

The Daily Roar

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Banditos roll into Iraq with a bang

By Sgt. 1st Class Christina Bhatti
2nd Stryker BCT PAO

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – The Soldiers from Battery B, “Banditos,” 2nd Battalion, 11th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, “Warrior,” 25th Infantry Division, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii made history Jan. 2, when they were the first Army unit to fire the 155mm M777A2 Light Weight Howitzer into the night sky over Baghdad.

“I’m proud to be part of this,” said San German, Puerto Rico native 1st Sgt. Ramon Malave, Battery B first sergeant. “My Soldiers are good and they want to fire this system out here.”

The “Banditos” were the first Army unit to receive this cannon system and have trained for 15 months to perfect their skills.

To train, the Soldiers went through rigorous hands on training, crew battle drills and a live-fire exercise at the Pohakuloa Training Area on the Big Island of Hawaii, said Malave.

The main mission of the battalion here is the Base Defense Operations Center. “We are responsible for defending and securing Camp Taji for all Soldiers that live here,” said Honolulu Hawaii native Lt. Col. Joe Gleichenhaus, 2nd Bn., 11th FA Regt. commander.

“One of the highlights of this unit is that they not only trained as a field artillery battalion, but have been focusing on being a battlespace owner; a maneuver unit. The versatility of these Soldiers is demonstrated here. They are fired up and are definitely disciplined to switch between their artillery and maneuver missions,” said Gleichenhaus.

For Newport N.H. Spc. Michael Cunningham, number 1 man for the cannon crew, Battery B, 2nd Bn., 11th FA Regt., the first firing of the system was extremely important. “The calibration of this system ensures that other units can count on us to be on time and on target,” he said.

Being on time and on target is easily achieved with this cannon system. The M777A2 is able to use a Global Positioning System -guided round. The Excalibur round allows for a coordinate to be directly imputed.

Once fired the coordinates ensure the round will get to the

target where the grid was put in, said Malave.

After clearing the area, the first round was fired, and the shockwave shook the earth. But it was barely felt amidst the excitement of cheering Soldiers. The cheering grew even louder when confirmation came in that the target was hit.

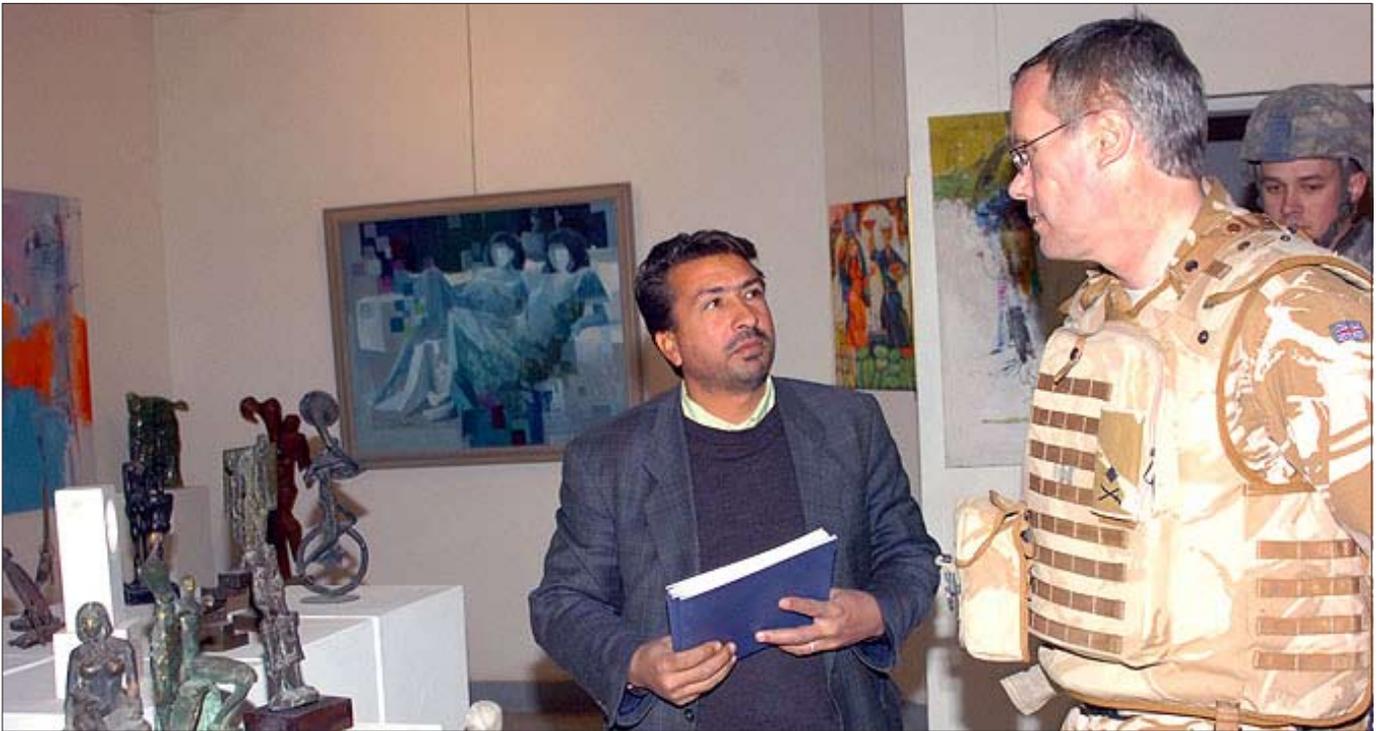
“We train a lot so when we go live it’s exciting,” said Olympia Washington native Pfc. Tyler Hughes, Battery B, 2nd Bn., 11th FA Regt.

To be apart of the first rounds shot downrange is great,” he said. “It is something I can definitely tell my children and grandchildren.”



by Sgt. 1st Class Christina Bhatti, 2nd Stryker BCT

Soldiers from Battery B, Banditos’prepare to fire the M777A2 Light Weight 155mm Howitzer.



by Spc. Katrina L. Faulkner-Brown

Work of art

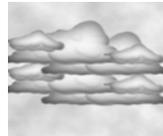
British Maj. Gen. Bruce Brealey, deputy commanding general, Multi-National Corps-Iraq, talks to a local art gallery owner about an art exhibit at Abu Nuwas Market during Brealey's tour of eastern Baghdad communities, Dec 31, 2007. Brealey visited various areas in the Rusafa District to gain first-hand knowledge of challenges facing coalition commanders and to make assessments of those challenges. Areas of interest for Brealey included a Joint Security Station, Abu Nuwas and Shorja markets and the Book Market revitalization.

Baghdad Three Day Weather Forecast

Wednesday
Scattered
clouds
HI: 50F/10C
LO: 32F/0C



Thursday
Overcast
HI: 50F/10C
LO: 37F/3C



Friday
Chance of rain
HI: 39F/9C
LO: 33F/1C




The Daily Roar

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Task Force XII Soldiers stand ready

By Sgt. 1st Class Chris Seaton
Task Force XII PAO

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Spc. David Leopold sat in the break room of the brigade air defense operations center. A fuel handler for Company E, 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, Leopold is used to working hard. For the past few days, he'd been doing just that while manning a guard tower on his forward operating base just outside Baghdad.

It's part of the job for Soldiers of all military occupational specialties while stationed in Iraq. For days at a time, they leave their flight lines, motor pools and offices to gear up and watch a fence line.

On the inside of the fence is the Iraq they know; sand bag covered container housing units, dining facilities, rocks and mud. On the other side, an Iraqi city bustles with street vendors, children playing soccer and an ever-increasing flurry of activity signaling new life in a recovering country.

For many, like Leopold, watching the city from a tower is as close as they'll get to life outside the FOB. For now, sitting in the break room, he and others were watching a movie between shifts.

A voice broke over the radio with a single code word that instantly told the Soldiers, "We are under attack!"

Leopold sprang to life. His body reacted before his mind could process the next steps, and before he knew it he was standing in full body armor waiting for instructions. He was sent to guard an important tactical operations center.

"When an attack happens, everybody (on tower guard duty) not manning the tower is sent to areas on base to guard sensitive property," said Leopold, a native of Lawton, Okla. "We just move as

quickly as we can to secure the area."

This one was just an exercise. The base was still secure, and all was well at Camp Taji. But training like this is important for a lot of reasons, say those who participated.

"It's a good reminder that we're still



by Sgt. 1st Class Chris Seaton, Task Force XII PAO
Spc. David Leopold stands guard outside a tactical operations center during a base force protection exercise.

in a combat zone," said Leopold. "The war doesn't stop on a FOB just because we put up a fence. Anything can happen."

"The attack exercise simulates what would happen if the base was directly attacked," said San Antonio, Texas native Sgt. 1st Class Shon Skinner, the Task Force XII force protection non-commissioned officer. "In an aviation unit, we've got a pretty important task of protecting this airfield."

During the exercise, organizers watch to see how people will react. They have goals for what should happen if a base is attacked. The exercise lets them see what actually happens.

"We put a lot of emphasis on getting it right, and I put a lot of stress on Soldiers," said Skinner. "We have to see what happens, and what their attitudes are when we start inducing stress."

Statistics in the global war on terrorism say the chances of a forward operating base being attacked by anything beyond infrequent mortar or indirect fire are low.

And Taji's brigade combat team Soldiers, who regularly patrol the streets of Baghdad, tell stories and bring back photos of reconciliation and improved security.

But insurgents in Iraq have tried the coordinated attacks on other bases. So far, none have succeeded. The idea of practicing the attack drill is to keep it that way.

"Personally, I don't see (an attack on Taji) happening, but it's comforting to know we have a plan," said Task Force XII network systems operator, Spc. Bryan Coffey, who hails from Anderson, S.C. "It could definitely save lives by getting us into place if something did happen."

"We are ready (for something to happen), and we'll always be ready," said Skinner. "If not, we'll continue to train until we are."

For Leopold, the message was clear. Whether or not he's seen it in his six months of pumping fuel in Iraq, the war that his hard work supports outside the fence is very real.

"Anything can happen inside or outside," he said. "We're going to be ready for either one."