Ice."

It doesn't take long for things to go bad under any conditions. There are a couple things we can do for ourselves to insure we make continued progress.

First every Soldier needs to understand escalation of force procedures. It is absolutely necessary that every Soldier understands how to determine if they are being threatened.

Across the Division there are between six and twelve EOF incidents weekly that result in Iraqi civilians being killed or seriously injured. One of the leading causes of an EOF are patrols driving like it's 2003.

We increase the probability of having an EOF incident by driving against traffic. We also create traffic problems in both direc-

tions possibly affecting other patrols. The decision to drive against traffic should be deliberate and calculated (the exception not the rule).

We also pull out in front of on-coming traffic. There are many times it would be prudent to wait for traffic to pass your patrol before moving into another lane. When we pull into traffic we have to know the on-coming vehicles see us. The best way to do this is to look into the drivers eyes, or look at the tires to ensure they have stopped rotating. This will limit the possibility of traffic accidents as well as limit the need for your gunners to cycle through the EOF procedures.

I am thankful for all of the great Soldiers in this task force. Showing the population respect is not a sign of weakness. This is our strength. When the occasion comes to confront our enemies, I expect you to confront, and pursue them relentlessly.

Strike and Kill.



Col. William B. Hickman
Commander

Command Sgt. Maj. Scott Schroeder
CSM

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Eagle STRIKE!!!

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2nd Brigade Combat Team - "Strike"

On The Cover:



A Soldier with 2nd Platoon, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), patrol down a dirt road in Iskandariyah, Iraq, Dec. 23. Their mission is to secure the local populace through active patrols, hunting down al-Qaeda, and continuing to set-up concerned local citizens "so these people can enjoy the safety and freedom we do back home," said 1st Lt. Brian Roberts, platoon leader with 2nd Platoon, Company C, 2-502nd Inf. Reg. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. James P. Hunter, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. Public Affairs).



Around Strike AO

(Top Left) Command Sgt. Maj. Marvin L. Hill, command sergeant major of Multi-National Force-Iraq, talks with troops of the 2nd "Strike" Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Dec. 22, at the Strike Brigade Headquarters on Camp Liberty. Hill, a former Strike Brigade command sergeant major, visited troops throughout the Strike area of operations.

(Top Right) Iraqis walk down a street in the Karkh District of Baghdad, Dec. 19.

(Right) Sgt. 1st Class Leon Clayton, platoon sergeant and native of Brick, N.J., with Mortar Platoon, Pale Horse Troop, 4th Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Stryker Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) pulls security in the Karkh District of Baghdad, Dec. 19. Approximately 1,000 Iraqi citizens, both of Shia and Sunni religions, gathered to march amongst one another to bring the two sects together as one. (U.S. Army photos by Sgt. James P. Hunter, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. Public Affairs)





Sgt. Clinton A. Rollings (foreground), a member of the 1st "Black Knights" Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, lowers his head in prayer during a memorial ceremony in the western Baghdad Ameriyah neighborhood, Dec. 7.

Black Knights remember fallen Soldiers

Story, photo by
Sgt. James P. Hunter
2nd BCT PAO

BAGHDAD—On Dec. 7, 2006, Staff Sgt. Kristopher Ciraso, with 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, lost his life when he was struck by an improvised explosive device while trying to repair a barrier in the western Ameriyah neighborhood of the Iraqi capital. He was the first "Black Knights" Soldier to lose his life during the battalion's 15-month deployment here.

Five months later, on May 14, 2007, six Soldiers and an interpreter who were riding in an M3 Bradley Cavalry Fighting Vehicle were struck by a deep-buried IED in Ameriyah. All seven – Staff Sgt. Christopher Moore, Sgt. Jean Paul Medlin, Sgt. David Behrle, Pfc. Travis Haslip, Pfc. Alexander Verela, Pfc. Joseph Gilmore, and the interpreter – died in

the blast.

In order to remember the fallen Soldiers of the cavalry unit, currently attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), the Black Knights held a ceremony in Ameriyah, Dec. 7, one year to the day they lost their first Soldier, and at the very site where those seven men lost their lives in May.

"This is the greatest way I know how to pay respect to these (Soldiers)"

said Spc. Justin Taylor
Co. D, 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment

The Black Knights honored 18 fallen warriors during the ceremony. Chap. (Capt.) Steven Rindahl, the Black Knights' chaplain, asked those in attendance to join him in prayer to remember their warriors "lost in the fight."

With heads bowed and emotions swirling, he asked for those men to be ever remembered as men who helped bring peace and stability to Iraq by fighting manfully against all evil.

"Today, we gather to honor the memory of our comrades who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the cause of freedom and peace," said Huntsville, Ala., native Lt. Col. Dale Kuehl, the Black Knights' commander. "We mark this day, the seventh of December, exactly a year after we lost our first Soldier; at the site where we had our greatest lost."

Cyrus, Ohio native Spc. Justin T. Taylor, a tanker with Company D, 1-5 Cavalry, said the opportunity to pay tribute to his fallen comrades was a great honor.

"This is the greatest way I know how to pay respect to these (Soldiers)," said Taylor, who served on the firing squad for the see **MEMORIAL**, pg. 10

Strike Force in Iskandariyah

Story, photos by
Sgt. James P. Hunter
2nd BCT PAO

South of Baghdad, in Iskandariyah and surrounding areas, troops of 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, currently attached to the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, are maneuvering and patrolling in rural, muddy areas.

Their mission is to secure the local populace through active patrols, hunting down al-Qaeda, and continuing to set-up concerned local citizens "so these people can enjoy the safety and freedom we do back home," said 1st Lt. Brian Roberts, platoon leader with 2nd Platoon, Company C, 2-502nd Inf. Reg.

They area consistently engaging the local populace, the local leaders and Sheiks in the area, said Roberts a native of Reading, Penn. While patrolling they stop and talk with these leaders, who are willing to have them over for lunch and Chi tea, talking about the activities in the area and what they can do to help improve it.

But they do face difficulties—the land being one, he said. "The area we are working in is heavily ridden with obstacles, such as reed lines and canals. So, for instance, if you take fire from the north, you may have two or three canals and reed lines from you and where your taking fire from which is difficult to maneuver in. You can't effectively move across that and maintain security."

However, with air support and Iraqi concerned local citizens, they have been able to maneuver the area in confidence.

Pfc. Kevin Smith, a native of Los Angeles, with 2nd Platoon, Co. C, 2-502nd Inf. Reg., said the deployment has gone pretty smooth thus far, with the occasional improvised explosive device in the area. Smith, who is on his first de-

ployment, is enjoying his opportunity to help secure the Iraqi people.

The troops of 2nd Platoon, alongside their company commander, Capt. Raub Nash a native of McCloud, Okla., traveled to various Iraqi army checkpoints Dec. 23 to see if they could make improvements and fortifications to the area, which would benefit the IA and allow them to put a company size element in the area. In doing so, it would put more security forces on the ground, enabling them to respond to insurgent activity in the area much quicker.

While dismounted, the IA received a tip there was an improvised explosive device near a bridge, so the company's scout platoon moved toward the area to confirm the tip and secure the area.

While moving toward the IED it detonated, raining white-phosphorus. Luckily, no troops sustained any injuries. They called in an explosive ordnance detachment, and while checking out the blast sight, they found another bomb daisy-chained to the first explosive.

They were able to detonate it, possibly saving American and Iraqi troops, and civilian's lives. This was a result of local nationals providing tips to secure their area.

This was the second tip they had received in the area. The first tip was confirmed true also, allowing U.S. forces to remove an IED from the roadways.

This area is historically known for IEDs and insurgent activity, said Roberts. The bridge is basically an insurgent fault line. To the south, the area is populated with pro-coalition and Iraqi security forces. To the north, it is heavily populated with al-Qaeda.

Those in the south must travel north constantly, because this is where their children go to school, said Roberts. All they want is safety and security while they try to carry-on with their lives.

So it proves the tip line is working, as the Iraqis are stepping up and doing what they can to bring insurgency to a stand-still.

Iraqi citizens are stepping up in the area in many different ways. Iraqis are answering their nations call as concerned local citizens, said Roberts.

"They are really starting to stand up more and more," said Roberts. The volunteers are manning checkpoints in this rural land, ensuring the safety of their neighborhoods.

Al-Qaeda activity is pretty much isolated to one area, Roberts said. The concerned citizens are locking down their area and flushing out those with insurgent intents.

"The populace is really starting to take care of their own," he said. "We know they can take care of their area. CLCs are the way of the future."

Strike Force troops will continue to work side-by-side with Iraqi security forces and volunteers, to help stabilize the area and defeat insurgent forces.



Pfc. Kevin Smith of Los Angeles, with 2nd Platoon, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), talks with Iraqi children at their home in Iskandariyah, Iraq, Dec. 23.

Shia, Sunnis march together for peace in Karkh District

On the sectarian line, Iraqis joined together to reconcile their differences

Story, photo by
Sgt. James P. Hunter
2nd BCT PAO

BAGHDAD-- Approximately 1,000 Iraqi citizens, of both Shia and Sunni religions, joined together on the sectarian fault line in Rawaniyah, the Karkh District of Baghdad, to march amongst one another in what they called a "Peace March," Dec. 19.

It was an Iraqi initiative and an Iraqi effort to ease sectarian tensions, solely driven by Iraqi Neighborhood and District Advisory Council leaders and Sheiks from both religious sects in the area, said Capt. Marcus Melton, commander and native of Atlanta, Ga., with Pale Horse Troop, 4th Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault).

With Iraqi army and Iraqi policemen maintaining the security on the streets and within the crowd during the event, they were able to successfully complete the march for united peace among all Iraqis.

Drums beat, children ran, silly string littered the air, and one man nearly wept. It was an exciting, yet emotional day for the Iraqis who participated.

A local Sheik came over a loud speaker during the march

to talk with his local comrades. He expressed his joy for their wanted peace, but nearly wept in the thought of those who have lost their lives in the battle for sectarian dominance. Many families, friends and sons have lost their lives during this time.

But dominance by one religious group is just a mindset, filed in the heads of the Iraqis, said Melton. This area is relatively calm today, but in January of this year violence raged through the streets, especially on Haifa.

The mindset that Shia's stay on this side of the fence and Sunni's stay on the other carried over from the violence which once plagued the area, said Melton.

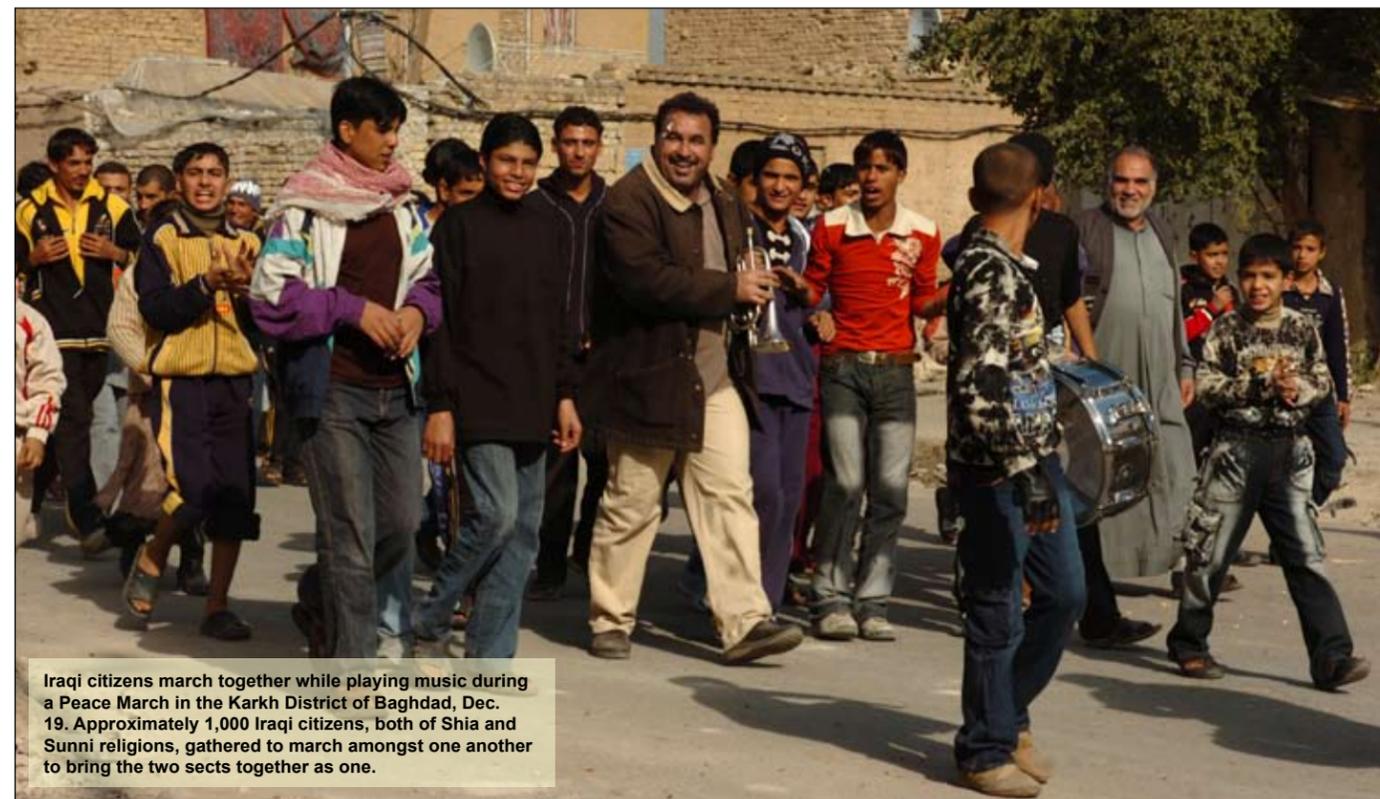
There is only a street, Sheik Murah St., which separates these men, Melton said. To the west of this street is a Shia neighborhood. To the east is a Sunni neighborhood.

"So it's a sectarian line dividing the two," he said. "They are working really hard within themselves to kind of get over this (sectarian mindset)."

If they continue their quest for peace among all, Melton said the area will stabilize and move things forward in several areas.

"If the neighborhoods come together and start really working together at the NAC and DAC levels without sectarian issues, the government will become much more efficient and more self-sustaining," Melton said. "Same thing on the security front in terms of the IA and the IP being trusted by the community and being able to secure the community-- both of which are positive things for us, which will allow us to transition out of a more direct role into more of an over-watch role."

see RECONCILE, pg. 11



Iraqi citizens march together while playing music during a Peace March in the Karkh District of Baghdad, Dec. 19. Approximately 1,000 Iraqi citizens, both of Shia and Sunni religions, gathered to march amongst one another to bring the two sects together as one.

Troops train police auxiliary forces in Hateen

Story, photos by
Sgt. James P. Hunter
2nd BCT PAO

BAGHDAD— When one thinks of a police force, he may think of a two-man team, patrolling through a neighborhood in their white-Chevy Monte Carlo, with blue and red lights, and the word "Police" written on the side.

They move throughout talking with local citizens at the diner, coffee shop, or on the street corners. No matter what community, country or religious sect, policemen are there to "protect and serve."

Change the type of vehicle, re-write it in Arabic, from right to left, and an average policemen in Iraq is no different.

One of the biggest areas of focus in north-west Baghdad, which has been seen widespread, is the volunteers stepping up throughout the various muhallahs, giving way to freedom and democracy.

In Ameriyah there are the FAR. In Ghazaliyah there are Ghazaliyan Guardians. In Kahdra, Jamia, and Adil, men are also volunteering their efforts. Now, in Hateen, there are Iraqi Police Auxiliary forces, focused on maintaining a stable, secure neighborhood.

In the Strike area of operations alone, units have been very successful with establishing volunteer forces, said Capt. Brian McCall, commander and native of Junction, City, Kan., with Battery A, 2-32 FA. If they apply and adapt too what they have learned from other units in dealing with volunteers, they too will be successful.

Just two weeks ago, U.S. troops with Battery A, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artil-

lery Regiment, began volunteer recruitment drives in the Hateen and Yarmouk muhallahs, the Mansour District of Baghdad.

From 300 men, they were able to, through background checks and various means of investigation, narrow the field to



Sgt. Danil Ramirez, assistant instructor and native of Miami, Fla., with 4th Platoon, Battery A, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, shows Iraqi Police Auxiliary Students ready-up drills in Hateen, Dec. 17. This day was the first day of training for the volunteers in Hateen.

tery A, 2-32 FA, are training these men on basic military and policing skills, said Sgt. Anthony Williams, instructor and native of Fresno, Calif., with 2nd Platoon, Battery A, 2-32 FA. They are training on everything from weapons and countering-improvised explosive devices, to proper

police ethics and values training.

For every two Soldiers there were seven Iraqis at the training grounds in Hateen.

Through interpreters they were able to convey their message of training and the importance of their role.

Their goal, during the course, is to ensure these men are fully capable of patrolling and maintaining ethics policemen live by, said

Williams.

see TRAINING, pg. 21

150 volunteers.

At the Operation Ace Academy in Hateen, the Iraqi Police Auxiliary began their training, Dec. 17.

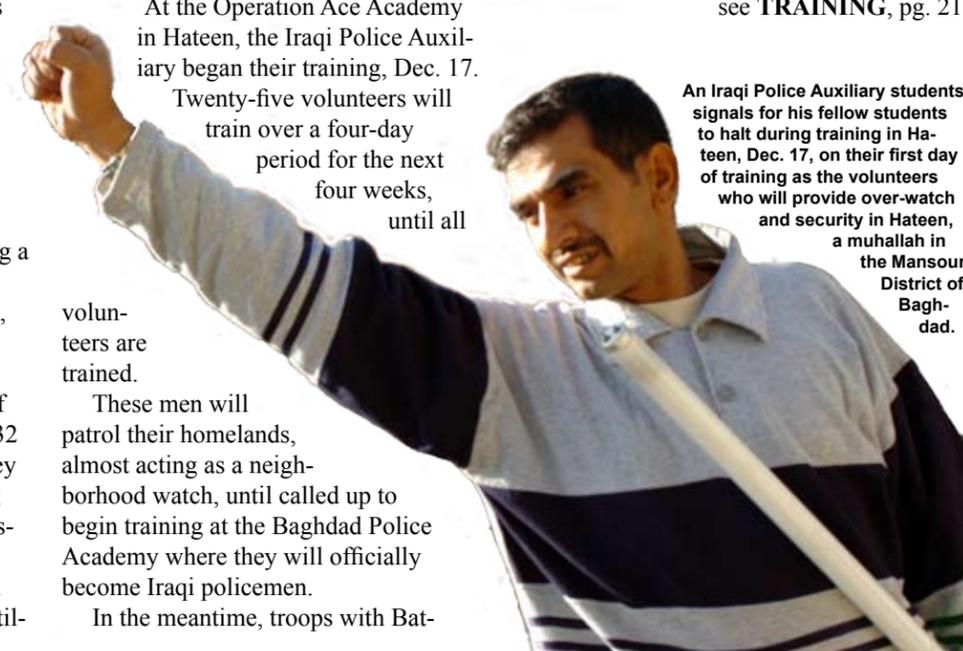
Twenty-five volunteers will train over a four-day period for the next four weeks, until all

volunteers are trained.

These men will patrol their homelands, almost acting as a neighborhood watch, until called up to begin training at the Baghdad Police Academy where they will officially become Iraqi policemen.

In the meantime, troops with Bat-

An Iraqi Police Auxiliary students signals for his fellow students to halt during training in Hateen, Dec. 17, on their first day of training as the volunteers who will provide over-watch and security in Hateen, a muhallah in the Mansour District of Baghdad.





Faces of the Heart



photo by Sgt. James P. Hunter, 2nd BCT PAO

Soldiers with 2nd Platoon, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), pull security while dismounted in Iskandariyah, Iraq, Dec. 23.



photo by Sgt. James P. Hunter, 2nd BCT PAO

Capt. Raub Nash of McCloud, Okla., commander of Company C, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), signals to his troops while dismounted in Iskandariyah, Iraq, Dec. 23.



Wheeled vehicle mechanic from Cole Camp, Mo., Spc. Patrick Gamm, uses his pry bar to remove the upper radiator hose on a Humvee Gun Truck. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Todd French, 526th BSB)



photo by Sgt. James P. Hunter, 2nd BCT PAO

Command Sgt. Maj. Marvin L. Hill, command sergeant major of Multi-National Force-Iraq, presents Spc. Colby T. Autrey, 2nd Brigade Combat Team S-6, with a coin for his hard-work and dedication to duty, Dec. 22



photo by Sgt. 1st Class Todd French, 526th BSB

Wheeled vehicle mechanic Pfc. Anthony M. Cruz from Pahump, Nev., and Spc. Daniels, wrestle with a driveline and discover damaged hydraulic lines. This discovery makes the maintenance even more challenging.



1st Lt. Lucas Stump, Troop A, 1st Squadron, 75th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) communicates with other Soldiers in his unit via radio during a censing mission in Bakariya, Iraq, Dec 4, 2007. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Charles Gill, 55th Combat Camera)

526th troops transport, build guard towers

Story by
Staff Sgt. Gerald Noble
526th BSB

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Soldiers with Company A of the 526th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), not only push necessary supplies to outlying areas, but they have also been tasked with another extremely important mission; transporting and building guard towers.

Because this mission is new, they took great efforts to prepare themselves prior to going out on any missions to ensure they were well trained. These guard towers will be assembled at new Joint Coalition Outposts in Baghdad to protect U.S. and Iraqi security forces.

One of the most challenging missions that the distribution company will face is the transport and assembly of all of the pieces necessary to construct the 30 ft concrete towers essential in giving coalition forces the

height and reach advantage as they continue to provide security in the thriving metropolis of Baghdad.

“These towers are some of our heaviest loads, after the M1A2 Abrams. It’s an awkward load, but so important when you’re talking about protecting peoples lives,” said Staff Sgt. Zachary Hayes, a squad leader in Co A.

Alpha Company troops want to be as prepared as they can to conduct this important mission. In order to practice what will become a muscle memory task they broke the assembly down into two phases: the transport of the towers using two Heavy Equipment Transport Trucks and the physical assembly, accomplished using a locally contracted Iraqi crane.

The training began with drivers training in the morning that resulted in seven new drivers becoming familiarized with the new load on their HETs. Without multiple drivers to choose from, the company would not be successful as construction of new JCOPs require so many to be on the road over the course of a

three to four day period.

The construction of the tower must be conducted with great care because any type of accident could be tragic. These civilian designed towers are not difficult to assemble and the benefit more than outweighs any difficulty in getting them to the site and assembling the pieces. The Iraqi crane operators have shown great skill and even a touch of fearlessness. The crane operators use the chains from the boom of the crane fastened into a hasty foot hold to ride the boom to each tower section and then ride atop the tower section as it is emplaced. The total time to assemble the tower with all of the materials present is approximately 35 minutes.

These towers are located throughout Baghdad and Iraq. At 15 or 30 feet all these structures tower, literally, over Iraqi army and Iraqi Police checkpoint. Staff Sgt. Gwendolyn Banks put it best, “The height and visibility from these towers provides added security for those guys [Iraqi security forces] while they are protecting their people, so we’re going to bring the towers to them.”



(Left) Soldiers with the 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, move toward an objective in Iskandariyah, Iraq, Dec. 23. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. James P. Hunter, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. Public Affairs)



(Right) Capt. Mark Battjes, commander, with Company B, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, talks with Dr. Koresh al-Askhir in Jamia, Dec. 15, in Jamia. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. James P. Hunter, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. Public Affairs)

MEMORIAL

ceremony.

But paying tribute to these men was done with mixed emotions, said Kuehl.

“While where we stand is hollowed ground, it also symbolically marks our greatest victory,” he told his troops. A year ago, this area in western Baghdad was hostile, but now the Black Knights were able to stand on this very ground and pay tribute to their fallen.

“About a year ago I wouldn’t even have been able to walk down these streets and do this,” Taylor said. “Right now, I feel confident and safe to walk in here and do this. It’s a huge deal and I’m glad. I can’t believe how far we’ve made it.”

When the Black Knights first entered Baghdad a year ago, they

entered a period during this war where violence was spinning out of control, said Kuehl. Al Qaeda was targeting civilians, both Shia and Sunni, to achieve their goals with little regard to the Iraqi people.

“Shia militia became more violent, targeting Sunnis and taking over whole neighborhoods,” he said. But thanks to the efforts of his troops, those who gave their lives in sacrifice for freedom, Iraqi Security Forces and concerned local citizens, the Black Knights were able to gain the security and stability in Baghdad.

“As we mourned our loses, we established a permanent presence in this community, and through our actions gained the confidence and trust of the locals and turned our tide against our enemies,” Kuehl said. “Feel pride in what we have accomplished.”

“These Soldiers have put on their gear, picked up a weapon and stood for something bigger than themselves,” Kuehl said. “We, who have been here, should never forget what it has cost.”

RECONCILE

Melton, who is in his second tour in Baghdad, said “I know they are moving forward and making progress. Certainly they have issues and problems and growing pains, but they have made a tremendous amount of progress.”

One Iraqi boy, Omar, 11, said because of the continued peace in his homeland, he came to celebrate with his fellow Iraqis.

Awass, with the Iraqi flag draped over his body, carried himself with much enthusiasm and excitement in his journey in Karkh.

He said the flag—one he is very proud to display—describes his great country. Red is for the blood shed. White is for “our handshake.” Green is for their land, and Black is for their oil.

“We thank our God, our families and our friends that our neighborhood is safe and free of Violence,” an Iraqi man who participated in the march said.

They marched for their peace, for their friends and for their brothers, said the Sheik. “Today we march for us being brothers forever.”



An Iraqi girl waves the Iraqi flag during a Peace March in the Karkh District of Baghdad, Dec. 19. Approximately 1,000 Iraqi citizens, both of Shia and Sunni religions, gathered to march amongst one another to bring the two sects together as one.

Soldiers use “Pit Crew Ops” to tackle logistical mission

Story by
1st Lt. Adam Hodges
526th BSB

The name is borrowed from NASCAR, but Soldiers from Company B, 526th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), are using pit crew operations to maintain the vehicles used in their convoys throughout Baghdad.

The operation is a circuit type set-up where each vehicle is tracked through six stations. Each of these stations is responsible for checking a different component of the vehicle. The first station checks each piece of equipment to make sure that it is mechanically sound and that its crew-served weapons are functioning properly.

Next, all communication and navigation equipment is inspected by the electronic maintenance section, lead by Chief Warrant Officer 2 Brandon Burk, to ensure that all the systems are fully operational.

“This pit crew concept is a great example of many different commodities working together to reach the mutually-sought goal of keeping our Soldiers safe when they go outside the wire,” said Burk.

The next step in the pit crew process is to check each vehicle’s counter-remote control electronic warfare system to ensure it’s operational. The CREW system is designed to be a software programmable radio frequency countermeasure system to protect convoys against improved explosive devices that are radio controlled. Bravo Company’s missile section has taken control of this mission.

After a vehicle has received a “go” from all six sections, it is cleared by the inspection section, headed by Staff Sgt. Dwayne Simpkins, prior to its return to the convoy staging area. The inspection section serves as an extra precautionary measure to make sure each piece of equipment is completely ready for the mission.

Due to the number of missions taking place in this area, some of these vehicles are used in 5-6 convoys per week. Without a systematic approach to maintaining this equipment, these vehicles wouldn’t be able to handle such a large workload. “Pit Crew Op’s is essential in keeping Soldiers safe on the road. Vehicles breaking down on missions, in our eyes, is unacceptable,” commented Chief Warrant Officer 2 William Pettit, the companies engineer equipment technician.

The company has processed over 500 internal pit crew jobs in the last two months, and is eager to continue their operations to ensure Soldiers’ safety on the road.



Armor troops, ISF patrol Kahdra daily

Story, photos by
Sgt. James P. Hunter
2nd BCT PAO

BAGHDAD- In Kahdra, troops with Company C, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, working and living alongside Iraqi National Police with the 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 6th Iraqi National Police, maintain presence in the area through patrols-both mounted and dismounted- going door-to-door talking with local citizens. Their presence alone creates a buzz.

Whether it's handing out tip cards—which may help lead to the detention of an insurgent or the prevention of an attack—or just maintaining their good relationship with the citizens through small talk, is vital.

"Tip cards have proven successful," said Spc. William Kelso, medic and native of Pasadena, Calif., with 2nd Platoon, Co. C, 1-64th AR, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). "Those tips have lead to a lot of (improvised explosive devices) and other known al-Qaeda members. The cards and the interaction with the people (are) very important. It's a small step to giving Iraq back to there own people."

Recently, the Soldiers of 2nd Platoon picked up an al-Qaeda leader responsible for trafficking IED-making material through Kahdra, said 1st Lt. James Gallagher, platoon leader and native of Royal Oak, Mich.

"For us to get out of here it's up to the people, by calling the tip line and watching their neighborhoods, letting us know if people are using abandoned houses. We see al-Qaeda members moving in and out," said Sgt. Jerry Bond, team leader and native of Manchester, Iowa. "We've been able to successfully destroy caches because of that."

The proof these tip cards and the interaction with citizen's works can be seen by simply looking at the numbers. Violence has dropped 70% in Kahdra since 1-64 arrived in country, said Gallagher.

"The key to the insurgency is not just politically or militarily, it's economically," said Gallagher. "If you look at before when al-Qaeda ran the town, at around three o'clock businesses closed. People were scared to stay out late. Now that new (Iraqi police) run the station and have taking over security, business has just started to blossom. Right now its 2015; you can still go out and the streets are still busy."

The IP station Gallagher refers to is the one in Kahdra.

Just a few months ago they received reports that al-Qaeda had insiders in the IP station, said Kelso.

"We got the go ahead from the (Minister of Interior) to take over the IP station and give control, at the time, to 2/5/2 INP. We helped them transition over," Kelso said. "Now 1/6/2 and the volunteers man the IP station.

Since then, violence has gone down in the area."

But these are all small steps, as American troops continue to train and mentor these Iraqi security forces, so they, one day, can take over the security measure themselves without the help of Coalition forces.

Sometimes it's just a trust issue. Not just with corruption, but with competence.

"When the people of Iraq trust their own law enforcement enough, we can go," said Kelso. "They are the future to the success."

Iraqis are slowly, but surely, gaining that trust, said Kelso. Their ability to search and clear rooms is astonishing. They are not 100% dependable on U.S. troops, but having 1-64 troops there is almost like a security blanket.

So what does it take? Because ISF have a step on American forces, for they know this culture much better.

"Turning over Iraq is not an issue of resources and assets, its leadership," said Gallagher. "...When you go out on missions you try to tell these guys as leaders how much they need to take control. You can tell who has strong leadership or not based on how well the mission goes."

There are days, Gallagher expresses, when missions are extremely successful. There are leaders within this battalion, 1/2/6 INP, who are strong.

A first sergeant within the battalion is the perfect description of good leadership, said Gallagher. He is very strong as a leader, who takes charge and gives his guys a task, mission and purpose.

The more like him, then the better off Kahdra is. The better, then the obvious: Kahdra can return to the beauty it once was. Already this can be seen. Business is blossoming, kids are playing in the street and everyone all around seems to be living a happier, safer life in Kahdra, said Kelso.



Iraqi National Policemen with the 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 6th Iraqi National Police place concertina wire near a bridge in Kahdra, Dec. 4.

Two Soldiers bring Christmas to deployed troops

Story by
Sgt. James P. Hunter
2nd BCT PAO

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq— Soldiers take care of other Soldiers. Soldiers care about other Soldiers. The proof—two Soldiers from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), were able to provide Christmas gift bags to each Soldier of the 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. To be exact, there are 801 Soldiers in that battalion alone.

The troops of 1st Bn., 8th Inf. arrived in Kuwait under the impression they were taking control for the 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry Regiment, and falling under the Strike brigade.

They trained relentlessly in Kuwait for their mission in northwest Baghdad, only to be given a different mission and area of operation in Iraq.

So their Christmas mail was put on hold, and re-routed to a warehouse in

Kuwait. This could have been a devastating situation, given the fact they would be away from their families for Christmas already and now they would not get any packages from their loved ones for some time.

When Sgt. Stephanie Brewster and Spc. Dara Laura caught wind of this, they decided to step up and give to those in need.

"A few people with genuine hearts can make something happen for a lot of people," said Vian, Okla. native, Chaplain (Capt.) Jennifer Rogers, 526th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. "These two ladies are those big hearts. I never ever expected we would have been able to help that many.

"I am really happy that they took the bull by the horns and just ran with it," Rogers continued. "They made 801 Soldiers have a great Christmas and let 1-8 Inf. know they cared about them."

The two Soldiers gathered different packages and items from different organizations and companies who support the efforts of troops worldwide. With these items, they were able to put together

enough gift bags to support the entire squadron.

Everything from socks and hygiene products to movies and magazines were in these packages for the troops of 1st CAB, 8th Inf. Reg. This was of the utmost importance with it being the holiday season.

"(It's important) to make sure people know that they aren't forgotten about," said Brewster, a native of Southside, Ala., and 2nd BCT mental health noncommissioned officer-in-charge, "what they are doing is important, people really do support us and don't bash us as much as everyone thinks."

Laura, a chaplain assistant with the 526th BSB, said it gives Soldiers a stronger sense of purpose when they know people care about their needs and their feelings.

When Laura, a Columbus, Ohio native, initially received a package during her first deployment she was excited.

"Anytime you get mail, it's exciting," she said. "It's something you look forward to."

Providing to Soldiers is nothing new to these two.

The two Soldiers provide for each Soldier within their respective unit. Laura ensures each Soldier within her battalion who isn't receiving a package does. Brewster ensures each Soldier within her company also gets a package. Thus far, Brewster has provided two packages to each Soldier.

"I usually go around to the different companies and find out who is not receiving mail and then I make up a roster of that and I keep track," said Laura. "When I get packages that come in under one of these [civilian agencies] I will route those different packages to the different Soldiers."

This is something they plan on doing throughout the year.

"This isn't going to stop just because Christmas is over," Laura said. And for those Soldier's in 1st CAB, 8th Inf. Reg, they too will not be forgotten. They plan to continue to route packages their way.

And what about the affect it has on Soldiers? "Smiles, lots of smiles," Laura said. "People feel like somebody cares."



photo courtesy of Sgt. Stephanie Brewster, 2nd BCT

Southside, Ala. native, Sgt. Stephanie Brewster, mental health noncommissioned officer-in-charge, with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), packs items into gift boxes for troops of the 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. Brewster and Spc. Dara Laura were able to provide enough Christmas gift bags to 801 troops of the battalion.

Troops make initial payment to concerned local citizens

Story, photo by
Sgt. James P. Hunter
2nd BCT PAO

BAGHDAD- It was a very joyful day for the concerned local citizens of Jamia, as troops with Company B, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), delivered their first month's salary, Dec. 4.

It was obvious these men were overjoyed, with them smiling and full of laughter. They kicked around the "football" with local children in Jamia. They were relaxed, and they very well should be for their efforts in stepping up and volunteering to keep the security in Jamia on an even keel.

"It's very significant for (the volunteers) because most of them have been without jobs for so long, so it's going to definitely improve the neighborhood in that these men who were previously unemployed and maybe vulnerable to being persuaded by the insurgency to accept money for conducting attacks," said Capt. Mark Battjes, commander and native of Parker, Colo., with Co. B, 1-64th AR. "Now they are on the pay rolls as a security force. They are going to get a regular paycheck."

One Iraqi man, who approached a U.S. troop, said he appreciates the Americans for the payment. He was very sincere and thankful, almost emotional. One could see it in his eyes, for he was overwhelmed.

He said, "All the men are happy they have money to feed their families."

But it's the local citizens of Jamia who should be thanking the volunteers. They have already made an immediate impact in the community, said 1st Lt. John Rerucha, executive officer and native of Fredericksburg, Virginia, with Co. B,

1-64th AR.

"Anytime local nationals see an organized force for their security, I think that is a confidence builder for the people in the community as they see us moving forward," he said. "The people are worried about the instability of the security."

Nearly a month ago, they began filtering into the streets. There are approximately 500 volunteers in Jamia alone.

These men were chosen from a list of names by the Neighborhood Advisory Council and then by commander's in the Iraqi army.

Since then, they have been training with the troops of 1-64 AR and the Iraqi army on how to properly search vehicles, man tactical checkpoints, and interact with local citizens at a TCP.

They also conducted weapons training, physical training, and drill-and-ceremony.

"We tried to instill a good sense of civil service," said Rerucha. "They are here to help the people. Eventually they will become (Iraqi Police)."

The volunteer's names have been submitted to the Iraqi Police Academy, where they will go as slots begin to open up.

Jamia is slotted for 600 IP's, and currently there are none policing in Jamia, said Battjes. These men are key to Jamia's security and stability.

"What these guys will allow us to do is set

the neighborhood up for long-term success," he said. "By standing these guys up, we are acknowledging that both (U.S. and IA troops) will have to leave this area someday, and we can hand over the responsibility of security to a trained force from the local area. The immediate impact will not be as great as its long-term affect."

A lot of the citizens joined the force because they've seen their communities in the state it's been in for far too long, said Rerucha. It gives them an opportunity to make a difference.

"The first thing is to serve my country, my neighborhood and the people of my neighborhood," said Capt. Ahmed Waqub about why he serves as a concerned local citizen in Jamia. "Secondly, I have to feed my family and feed myself. I was tired of sitting at home with no work.

"I am fed up with the situation in Jamia," he continued. "We want a more stabilized situation in Jamia."

He said the people of Jamia feel more comfortable with people from within their own community providing security. He is sure that deep inside these people's hearts, they are tired of the offensive actions of insurgents. They want change, and he wants to deliver that change.

In his opinion, 90% of the people within Jamia agree with and respect the volunteer's efforts.

He feels the other 10% are the criminals who never want change, who seek to wreak havoc on the daily lives of the people of Jamia.

But those insurgents will have to choose another day to wreak havoc, for this day belonged to the volunteers.

When they got paid, Waqub said the volunteer's tension and nervousness eased. The payment proves the good intentions of the American forces and the volunteers working throughout Jamia.



Capt. Mark Battjes, commander and native of Parker, Colo., with Company B, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, hands an Iraqi concerned local citizen his months salary, Dec. 4, in Jamia.

Volunteer drive held for Iraqi citizens in northwest Baghdad

Story, photos by
Sgt. James P. Hunter
2nd BCT PAO

BAGHDAD—Local citizens have stepped up to answer their nations call, and particularly the call for a standardized, uniformed police force to be there when their neighbors and fellow Iraqi citizens call out in tears and anguish for their help.

A 3-day volunteer drive was held Dec. 10-12 in the Dawoodi, Dur Sud and Andulus muhallahs of northwest Baghdad to recruit candidates for the volunteer security force, or better known as concerned local citizens.

They came in swarms, nearly 100 men per muhallah, all seeking the same thing—a job. Two very distinct reasons stick out to why these men came. First off, because of their love for country. Secondly, so they can feed their families.

"They want jobs. None of these guys have jobs," 1st Lt. Matthew Nicholl, platoon leader and native of Lawrence, Kansas, with 3rd Platoon, Company D., 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment. "The biggest thing we are going to do for this muhallah is give seventy-five guys jobs; seventy-five males jobs, because if they're not working for us, they're working for the other guys."

Though this area isn't necessarily poor, comparatively to other communities, their work alone will help boost the economy. If a man brings in his two sons, and all three gain jobs, then they bring \$1200 a month into their household. That is \$1200 into their pockets and then into the economy.

"That's a lot of money; it has to improve the economy," said Nicholl. "There is going to be second and third order effects. It's keeping the money in the muhallahs. You will see it in ways of businesses opening and businesses expanding."

The troops of Delta Company worked with the local Neighbor Advisory Council members to come up with a list of names for possible candidates. The NAC members chose the candidates, and invitations were sent out to each individual, welcoming them to come out for the recruitment drive.

Each individual went through a series of in processing procedures. They were fingerprinted to check if they had any criminal background and medics gave them a

physical screening to check their health status. Afterwards, they conducted a physical fitness test, consisting of push-ups, sit-ups and a 100-meter dash. Finally, they were interviewed by Iraqi national police commanders who approved or disapproved them for recruitment into the volunteer force.

The final list of possible candidates goes to the Ministry of Interior, where they choose the 75 best candidates per muhallah, said Nicholl.

But one thing must be taken into consideration when selecting these men. In these areas, 60-70% of the populace is Shia.

"Out of the 75 volunteers, we have to make it reflect the demographics of the actual muhallah," said Nicholl. By doing this it will better balance the force.

Once these 75 men are selected, they will be uniformed and integrated into training with Iraqi army and national police members, manning checkpoints alongside them and patrolling through the Muhallahs.

These men will be vital to their communities, said Nicholl. The Iraqi army in the area is overwhelmed with work, manning tactical checkpoints and patrolling through the muhallahs. They are acting more as a police force than a military force, which is the "wrong answer."

Placing these volunteers into their home cities, where they know and have built trust with the local citizens, is putting a known face on the security issues that plague some Baghdad muhallahs.

One man, Yaser Abdul Satar, sported a tattoo of Iraq with the nation's colors in it. He said it's a symbol of his love for country,

which is one reason Satar wants to be a part of this volunteer force.

Secondly, however, his lack of job is preventing him from doing the one thing he has wanted to do for some time—marry. His

country, his family and the people of Dur Sud come first.

Spc. Chris Johnson, Driver and native of Richmond, Va., with Company D, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, said the area is pretty safe. They patrol often, going to the local schools and talking with the children.

There are some known criminals operating in the area, but it's relatively safe. If these men are in place to identify those who do not belong and are known criminals they will be successful, he said.



With one man holding his legs, an Iraqi man and candidate for the volunteer force in Dur Sud performs sit-ups during the physical fitness portion of the volunteer drive, Dec 11.



An Iraqi man performs push-ups during the physical fitness portion of the volunteer drive at an all-girls high school in Dur Sud, Dec 11.

IA, troops deliver backpacks to Iraqi school children

Story, photos by
Sgt. James P. Hunter
2nd BCT PAO

ADIL, Iraq— A school is a place of learning. It's a place where children go to higher their education, through teachers who are dedicated to their future.

"I have always been a believer that when you are in school the only thing you should worry about is learning, and all teachers should be worried about is teaching," said 1st Lt. Reimund G. Manneck Jr., Fire Support Officer, Company A, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment. "I think, especially in a safe place like Adil, where kids and teachers can go to school on their own without any fear, they should be at least afforded a good building and plenty of supplies so they can focus on learning and not worry that they will run out of notebooks and pencils and that their building is falling apart."

Iraqi army soldiers and Alpha Com-

pany troops, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), delivered backpacks to school children at the Kawaryzmi Primary School in Adil, Dec. 13.

The headmaster's at the school were complaining they didn't receive enough school supplies for their students for the entirety of the school year, said Hartsdale, N.Y. native, Manneck. This was the second school they delivered supplies to, with the first being Al Khullud Secondary School for Girls.

So working with the Iraqi army, they gathered the supplies and delivered them to very enthusiastic, but well-mannered students.

Upfront in charge of delivering these supplies were the soldiers of 3rd Company of the 3rd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division.

Their company commander, Capt. Hyder, who according to Manneck, "is very willing to help the people. Of all Iraqi army officers we have met, he is the best in helping the community," is very understanding of the needs of the Iraqi people.

"He understands that in order to pull the population away from the insurgents you need to work with and help people," continued Manneck.

"He is always planning humanitarian assistance and medical type drops..."

Sometimes pulling these supplies in can be difficult for the Iraqi army, said Manneck. So, this is where the U.S. troops step in to help by providing the supplies.

But it is still the Iraqi army upfront, providing to their people.

Due to their interaction with the people "We learn about the schools who need supplies through the Iraqi army," said 1st Lt. Robert Behrman, with Company B, 492nd Civil Affairs Battalion, attached to 1-64 AR. "If it weren't for the Iraqi army school supply missions wouldn't happen. These are things that are motivated, initiated and driven by the Iraqi army."

With the Iraqi army out interacting with the people, finding out their needs can only mean immediate change, said Behrman. With the local citizens of Adil's trust in the IA, the soldiers can continue to reach out and conduct their mission of security throughout.

"By having the IA upfront in these type of operations it build people's confidence and trust in them, something that used to lack here in Adil but has been getting better since we have been doing these joint operations," said Manneck.



Anxiously waiting, Iraqi children at the Kawaryzmi Primary School in Adil, the Mansour District of Baghdad, wait in line to receive new backpacks, Dec. 13. Iraqi army and U.S. troops delivered nearly 400 backpacks to Iraqi school children.



Iraqi children hold up their new backpacks at the Kawaryzmi Primary School in Adil, Dec. 13. Iraqi army soldiers with the 3rd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division and U.S. troops of Company A, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, dropped off backpacks to nearly 400 school children between the ages of six and 12.

Red Platoon forging lasting bond with children

Story by
1st Lt. Adam Buchanan
Co. D, 1-64th AR

BAGHDAD- The "Black Knights" of Delta Company are always looking for ways to help support the community of Mansour, trying to build a rapport with local citizens so that they don't have a bad perception regarding the activities of Coalition Forces. This is not always an easy task, but it is certainly a necessary step that U.S. forces must take in an effort to build trust with Iraqis and show that U.S. Forces are here to help rebuild this struggling nation.

First Platoon (Red), Delta Company, Task Force 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), often visit the children in the cancer ward of the Iskan Children's Hospital. This has been one of the most rewarding experiences for Red Platoon.

While CF and Iraqi army try to maintain the rule of law and improve essential services for the citizens of Mansour, life goes on for the residents. Iskan Children's

Hospital is one place where this mundane existence doesn't have the luxury of being taken for granted.

Only a few hundred meters to the north of Joint Security Station Washash sits the Iskan Children's Hospital. This is the largest medical facility in the area and is an important part of the surrounding community. But as with anything in Iraq, there are no clear lines drawn. For all the good that this hospital does for the residents of Iskan and the greater Mansour area, reports

indicate that insurgents use the hospital to store weapons and hide.

Even with intelligence continuing to indicate the Children's Hospital is being used for more than just treating patients, the Black Knights have made many efforts to help improve the facilities' treatment capabilities. Delta Company has facilitated many inspections by civil affairs teams and one by the Strike Brigade Surgeon in an effort to help open a dialogue between the Iraqi Ministry of Health and the Iskan Children's hospital so that the MOH

see BOND, pg. 20



Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Deunger, platoon sergeant and native of Austin, Texas, and Staff Sgt. Anthony Orosz, a native of Camden, S.C., both with Company D, Task Force 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), pose with children of the Iskan Children's Hospital during one of their many visits. These Soldiers have forged a lasting bond with these children that bridge the cultural divide and the angst of ongoing counter insurgency operations.

Concerned local citizen tip leads to IED cache

Story by
Capt. Mark Battjes
Co. B, 1-64th AR

BAGHDAD- A tip from a member of the Jamia Concerned Local Citizens' security force led Coalition Forces to a large cache of munitions, improvised explosive device, and IED-making materials Dec. 5 in the Jamia neighborhood of Baghdad.

The member of the CLC had noticed an unusual blanket covering possible weapons in the driveway of a home the day prior while playing soccer and gave this information to Coalition Forces at Joint Security Station Bonzai. Responding to the

information, 3rd Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, followed the CLC to the location where they found anti-tank mines, mortar and artillery rounds, explosive materials, IED-initiating systems, and two complete IEDs that were ready for emplacement. It is the first large cache found in the neighborhood in the last several weeks.

The tip from the CLC is the first of its kind from the security force that began operations less than two weeks ago.

"Without this concerned citizen coming forward and giving us the information about suspicious activity in his neighborhood, we might not have located this cache before its contents were used to attack Coalition or Iraqi

forces," said 1st Lt. Mike Kelly, the platoon leader for 3rd Platoon, Company B, 1-64th AR.

The Jamia CLC security force is in the early stages of its formation and is currently undergoing on-the-job training with both Bravo Company and the 3rd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division. Once the force is certified by Iraqi Army leadership as trained, they will begin conducting 24 hour joint operations with the Iraqi army at traffic control points throughout the Jamia neighborhood. Kelly stated, "We expect more tips like this to come in from CLCs once they begin full time operations and that should lead to a significant increase in the security of the neighborhood."



Staff Sgt. Andrew Morales, 3rd Platoon, Troop A, 1st Squadron, 75th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), enters a new resident into the HIDES system in Gazaliyah, Iraq, Dec 5, 2007.



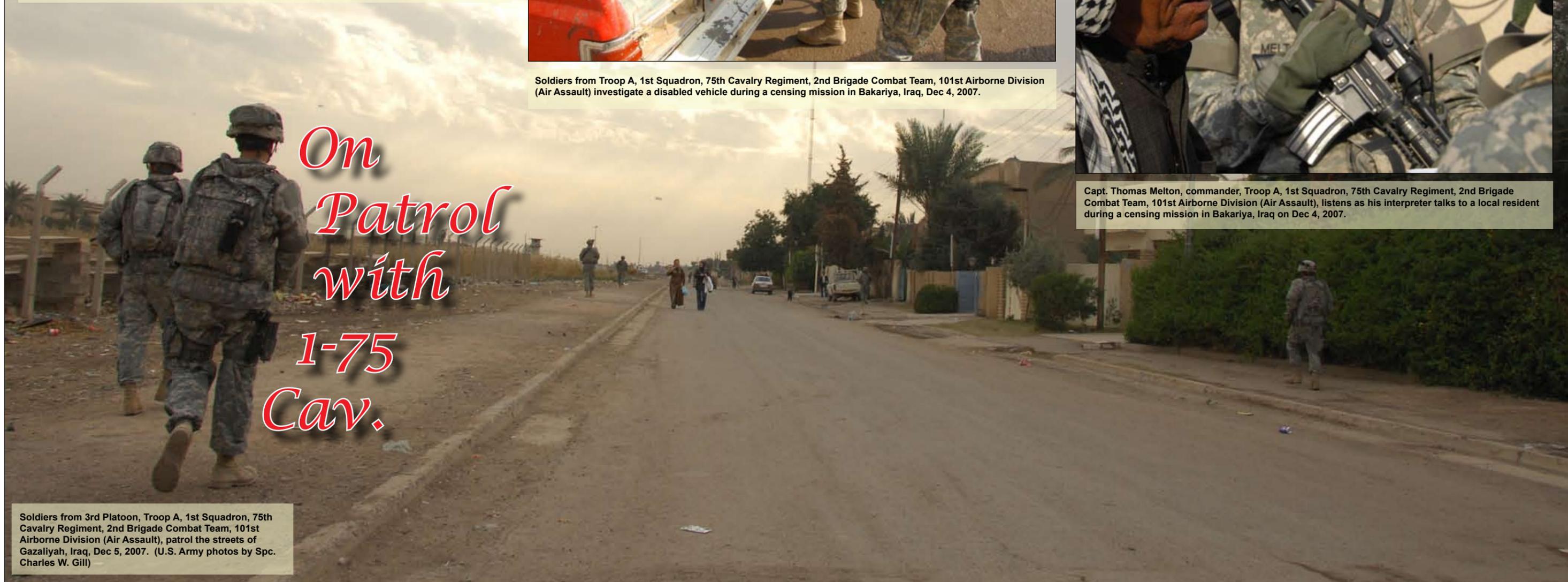
Soldiers from Troop A, 1st Squadron, 75th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) investigate a disabled vehicle during a censing mission in Bakariya, Iraq, Dec 4, 2007.



Capt. Thomas Melton, commander, Troop A, 1st Squadron, 75th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), listens as his interpreter talks to a local resident during a censing mission in Bakariya, Iraq on Dec 4, 2007.

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Soldiers from 3rd Platoon, Troop A, 1st Squadron, 75th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), patrol the streets of Gazaliyah, Iraq, Dec 5, 2007. (U.S. Army photos by Spc. Charles W. Gill)



BOND

is more responsive to the needs and supply requests of the hospital.

However, one of the most important things that the Black Knights have done for the hospital has nothing to do with improving security or improving the supply chain for the hospital and has everything to do with showing basic human compassion for some of the less fortunate children, those that suffer most.

Ever since Red Platoon conducted its first assessment of the Children's Hospital, the platoon has been aware of the very difficult situations the patients in the cancer ward of the hospital face. Most of the children in this part of the hospital face a very grim future.

The number of patients in the cancer ward at Iskan Children's hospital has fluctuated over the months due to the simple life and death battles that these children wage with leukemia every day. In an effort to bring a little light into their world, the Soldiers of Red Platoon bring candy and toys to these patients whenever possible.

Some of the children are at first scared and taken aback by Soldiers in uniform; but when the faces of the children light up at the site of American Soldiers bearing candy, toys, and smiles, everything suddenly makes sense and seems worthwhile to the Soldiers. It is an overwhelming yet rewarding perspective.

Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Deunger, native of Austin, Texas, and Platoon Sergeant for Red Platoon, commented, "It tears me up to see what these kids go through. I have a two year old son at home who is healthy, but I can't imagine what I would go through if I had a child that sick."

In the bigger scheme of things it may just seem like superficial help to a much deeper problem, but the Soldiers see it as more than that. Okechobee, Fla. native, Staff Sgt. James Slayton remarked, "You can tell which ones are not going to make it, but we still try and bring something good into their lives as best as we can while they are still with us. These kids don't have many reasons to smile and we try and give them some."

Alamogordo, N.M. native 1st Lt. Jeremy McCool, Platoon Leader, has family and friends send care packages to him from the United States filled with toys specifically for these kids. McCool, usually quick to share the contents of his care packages, is protective of the toys and candy sent from home for the leukemia patients, whom he refers to as "his children."

As hard as it is to see the struggles of these children and their parents -- struggles they don't always win -- Red Platoon will continue to visit the cancer ward at Iskan Children's Hospital for the remainder of their deployment. These Soldiers have forged a lasting bond with these children that bridge the cultural divide and the angst of ongoing counter insurgency operations.



Iraqi army soldiers from 4th Battalion, 1st Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division provide security during a joint censing mission with Soldiers from Troop A, 1st Squadron, 75th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), in Bakariya, Iraq on Dec 4, 2007. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Charles W. Gill)

Local tribal leaders make an attempt at reconciliation

Story by
Maj. Chris Budihas
Co. B, 1-64th AR

After four years of brutal fighting between insurgents, the Iraqi army and Coalition Forces, most of west Mansour's local population is tired of the ravages of war that has prevented any sort of normalcy in this area since Saddam's regime reigned.

When Task Force 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, from Fort Stewart, Ga., attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), arrived in Mansour in mid-June, the battalion was conducting full spectrum combat operations with a daily average of up to fifteen significant enemy events per day.

However, due to the battalion's aggressive operations in cooperation with the Iraqi

army battalion they were partnered with, 1-64 AR has reduced violent activities to a daily average of zero to three enemy events daily.

Due to this new found security, local tribal and civic leaders in the Baghdad neighborhood of Jamia are attempting to form a reconciliation committee. Sheik Wisham al Summaidi, a long-time resident of Jamia, has stepped forward to form this committee that will serve to be a voice for the local population to improve their municipal services and facilitate discussion about the return of former local residents who fled the area due to the violence that used to reign in the streets.

Now that the area is secured, former residents want to return to their homes, many of which have been occupied by displaced families from other areas of the city. This committee, chaired by Sheik Washim, would explore solutions to this complicated matter

of resettling currently displaced people living in Jamia, while bringing back the original residents.

During a recent meeting, Lt. Col. Edward Chesney, battalion commander; Maj. Chris Budihas, battalion operations officer; and Capt. Mark Battjes, Company B commander, met with Sheik Washim and the other representatives of the Jamia-Adl Support Council.

The group discussed some of the details surrounding functions that the council will perform and how it will integrate with the elected local government effort; the Neighborhood Advisory Council in Jamia. The chairman explained the committee's structure, membership, and all their goals to these Coalition leaders. This successful meeting sets the stage for further dialogue between Coalition and the committee, which will undoubtedly bring further stability to this former Iraqi "ghost town."

Working to Improve Baghdad



photo by Spc. Charles W. Gill, 55th Combat Camera

A Local national, hired to clean up the neighborhood, assembles a wheel barrel at Joint Security Station Thrasher in Gazaliyah, Iraq, on Dec 4, 2007. Iraqi citizens are beginning to step up and look toward the future—a future of a clean, economically structure society once again.

TRAINING

"We are trying to instill certain core values..." said 1st Lt. Douglas McDonough, platoon leader and native of Bonham, Texas, with 2nd Platoon, Battery A, 2-32 FA. They are tailoring their training to the Iraqi society, but ensuring they instill the basic skills and situational awareness each policemen must be keen on.

Even Iraqi army commanders in the area came to talk with these men on their importance; for their job is important to the future of Hateen and the future of Iraq.

Everyone knows military forces are used for aggressive actions against a known enemy force. Pushing police forces out into the muhallahs allows Iraqi military troops the opportunity to focus on training and military operations.

It also gives the Hateen IPA a sense of ownership for their homeland, said McCall. These men want to help their neighborhood, and in doing so, it puts more jobs into the community and gives them a sense of pride for security in their neighborhood.

"(Being a volunteer) is very important to these people," said Williams. "These guys want to save their neighborhoods."

With their will to save their neighborhoods, they should have an immediate impact in the area.

"I think initially the people will see friendly faces in their neighborhood; guys they have known all their lives there working to protect them," McCall said. "... if a guy they know and trust is patrolling the streets in front of their house (should) make them feel a lot better."

In the area, with a population of 30,000 Iraqis, McCall is eager to see how the good initiative of the Iraqi volunteers will play out.

"I think it can be a turning point for this community," he said.

ISF, U.S. troops detain 27 suspected AQI in North Babil

By MND-C PAO

NORTH BABIL, Iraq - A joint raid Dec. 7 resulted in the detention of 27 suspected al-Qaeda terrorists in a building in north Babil that was suspected to be an al-Qaeda safehouse where members planned attacks against local citizens, Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition Forces.

The raid was conducted by the Iraqi army and Soldiers with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), currently attached to the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division.

Intelligence indicated that the al-Qaeda members operating out of the building included high-value individuals.

The raid was conducted by an air assault. As they moved off the helicopter, the Soldiers received direct small arms fire from the direction of the building.

Coalition Forces returned fire and eventually captured the suspects, including one suspect who attempted to flee and hide in a ditch before being captured. That individual turned out to be one of the high-value targets.

"The Iraqi Army did a fantastic job in clearing the objective area," said Capt. George Morris, commander of Co. B, 2-502nd Inf. Regt.

"There is no place to hide," said Lt. Col. Kane Barksdale, commander of 1st Battalion, 76th Field Artillery, 4th BCT, 3rd Inf. Div., the battalion task force that 2-502nd Inf. Regt. is tasked under.

"For my area of operation, this was a great success," Barksdale said, adding that much of the success of the mission was owed to intelligence reports from Concerned Local Citizens.

1-320th troops receive combat patch

Story by

Pfc. Samantha Schutz

4th Inf. Div. Public Affairs

It was a moment of pride for Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 101st Airborne Division 'Top Guns,' as they received their combat patches during a ceremony Dec. 22 at their battalion headquarters.

Lt. Col. David Burwell, commander of the 'Top Guns,' presented four Soldiers

from each of the four batteries in the battalion with the Screaming Eagle patch, and each of the battery commanders issued patches to the remaining Soldiers in their battery.

"Soldiers, wear these patches with pride, for they are well-earned," Burwell said. "Trust me when I say that you will look proudly on this patch for the rest of your lives. You have now officially joined the ranks of many combat veterans before you."

According to Army Regulations, the

"RE-UP"



photo courtesy of 1st Bn., 502nd Inf. Reg.

Sgt. Jose Zavala of Greenacres, Fla., recites the Oath of Enlistment as read to him by 1st Lt. John Tallarico, both with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, at Camp Taji, Iraq, Dec. 12.



photo courtesy of 1st Bn., 502nd Inf. Reg.

Spc. David Hernandez of Brooklyn, N.Y., with Headquarters and Headquarters Company poses for a photo with Capt. Mickey West after re-enlisting Dec. 12 at Camp Taji.

First Strike

combat patch, or Shoulder Sleeve Insignia, is authorized for wear as soon as a Soldier deploys to a combat zone.

The 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 101st Airborne Division has been at Camp Liberty for two months of their expected 15-month deployment.

For many young Soldiers in the unit, including Burbank, Calif., native Kevin Christoffersen, a driver for the battalion's personal security detachment with Headquarters, Headquarters Battery, 1st

see PATCH, pg. 23

Troops receive combat patch

Story by

1st Sgt. Ira F. Turner

Co. B, 2nd BSTB

On Dec. 14, members of Company B, 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, gathered to receive their combat patch. Battalion command sergeant major, Command Sgt. Maj. Wayne St. Louis, insisted on presenting each Soldier with their combat patch in person. In doing so, he had the opportunity to express to the Soldiers his feelings on the importance of receiving their first combat patch.

The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Miguel Hobbs, also spoke to each of the Soldiers and educated them on the proud history of the Screaming Eagles. He spoke about the first Airborne Infantry Regiment in the United States Army, the 502nd, as well as their famous stand at Bastogne, France, in December of 1944. Nearly 63 years to the day after the Battle of the Bulge, the Soldiers of the 2nd BSTB received their Combat patch.

When asked about having to wait nearly 60 days into the deployment before receiving the combat patch, the Soldiers of Bravo

Company said that they didn't mind.

Pfc. Jamisha Tillman of Fayetteville, N.C. said, "Hearing the sergeant major and the battalion commander speak made me feel like I was receiving an award." Other Soldiers had also indicated that they were more satisfied with the way they were presented their patch.

Spc. Timothy Kendzierski of Melbourne, Fla., said, "I liked the ceremony. It's important in the Army to conduct ceremonies, it makes you remember all of those that served before you and the tradition that you now continue."

Pfc. Hugh Hicks of Chickmauga, Ga., was also moved by the ceremony. "If I had just been given it to throw on it wouldn't have been a big deal" he said. "Having the ceremony made me understand that wearing the combat patch matters."

The history of the 101st Airborne Division, "Screaming Eagles," is a long and distinguished one as well as that of the 502nd Infantry Regiment.

The Bravo Company Soldiers all stood proud while receiving their award and all that received their first combat patch will always remember when and how they received it.



Command Sgt. Maj. Wayne St. Louis, 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, speaks to his troops during a combat patch ceremony, Dec. 14.

PATCH

Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, Operation Iraqi Freedom 07-09 is their first tour of duty.

"I knew I would deploy, and I had some clues about what to expect because I looked at people with combat patches as role models," said Christoffersen, who enlisted in the Army a year and a half ago. "Now I've seen it for myself. Now I can be a role model to someone else."

Other Soldiers in the unit were already role models for those who had yet to deploy. These Soldiers switched their previous combat patch to the 101st Airborne Division's unit patch.

Spc. Casey Benson, a native of Kannapolis, N.C., and a gunner for the battalion's personal security detachment with Headquarters, Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, earned the 4th Infantry Division's combat patch when he deployed with the Ironhorse division during OIF 05-07.

"Overall, I think training and deploying with two different units has made me a more well-rounded Soldier," said Benson, who has spent three years in the Army. He said he is grateful for the opportunities that the Army has given him because "some people never even leave the state they live in."

Not every Soldier has the opportunity to deploy to a combat zone, so earning the combat patch is, as Christoffersen put it, "a great honor." As proud as the Soldiers of the 'Top Guns' battalion looked during the ceremony, there is no question they will indeed remember their patches and the moment they received them with pride for the rest of their lives.



photo Pfc. Samantha Schutz, 4th Inf. Div. PAO

Soldiers of the Service Battery, 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, stand in formation after receiving their combat patches.



Merry Christmas

Strike Brigade Combat Team



Top Left: Soldiers with Company C, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, prepare Christmas Dinner at Joint Security Station Kahdra. (U.S. Army photo by Maj. Jose F. Garcia, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. Public Affairs)

Top Right: Soldiers from Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery, enjoy a special holiday meal brought out to their Christmas party at Joint Security Station Torch in Yarmouk, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Charles W. Gill, 55th Combat Camera)

Bottom Right: Pfc. Dennis Cox, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment opens gifts that his family sent. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Larry O'Bonnon, 1-64th AR)

Bottom Left: Spc. Dara Laura, chaplain assistant and native of Columbus, with the 526th Brigade Support Battalion, packages candy into gift bags for troops of the 1st Combat Arms Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. (U.S. Army photo by Chaplain (Capt.) Jennifer Rogers, 526th BSB)

Middle Left: Soldiers from Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery, show some holiday spirit and love at their Christmas party at Joint Security Station Torch in Yarmouk, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Charles W. Gill)

Middle: Soldiers show cased their holiday spirit outside their trailers at Camp Liberty, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo courtesy of 526th BSB)