

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE 1ST BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM

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CAV ROCKS!





A “Manchu” Infantryman, with 4-9 Infantry Battalion, takes a knee during Operation Harvest II in the western desert of the Salah ad Din province. The “Manchus” are fighting along side Bastogne Soldiers in an effort to eradicate extremist networks in the region. The combat power added to the Bastogne Brigade creates unique offensive and defensive capabilities. “4-9 Infantry provides us the opportunity to attack the enemy in new areas and in different ways,” said Maj. Jason Tussey.

Sons of Iraq take next step

Story and photos by 1st Lt. Jonathan J. Springer
2nd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment PAO

Forward Operating Base O’Ryan, Iraq – Violence throughout Iraq has dramatically decreased thanks to the brave efforts of local citizens who have bonded together and are committed, along with Coalition Forces and Iraqi Security Forces, to fight against Al-Qaeda extremists.

Many commanders attribute the success of the security situation in Iraq to the Sons of Iraq. The SoI are formerly known as the Concerned Local Citizens, and before that, the Tribal Security Forces.

These Sons of Iraq are a maturing result of the ‘tribal awakening’ that blossomed throughout Iraq following Gen. David Petraeus’ implementation of “the surge” and are made up of men who are committed to ridding their local villages of insurgents in order to protect their families and tribes.

Strategic-level leaders in Iraq recognized that the early Tribal Security Forces would only be a temporary fix to the security situation during “the surge” in 2007, but have since seen the SoI become a significant contributing factor to the stability enjoyed in areas around the country. The leaders of these groups, tribal sheiks and elected community representatives, are now working with the Government of Iraq to get SoI members permanent employment within the Ministries of Interior and Defense as full-time Iraqi Security Force members.

One unit who has seen just how effective the Sons of Iraq are in their area of operations is 2nd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault).

The battalion, to help facilitate the process of providing the local tribesman a permanent employment opportunity within the Iraq government, planned and executed a large-scale operation aimed at helping transition these SoI members into the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police.

This operation, dubbed Operation Balls MEPS (Military Enlistment Processing Station), was executed Feb. 25, at Forward Operating Base O’Ryan. This is the first of many operations to be conducted at different locations throughout the battalion’s area.

“We are implementing the process of identifying qualified individuals from the Sons of Iraq program who are willing to remain paid members of a security force and facilitating their matriculation into active service with either the Ministry of the Interior’s Police

Forces or the Ministry of Defense’s Army Forces,” said Maj. Timothy Frambes, operations officer for the “Balls of the Eagle” battalion.

Frambes said the battalion coined this operation “Balls MEPS” as homage to the majority of the U.S. Military member’s first experience at Military Enlistment Processing Stations throughout the United States.

“Before we joined the military, we all had to endure military physicals, testing, and some sort of interview as we volunteered to serve our nation. During Operation Balls MEPS, we have a number of stations that are required for these SoI to go through,” said Frambes.

Some of the stations that are required for Operation



Sons of Iraq members do push-ups as part of transition to Iraqi Security Forces near Forward Operating Base O’Ryan.



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PAGE 2: BALLS’ SOLDIERS SEE SONS OF IRAQ TAKE NEXT STEP

PAGE 4: WHERE THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD

PAGE 5: BASTOGNE CAV COMPANY ROCK SOLID

PAGE 9: STB SPARTANS MAKE HISTORY IN TIKRIT

PAGE 11: “MANCHUS” AND BASTOGNE STRYKE ENEMY IN SALAH AD DIN

PAGE 12: “NO SLACK” TRAINS IRAQI POLICE

PAGE 13: EYE OF THE EAGLE PHOTO SPREAD

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Balls MEPS include a physical fitness test, medical screening, and basic administration to process the large volume of paperwork that entailed with government service.

The operation was planned, coordinated and executed jointly with key-leaders from the 2-320th FAR, local Iraqi Police, and the 3rd and 4th Battalions of the 4th Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division.

“The fact that our partnered Iraqi Army battalions and the local IP stations are jointly involved furthers our ability to cooperatively administer to some of the basic functions that will extend the security gains achieved by all of the programs and local volunteers in the recent past,” added Frambes.

In just two days, nearly 500 SoI members and other prospective applicants arrived at the front gates of FOB O’Ryan, ready to apply and tackle the physical training events required to get the chance to become permanent ISF members. Frambes said that this first Balls MEPS operation has been a huge success for the battalion, the brigade, and Coalition forces as a whole.

“Right now, we are the only battalion within the 1st BCT executing something like this; we are setting the example for other units to build on as they execute the same processes,” noted Frambes.

Since the inception of the SoI program, one that was inherited by the ‘Balls’ battalion, enemy attacks in their area of operations declined 20 percent since November 2007.

“I believe we as a battalion have been successful because of our operational tempo. Our guys are outside the wire conducting numerous combat operations. On top of that, we are getting a lot more cooperation from the local populace, the ISF, and the SoI concerning enemy activity in the area,” said Staff Sgt. Christopher James Estes, an intelligence analyst with the 2-320th FAR.

Estes said that intelligence was critical to how the battalion plans and conducts operations, and the support from the SoI has been crucial to the 2-320th FAR’s success thus far.

“Intelligence drives our maneuver plan on the ground. With all the success we’ve had at taking high value individuals off the streets. This in turn produces a safer and more secure Iraq,” Estes said.

Continuing to improve the security situation in Iraq is exactly what Frambes hopes Operation Balls MEPS will

eventually accomplish.

“Many of the men on our SoI checkpoints are former members of the IAs or IPs, and what we have now is a hometown guard of sorts. This is a good system, which provides a service to the country by denying the extremists, and other unsavory characters, the ability to negatively influence the people through murder, mayhem, and intimidation on the same,” said Frambes.

What Frambes hopes is that the members of these local tribal forces can continue to provide the same protection they have given to their own tribes, but now serving in Iraq’s security forces.

“The enemy no longer has a refuge amongst the people here. The vast majority of Iraqis want progress and are tired of the ruthlessness of the insurgency. We are focused, along with the SoI and the ISF, and are aggressive in our pursuit for the insurgents,” said Lt. Col. John Dunleavy, commander of the 2-320th FAR.

By remaining determined and focused in the fight against terrorism, Dunleavy said most Iraqis are finally starting to turn against the insurgency with the help of the Sons of Iraq and the improved ISF; the security situation has vastly improved. He also hopes that transitioning the Sons of Iraq members into the ISF will bring a permanent, and positive, change to this country.

“This is a long struggle and it is tough to define when it will end. I can only speak for our area of operations and our battalion, but what I know is we did not deploy with the mind set of trying to just improve things ... we are committed to win and we believe we are winning,” said Dunleavy.

“This Sons of Iraq program is an impressive display of the Iraqi people’s resolve, to end for good, the cycle of violence that was the hallmark of sectarian conflict that tore this country apart following the Golden Dome Mosque bombing in Samarra in February 2006. I believe that the population truly believes that they have a future; one without fear of continued violence,” said Frambes.

With the numbers that 2-320th FAR have seen thus far, Operation Balls MEPS will provide the Iraqi Government the added personnel it needs to boost its security forces substantially.

In turn, this operation will also provide these brave tribal security members permanent employment and the opportunity to continue to make improvements in the security situation here.



Where the rubber meets the road



Story and photos by
Spc. Rick Rzepka
Bastogne PAO

TIKRIT, Iraq – Wars have been won and lost based on logistics. Logistics is an art-form, which when executed properly can mean the difference between life and death, glory and shame.

“A little neglect may breed mischief. For want of a nail, the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe, the horse was lost; and for want of a horse, the rider was lost,” said Benjamin Franklin on the import of the logistician.

The 426th Brigade Support Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division eats, sleeps and breathes logistics and without them, the Bastogne Infantrymen would pay the price. Since arriving in Iraq in early October, 2007, the 426th BSB has moved a staggering amount of crucial material to the Bastogne infantry battalions in the Salah ad Din province.

In five months, the “Taskmasters” have driven more than 89 thousand miles on perilous roads to deliver their essential cargo. A feat that would make even the most seasoned UPS drivers wince.

More than 1.5 million gallons of fuel have been delivered courtesy of these master logisticians who take pride in knowing that they are at the heart of the fight for freedom in one of Iraq’s most volatile provinces.

“It’s critical to the overall mission here,” said Staff Sgt. Calvin Newkirk, a motor transporter with Alpha Company, 426th BSB. “We keep everything rolling. Without supplies, the infantrymen couldn’t move,” he said.

In providing direct support logistic operations in a combat environment, the Soldiers of the 426th realize that they are a critical link in helping to secure the people of Iraq.

“It’s like a chain reaction,” said Spc. Michael Velasquez, a logistics specialist who provides security for combat



A 426th BSB Soldier goes over a pre-combat checklist before hitting the road.

logistics patrols. “I’m playing a role as a guardian for the convoy. To provide safety for them is to provide safety for the infantry so they get the supplies they need so they can support the Iraqi people. Together, we can complete the mission,” he said.

Recently, the 426th conducted one of their largest missions to date by supplying concrete barriers to an Iraqi Police station in ad Dawr, southeast of Tikrit.

With more than 30 vehicles that stretched over 3.5 miles, the 426th delivered the much needed ramparts in an effort to help secure the town and its residents.

“We’re setting them up for success,” said Newkirk who drove several hours to complete the mission. “The T-walls will provide the local nationals security and freedom of movement,” he said.

“Anything we can do for the Iraqis is a big help,” said Sgt. 1st Class James Faggart, a platoon

sergeant in the BSB’s transportation section. “There’s a lot of good people here in Iraq, who really want to see change,” he said.

Faggart, who has seen multiple deployments, said that the most dramatic change comes from the people stepping up and securing themselves. “The Concerned Local Citizens are out there, securing their own areas,” he said. “I think it’s been a big change since 2005 when we were here last time.”

The most rewarding aspects of being a combat logistician is being able to bring his troopers home safely after each mission, said Faggart, who credits the battalion’s success with the four key principles of discipline, accountability, training and maintenance.

“My guys are focused, they’re not playing around out there,” said Faggart. “Where the rubber meets the road is where the Soldiers get out there and make it happen.”

Bastogne Cav Company Rock Solid...

Story and photos by Spc. Rick Rzepka
Bastogne PAO

BALAD, Iraq - As the ramp slammed down in the muck, the rain came howling in drenching the men who leapt off the back of the Chinook helicopter. The troopers hurried into the field of sloppy mud where they slipped and slid through the landing zone to reorganize in the pitch black Iraqi night. Not even the moon was friendly on this mission, which would prove to be a testament to the guts of Army Infantrymen and to the determination of Charlie Company Soldiers to make even the most remote hamlets in the Salah ad-Din province safe from al Qaeda's treachery.

Soldiers from Charlie Company, 1st Squadron, 32nd Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division conducted Operation Helsinki Feb. 15 to clear out al Qaeda fighters from an area here that has typically not received much attention from Coalition Forces.

Helsinki was a combined counter-insurgency operation, which was conducted in partnership with the Iraqi Army, to help enable legitimate governmental organizations and to provide security for the citizens in the Bichigan peninsula, said 1st Sgt. Timothy Seeber, Charlie Company First Sergeant. Seeber called the Bichigan area, west of Balad, an al Qaeda safe-haven that AQI flees to in order to avoid being killed or captured. "AQI is on the run here and they know we have the means and mobility to kill or capture them where they hide," said Seeber.

Helsinki began with a pre-dawn air assault into the fertile farmlands of the Bichigan area, which were heavily soaked with the early morning rain. With mud smeared on faces and firearms, Charlie Company Soldiers spent the day moving from house to house questioning residents and searching for AQI weapons caches along with Iraqi Army Soldiers.

The search turned up two weapons caches and resulted in the apprehension of a suspected AQI operative.

Since Charlie Company moved from FOB Caldwell near the Iranian border in early December, they have been instrumental in capturing three of the Balad area's high value targets and have discovered numerous weapon caches, said Staff Sgt. Tommy Pafford.

Much of the success that Charlie Company has had is due largely to spending a great deal of time out among the people and to the Sons of Iraq movement, which has enabled U.S. and Iraqi Forces with quality intelligence about AQI operations in the area, said Pafford.

Spending time outside of the relative comfort of FOB Paliwoda has paid dividends for Charlie Company who often find themselves operating in austere conditions.

"Staying outside the wire overnight in the mud and cold is the norm for us," said Pvt. First Class Michael LaChappelle, who along with his fellow Charlie Company troopers found himself without a helicopter ride back to base on Feb. 15 due to poor weather conditions.

After spending much of Operation Helsinki cold and wet, the "Rock" Soldiers would have to bear the elements under a foggy, black Iraqi sky until the weather improved.

"My guys would walk to the end of this Earth if they were asked to," said Pafford. "They realize that this war is bigger than us."



I am a Soldier. I fight where I am told, and I win where I fight. - Gen. George Patton



ABOVE: Charlie Company Soldiers prepare to enter and clear a building during Operation Helsinki. RIGHT: The Cav Soldiers started the mission wet and muddy after air assaulting into the Bichigan Peninsula's fertile farmlands.



Charlie Company Soldiers stay on the move as they assault through a village thought to be held by extremists. With little or no sleep the Cav troopers cleared more than twenty buildings and searched for weapons caches in the fields of the Bichigan Peninsula.



Charlie "Rock" Soldiers take the high ground during Operation Helsinki. The troopers searched high and low for hidden weapons and enemy activity in the area during the clearing operation.



A Soldier finds time to eat during the fast-paced operation, which was a combined effort between Cav Soldiers and Iraqi police.



A Soldier waits out the long night next to a fire. The operation saw Charlie Company Soldiers endure poor weather conditions and low temperatures, which according to most "Rock" Soldiers is the norm during the winter months in Iraq.

SPARTANS MAKE HISTORY IN TIKRIT

Story and photos by
Spc. Rick Rzepka
Bastogne PAO

TIKRIT, Iraq - "The Spartans are the equal of any men when they fight as individuals, but when fighting together as a collective, they surpass all other men." This was uttered to a Persian king more than twenty five hundred years ago on the verge of one of the greatest last stand battles in history.

Today, Spartans of another kind find themselves making another great stand along with their Iraqi partners to secure the people of Tikrit, Iraq.

The 1st Special Troops Battalion "Spartans" of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, like the Greek warriors of antiquity, are making military history by being the first Special Troops Battalion to control a significant amount of battlespace in the Iraq theatre of operations.

"To my knowledge, the 1st STB, 1st BCT is the first to pickup battlespace as a maneuver element," said Lt. Col. Rick Rhyne, 1st STB commander.

Typically, STBs function in more of a support capacity by bringing a diverse array of warfighting enablers to the brigade. By combining signal, intelligence, engineer, chemical, military police, and other specialized maneuver support units under one battalion, the STB acts as a combat force multiplier for the brigade.

However, since arriving in Iraq, the 1st STB has taken on the additional role of managing battlespace in and around the Tikrit area by conducting missions usually reserved to infantry battalions.

"It does present difficulties, in that a normal Special Troop Battalion is not formulated to do these types of operations," said Rhyne. "In positions where you would have a captain, I have a lieutenant, where you have a major, I have a captain," he said.

The Soldiers of the STB, however, have come to realize that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

"Everyone has had to step up and learn new roles for us to succeed here," said Capt. John Gabriel, the battalion's Operations Officer. "It has been a challenge, but we had the right people in the right place at the right time," he said.

Adapting his organization to new challenges is nothing new to Rhyne, a career Special Forces officer who has been operating in the Middle East since 1993.

"I've been very impressed with all of our Soldiers in the 1st STB because they have stood up to a very difficult job," said Rhyne. "Any counter-insurgency operation is difficult, it doesn't matter what your military occupational specialty is."

Rhyne said that the crux of the STB's mission here, lies in securing, interacting and developing a relationship with the people of the Tikrit area.

"The local populace is key to the counter insurgency fight here," said Rhyne. "The center of gravity is the people. When we get out of our vehicles we become an individual and it makes them become more personal with us," he said.

Rhyne, who often walks the streets of Tikrit to gain the trust of the people, said that the best advice he gives to his Soldiers is to understand that the risk of being out amongst the people is a necessary and fundamental part of weeding out the insurgents here.

"By building strong ties to the local community and to the Iraqi Security Forces, 1st STB Soldiers have helped drive a wedge between the insurgency and the local populace, which is forcing the terrorists to flee to remote areas of the province," said Gabriel.

"We feel safer when the locals know us and trust us. That's our safety," said Gabriel who credits the decrease in violence in the area to cooperation between Iraqi Security Forces, the Son's of Iraq movement and Coalition Forces. "Once the people feel secure in the city, they start to push the enemy out into the desert where it's much easier for us to kill them," he said.

On Feb. 23, STB Soldiers assisted Iraqi Policemen on Operation Desert Harvest, which was planned and led by Iraqi Security Forces, to clear a desolate area near Lake Thar Thar from insurgents who had taken over a fishing village. There, Iraqi Security Forces with help from STB Soldiers, killed several Al Qaeda insurgents and found a large supply of home-made explosives which was hidden nearby.

"They developed their own intelligence and their own plan here, which shows how much they have matured," said Gabriel.

"When I was here two years ago, the Iraqis didn't have the capacity to conduct a full scale attack and go home with no casualties like they did here," he said.

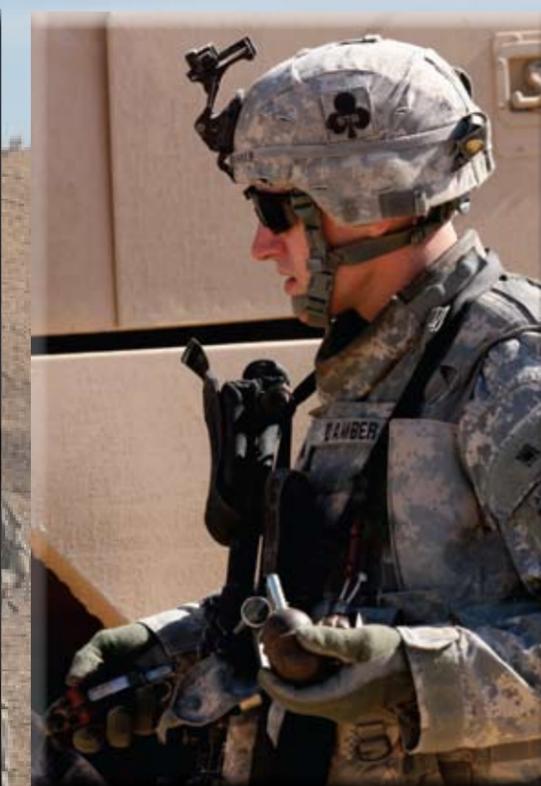
"We're heading in the right direction, there's no question about that," said Rhyne. "What I tell my Soldiers is, that the kids that are about four-feet high, when they're our size, that's when you're going to see change, that's when your going to see a better place."



A Bastogne Soldier, attached to the 1st STB Spartans, keeps an eye out for enemy activity during Operation Desert Harvest along with an Iraqi Policeman. The Spartans are responsible for security in Tikrit.



A truck once used by enemy extremist was destroyed during a recent Spartan operation near Lake Thar Thar.



A Spartan Soldier finds two hand grenades in a weapons cache.

MANCHUS AND BASTOGNE STRIKE TOGETHER

Story and photos by
Maj. Johnpaul Arnold
Bastogne PAO

BAYJI, Iraq – Sand, dust and enemy scatter as the lethal, wheeled vehicles of 4-9 Infantry Battalion “Manchus” maneuver through the fluid terrain of northern Salah ad Din Province in February with few months left before their redeployment.

After serving with their parent brigade, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, the Manchus are now fighting extremists with the 1st Brigade Combat Team “Bastogne”, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault).

As part of Operation Harvest II, the Stryker vehicle battalion uprooted and cleared untapped areas of Salah ad Din Province, using their futuristic Land Warrior System to maintain situational awareness.

Manchu Commander Lt. William Prior said this about his battalion’s current open-desert operation: “Taking care of some of that business outside the population centers will ultimately have an impact inside the population centers.”

“The amount of manpower we have to accomplish our mission is going to be enough to disrupt insurgent activi-

ties. Hopefully we can find caches so they do not reach any other units,” said 1st Lt. Gerald Winn of C Company. Since early January, the Bastogne Brigade has found 20 car bombs, large caches and extremists’ camps throughout Salah ad Din Province.



During its operation, 4-9 found 40 bags of ammonium nitrate and 4 suspicious vacated vehicles in flat desert. The Manchus also tactically questioned and detained some suspect military aged males.

The combat power added to the 1st BCT creates unique offensive and defensive capabilities. “4-9 Infantry Battalion provides us the opportunity to attack the enemy in new areas and in different ways. The Manchu Battalion provides us greater mobility, protection and fire-power,” said 1st Brigade Combat Team Battle Major, Maj. Jason Tussey.

The Manchus of the “2nd to None” division directly working with a Screaming Eagle “Air Assault” brigade is quite historic and rare. Both Manchus and Bastogne have legacies of valor and honorable service going back to the War of 1812 and World War II respectively.

Sgt. Christian Garcia of C Co. said, “101st has a great sense of history. It is good that we are working together.”



A “Manchu” Soldier takes a knee in the Western Desert of the Salah ad Din province.

NO SLACK TRAINS IPs TO PROTECT AND SERVE

Story and photos by
Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Doheny
Bastogne PAO

SAMARRA, Iraq— Sixty-four Iraqi policemen took the first step toward becoming full-fledged members of the police force in Samarra during a ceremony honoring their completion of a two-week training course Feb. 2.

During the first ever Samarra Preparatory Police Academy graduation ceremony, the newest members of a force designed to protect and serve the citizens of Samarra, received certificates were recognizing their service. The training course was designed to give the men the tools they will need in order to perform basic police duties.

With an urgent need to fill the police ranks with qualified, trained IPs to improve the security within the city of Samarra, the Soldiers from Task Force No Slack, 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, developed this intense two-week course. Although the TF No Slack Soldiers developed the training criteria, they shared most of the instruction duties with veteran IPs who were selected by police station chiefs in the city.

“During the first few days there were times where the separation between our No Slack Soldiers, American military police and Iraqi police trainers was noticeable. After a few days though you could see the bond between all three elements,” said Sgt. Maj. Jeffrey England, No Slack operations sergeant major. “As with our basic trainees and instructors, there became a competitive nature between the three platoons. It truly fostered that competitive spirit needed in training environments.”

During the two-week course, the men received instruction on everything from drill and discipline to basic police ethics. According to England, who was in charge of the training, the end state was far more than what he expected when

he developed the course. “These guys have the ability to retain information at a remarkable level,” he said. “They really grasped the idea of helping the people in the community and that they are there to protect and serve the people of Samarra. I was truly taken back at their level of competence.”

Throughout the course the IPs went through an American-style basic training regimen. They were woken up early in the morning to conduct physical training and movement from location to location was done by using drill and ceremony. The days were filled with classes, non-stop training and evaluations.

“They were tired at the end of the day,” said England. “There was no horsing around at night; they were ready to go to their quarters and sleep.”

“No Slack” Soldiers conducted many engagements with tribal leaders within the city to recruit trainees between the ages of 18 and 35. Although the recruitment was difficult, England says there are, “hundreds more waiting to get in.”

“The Soldiers from Charlie Company conducted dismounted patrols in the city and were able to spread the word through engaging local leaders. The tribal counsels did the leg work by passing the information to their people through word of mouth.”

England said the most important thing that these men can take away from the course is how to properly interact with the citizens and become a useful tool in serving the people of Samarra.

“The understanding that they are not SWAT or Iraqi Army, but rather police designed to protect and serve the people was by far and away the most important factor during the two weeks,” England said. “They are to go out and become friends to the people and to only use force when needed. By understanding that philosophy of protecting and serving, they know that they are truly servants to the population.”



Captain Josh Kurtzman, Cougar Company commander, speaks with Iraqi Policemen and Sol members in Samarra.

eye of the eagle

the world as Bastogne Soldiers see it

Photos by Bastogne PAO



Radio operators with Charlie, 1-32 Cav keep commanders informed during Operation Helsinki.



The Backbone of the Bastogne Brigade.



A Bastogne Spartan with 1st STB, scopes out the Lake Thar Thar region of the Salah ad Din province.



A "Manchu" Soldier holds the 4-9 Infantry guidon at COB Speicher.



Soldiers from 426th BSB prepare to hit the road.



Pvt. 1st Class Christopher Clark, 426th BSB, wears the Purple Heart with pride.



A Soldier with 1-32 Cavalry Regiment during Operation Helsinki, in the Bichigan peninsula.



A "No Slack" medic helps to train prospective Iraqi Policemen near FOB Brassfield-Mora.



Spartan Soldiers with 1st STB, search a hut on Lake Thar Thar during Operation Desert Harvest.

TODAY, TOMORROW, FOREVER...

A SNAPSHOT OF THE HISTORY OF THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION (AA)

When Bastogne was relieved by Gen. Patton's 3rd Army, a Time Magazine reporter interviewed one of the paratroopers who had successfully defended Bastogne.

"What set the 101st Airborne apart from other units in the U.S. Army," asked the reporter? The paratrooper snorted and told him, "what the hell, everybody in this outfit is crazy, including me. If we weren't, we wouldn't be in it!"

In seven years of combat in Vietnam, elements of the 101st Airborne Division (Air-Mobile) participated in 15 campaigns including the Battle of Hamburger Hill.

