

The Ivy Leaf

Established in 1917 to honor those who serve

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MULTI-NATIONAL DIVISION - BAGHDAD

“STEADFAST AND LOYAL”

September 29, 2008

MND-B Soldiers, Sailor turn horror of ‘Pile,’ Sept. 11 into motivation to serve nation



Photo by Staff Sgt. Brock Jones, MND-B PAO

MND-B Soldiers raise flags during the 4th Infantry Division and Multi-National Division – Baghdad Patriot Day Observance held in front of the division headquarters Sept. 11.

By Staff Sgt. Brock Jones
MND-B PAO

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – September 10, 2001, was a normal Monday for most Americans: another work week, another commute, another day. New Yorkers and others across the nation went about their day not knowing that the next twenty-four hours would bring the worst terrorist attacks in America’s history. The nation went to sleep on Monday night and woke up reeling from the horrors of terrorism. Many were numb beyond all ability to feel. Many suffered paralyzing losses.

But there were others for which Sept. 11 was a call to action.

“During 9-11, I was a first responder,” said Juan Vega, a native of Bronx, N.Y. “I was in Tower Two during the initial attacks. World Trade Center Tower Two was the first building that fell, that collapsed, and I just managed to be one of the lucky ones to escape.”

“My wife is a paramedic with the fire department so the whole time that I spent trying to run from this damn building, I’m trying to run back because I knew that my wife was somewhere in there,” he said.

It wasn’t until four days later that he ran into his wife, alive and well.

See Sept. 11 memorial pg. 12

MND-B Soldiers reinforce Baghdad stability during Ramadan

By Staff Sgt. Brent Williams
1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FALCON, Iraq – The information flyer informs the Iraqi man that the suspect is wanted for crimes committed against the Iraqi people.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Brent Williams

Sgt. Julio Tirado, an infantry team leader and 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, MND-B, patrols outside of local shops and business Sep. 6 in the Bayaa community of the Rashid district in southern Baghdad.

The Soldiers of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, working with Iraqi Security Forces, continue to distribute information flyers and posters that encourage Iraqi citizens to join in the fight against special groups criminals and terrorists.

The National Police of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Bde., 2nd NP Div., attribute a large portion of their success in detaining Baghdad’s most wanted criminals to the information dissemination campaign, said 1st Lt. Ben Hartig, a platoon leader from Concord, Calif., assigned to the 4th Bn, 64th Armor Regiment, attached to the 1st Bn., 22nd Inf. Regt., 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

“They really get on board with it,” said Hartig, a graduate of the United States Military Academy, Class of 2006.

See Ramadan pg. 6

Soldier donates hair to Locks of Love

By Staff Sgt. Michael Farris
64th BSB, 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – For many, making it through a tour of Iraq is about improving their quality of life for 15 months. One Soldier strives to improve the lives of children far away.

While taking a break from her duties as the communications NCO, Company B, 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, Sgt. Shauna Star saw a television show about an organization named Locks of Love that provides wigs for children. Not only did this spark her curiosity, but she decided to take a stand for those less fortunate.

Locks of Love is a non-profit organization that provides manufactured hair pieces for children who have undergone chemotherapy.

See Locks of Love pg. 15

‘Bayonet’ Soldiers help Fedaliyah farmers feed ‘Jammous’

By Pfc. Lyndsey Dransfield
MND-B PAO

BAGHDAD, Iraq – Agriculture began more than 10,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East. Today it is still a primary economic activity of the people of Iraq.

While many MND-B commanders at every level focus on electricity and sewer improvements throughout the city of Baghdad, Capt. David Bestow, a native of Nedford, Ore., commander of Company B “Bayonets,” 1st Battalion, 66th Armor Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, is focused on helping the farmers of Fedaliyah in the New Baghdad area feed their jammous – Arabic pronunciation for domesticated water buffalo – used by locals primarily for milk and meat.

Fedaliyah is an agricultural village on the outskirts of

eastern Baghdad consisting of more than 1,500 jammous herders and 20,000 head of water buffalo, approximately ten percent of the total jammous population in Iraq.

Since Iraq began the transition from a controlled market to a free market in 2003, the farmers in Fedaliyah have faced many problems obtaining feed for their livestock, said Bestow.

Many of the residents have surrendered their lives as farmers, sold their jammous to purchase trucks, and began completely new lifestyles.

“These people have spent most of their lives at home with their families, taking their herds to and from the Diyala River twice a day for a bath while their kids follow along,” said Bestow.

See Buffalo pg. 16

The Ivy Leaf **Commentary / Editorials**

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4th BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.

18th MP Bde.

926th Eng. Bde.

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MND-B CSM visits with 4th Inf. Div. Soldiers at FOB War Eagle



Photo by Sgt. Jason Thompson, MND-B PAO

Command Sgt. Maj. John Gioia, a Buffalo, N.Y., native, who is the senior enlisted leader of Multi-National Division – Baghdad and the 4th Infantry Division, presents a coin of excellence to Cpl. James Buckley, a Beaumont, Calif., native, and team leader with the Commander's Security Detachment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Inf. Div., MND-B, at Forward Operating Base War Eagle Sept. 3. Gioia held an open forum with the Soldiers and discussed a wide array of topics with them, to include training and readiness, multiple deployments, the changeover of forces from MND-B Soldiers to Iraqi Army soldiers, redeployment, and reintegration with Families following the deployment.

By Sgt. Jason Thompson

MND-B PAO

BAGHDAD – Command Sgt. Maj. John Gioia, the senior enlisted leader for Multi-National Division – Baghdad and the 4th Infantry Division, took advantage of an opportunity to meet with the Soldiers of 3rd Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Inf. Div., in northern Baghdad Sept. 3.

During his visit at Forward Operating Base War Eagle, the Buffalo, N.Y., native, sat down with more than 30 Soldiers packed into a small dining facility. He discussed a wide variety of topics with the Soldiers, such as training and readiness, multiple deployments, redeployment, and reintegration with Families following the deployment.

"It's a great opportunity for me to get the pulse of the Soldiers," said Gioia. "I enjoy meeting and speaking with our young men and women, which helps me to get an exact feel for what is important to them and to hear their concerns. I find that I get a different perspective from the eyes of the junior Soldiers than that of the senior enlisted leaders."

Gioia said he felt it was not only important for the Soldiers, but was beneficial for himself as well, to address any questions they had.

"It reassures the Soldiers that everyone is passing on as much information as they have."

After the meeting, Gioia presented his coin "for excellence" to 10 Soldiers identified by the battalion's leaders for their accomplishments and expressed his gratitude for their continued service.

"Each of you is my hero," Gioia told the Soldiers. "You all volunteered to serve your country during this difficult time for our nation. I am honored to serve in your ranks today."

The Soldiers' seemed to genuinely appreciate Gioia's visit. Many said it was great to hear his point of view on the various issues being faced throughout the division.

"It was great to see him take time out of his busy schedule to do nothing more than answer all our questions," said Pfc. Jesse Grimsley, a Pillon, S.C., native, who is an aviation operation specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 3rd STB, 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div. "Sometimes, as a new Soldier in the Army, the sergeants major often seem distant from what we experience at our level. Command Sgt. Maj. Gioia seems like he is very well in tune with what is going on down on the lines, and he is trying to look out for us."



Photo by Sgt. Jason Thompson, MND-B PAO

Command Sgt. Maj. John Gioia, a Buffalo, N.Y., native, who is the senior enlisted leader of Multi-National Division – Baghdad and the 4th Infantry Division, talks with a group of Soldiers from 1st Armor Division, attached to the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Inf. Div., while the Soldiers enjoy a warm meal at Forward Operating Base War Eagle Sept. 3.

Operation Iraqi Freedom in retrospect

By Capt. James Simpson
Rear Det., 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

FORT HOOD, Texas – There is no shortage of critics when it comes to our efforts in Iraq. U.S. publications are replete with negative stories about our government, our allies, military units and sometimes individual service members.

One must look hard to find any stories of success in the last few years; however, as we've recently turned a corner in Operation Iraqi Freedom, it's appropriate to reflect on the accomplishments that got us here.



Capt. James Simpson

The invasion began in March 2003 with more than 200,000 Coalition Forces troops. By mid-April of that year, the Saddam regime was completely defeated and commanders immediately turned their attention to control over looting and other civil concerns. By May, a Coalition Forces Provisional Authority was established to pave the way for democracy in Iraq. At the same time, strategic commanders were faced with a growing insurgent threat.

Initially, many of the targets for the U.S. and British Armies were Ba'ath party officials. Two of these were Saddam's sons, Qusay and Uday Hussein. Uday in particular had a reputation as a completely malicious thug. In July 2003, a task force cornered and killed the two brothers after a lengthy firefight. Dozens of other former regime members were also captured during this time. In December of the same year, a task force, with assistance from the 4th Infantry Division, captured Saddam Hussein in Operation Red Dawn.

In March 2004, the Iraqi Governing Council took office and signed a tempo-

rary constitution. By June, control over Iraq was handed over to the Iraqi Government. While the Americans and their Allies continued counter insurgency operations, they also began to train and expand Iraqi Security Forces including the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi National Police. In early 2005, the Iraqi people held free elections for the Iraqi National Assembly. The new assembly promptly chose Ibrahim al Jaafari as the new Iraqi Prime Minister.

The Government of Iraq was successful in drafting and approving a constitution by October 2005. The approval of the Iraqi Constitution required significant negotiation and cooperation between Shia, Sunni and Kurd representatives. In December, elections were held and more than 12 million voters participated. After lengthy negotiations, the new government was seated and Nouri al Maliki became the new Iraqi Prime Minister. This again demonstrated successful political cooperation among various factions.

The newly elected Iraqi Government faced an immediate challenge in reducing the influence of militias.

Two primary threats to Coalition Forces, including Iraqi Forces, were continual resistance from militias and attacks by al-Qaeda in Iraq. Al Zarqawi posed a threat not only to U.S. Soldiers, but to democracy in Iraq. He strongly opposed moderate government of Muslim states and made numerous attacks to undermine cooperation between the Sunni and Shia. In June of 2006, al Zarqawi was killed by a coalition air strike north of Baghdad. Although scores of other anti-Iraqi forces were killed or captured during 2006, the insurgency remained a viable threat to the U.S. military and the future of Iraq.

In December 2006, Saddam Hussein was executed for crimes against humanity. He was tried in Iraqi court and given justice under Iraqi law. A chapter in Iraq's history that included oppression and tyranny had come to a close.

See OIF pg. 19

Spiritual reading serves to feed spirit

Capt. Timothy Meier
Chaplain, MND-B

BAGHDAD – In the last issue of "The Ivy Leaf," I suggested that the Army expects Soldiers to be physically "fit to fight" and to be spiritually fit as well in order to thrive – and not just survive – in the midst of a war zone.

I proposed that engaging in simple spiritual exercises can do for our spirits what physical exercise can do for our bodies. Something as ordinary as breathing can become a spiritual exercise, as was detailed in that article. This week, I want to present another easy and accessible action which can improve our spiritual fitness: spiritual reading.

The practice of reading has long fed the human spirit. Just as breathing meditation can be identified with many Eastern spiritual traditions, "lectio divina" (Latin for "divine reading" or "holy reading") shines as a hallmark of Western spirituality. Like the breathing meditation mentioned last week, this spiritual exercise is simple, easy and need not occupy a lot of time in the schedules of busy military personnel.

There are lots of writings (the Latin word 'scriptura' comes to mind), which can serve as the basis for spiritual reading. An easy and readily available one would be the Holy Scriptures from the Jewish and Christian traditions. However, given one's background and preferences, the Qur'an, the Bhagavad Gita, or your own favorite spiritual text can serve as the basis for this spiritual exercise.

A key to making this practice become a true spiritual exercise is to set a particular time each day to be devoted to this action. By

being faithful to the time set aside each day – I suggest starting out very modestly, say, five minutes if you've never tried this before – you'll develop a habit of doing it. As with physical exercise, repetition and discipline are crucial to the effectiveness of spiritual exercise. This habit of spiritual reading, when coupled with the simple breathing meditation from the last issue of "The Ivy Leaf," can yield wonderful results in terms of stress reduction and a growing intimacy with the Divine.

One suggestion for approaching a period of "divine reading" might be to see it as a four-fold action:

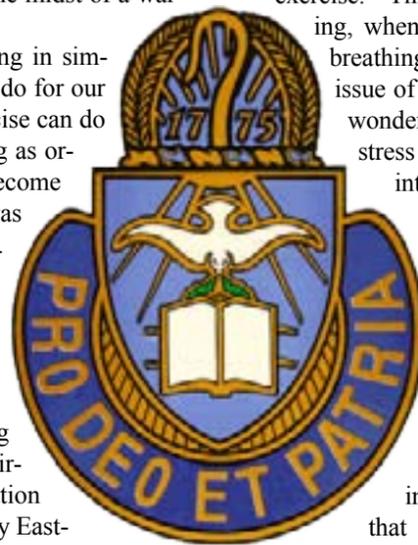
1. Read a short passage from your text, slowly.
2. Read it again, pausing on a word or phrase that attracts your attention.

Breathe.

3. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving or petition, based on what you've read, and how it's affected you.

4. Rest for a moment in the love of God who has brought you to this time and place.

If you've not attempted this sort of spiritual exercise before, it's helpful if you can find a place free from distractions. After a while, with practice, even those distractions lose their power to divert you from your primary spiritual aim. It's much better to start out slowly and work into and up to more time, if this practice feeds your soul, than to adopt an unrealistic expectation, such as "I'm going to do one hour of spiritual reading each morning," and become disillusioned with the practice and yourself because you're not able to follow through on your resolution.



Word on the Street:

What are your two favorite down time activities?

By 1st Lt. Angel Richardson
926th Eng. Bde.



Spc. Felacia Durr
Montgomery, Ala.
Assistant Supply Specialist
926th Eng. Bde.

"My favorite activities are basketball or aerobics."



Spc. Tiffany Snow
Montgomery, Ala.
Human Resources Administrator
926th Eng. Bde.

"I enjoy playing softball and listening to music during my downtime."



Spc. Christopher Wright
Wetumpka, Ala.
Signal Supply Systems Specialist
926th Eng. Bde.

"I really like watching college football and playing softball."



Pfc. Conesha Massengale
Montgomery, Ala.
Signal Supply Systems Specialist
926th Eng. Bde.

"I surf the internet and call my Family during down time."

News briefs

Suspected IED cell leader responsible for attacks captured

2nd SBCT PAO, 25th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – A high-value suspect and his brother, both allegedly responsible for attacks against civilians, were taken into custody Sept. 18.

Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment "Golden Dragons," 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team "Warrior," 25th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, detained the suspect at approximately 11 p.m. north of Taji.

The suspected terrorist is an alleged IED cell leader in the al Abayachi area and is believed to be responsible for orchestrating an Aug. 10 suicide-belt improvised-explosive device attack in Tarmiyah as well as multiple small-arms attacks.

The suspect is also alleged to have secured weapons for use against Iraqis Security and Coalition Forces.

"These two are suspected to be an integral part of an elaborate improvised-explosive device group. Having them off the streets provides an immediate security win," said Maj. Jim Craig, operations officer for 2nd SBCT, 25th Inf. Div. "Sons of Iraq turned these two over to Coalition Forces in an effort to remove known criminals from their area. With actions like this, the Sons of Iraq continue to prove their value to their neighborhoods and to the country."

Tip from Sol leads MND-B soldiers to munitions northwest of Baghdad

Multi-National Division – Baghdad PAO

BAGHDAD – A Sons of Iraq member and Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers combined their efforts to secure the Baghdad area and uncover weapons caches Sept. 16.

A tip from a Sheik, who serves as a Sons of Iraq (Abna al-Iraq) member led Soldiers serving with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 2nd Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, to the seizure of seven 57mm rockets northwest of Baghdad at approximately 10:30 a.m.

At approximately 12:30 p.m., Soldiers serving with Company B, 1st Battalion, 14th Inf. Regt., 2nd SBCT, 25th Inf. Div., found a munitions cache north of Baghdad. The munitions included a 152mm Soviet-manufactured high-explosive projectile, five sticks of TNT, 15 pounds of TNT charges, a rocket-propelled grenade launcher and a rifle.

"The Soldiers of 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, continue to diligently scour the areas north and northwest of Baghdad to remove these dangerous weapons as threats to the Iraqi people," said Lt. Col. Steve Stover, spokesman, MND-B and the 4th Infantry Division. "Working with the Sheiks, Sons of Iraq and Iraqi Security Forces in their areas, they are truly making a difference every day."



Support battalion puts weapons into right hands



Photo by Staff Sgt. Sterling Riley, Co. B, 526th BSB, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div.

Spc. Brittany Randolph, a native of Spokane Valley, Wash., and Sgt. Carolyn McClary, a native of Arlington, Va., document weapons being turned in for evaluation and repair.

By 2nd Lt. Nathaniel Beckett

Co. B, 526th BSB, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div.

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – It's 9 a.m. and already more than 100 degrees on Camp Liberty Sept. 12. Dripping with sweat, a Soldier watches as an infantry company pull up with a load of confiscated weapons.

Staff Sgt. Sterling Riley and his team of Soldiers from the 526th Brigade Support Battalion collect the weapons for repair and put them back into the hands of the Iraqi Army and Police forces to help ensure the security of Iraq.

Iraq has been a country in conflict for decades, leaving thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of weapons in circulation among the general population.

Every household is allowed to have one AK-47 in order to protect their property; however, that still may leave thousands of weapons in the wrong hands.

On a daily basis, maneuver battalions of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), run across many of these weapons.

During the course of a patrol, maneuver Soldiers may find a cache of weapons buried in a field. On a raid, they may confiscate a stockpile of weapons in an insurgent's hideout.

The question arises though. What does one do with the abundance of confiscated weapons?

The support battalion comes in to play by processing the excess weapons, eventually putting the weapons back into the hands of the Iraqi Security Forces.

Over the past week, the units of Strike Brigade have been traveling from the various joint security stations throughout northwest Baghdad and the surrounding areas to turn in weapons.

The weapons range from a mundane 9 mm Beretta Pistol to an exotic fully chrome-plated AK-47 assault rifle.

Spc. Dwayne Molden, a native of Fort Worth, Texas, carefully cleared each rifle and came across an array of weapons.

"All week, weapons have been streaming in. We even have some bolt action rifles from the World War I era," he said.

The turn-in process is fairly straight forward. Once a weapon is cleared, its serial number is recorded and it is sorted by type.

Sgt. Carolyn McClary, from Arlington, Va., properly documents each weapon turned in.

"I am not a small-arm weapons specialist like some of the group here, but this week, I have had the opportunity to learn about enemy weapons in detail. We have processed AK-47s manufactured in China, Russia, Israel and even here in Baghdad, Iraq."



Photo by Sgt. Carolyn McClary, Co. B, 526th BSB, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div.

9 mm pistols, turned in by Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), sit in a box waiting to be inventoried by Soldiers from the 526th Brigade Support Battalion Sept. 12.

Spc. Brittany Randolph, a small-arms repair specialist, from Spokane, Wash., is another Soldier from Riley's crew. She inspected a box filled to the brim with 9mm semi-automatic pistols.

"During my last deployment, I had the chance to handle some enemy weapons as evidence but nothing like this. Just today, I've handled a rocket propelled grenade launcher, a mortar tube, a sub-machine gun and even an AK-47 with a mother of pearl stock."

This five-day collection effort netted almost 400 weapons. As the collection mission wraps up, Riley looked over at his crew and said, "They have worked hard in the heat. Once we finish up today, all of these weapons will be sealed up in a container and we can move on to the next phase of the operation."

"In the days to come, 526th BSB will move the weapons to Taji National Depot 30 miles to the north," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Carrie Belawske, of Sturgis, S.D., who serves as the ammunition officer for the Strike Brigade. "Civilian technicians there are waiting to inspect these weapons, they will fix the ones. They can and put them back into circulation where they can do some good – helping the Iraqi Security Forces secure their country."

4th BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.



Infantry Soldiers continue patrols, see improved security in Hay Nassir



Photo by Sgt. Grant Okubo, 4th BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div.

Staff Sgt. Daniel Desoto, a Pineville, La., native, assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light), Multi-National Division – Baghdad, looks for rooftop snipers during a dismounted patrol in Hay Nassir Aug. 26.

By Sgt. Grant Okubo

4th BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div.

JOINT SECURITY STATION SHAWRA WA UM JIDIR, Iraq – As security conditions improve in eastern Baghdad, Patriot Brigade infantry Soldiers are determined to keep supporting Iraqi Security Forces protecting the people through continual patrols.

To this end, Soldiers assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light), conducted a dismounted patrol in Hay Nassir Aug. 26.

Fewer incidents of violence have influenced the area and its residents now than when the unit first arrived, said Pfc. Boston Snelson, from Chestnut, Ill., who serves with Co. B, 2nd Bn., 30th Inf. Regt.

During their dismounted patrol, 1st Platoon Soldiers traveled through and made a population assessment of the area, explained Staff Sgt. Daniel Desoto. The area was heavy with violent activity just a few months ago; however, things have calmed down considerably, said Desoto, a Pineville, La., native. Now when the platoon patrols the area, people come to the Soldiers and talk with them, he commented.

With the added sense of security, reconstruction projects have resumed in the area, and the local community in Hay Nassir sees the MND-B Soldiers keeping their promise to help Iraqi officials bring essential services to the people, Desoto continued, adding that the residents recognize the return-

ing Soldiers, who have developed a rapport and formed bonds with the people.

As relationships between the Soldiers and citizens have improved, so has the peoples' willingness to provide valuable information about illegal activities in the area, said Desoto.

The Soldiers' capabilities to gauge activity in the area and recognize social queues have improved as well, he said, because there are things Soldiers can see that they wouldn't have picked up on six or seven months ago, and that is due mostly to the added experience of working in the area for awhile and getting to know the people in it.

Sgt. Orentheous Reed, a who serves with 1st Platoon, Co. B, and hails from Blakely, Ga., said he has witnessed big changes in Hay Nassir and is happy with the progress that has been made in part because of the efforts his platoon has made.

With all of the progress, Reed said it is still vitally important that Soldiers exercise caution and remain vigilant in their efforts.

Looking at the area now, he added, it is very hard to imagine when the platoon first arrived on the scene that they would reach the point where they are today.

One factor Snelson attributed the to improved conditions in Hay Nassir is the extraction of "the bad elements" from the area.

The constant presence of Soldiers and Iraqi Security Forces, he said, has played a key role in bring about positive changes.

"The more we're out there, the more the threat level goes down," concluded Snelson.



Photo by Sgt. Grant Okubo, 4th BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div.

Sgt. Matthew Priest, an Ooltewah, Tenn., native, assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light), MND-B provides security during a dismounted patrol in Hay Nassir Aug. 26.



1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

MND-B Soldiers reinforce Baghdad stability during Ramadan

Continued from page 1

“The NPs are big fans of the (information distribution), and credit their success in detaining bad guys to getting pictures of (enemy) faces out to the public, and having the tip line phone numbers on those handbills.”

During the Muslim observance of the month of Ramadan, the platoon of U.S. Soldiers use a different approach during combined operations and security patrols in the Bayaa and Aamel communities of the Rashid district in southern Baghdad, he explained.

Conducting more night patrols and focused area patrols around the busiest parts of the day, morning and night, the unit has modified its patrol schedule to accommodate for the Iraqi people practicing the customs of Ramadan, said Sgt. 1st Class Marcus Brister, a platoon sergeant from Baton Rouge, La., assigned to Co. D, 4th Bn., 64th Armor Regt. “During Ramadan,

since the Iraqis pray and fast during the day, we observe, and try to respect their religion here, pushing our operations out through the night, when they are going to be most active,” Brister said.

“If we come out at night, people are more apt to greet and talk to us, because they have eaten a meal once the sun has set,” he explained. “It helps out with us doing our information (dissemination); let’s the people know that we really care about them.”

The unit’s basic understanding of language, culture and customs helps to build relations with the Iraqi people, said Sgt. Julio Tirado, an infantry team leader from Catalina, Puerto Rico.

“We have to understand first that this country has different customs than us, especially in the religion,” explained Tirado, who is assigned to Co. D, 4th Bn., 64th Armor Regt. “It is so different; it is very traditional.”

The platoon continues to conduct patrols and joint patrols with National Police to ensure that Al Qaeda in Iraq and militia elements stay out of Rashid, said Tirado.

The Soldiers regularly inspect checkpoints and assist local Iraqi Security Forces leaders in the training and professional development of their troops, he explained.

Brister said that he agrees it is a calculated risk to change standard operating procedures for Ramadan, but the fact is that there is still a combined presence of ISF and Coalition Forces in the neighborhoods.

The support of the Iraqi residents in the Rashid district also helps to reinforce the stability that the district, home to approximately 1.6 million Iraqis, currently enjoys, said Brister.

“We’re to the point here now, where we have developed a pretty substantial source network be-

tween our local national sources and the National Police here, and we get a ‘heads-up’ whenever anything moves,” he explained.

Iraqi NP patrol leader, 2nd Lt. Adel, says that the Iraqi people in his sector appreciate the work of the 2nd Bn., 5th Bde., 2nd NP Div.

Adel also said that handing out flyers and handbills helps keep the people informed of the current situation in their community.

The Soldiers of Co. D, 4th Bn., 64th Armor Regt., have been distributing flyers, hanging posters and working with the National Police for the last three weeks, said Spc. Brandon Josey, from Denver, N.C.

The NPs continue to distribute the information products and keep stacks of flyers to hand to drivers who pass through their checkpoints.

“Handbills are important, helps the community in our area know about what we’re doing; and what’s going on with the insurgency here,” said Josey, deployed for his first time in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

It will be one year in October, since the company first deployed to Baghdad, he said, and since that time, the unit has worked throughout the Rashid district and Baghdad, said Josey, who serves as an M2 Bradley gunner and infantry dismount.

During the past 11 months, the Soldiers have served in some of the most volatile areas of the city, patrolling in the Saydiyah community of Rashid and Baghdad’s Sadr City, he explained.

“We’ve watched the security with the Iraqis evolve from a little to a lot,” Josey said.

“In Saydiyah, we made a huge impact,” he added. “When we first got there, there were (significant activities) everyday, and now the Iraqi Army’s in Saydiyah, and is pretty much running the place.”

Working in areas, like Doura, where their primary mission was to train ISF, helped introduce the Soldier to his Iraqi counterparts.

“Overall, I think they do a really good job for what little they have,” he said.

The company’s current mission is to help the communities, explained Josey. They have been accomplishing this task by issuing microgrants to local business owners, keeping the community informed and interacting with the people.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Brent Williams, 1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Iraqi National Policemen from the 2nd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 2nd National Police Division, conduct pre-combat checks and inspections prior to an information dissemination operation Sep. 6 in the Bayaa community of the Rashid district in southern Baghdad.

National Police relentlessly share information in West Rashid

By Capt. Jeffrey Tounge

1st Bn., 22nd Inf. Regt., 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FALCON, Iraq – National Policemen and Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers used information handbills to engage the residents of Aamel and Bayaa Sept. 11 in an effort to keep criminals on the move in West Rashid.

The 2nd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 2nd National Police Division, has conducted several information dissemination operations in Hayys Aamel and Bayaa in order to remain proactive in the hunt for active criminals.

This operation is the fourth in a series of National Police-led operations, and the residents of Aamel and Bayaa remain positive and welcoming.

Residents of the Tamin Market area in Hayy Bayaa thanked the National Police for the improved security and indicated they were optimistic about the recent improvements to the neighborhood.

“The security situation is good, and we thank God for our situation now,” said A’alaa Jabar, an INP assigned to 2nd Bn., 5th Bde., 2nd NP Div. “The people feel more comfortable and are able to go walking and shopping.”

These operations stress the importance of community involvement with information sharing and cooperation with the local Iraqi Security Forces.

So far, the residents in West Rashid have made the operations successful with their positive approach to local security forces.

“The National Police have worked hard to develop a working relationship with the local residents,” said

Capt. John Matheny, a native of Marietta, Ohio, and battle captain assigned to the 1st Bn., 22nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Inf. Div., Multi-National Division – Baghdad. “This is an important aspect of catching a criminal. When the criminals no longer find haven within the community, they are exposed and vulnerable.”

The National Police and Coalition Forces are confident that this series of operations will bear fruit over time as more useful information is made available to the National Police to develop their targeting process.

“The residents of Aamel and Bayaa were interested in removing dangerous individuals from their neighborhoods by supporting the National Police with actionable information,” said Maj. Mark Thompson,



Photo by 2nd Lt. Kyle Fichtner, 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

Iraqi National Policemen from the 2nd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 2nd National Police Division, deliver information handbills to Iraqi citizens of Hayy Aamel Sep. 11 in the Rashid district of southern Baghdad.

'Regulars,' residents work together to remove concertina wire from streets of Jihad

By 1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FALCON, Iraq – Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, patrolled the streets of Jihad on a September evening not only to secure the streets and community but also to look for old concertina wire.

1st Lt. Matt Cyr, platoon leader for 3rd Platoon, Company C, 1st Bn., 22nd Inf. Regt., 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div., led a patrol through the streets of Jihad in order to remove abandoned and unused concertina wire in an attempt to beautify the area. The vestiges of war are no longer necessary and the residents of Jihad are anxious to assist in the cleanup efforts.

“A local resident from the Sons of Iraq program saw my Soldiers working hard to free the wire from obstructions and loading it onto the trucks,” explained Cyr, of Dover, N.H. “He immediately came over to the platoon and was eager to help the Soldiers remove the wire and clean the streets of his neighborhood.”

The Soldiers of 3rd Pltn., Co. C, worked hand-in-hand with the community members to improve the aesthetics of the area, said Cyr.

Across Baghdad, and especially in West Rashid, Soldiers and community members have been working hard to clean up the unnecessary and unneeded obstructions in residential areas.

“Small events like these happen on a daily basis throughout Jihad and West Rashid,” commented 1st Lt. Nolan Maxwell, of Santa Maria, Calif., assigned to Co. C, 1st Bn., 22nd Inf. Regt., 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div. “They demonstrate a renewed sense of pride amongst the Iraqi citizens for the welfare of their neighborhoods as well as a willingness to work alongside Coalition Forces for the betterment of their country.”

These small acts within the community are positive steps to return Baghdad and West Rashid to a state of normalcy that the residents will be proud to preserve.

IP transition to be Baghdad's first line of defense



Photo by Sgt. Daniel Blottenberger, 18th MP Bde. PAO

An Iraqi Policeman mans a machine gun at a checkpoint in the Salhiya district of Baghdad Sept. 10. Salhiya was the first district in Baghdad to transfer from Iraqi Army to IP at all of its checkpoints.

By Sgt. Daniel Blottenberger
18th MP Bde. PAO

BAGHDAD – A large Iraqi Security Force convoy, which included several Iraqi Army humvees, exited the International Zone in Baghdad at midday Sept. 10. At the front and back of the convoy was an Iraqi Police patrol vehicle providing escort security for the convoy.

“That says something in itself,” said Capt. Nathan Brookshire, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 716th Military Police Battalion, while viewing the long line of humvees exiting the International Zone.

“Iraqi police pulling security for an Iraqi Army convoy – you don’t see that every day.”

At least you don’t in Baghdad where, until recent months the local populace security was provided by the Iraqi Army.

Now Iraqi Police are continuing the transition of becoming the primary ISF in Baghdad by taking over at checkpoints to provide the first line of security for the citizens of Baghdad.

In recent months the process of turning all Iraqi Army manned checkpoints over to the IP has been very successful.

Coalition Forces and IP leadership have seen great progress in this effort to make IP Baghdad’s primary local security force.

The Salhiya district is the first of the Baghdad districts to have all of its checkpoints turned over to IP control.

There are many key terrain features in the Salhiya district, which makes it an important district in the overall security of Baghdad.

One of these landmarks is the Seik Railway, which is Iraq’s main railway that runs from Mosul to Basra.

“The trains have been running successfully for about a year now,” said Capt. William Macugay, commander of Alpha Battery, 4th Battalion, 42nd Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, attached to 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

Along with the successful security of the railways, the po-

lice transition team that works in Salhiya said the transition has gone smoothly for the IP.

“The transition from IA to IP has been extremely smooth because of the connection between Iraqi Police leadership and the IA,” said Brookshire, a native of Richmond, Ken. “The ISF in Baghdad conduct joint security meetings so all the key leaders are in the same room talking about how to keep the area secure”

Aside from Salhiya, the transition continues to spread throughout Baghdad.

“Within the next year, I predict we will have all of Baghdad transitioned to IP taking the lead at providing rule of law in their communities,” said Macugay, a native of Ewa Beach, Hawaii.

Macugay credits the IP success to the time the IA spent with preparing the IP for the transition.

The IP have gone through months of training and planning



Photo by Sgt. Daniel Blottenberger, 18th MP Bde. PAO

An Iraqi Army vehicle drives through an Iraqi Police checkpoint in the Salhiya district of Baghdad Sept. 10.

to be ready for this transfer. Now it was time for the Coalition Forces to see if the IP were ready to provide for their communities.

“A lot of planning went into the transition,” said Brookshire, who conducts police transition team operations, mentoring IP, at four Salhiya IP stations, including the district headquarters.

The initial phase of transitioning was to test the IP to make sure they were able to provide adequate security for the area.

IP leadership and CF inspected the checkpoints to make sure they had all their proper equipment for the checkpoint to operate successfully.

They continued the inspection by conducting rehearsals to test communications and response time of the IP force in emergency situations.

Since the transition took place the IP have been tested several times by criminal elements and have responded by providing law and order during every situation.

“In the past few months, the IP have responded to incidents on their own with minimal CF support,” said Brookshire. “The situation now is IP are in the lead; they respond to incidents within the district. They are the initial responders we act as more of a liaison for them now.”

The IP credit their success to the local community coming forth with information to reduce criminal activities in the area.

“The people in the community have an awareness of what is supposed to be there and what is not supposed to be there,” said Brookshire.

“We have seen increased reporting at the station level because the IP know the area.”

“We have a good working relationship with the citizens,” said Iraqi Policeman Capt. Nasser Abed, the Salhiya district headquarters operations officer.

“Our door is always open for citizens to report problems and they use a tip line where they can report criminal activities to us.”



2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div.

Education remains priority in Ameriya

By Capt. Andrew Graziano

2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div.

BAGHDAD—Despite Baghdad having a number of priorities for the improvement of essential services, the importance of education has not been forgotten.

The Alethar School in the northwestern Baghdad neighborhood of Ameriya is a great example of the priority that local Neighborhood Area Councils have put on education.

The school was recently renovated to provide new classrooms, desks, chairs and even computers in order to provide an ample learning environment for the children of Ameriya.

Working closely with the Ameriya NAC, Om Omar, the school manager, was able to provide the renovations through a micro grant from Coalition Forces.

She now manages several locations in Ameriya, all while raising her own children as well.

“A few dedicated and selfless citizens are contributing immensely to the rebuilding of Iraq by funding, managing and running their own schools,” said Capt. Jose Reyes, with the 4th Squadron, 10th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

“They do so with the knowledge and blessing of the Ministry of Education. These people bring hope to the rest of Iraqis.”

The Alethar School is for children 3-14 years of age and offers a variety of classes to include math, reading, writing, English, music, art and computers.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Manuel Martinez, 2nd BCT PAO, 101st Abn. Div.

Iraqi children watch as Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers from Troop C, 4th Squadron, 10th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), interact with their fellow classmates during a visit to Alethar Elementary School in Ameriya Aug. 12.

The school has a cafeteria, a playground set outside and a field across the street that is also used for some activities.

This renovation provides children with an excellent place for both educational and social growth.

The variety of classes offer a well rounded education and the computer classes only benefit the children as they grow up in a world that is becoming more technologically advanced everyday.

“Iraqi children are being given a place to learn and grow in a safe environment; the children will be given the foundation to be successful in life,” said 2nd Lt. Benjamin Dalton, with 4th Sqdn., 10th Cav. Regt.

High school opens in northwestern Baghdad

By Sgt. Matthew Vanderboegh

2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div.

BAGHDAD – “Words could not describe how I feel,” said Fadem Zkar Shan Shal, in speaking of his new school in Ghazaliyah. “We have worked so very hard to put this all together and now it is finally happening.”

Last year, the Al Ghazaliyah High School opened its doors to 288 students; however, a lot has changed since then. With a large influx of residents from surrounding areas and a long stretch of relative peace, the population of Ghazaliyah is swelling.

As one may think with the influx in population, there would be an influx of students.

The headmaster was able to see his dream of a 600-person school, the largest of its kind in the region, finally open its doors Aug. 30.

With the total student body doubling from the previous year, new requirements for teachers, special classes and expanded extracurricular activities were needed.

The expanded classroom sizes are a positive sign of success in education. With that success however, are additional concerns.

“We have 16 teachers for all the students,” said Fadem, in explaining her concerns. “This is not nearly enough. I have requested to the Ministry of Education that they send more teachers.”

The school also set up

a special education class focused on students who have fallen behind in their studies.

“Due to the war, the students could not go to school,” said Fadem. “Now some have become uninterested with school work and need to have more focus from the teachers. The teachers have done this without extra pay in their spare time.”

Dr. Abbas, a contractor for the project, said the project is very important for the youth of the neighborhood.

“I wanted to make sure that this school had everything it needed,” he said. “A student cannot learn by books alone. That is why we put in fifteen new computers, microscopes, new writing boards and new desks. When a student can use this kind of equipment, he will want to come back and want to learn more.”

Helping push the project along were Soldiers from the 1st Squadron, 75th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

“I am very passionate about the education of these children,” said Capt. Joseph Sincere, with the 1-75th Cav. Regt. “This is the future of Iraq. What we do here right now affects the Iraq of tomorrow. The projects like this ensure that future.”

Of those projects for the future, Sincere said that there would be an additional 12 schools refurbished by the middle of October. Two of those twelve will be dedicated as schools for girls.



Photo by Sgt. Matthew Vanderboegh, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div.

Sheik Razak (center), along with his fellow local government officials and leaders, cuts a ribbon during a reopening ceremony for the all-boys Al Ghazaliyah High School in Ghazaliyah Aug. 30. The high school officially reopened its doors following months of refurbishment.

Sons of Iraq concerned about their transition

By Capt. S. Lee Cleghorn

2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div.

BAGHDAD – The Sons of Iraq (Abna al-Iraq) in the northwestern Baghdad neighborhood of Washash convened on Joint Security Station Washash Sept. 13 to collect what will perhaps be one of their final payments from Coalition Forces in Iraq – which signals a milestone development for the security of the capital city.



Photo by 1st Lt. Brian Winter, 2nd BCT PAO, 101st Abn. Div.

A Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldier screens a Sons of Iraq (Abna al-Iraq) member Sept. 13 as he enters Joint Security Station Washash to receive his monthly wages.

The local security forces, some of whom Multi-National Division – Baghdad have been paying for years to provide security in their neighborhoods, will soon report directly to the Iraqi Army per a recent directive from Prime Minister Al-Maliki.

Although the members have known for some time that they will eventually be absorbed into the Iraqi Security Forces, the idea has not necessarily settled in easily.

“My primary concern is that the Government of Iraq will take over control of the SoI without realizing the hard work, dedication, and time spent by the SoI to improve our security,” said Gen. Sa’aid, a Sons of Iraq leader, while his men stood in line to receive their wages.

“I don’t think they give us enough credit for the improvements in security in Iraq.”

Sa’aid, who commands more than 200 security members, knows firsthand the sacrifices his men have made.

Two months ago, a gunman shot him three times in the neck and head in an attempted assassination.

The SoI have provided security, but not without challenges.

Coalition Forces now find themselves marketing the Sons of Iraq transition both to the volunteers and the Iraqi Security Forces as the vital next step in the story progress for this embattled nation.

“The value of the SoI taking responsibility for their own security cannot be underestimated,” said the 1st Lt. Brian Winter, with the 4th Squadron, 10th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

Although the efforts of the SoI have been an important step forward, Winter said their commitment to future peace and stability will be tested by the upcoming transition and will determine their true impact on this volatile country.

In order to wean the SoI from the Americans and transition them to Iraqi government control, the Iraqi Army is taking incremental steps to gain their trust.

During the pay operations at JSS Washash, an Iraqi Army officer sat alongside Winter and spoke to each of the SoI members as they received their monthly wages.

Additionally, the Iraqi Army has begun taking the men along on patrols through their neighborhoods.

The transition of the civilian security force to Iraqi Security Forces seems daunting to some members of the force, like As-sad Abied Hossen.

“I don’t want to become part of the IA,” he said. “I want to stay here in my neighborhood. I think I will be able to do that if I work for the Iraqi Police instead of the Army.”

Hossen is not alone in voicing concerns about their future, as many of his brethren shared his sentiments during the pay day.

To be certain, not all of the men will be completely satisfied with the transition, but Coalition Forces leaders hope that those who may be disenchanted will fall back into civilian life peacefully.

By not building, engineers help rebuild Sadr City

By Sgt. Jerry Saslav
3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE WAR EAGLE, Iraq – The Soldiers of Earth Movers Platoon, Company B, 46th Engineer Combat Battalion (Heavy), gathered for their mission briefing.

They would pick up a Quality Assurance/Quality Control team and then head into Sadr City.

The men are heavy equipment operators and supervisors – they just haven't done that job in months.

After the briefing, the troops of the 46th ECB, which is currently attached to Multi-National Division – Baghdad's 926th Engineer Brigade, took a moment, formed a circle, linked arms and prayed; they then loaded into their Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles and headed out.

The platoon provides security for a QA/QC team as it checks on the quality of Coalition Forces-funded projects being carried out by Iraqi contractors.

The engineers provide transportation and physical security for their fellow engineers, and the team visits approximately 120 sites a week.

The Soldiers cannot always drive to each construction site; walking is their normal mode of transportation.

"Security's first; we use Infantry tactics as for how we move. Our primary focus is always the security and safety of the people we escort," said 1st Lt. Jeremy Atkinson, a native of New Orleans, who serves as the platoon leader.

For this mission, the team visited a park, a performing arts center and a few schools, all under various stages of construction in the Sadr City district of Baghdad.

The first stop was the Talley Performing Arts Center, where a building to house a concession stand, storage and offices is being built at one end of the lot with the theatre located at the other end.

As the team exited their MRAPs, the engineers fanned out and pulled security while the QA/QC members started their inspection. Staff Sgt. Romualdo Portes was the first Soldier out of the back of his vehicle.

"When I roll out of the vehicles, everything goes through your mind. You've got to remember your training. You've got to picture the possibilities of getting hit, sniper fire, a

suicide vest, anything," said Portes, a native of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, who serves with the 46th ECB (Heavy).

The team tries to spend as little time on the ground as possible while allowing the QA/QC members the time they need.

"It's kind of unique to see how the Iraqis actually build their structures versus how we build in the U.S. They work hard; they're dedicated to what they do, and they do their best at it," said Rhodes, a platoon sergeant with Co. B, 46th ECB, Task Force Gold, 926th Engineer Brigade, Multi-National Division-Baghdad.

There was no heavy machinery present at the site, rather, the site was primarily manned by Iraqi laborers with hand tools.

"It's kind of interesting, looking at them work, because we have equipment to work with and whatever they have they make do with it," said Staff Sgt. Mario Haywood, a native of Los Angeles.

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Photo by Sgt. Jerry Saslav, 3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Staff Sgt. Mario Haywood (left), a native of Los Angeles, listens intently as Sgt. 1st Class Antwann Rhodes, a native of Memphis, stresses the importance of the training to his platoon members before they head to the Sadr City district of Baghdad Sept. 9.

Team STEEL pays dividends in northern Baghdad neighborhood

By Capt. Clint Rusch

Co. C, 1-68 AR, 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

BEIDHA'A, Iraq – Ibrahim's gnarled grip, handicapped by his hard years of living in Baghdad's Beidha'a neighborhood, did not require an interpreter; its meaning was clear to the members of Team STEEL's Red Platoon at first glance.

His smile, expressed with his whole face, only reinforced that he was overjoyed at the assistance the men of Company C, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, provided for him.

In early July, Capt. Todd Allison, of Austin, Texas, led an initiative to reconnoiter the businesses along what the men operating out of Combat Outpost Ford refer to as the 'Miller Street Market.' This is a long stretch of loosely organized businesses, often co-located with the owner's homes. The assessments helped determine the suitability of each for a small business assistance payment under the Army's microgrant program.

The long hours of work that he and his men put in, talking with business owners, explaining the process, developing a list of businesses to

nominate, and then conducting the nomination process with them would, Allison said, "hopefully pay dividends as we show the Iraqis in the area that we're not just committed to their security. We're committed to long-term, sustainable growth for their businesses and communities."

The money did not come easily; but after a month of waiting for the approval process to work itself out, Team STEEL drew an initial stipend that would cover approximately 20 grants. Ibrahim was one of them; he is a shopkeeper who operated a small 'ration shop,' most analogous to a corner store in the United States.



Photo by Capt. Clint Rusch, Co. C, 1-68 AR, 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

Capt. Clint Rusch, of Bloomington, Minn., shakes hands with Iraqi business owner Ibrahim as he delivers a business assistance payment under the Army's Micro-Grants Program.

FOB War Eagle stands strong

By 1st Lt. Charles Feher

Co. B, 3rd STB, 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – For five grueling months Soldiers from the Phoenix Battalion have prepared, executed and improved a complex defensive plan that has protected the Striker Brigade's headquarters from local and regional threats.

Led by the "Black Knights" of Company B, 3rd Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, the Base Defense Operations Center supervises the execution of all force protection activities on Forward Operating Base War Eagle in northern Baghdad.

The perimeter is secured by several guard towers with interlocking fields of fire, multiple entry control points, a state of the art visual surveillance system and enclosed by tall, thick concrete walls adorned with barbed wire.

Soldiers guarding the entry control points are highly skilled in escalation of force tactics, techniques and procedures, and ensure that threats attempting to enter the FOB do not reach or penetrate its perimeter. Unlike most Coalition Forces – occupied FOBs, the Iraqi Army is co-located with MND-B troops and share the same perimeter. This unique situation presents a difficult challenge in controlling unauthorized access to the FOB. Written and photographic access rosters located at every entry effectively eliminate the possibility of unauthorized access to the FOB by creating an in-depth reference and understanding of Iraqi civilian, Iraqi Army, local national contractors and U.S. Army identification

cards and authorizations.

Meticulous personnel and vehicular searches further prevent malicious materials from entering the FOB. When discrepancies in identification do occur, BDOC's excellent rapport with the Iraqi Army allows for swift confirmation of the identification of the individuals in question.

Sgt. 1st Class Carl Pinyan, a native of Denver, who serves as BDOC NCOIC is proud of the dedication and attention he said detail that Soldiers on guard duty maintain.

"They are always alert, professional and prepared to handle any situation," he said.

Additionally, the Black Knights enhance force protection measures by conducting reconnaissance patrols throughout the area surrounding FOB War Eagle. These patrols provide a significant opportunity to interact with and win the hearts and minds of the community and Iraqi Security Forces.

Sgt. Jose Lozoya, an Odessa, Texas, native, echoed this sentiment.

"Because we do these patrols, the local nationals get to know us and we them. It makes us both feel more secure," he said.

The patrols also increase the BDOC's ability to find and identify possible threats.

The tower guards, entry control point guards, patrolling Soldiers and BDOC personnel execute continuous full-spectrum defensive operations providing the Striker Brigade with safety and security from the enemy.

Their diligence and swift response to possible threats has earned the respect of their fellow Soldiers, the Iraqi Army and the local populace.



2nd BCT, 25th Inf. Div.

Reconstruction improves Tarmiyah infrastructure



Photo by Sgt. Whitney Houston, 2nd SBCT PAO, 25th Inf. Div.

A glass cutter marks a sheet of glass before making his cut in Tarmiyah, northwest of Baghdad, Sept. 10. The glass is for an agricultural bank, which will aid the residents of the Qada. Currently, the nearest bank is located in Baghdad.

By Sgt. Whitney Houston

2nd SBCT PAO, 25th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Reconstruction projects throughout the region of Tarmiyah, located northwest of Baghdad, are providing many opportunities for residents to move forward and begin living better lives.

Due to conflicts that have littered the region over the years, the citizens of Tarmiyah are lacking many essential services such as schools, potable water, sewers and banks. However, reconstruction projects are in progress to help restore infrastructure.

“The bottom line is that increased capacity is what every Iraqi needs right now,” said 1st Lt. Eric Peterson, native of Littleton, Colo., and platoon leader assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment “Golden Dragons,” 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team “Warrior,” 25th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad. “Their infrastructure has decayed a little bit because of conflict over the years, so we’re trying to counteract those effects by really getting into these reconstruction projects as heavy and as hard as we can to give them this capacity.”

A major focus has been placed on education buildings first as school will begin within the first weeks of September.

“We have 17 school projects going on right now,” Peterson said. “So we’re hustling right now to finish up the school projects, then we’ll get more involved with services like water, electricity and sewage.”

Funding for the reconstruction effort is provided through the Iraqi Commanders Emergency Relief Program. Using this program allows the local government to get money for projects quickly and efficiently. It also allows them to help in the planning process, hire local contractors and mitigate corruption. Coalition Forces gather weekly with local government officials to ensure everyone is on the same sheet of music and ensure the project is going smoothly, Peterson explained.

Though projects are nearing completion, security is still a key

issue on residents’ minds. The Iraqi Police are instrumental in ensuring the security of the project sites and residents.

“The security situation is getting better in Tarmiyah,” said Mohammad Jassim Al Mashadani, Tarmiyah Qada leader. “We have meetings often with the police to ensure that security constantly improves, because security is directly correlated with the project’s success.”

As good as security is getting, it is still not perfect. Recent suicide vest improvised-explosive device attacks killed one U.S. Soldier, local residents and wounded a prominent Sons of Iraq (Abna al-Iraq) leader, who lost his right leg from the blast but managed to get away with his life, Peterson explained.

Despite these attacks, spirits are high due to the benefits of reconstruction.

“The people are very happy about the projects,” said Jassim.

“This year, we’ve had a lot of projects which have helped us very much. Coalition Forces and the (Government of Iraq) have enabled us to give our people jobs, and a decrease in terrorism shows the people are backing the projects. God willing, our city will continue to improve.”



Photo by Sgt. Whitney Houston, 2nd SBCT PAO, 25th Inf. Div.

First Lt. Eric Peterson, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team “Warrior,” 25th Infantry Division, discuss progress of recent contracts in the area with Abid Al Hamed Majed Mehseh, a member of the Tarmiyah Qada council and director of engineers, in Tarmiyah, northwest of Baghdad, Sept. 10.

MND-B Soldiers rebuild weapons range for Coalition Forces

By 1st Lt. Jason Blanco

955th Eng. Co., 926th Eng. Bde. PAO

FORWARD OPERATING BASE HAWK, Iraq – During the sweltering summer months, the 955th Engineer Company, based in Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., was given the task to conduct engineering upgrades to Forward Operating Base Hawk Range. Their mission was to reopen and ensure continued safe use of the range for all Coalition Forces and Iraqi Army Soldiers in the surrounding operational environment.

A small group of 14 heavy equipment operators went on the mission. Additionally, all the Soldiers involved in the range mission had civilian experience as carpenters or masons. These combined skills were instrumental in the mission’s success.

During the construction phase, the Soldiers had to identify and replace all damaged HESCO barriers on the range, which required disassembling a single basket from the set or connecting preexisting filled baskets to empty baskets. The Soldiers also worked hard at clearing and grading areas to allow the placement of new HESCO barriers.

Other renovations to FOB Hawk Range included building a ricochet overhang. The 955th Engineer Company Soldiers made on the spot adjustments to their plans which called for 20,000 tires to be emplaced for the ricochet overhang. Instead, they used additional HESCO barriers to decrease construction

time and increase protection.

Construction plans also called for thousands of sandbags to be filled and placed for extra protection, specifically on top of the ricochet overhang. The Soldiers, once again, used their in-



Photo by 1st Lt. Jason Blanco, 955th Eng. Co., 926th Eng. Bde.

Pvt. Edward Fluech from Poplar Bluff, Mo., Spc. Charles McPeak from Dixon, Mo., and Spc. Christopher Burch from Fordland, Mo., fill sand bags used to make the ricochet barrier.

enuity and creativity to construct a giant sand-box on top, then capped the box and added sandbags to the top; a difference of filling a few hundred sandbags compared to thousands.

Throughout the project, the Soldiers had ample opportunities to brush up on their equipment operating skills. Some of the heavy equipment needed for the construction of the range was a hydraulic excavator, 2.5 yard loader, 20-ton dump truck, bobcat, and concrete mobile mixer. The mechanics assigned to this mission always found themselves to be busy working on equipment.

“It was a daunting task trying to keep the equipment operational,” said Specialist Douglas Belcher, of Rolla, Mo., one of the 955th’s mechanics assigned to the mission.

After only a few short weeks, the reconstruction of the range was completed both to standard and ahead of schedule.

Staff Sgt. Larry White, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the mission, a native of Waynesville, Mo., remarked, “The range looks a lot better than it did two weeks ago!”

The reconstruction work that the 955th Eng. Co. Soldiers completed at FOB Hawk Range was inspected and certified by a master gunner, allowing it to be reopened. With the range reopened, Coalition Forces and Iraqi Army soldiers living at FOB Hawk can once again utilize the range for weapons training.

4th Combat Avn. Bde.



Classic rock 'n' roll band visits CAB, rocks Camp Taji

By Sgt. 1st Class Brent Hunt
CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – In an effort to increase morale and bring the gift of music to Soldiers serving in Iraq, a rock 'n' roll band comprised of top-notch acts from the '70s and '80s visited Soldiers from the Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, and performed a live concert on Camp Taji Sept. 11.

The members of Big Noize, a band consisting of members from Deep Purple, Rainbow, Ozzy Osbourne, Quiet Riot and AC/DC, were provided first-hand knowledge during the day on combat aviation operations throughout MND-B by Soldiers from the CAB.

Later that evening, the band provided everyone working and living on the camp first-hand knowledge on how to rock.

"I got this project together, named Big Noize, and this is a perfect mixture of guys," said Joe Lynn Turner, lead singer for the band who also sang for Deep Purple and Rainbow. "This is something we wanted to do – to help the guys (service members stationed in Kuwait and Iraq). Also, we wanted to show the people back in the U.S. and the whole world all the great things going on over here.

"This is a life-changing experience for us, and we want to let people know all the sacrifices you are making for world peace," he said. "Most people don't realize –

'To have world peace, you have to make sacrifices.' With all the rebuilding going on in this country, it is unbelievable. You are doing a great, great job. You guys are the real rock stars."

During the day's events, the band was escorted to the Camp Taji Airfield where Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 4th Aviation Regiment, showed off one of the AH-64D Apache attack helicopters. Then after spending more than an hour taking turns sitting in the cockpit and being shown how the combat aircraft operates, the band was whisked to the Apache helicopter simulator, where each rocker took turns flying combat missions in the high-tech piece of equipment.

"This (the simulator) is way harder than I thought it was going to be," said Carlos Cavazo, lead guitar player for the band who also was one of the founding members of the '80s rock band Quiet Riot. "There is so much to think about when you are flying in the simulator.

"I've always wanted to be an Army guy, and being here for ten days gives me a brief chance to do that," said the head banger, whose classic songs include "Metal Health" and "Come on Feel the Noize." Quiet Riot was an American Band whose success in 1983 and



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Brent Hunt, CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Soldiers from the Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, and the classic rock 'n' roll band Big Noize, stand in front of an AH-64D Apache helicopter on Camp Taji Sept. 11. The band, comprised of members from Deep Purple, Quiet Riot, Ozzy Osbourne and AC/DC, visited the CAB and played a standing room only concert for service members and civilians stationed on the camp north of Baghdad.

1984 contributed to launching the glam metal scene during the '80s.

During their visit, Big Noize visited service members stationed in Kuwait and Iraq for ten days and they put on five electric guitar-pumping shows. The band consists of Turner's lead vocal talents, Phil Soussan, who played bass guitar for Ozzy Osbourne, Cavazo and Simon Wright, who played drums for AC/DC and Ronnie James Dio.

Camp Taji was the last gig on the bands world wind tour, where the group belted out heavy metal classics to a crowd of more than 300 screaming Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and civilians working on the dusty camp surrounded by Iraqi farmlands.

Some of the hits performed by the group were "Crazy Train," originally sung by Osbourne, "Smoke on the Water," originally performed by Deep Purple, "Hells Bells" originally performed by AC/DC, and "Holy Diver," originally sung by Ronnie James Dio.

"I grew up on classic rock, and this concert is the biggest morale booster since I've been here," said Pfc. Johnathan Shufeldt, 23, Company G, 2nd Bn., 4th Avn. Regt., CAB. "My favorite songs they performed were by Ronnie James Dio. They rock, and I love Dio. These types of events definitely help you blow off steam from the long work days."



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Brent Hunt, CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

The classic rock 'n' roll band Big Noize played to a standing room only crowd their brand of '70s and '80s hits for service members and civilians on Camp Taji Sept. 11.



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Brent Hunt, CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Sgt. 1st Class Daryl Yost, platoon sergeant, Company A, 1st Battalion, 4th Aviation Regiment, Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, shows Carlos Cavazo, guitarist for the classic rock 'n' roll band Big Noize an AH-64D Apache helicopter on Camp Taji Sept. 11.

For turn horror of 'Pile'

erve



Photo by Pfc. Lydney Dransfield, MND-B PAO

Multi-National Division – Baghdad Patriot Day

up to the fire floor

en the planes hit the
wait with his mother

ing to emerge alive
college to finish his
to help his father's

recovery operation
er firemen that were

"I also had the privilege of playing the bagpipes with the FDNY (Fire Department New York) bagpipe band at some of the memorials and funeral services for firemen that were killed."

During the months-long rescue and recovery operation at Ground Zero, volunteers from all over the nation came to render aid in whatever way they could.

They volunteered their time and money, and risked their health to clean up what hate had created. But for Vega, Surgener and Dowdell, and thousands of others like them, it wasn't enough. There was more to be done.

Once again, as on the day they responded to help a burning and broken city, they all heeded yet another personal call to arms and joined the military service.

Vega, who had served in the Army during the Gulf War, enlisted again in 2003 as a medic and found himself in Iraq with the 101st Airborne Division during the initial invasion. Sgt. Vega is now in the Army Reserve, deployed as a combat medic with Company D, 404th Civil Affairs Battalion, attached to 7th Squadron, 10th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

"I put on the uniform because I love this country," said Vega.

Surgener also felt the need to serve in the military. He had passed the age limit for many of the service branches but discovered he would still qualify for the Navy. He joined and eventually became a combat photographer, specializing in both still and video photography.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Surgener is assigned to Navy Expeditionary Combat Command out of Norfolk, Va., and is currently attached to 4th Inf. Div. and MND-B as a combat camera operator in support of the Army and its mission in Baghdad.

"I am here doing what I feel is best to serve my country. My attitude is if you are able, you should serve," he said. "I am able, and I have something to contribute, so I chose to serve. I'm glad and proud to be here on this day."

Dowdell also found the military to be the means to satisfy his need to do more, finally being accepted to West Point, an accomplishment his father had always encouraged him to achieve. 1st Lt. Dowdell currently serves as a platoon leader with 4th Battalion, 42nd Field Artillery Regt., 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div., currently attached to 2nd BCT, 101st Airborne Div., MND-B. He is in his first deployment to Iraq.

"(Going to West Point) was something my father wanted, and I finally got to see it through," said Dowdell.

"I know he was real proud that I decided to go into the military and kind of follow in the same line of service that he started when he became a fireman. To me, my father is my hero. My father was my best friend."

All three of these men continue to serve with the same zeal and fervor that drove them to "The Pile" seven years ago, and there are thousands serving with them in the military from California to Maine, Florida to Minnesota, who, out of the sadness, felt the same silent need



Photo by Staff Sgt. Brock Jones, MND-B PAO

◀ 1st. Lt. Patrick Dowdell, a native of New York City, who serves as a platoon leader with 4th Battalion, 42nd Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, attached to 2nd BCT, 101st Airborne Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, stands in front of a New York City Fire Department flag following the 4th Inf. Div. and MND-B Patriot Day Observance held in front of the division headquarters Sept. 11. Dowdell's father, Lt. Kevin Dowdell, a 22-year veteran of FDNY, was killed Sept. 11, 2001, when Tower Two collapsed.



Photo by Pfc. Lydney Dransfield, MND-B PAO

▲ MND-B Soldiers fold flag during 4th Infantry Division and Multi-National Division – Baghdad Patriot Day Observance held in front of the division headquarters Sept. 11.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Brock Jones, MND-B PAO

◀ Sgt. Juan Vega (middle), a native of Bronx, N.Y., who was a first responder with the New York Fire Department on Sept. 11, 2001, reaches up to hand off an FDNY flag to Victory Base Complex firefighters so they can attach it to the side of their fire truck prior to the 4th Infantry Division and Multi-National Division – Baghdad Patriot Day Observance held in front of the division headquarters Sept. 11. Vega is now a combat medic with Company D, 404th Civil Affairs Battalion, attached to 7th Squadron, 10th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Inf. Div., MND-B.

Day in the life

Texas native goes from thick of fighting to rebuilding Sadr City

By Sgt. Jerry Saslav

3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE WAR EAGLE, Iraq – “When we first got here, I would have never expected any of the stuff to happen, never expected it to happen, so it teaches you to prepare for anything,” said Staff Sgt. Matthew Radcliffe, a native of Spring, Texas.

This is Radcliffe’s second tour in Iraq. He is a military policeman by trade, but during this tour he has been involved in everything from direct fire engagements with the enemy to escorting reconstruction teams across northern Baghdad.

“He is not the type of guy to bang his own gong. He’s very talented, and I think he probably doesn’t think what he did is extraordinary because he’s probably been successful his whole life,” said Lt. Col. Michael Pemrick, the deputy commanding officer of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

In the past nine months, Radcliffe, who now serves as a squad leader with the Military Police Platoon, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd Special Troops Battalion, 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div., has, by his own account, performed more than 200 combat patrols in and around Sadr City and conducted various missions from detainee backhaul to direct fire engagements with the enemy.

He is currently providing security for the embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team responsible for rebuilding governmental services in Iraq.

He provided security for Civil Affairs teams and worked with Iraqi Security Forces in the Sadr City and Adhamiyah districts of Baghdad. Radcliffe served on Pemrick’s personal security detachment until recently when he took over his duties as a squad leader.

“He was the lead truck in my PSD. Not only was he competent in moving us around the battlefield safely, he’s also a very good dismounted leader and led his men through many situations that were hazardous with no issues,” said Pemrick.

In late March, Special Groups criminals violated the Muqtada al Sadr-ordered cease fire. It was decided that the Iraqi Army, with MND-B forces assistance, would move into Sadr City to help quash the uprising.

“The mission here for United States Forces, of course, is to

try and pass the torch to the Iraqi forces, try to get them trained up, get them to learn how to do their job better. Part of the way we do that is by leading by example,” said Radcliffe.

As the IA conducted its initial push into Sadr City, among the MND-B forces present were Pemrick and his PSD team.

“The IA was conducting the push and we were there to supervise,” said Radcliffe.

They ended up doing more than supervising.

“There were a couple of times when the IA were trying to take Phase Line Gold; we were dismounted with them and Sgt. Radcliffe was our point guy. He was up with the point IA guys. There’s IED’s going off, RPGs and small arms fire, general confusion, it was dark, he never faltered,” said Pemrick, a native of Greenwich, N.Y.

“A lot of that was morale boosting and helping them out along the way,” said Radcliffe.

“He gained the trust of many of the IA Soldiers, who got to work with him, and they drew confidence from his example. As he moved forward, they would move forward with him. He was a key member of that whole situation,” said Pemrick.

Radcliffe received the Army Commendation Medal with Valor for his actions in Sadr City.

“Us (U.S. troops) pushing forward with them has given the IA a lot of confidence in their abilities,” said Radcliffe.

This teamwork has paid off.

“It (the IA’s confidence in their abilities) helps them conduct the raids that they’re doing up north of the wall. A lot of the stuff that they are doing on their own are because of those events in Sadr City,” said Radcliffe.

The IA’s confidence in their abilities

and taking the lead on missions is a welcome sight for Radcliffe.

“It’s like you’ve been training a football team for a while. You see them in practice; you’ve helped them in their drills in order to become an effective football team. You’re the coach on the sidelines, and you get to see them play their first game and they win,” said Radcliffe.

Radcliffe then moved on to providing security for the Civil Affairs Teams and embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams, who are working with the Iraqi Government to help rebuild the country.

These teams head out into cities and town to see what needs to be fixed, built or rebuilt. They would decide what would help the community and hire a contractor. The teams would regularly stop by to check on the projects progress.

One project was a school.

“We were there for the initial check ... when the school was falling apart at the

seams. Then we get to go back to the schools reopening. To see the difference that’s been made, that part is really cool,” said Radcliffe.

This gave Radcliffe a chance to see Iraq slowly being rebuilt. It also sent him back into Sadr City.

“That’s probably the most surreal portion for me,” said Radcliffe. “Six months ago, they were fighting us. They were trying to kill us. Now you go through the area, people have their shops open; they’re going back to school.”

“They’re rebuilding the buildings, talking to the people on the street ... nothing but happiness from them. They’re happy that we’re there, that we’re putting generators and lights in the neighborhood. They’re happy for the security – progress is all about progress.”

And for Radcliffe, who entered the Army four years ago as a private first class, that progress is a welcome sight.

“All these things that the Iraqi Government is doing, the Iraqi Army, it shows progress,” said Radcliffe, “and that’s what’s ultimately going to get us out of here.”

Radcliffe’s leadership ability is also a welcome sight to those he works with.

“He’s a future sergeant major, a future (officer candidate school) guy. He will not stay long as a staff sergeant, nor should he,” said Pemrick.



Photo by Sgt. Zach Mott, 3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Staff Sgt. Matthew Radcliffe, a Spring, Texas, native, provides security for a member of the Striker Brigade command team during a patrol through the Adhamiyah district in northern Baghdad Aug. 14.



Photo by Sgt. Zach Mott, 3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Staff Sgt. Matthew Radcliffe (center), a Spring, Texas, native, talks with Lt. Col. Michael Pemrick (right), a Greenwich, N.Y., native, before a battlefield circulation patrol around northern Baghdad Aug. 14.

Soldier donates hair to Locks of Love for children

Continued from page 1

"I wanted to show my support for the children from Iraq," she said while holding the braid of hair. "I just hope more people will do the same."

Star's motivation for this project came to light when she watched the children get dressed up. She witnessed each child's excitement grow as they headed for a night away from treatment to enjoy a dance at the hospital. Star said she wanted to learn more about how she could help more of these children. She went to their Web site at locksoflove.org and requested more information.

Once the long hair is prepared, the Locks of Love manufacturer blends the colors for the child's hairpiece and sends it along with the foam head block to a factory in Indonesia. At the factory, a surgical silicone skullcap, colored to match the child's skin tone, is made from the head block. Next, each piece of hair is hand injected using a special needle at a 45-degree angle into the skullcap. This is done 150,000 times for one hair piece. The hair is then sealed into the base by another layer of silicone. This step takes eight to 10 weeks.

Once completed, the prosthesis is checked to ensure it is all one length. After breaking it in for a day or two, the child can go to a specially selected beauty salon and have it styled to compliment their facial features.

Star, a Grover Beach, Calif., native, hasn't cut her hair for more than seven years, but after seeing so many children smile, she felt compelled to donate. In total, she donated 13 inches of braided hair. Along with Star, Capt. Latisha Ward, assistant operations officer, also donated her hair. Ward and Star went together to support each other with this decision.

"Sgt. Star is the kind of NCO that found a way to donate to a worthy cause while deployed, which is commendable," said Capt. Troy Fisher, a Houston native, who serves as commander of Co. B, 64th BSB.



Photo by Capt. Troy Fisher, 64th BSB, 3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Sgt. Shauna Star, a Grover Beach, Calif., native, holds her freshly cut hair that she will donate to the Locks of Love organization which manufactures wigs for children with cancer. Star is a communications NCO with Company B, 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

Soldier marries sweetheart via telephone from Iraq

By Sgt. Zach Mott

3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE CALLAHAN, Iraq – Pfc. Donald Pope's Friday began in much the same way it has in his previous nine months in Iraq. He completed his shift in the tactical operations center, went to sleep and woke up to begin another shift that evening.

This mid-September day proved to be a bit different however. In fact, it is one that Pope, a Daleville, Ala., native, will remember forever.

"I woke up, got married and went to work," said the fire support specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

His matter of fact delivery of what many consider a defining day in their lives belies his true emotions Sept. 12 as he stated his vows to the former Laura Tomblin, who stated her vows on the other end of a phone line in Georgia.

"I was nervous and frustrated," Pope said, from Forward Operating Base Callahan in northern Baghdad. "We

had a tough time getting it set up."

The original plan was for the nuptials to be conducted via video teleconference, but with connectivity issues spoiling that method, other members of the Silver Lions stepped in to allow the wedding to continue.

Lt. Col. Michael Pappal, an Indiana, Pa., native who commands the 1-68 AR, and Maj. Rob MacMillan, operations officer for 1-68 AR, offered up a phone line for Pope to call his betrothed and conduct the ceremony.

Haywood Tomblin, Pope's soon-to-be father in law, officiated the ceremony in Georgia.

"This shows that a little piece of home can be brought to an area that you don't get a lot of that," said Staff Sgt. Thomas Huerta, a San Antonio native, who serves as a personnel NCO with 1-68 AR and witnessed the ceremony.

After meeting more than four years ago, Pope and his new bride began dating shortly before he entered the Army two years ago. Marriage was discussed before Pope left for Iraq in December. The subject was again broached during his mid-tour leave this summer.

"We didn't want to wait any more," he said.

"I love her, and she makes me happy – and she can actually put up with me."



Photo by Staff Sgt. Thomas Huerta

Pfc. Donald Pope, said his vows to the former Laura Tomblin during a wedding ceremony Sept. 12 conducted via telephone from Forward Operating Base Callahan to Georgia.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Thomas Huerta, 1-68 AR, 3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Pfc. Donald Pope (right) says his vows to the former Laura Tomblin during a wedding ceremony conducted via telephone from Forward Operating Base Callahan to Georgia Sept. 12. Pope is a fire support specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

Making a list, checking it again ... and again

By Sgt. Jerry Saslav

3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – There are never more than a handful of them in one area at a time; they need to rely on other Soldiers to accomplish their mission; and if their job is done right, you will see it and never know.

In fact, all Multi-National Division – Baghdad-funded reconstruction projects in Sadr City cannot be completed without their agreement.

They are Quality Assurance/Quality Control engineers who work for Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

There are more than 200 MND-B-funded reconstruction and refurbishment projects alone in the section of Sadr City known as Operating Environment Gold. The projects have a list of tasks, known as a scope of work, which must be completed.

The QA/QC team is charged with checking the quality of more than 120 projects per week that are being spearheaded by Iraqi contractors and accomplished by the Iraqi workers they hire.

The engineers “make sure the quality of work that is being done, is being done to standards usually above the standards of work being done in Iraq. In other words, we’re trying to bring their standards up to the U.S. (standards),” said 1st Lt. David Holland who serves as a QA/QC officer-in-charge for 890th Combat Engineer Battalion, 926th Engineer Brigade, MND-B.

The QA/QC team is usually escorted by Soldiers from Company B, 46th Engineer Combat Battalion (Heavy), Task Force Gold, 926th Eng. Bde., MND-B, who provide security and transportation for each mission.

Once the site is secured, the QA/QC team splits up to make its assessments. An NCO talks with the foreman to go over a scope of work checklist.

“Most of them are up front, but they tend to overlook some small things. I try walking with the contractor throughout the entire building to see what he’s done. He’ll point out things to me, and I’ll point out flaws like missing paint or paint in the wrong areas,” said Sgt. Ross Maki, a native of Lake Linden, Mich., who serves as a QA/QC team member, Co. A, 46th ECB.

Holland, a photographer back in the United States, walks around the site taking pictures.

“As an engineer, I look for things they don’t necessary look (for). The contractor wants to show

off what he has done – that is good,” said Holland, a native of Maben, Miss. “Then we can use photos to verify the progress or the deficiencies for each project.”

The photos help the Iraqi contractors, whose experience varies from minimal to several decades, see what areas need more work.

“There are some great contractors and some not as great contractors. Some are struggling contractors themselves, trying to get a business started, and they actually won the contract,” said Holland.

It is the different levels of contractor experience that cause most of the issues.

A refurbished school classroom, for example, “means from the floor to the ceiling and everything in-between. For one contractor, it may mean painting the wall only. (For) another contractor, it may mean painting the walls, putting in new electrical and a new ceiling fan – and that’s it, nothing for the floor,” said Holland.

“A more experienced contractor knows the better he does, the more contracts he can get later.”

On this day, the team visited a park, a performing arts center and a few schools, all under various stages of construction in this northeastern Baghdad district.

At the school, there are specific items the teams checks before giving the scope of work a passing grade.

“We make sure they have fire extinguishers, computers and desks, some of the basic necessities for a school,” said Holland.

After the day’s visits, Holland offered praise for the progress.

“Overall, the schools look good,” he said.

As the QA/QC team inspected Regular 6 Park in the Jamila neighborhood of Sadr City, the team found some damage to work that had already been completed.

This causes troubles for both the contractor and QA/QC team.

“One of the problems with a project such as a park or a clinic, or even a school, is that they are sometimes using the facilities while they are trying to fix the facilities,” said Holland.

“You don’t always see the complete, perfect finished product before it’s destroyed by other people.”

The contractor said that even though the damage was being done at night by area children, he would have it fixed.



Photo by Sgt. Jerry Saslav, 3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

1st Lt. David Holland (left), a native of Maben, Miss., takes a photograph of a scope of work document being held by Sgt. Ross Maki, a native of Lake Linden, Mich., at the Talley Performing Arts Center in the Sadr City district of Baghdad before starting their inspection Sept. 9.

‘Bayonet’ Soldiers help Fedaliyah farmers feed ‘Jammous’

Continued from page 1

“Because of the feed problems, they are being forced to turn to the trucking industry and a lifestyle on the road away from their families, transporting grain and food rations.”

“This is not only an economical issue; it’s a complete change in their way of life. They are used to having low services and no electricity, and they’re content this way,” he said.

When the Bayonets took responsibility of the area in March, militia groups had a strong influence on the residents of the city and security was anything but stable.

“The main road into the city was lined with EFPs (explosively-formed projectiles) on both sides,” said Staff Sgt. Alan Jones, a squad leader with 2nd Platoon, Co. B, 1st Bn., 66th Armor Regt. “Every time we’d attempt to go in, a vehicle would get hit and we’d get ambushed.”

Since then, the Soldiers have acted to improve the security of Fedaliyah to include placing barriers along the roads to reduce the ability of emplacing EFPs and other improvised explosive devices.

“Due to a number of factors, things went from night to day quickly and many of the higher influencing individuals fled the city,” said Bestow.

One of the first missions conducted by the Bayonets when they entered the city was a population survey.

Each platoon was assigned an area. They went door-to-door meeting the people and getting to know them. They asked them what essential services they had and what they were deficient in, Bestow said.

“One of the main issues brought up by the people was the jammous feed problem.”

With the help of his fellow Soldiers, Bestow instantly began researching jammous—how much they eat, how much they cost to feed—and contacted the proper authorities and individuals who need to be involved in order to resolve the issue.

“We contacted provincial reconstruction team representatives, explained the issue and brought them out here so they can see for themselves,” Bestow explained. “We have also arranged meetings with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Trade, and some of the farmers in the area.”

The first day the PRT members were in Fedaliyah, the Soldiers escorted them down to the shores of the Diyala River where the jammous cool off. One of the members was approached by a 12-year-old boy who immediately asked him if there was anything they could do to help with the feed problem, Bestow said.

“Seeing a 12-year-old herder express so much interest showed how important this issue is to the (residents of Fedaliyah),” he said. “The PRT members seemed very excited about resolving this issue.”

“I think we are making headway by getting the right people to meet (each other),” said Bestow.

While this may be a small step in improving the infrastructure of Iraq, it is a substantial development for the residents of Fedaliyah whose lives depend on the water buffalo.



Photo by Pfc. Lyndsey Dransfield, MND-B PAO

A local farmer from the Fedaliyah area of New Baghdad calms one of his male jammous while the animals cool off in the Diyala River Sept. 2. Jammous are large domesticated water buffalo used by locals primarily for meat and milk. Approximately 10 percent of the jammous population in Iraq resides in Fedaliyah.

Iron Eagle brigade names NCO, Soldier of Year



Photo by Sgt. Jason Dangel, CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Spc. Thomas Elfar (left), petroleum supply specialist, Company E, 1st Battalion, 4th Aviation Regiment, Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, listens as the results are announced during the conclusion of the "Iron Eagle" Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year competition here Sept. 16. Elfar, who hails from Punta, Fla., went on to win the CAB Soldier of the Year title.

By Sgt. Jason Dangel

CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Two Soldiers from the Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, were crowned champions during the "Iron Eagle" brigade's Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year competition at Camp Taji Sept. 15.

Sgt. Jamiell Dominguez, a Seattle native, who serves as a flight medic assigned to Company C, 2nd Battalion, 4th Aviation Regiment, took top honors as NCO of the Year while Spc. Thomas Elfar, a petroleum supply specialist assigned to Co. C, 1st Bn., 4th Avn. Regt., from Punta, Fla., was named Soldier of the Year.

Command Sgt. Maj. Archie Davis serves as the presiding official and host of the event was the brigade's top enlisted leader and described the competition as a "tight race" before announcing his decision to the competitors anxiously waiting for the results.

"Everyone who competed today is a winner," he said, to the small formation of Soldiers eager to here

the results of the four-hour long contest.

"Your service to your country and to this great organization is a testament of your dedication as professional Soldiers and noncommissioned officers. You represent only one percent of the United States. Not everyone can do what we do. You should be proud to wear this uniform," he said.

Both NCOs and Soldiers were subject to tough questions posed by command sergeant majors from across the brigade.

The competitors were all previous winners of quarterly competitions over the past year.

The questions ranged from basic Soldier knowledge all the way to details of the presidential race and the recent devastation caused by Hurricane Ike in southeast Texas.

Dominguez, who was named the 2007 Forces Command Soldier of the Year, experienced her second win as an NCO. To date, she has claimed top honors during six separate boards.

"I had the opportunity to compete at the Soldier level, it was really amazing," Dominguez said after winning a quarterly board competition last week.

"It was a little scary to come back as a noncommissioned officer; I was facing my fear and adversity, and there's always 'what if I don't hold up to my reputation.' As long as you do your personal best, that is what it's all about."

Elfar has also won multiple board competitions at the brigade level and hopes to follow in the footsteps of Dominguez. While he has been deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Elfar said he has worked hard towards earning his sergeant stripes as well as the board competitions.

"These competitions are no joke, and you have to do a lot of studying prior to competing," Elfar said, shortly after being named the Iron Eagle Soldier of the Year.

"My goal is to progress and reach the next rank as quickly as possible, not only for my career, but for my Family as well."



Photo by Sgt. Jason Dangel, CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

A group of Soldiers from the Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, stand ready to hear the results of the brigade's Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year competition during the conclusion of board proceedings at the "Iron Eagle" conference room here Sept. 16.

By not building, engineers help rebuild Sadr City

Continued from page 9

After a short time on the ground, the team headed to schools in the northeastern Baghdad district. They drove to some and walked to others.

"We look for strange items along the streets, unusual scenery around the schools. Normally when we go to the schools, there are people working and walking around the schools; but if we get to a school that's totally empty, it makes the hair stand up on the back of your neck and raises a red flag," said Rhodes.

At one school the team walked to, Haywood, a squad leader with Co. B, 46th ECB (Heavy), positioned himself at the gate of the school.

"You feel good because you're watching out for your guys; you're watching out for the innocent civilians, and you're also watching out for the guys who are checking these schools and making sure that these young kids have somewhere to go to get educated, to have parks to play in, soccer fields to play on," said Haywood.

In very little time, Haywood found himself confronted by 20 children – all of whom were vying for his attention. It is a situation, he said, that he doesn't mind.

"I have kids myself. If we're in an area that is not too safe, then I 'shoo' them away because we have protection and they don't," said Haywood, who kept a watchful eye on the surrounding buildings.

As Haywood manned the entrance, other members of the Earth Movers provided security around the rest of the compound.

"We're looking for any kind of possible booby traps or possible (improvised-explosive devices) inside the school. There's always the threat that there may be somebody with some kind of small-arms waiting for you inside the school," said Atkinson, who is a platoon leader with Co. B, 46th ECB.

There weren't many workmen visible at this school, just the caretaker and his family.

"It's a good feeling, knowing that we're going through the schools, making sure the schools are ready for the year because education is a plus to all kids, not just only our kids in the U.S. The kids clap and they sing songs, in their native language, giving us praise for the things that we're doing," said Rhodes.

One of the stops was a park, called Regular 6 Park by the MND-B troops, after Task Force 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment's commander, who led the effort to regain security in this war-torn district.

The park had been close to completion once before. However, upon inspection, it was decided that a better job could be done so the contractor started over. While the contractor was working, children used the park.

"The kids are always in the park having fun. It's a good feeling seeing the little kids being able to enjoy life like our kids enjoy life back home," said Rhodes.

While many children visit the park, it remains in an area where violence dominated daily life this past spring.

"The park's a little more risky because you're out in the open versus being in a school, where you've got good surroundings. Once you've cleared the school, you're pretty safe inside," said Atkinson. "We have to make sure we still shake the hands of the kids, pass out candy and water bottles – at the same time, maintain an aggressive posture, ready to strike if someone should try to strike us."

As the QA/QC team inspected the park and found some damage. The contractor said while the damage was being done at night by area children, he would have it fixed.

It was Portes turn as we was approached by the curious children. He joked with them, all the while scanning the area to ensure there were no potential threats.

While he and the rest of the platoon are not necessarily performing the military occupational specialties they had trained for, the Soldiers say they are gratified by the current role they are playing.

"It's rewarding when the kids smile at you, and they know that you're there for a reason. It's not to kill or to invade, like some of the bad guys like to think so," said Portes. "They know that you're there for a good reason: it's to help them out."

"I love when the kids approach me and they try to shake my hand. When you think about it, they're around six, seven now; they're going to remember my face. They might not remember names, but they'll definitely remember that one person, that one American Soldier that took the time, that took a picture with them and shook their hands."

"We're changing the area. We're helping the people of Iraq."

Raider Brigade FRGs, Rear Det. remain valuable tools



Photo courtesy of Rear Det., 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

Family members and friends joined Soldiers and leaders of the Rear Detachment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, to take a "Walk to Iraq and Back" March 29, at Fort Hood, Texas. The morale-raising event created by Family Readiness Group leaders provides Family members and rear detachment cadre the opportunity to show their support for their Soldiers of the 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div., deployed in support of Multi-National Division – Baghdad and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The event consists of Families and friends of deployed Soldiers walking, running or jogging to show their support for their loved ones deployed to Iraq. The Raider Brigade has a robust family readiness group program with a multitude of spouse volunteers who support single Soldiers and Family members throughout the deployment by providing volunteer services and information.

By Capt. James Simpson

Rear Det., 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

FORT HOOD, Texas – Through the course of Operation Iraqi Freedom, family readiness groups have evolved into very productive support systems for the 4th Infantry Division.

Commanders realized early the importance of strong rear detachments and capable FRG leaders to care for the U.S. Army's Families.

"Genuine concern for Families yields lasting benefits to forward leaders and Soldiers alike," says Maj. Philip Secrist, Rear Detachment commander, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division.

The commanders and Rear Detachment cadre of the Raider Brigade were carefully chosen to reflect this focus, said Secrist.

"Our impact on parents, spouses and children benefits the morale of deployed Soldiers and can make lasting impressions," he said.

Successful FRGs are built over time, Secrist explained.

Good planning, hard work and commitment to the organization can result in growing participation from Family members, he added.

First-rate FRG events held before deployment are a good step toward building a core of volunteers that will ensure good events during the deployment, said Valerie Adams, family readiness support advisor, 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

For example, leaders, Soldiers and Family members of the 1st Special Troops Battalion, 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div., deployed in support of Multi-National Division – Baghdad, held an organization day before deploying in early March that resulted in maximum participation across the battalion, said Adams.

The event helped to spark a sense of identification among



Photo by Spc. David Hodge, 1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Sgt. 1st Class Charles Jones, brigade master gunner, assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 1st Special Troops Battalion, 4th Infantry Division, cheers on the Tug-of-War Competition, for children ages 5-8, during the Phoenix Battalion "Fun Day," Oct. 26, 2007, at Veterans of Foreign Wars Lodge No. 3892 in Harker Heights.

the unit's Families that lasted throughout the deployment, she explained.

"We keep the Families busy and inundated with knowledge of current events," Adams said.

From 1st STB's barbecue parties to 4th Battalion, 42nd Field Artillery, 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.'s Back to School Bash at Belton Lakes and Outdoor Recreation and Activities, Raider Families came together to make strong bonds, Adams explained.

"These events were good opportunities to welcome new Families and disseminate information," she said. "Due to the commitment of many volunteers, these events were also a lot of fun for children and adults."

One such volunteer, Sylvia Mellot, from Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 1st BCT, continually worked behind the scenes reaching out to Families.

Quality FRG events are now common in 1st BCT, and often have as many as 200 Family members, said Adams, who calls Middletown, Ohio, home.

While quality Family fun events are important, they are only one part of the FRG mission, she said.

Many Families may have just one interaction with the FRG, and its usually during a Family emergency, explained Adams. These emergencies can range from car problems to a death in the Family.

People often rely on those close to them in these circumstances and having strong relationships developed through FRGs can be rewarding, she said.

"During the deployment, numerous housing problems, financial hardships and medical emergencies were overcome with the help of FRGs and rear detachment," said Adams.

FRG leaders and other volunteers are the foundation of a good FRG, said Secrist.

The time they spend with Families and their continual support of the rear detachment are very important, he explained.

A collective commitment to the unit and to Families helped the 1st BCT vastly improve its FRG.

"Commanders throughout the Brigade will return to find a 'Family friendly' atmosphere," Secrist said.

"There is still room to grow; a persistent effort should be made to reach out to Families and to find the volunteers of tomorrow," Secrist added.

With continual support, family readiness groups throughout the division can remain a valuable tool for commanders and will successfully care for Families during future deployments, he said.

'Did you hear the one about the three Comedians who went to Sadr City?'

By Sgt. Jerry Saslav

3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Joint Security Station Sadr City, Iraq – It was an average August day in Iraq. The temperature was over 110 degrees Fahrenheit. A small crowd of 50 Soldiers, weapons and full battle rattle placed nearby, were seated on in a loose semi-circle, waiting.

Scott Kennedy, a native of Lubbock, Texas, walked up and faced the troops.

"I know you guys have long, hot and busy days. Thank you for taking the time to be here," said Kennedy.

A USO-sponsored comedy tour had come to JSS Sadr City.

"We primarily go out to (patrol bases) and (forward operating bases) and (combat operating posts) that don't normally get entertainment," said Kennedy.

"We want you guys to laugh, have a good time and pretend that you're back at home for a little bit," Kennedy told the crowd. "You're here at the Sadr City Comedy Club!"

This is Scott Kennedy's 21st trip to Iraq. He never served in the military.

Kennedy has two nephews in the Marines. They both served two tours in Iraq. "They told me nobody ever came out to entertain them. So when we put this tour together, 'Comics ready to entertain,' I specifically ask to, whenever possible, to go out to places, patrol bases, COPs, FOBs, places where maybe they don't get anything," said Kennedy.

This past February, he began coming to Iraq twelve days a month; he brings two fellow comics with him.

"You guys are out here in places like Sadr City, working really hard," said Kennedy. His aim is to give the troops "a little break in the day, recharge some batteries, a little taste of home."

"I've met some of the greatest guys in the world," Kennedy said. "The greatest human beings in the world are serving our country, and I frankly got tired of saying 'thank you,' in the airport."

"They see a Black Hawk and they think it's a (medical evacuation). They don't get anybody come visit them. They're always surprised, and the smile on their faces is enough. They have nothing out there, and they'll give you the shirt off their back."

That happened to Kennedy on Friday, August 23. An NCO took off the unit shirt he was wearing and gave it to Kennedy.

"I've run into guys here that I've done shows for in Afghanistan, and I run into them here and it's almost like an old long-lost brother," said Kennedy.

For this show, Staff Sgt. Jonathon Brown was the long lost brother. Brown met Kennedy at COP Cobra in Afghanistan in 2004.

"I wouldn't expect somebody like that to remember me – you know, just one guy. He's an unforgettable face, hilarious as all get out," said Brown, a native of Dayton, Texas, who serves as a squad leader for the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

"There was just four little dirt walls in Afghanistan, and he



Photo by Sgt. Jerry Saslav, 3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Comedienne Beth Sherman shares a laugh with 1st Sgt. Craig Copridge, a native of Kansas City, Mo., during a "Comics Ready to Entertain" show at Joint Security Station Sadr City in northeastern Baghdad Aug. 23.

shows up. I went up to him ... when I first saw him, and as soon as I told him about COP Cobra, he said he remembered it right off the back," said Brown.

"He said, it was one of his most memorable shows that he's done for the USO. That really touched base with me. It was my first real-world deployment. It was my first home overseas, and it really touched base with me that he remembered my home. It was good."

Seeing Staff Sgt. Brown pumped up Scott Kennedy and brought back memories.

"That (COP Cobra) was one of the tiniest, in the middle of nowhere, it had nothing, and they had absolutely nothing, and they were the best group of guys," said Kennedy.

"There wasn't even a wall; I mean they were still digging in, there was no bathroom, there was nothing. When I got home I sent them a humongous care package. I'm trying to think, what do you send these guys? They have nothing! I sent them some popcorn that you heat up over the stove; I mean, they had fire! I never heard if they got it. I've never seen anybody since '04 from Cobra. I had the whole cast from "Will and Grace" sign cast photos and stuff. I never heard if they got it. He said 'Yes they got it.' They put the photos up in the TOC," said Kennedy.

The "stage" for this show was a concrete pad under a camouflaged net.

"It's not a comedy club, eight o'clock at night in air-conditioning with a beer," said Kennedy. "(The troops) are in the hot sun with battle rattle and a near beer, maybe, on a good day. I have more comics who want to come than I can bring. There's never a shortage of people who want to come."

One of those people was comedian Dan Naturman. This was his first time in Iraq.

"You can't really compare this to anything else; it's a whole new ball of wax," said Naturman, a native of New York City. "It's what little I can do to contribute."

Naturman was the first comic up. He loosened up the troops.

"We need it, troops need it. It takes away from some of the rigmarole that we have to go through," said Staff. Sgt. Brown. "It was an awesome USO show."

Next up was Beth Sherman, a native of Philadelphia. She is a writer for the Tonight Show with Jay Leno.

"It was good. It was nice to have a break from the humdrum rituals that we do every day," said Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Bishop, a native of New Albany, Ind., who serves as signal NCO for Task Force Gold, 926th Engineer Brigade, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

"I was really surprised when I heard they were coming out, but then I got to thinking 'It's not that bad.' They've probably been to worse places," said Bishop.

Operation Iraqi Freedom in retrospect

Continued from page 3

But the Iraqi people still had much to achieve in the way of peace and prosperity. While Coalition troops struggled to achieve complete success over the insurgency, they maintained a vast effort to improve Iraqi infrastructure. Tens of billions of dollars were spent since the invasion for projects to improve water, sewage and electricity across Iraq. Further, local commanders helped communities improve everything from schools to soccer fields.

In January 2007, a plan was announced by President George W. Bush to add an additional 20,000 American troops to Iraq. This "surge" was to achieve a decisive blow against al-Qaeda and other threats to Iraqi sovereignty.

The military success would then give the Government of Iraq the opportunity for further political cooperation and less dependence on U.S. Forces. The surge has achieved many of its stated goals. Since the additional Soldiers arrived in Iraq, al-Qaeda is significantly less menacing to the Iraqi people.

By mid-2008, troop levels are nearing pre-surge levels. Various reports during the last few months illustrate remarkable progress in Iraq. The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad reported that 15 to 18 political benchmarks have been met by the Iraqi government. Another report states that in July of this year, U.S. casualties were at their lowest level since the invasion. Also, the Government of Iraq is closer to be-

ing self-sufficient monetarily. Oil output now exceeds that of pre-war levels. There are also many good examples of emerging private sector investment and modernization.

Success in Iraq leads to the inevitable reduction in U.S. troop levels. How much of a reduction and how soon is for the National Command Authority to decide. Cynics among us dare not speak the word "success" when referring to Iraq. But years from now, if freedom and democracy spread throughout the region, and tyrannical governments begin to fall, one may look back and recognize the monumental achievements of the past few years. These achievements were made possible because of the U.S. military, our allies and Iraqi citizens.

Summer's winners and losers

By **Spc. Douglas York**
MND-B PAO

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Aside from Dark Knight, Iron Man and a few other films, Hollywood offered more flops, sags and busts this summer than the lineup outside of “Doctor 90210’s” office.



Spc. Douglas

With that lovely visual in mind, here is my run down of the summer’s winners and biggest losers, and no, Britney Spears will not be making any appearances on my list.

Best of the Best, starting with number 1:

Dark Knight: As if I was going to put anything other than this film here. Director Christopher Nolan’s masterpiece has been ringing it in at the cash register (still in the top ten of the box office after being released two months ago) and will likely soon pass Titanic as the all-time winner at the box office. The buzz around the film left us dying to see the flick and the movie didn’t disappoint. Watch out come Oscar time!

Iron Man: In the year of the comic book-film revolution, this movie didn’t disappoint and has totally reenergized not only actor Robert Downey Jr.’s career, but it also set the standard for every comic book film that followed. Though the aforementioned “Dark Knight” raised the bar even higher, I absolutely can not wait for “Iron Man 2,” as well as the “Avengers” movies that are coming out in the next few years!

Mama Mia!: Going up against some pretty tough competition, this film has held its own throughout the summer and is rivaling 2002 Best Picture winner “Chicago” as the all-time grossing musical. Drawing on music from the 70’s-era band ABBA, the film had the largest opening of any musical in U.S. film history. Meryl Streep heads the cast, playing the role of single mother Donna Sheridan. Pierce Brosnan, Colin Firth and Stellan Skarsgaard play the three potential fathers to Donna’s daughter Sophie, played by relative newcomer Amanda Seyfried.

Actor Robert Downey Jr. After battling various demons over the years (alcoholism, drugs and various other scandals), Downey Jr. has completely revived his career and reinvented his domestic marketability. He has starred in two of the season’s biggest box office

surprises (“Iron Man,” and “Tropic Thunder,” with a cameo in “The Incredible Hulk”) and has saved a career that once saw him nominated for a Best Actor Oscar back in 1992 for “Chaplin.”

The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor: Maybe it is because I saw this film in a less than stellar capacity, but while I am a quasi-fan of the first two films in the series (mostly because of the lovely Rachel Weisz), I didn’t care for this one too much and it might have to do with Weisz not reprising her role as Evelyn Carnahan-O’Connell (the role was taken over by actress Maria Bello).

Despite that, despite the terrible reviews that the movie has received and despite the fact that the film was directed by the not-too-talented Rob Cohen, the film has done surprisingly well domestically, garnering nearly \$100 million since its August 11 release.

Now for those that just stunk, starting with number 5:

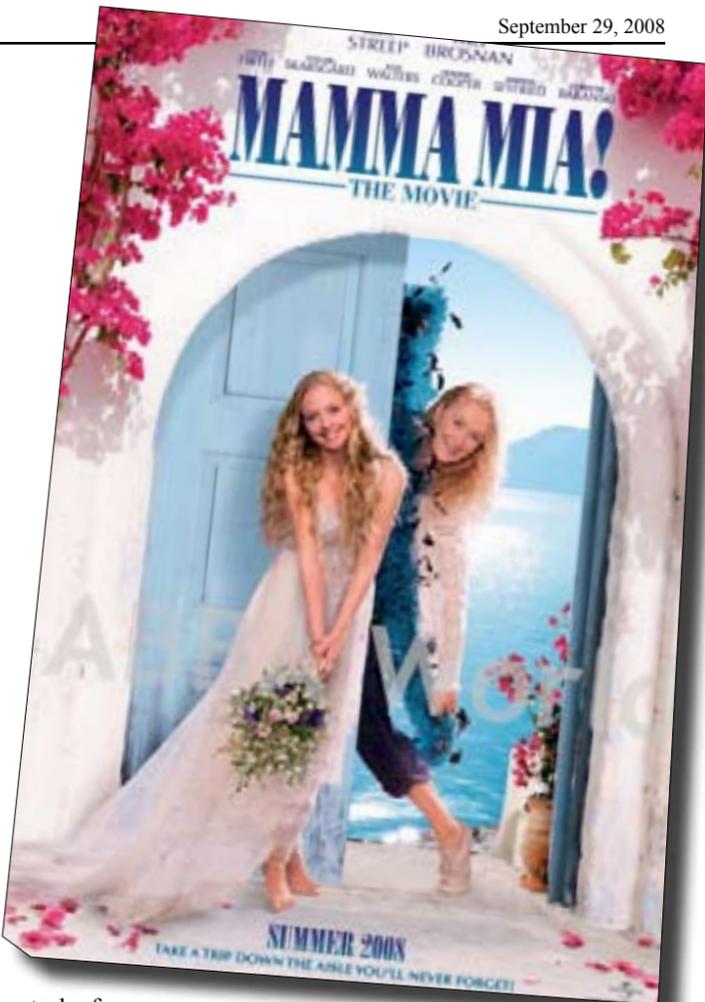
The Happening: What in the name of M. Night Shyamalan was this film supposed to be? I fell asleep during it, and though the quality of the disc I watched was terrible, that wasn’t the problem. This film had a great cast, a proven director, and a good idea going in. However, it bombed at the box office and it bombed in trying to hammer home its points of fidelity, honesty and loyalty. I gave Shyamalan a pass on his last two films because they were at least interesting. Too many more “happenings” like this and he can call it a career.

Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull: It pains me to place this here as I have wrestled with the idea of trying to defend this flick.

I waited all of those years for this? What a shame that the once-dynamic duo of Steven Spielberg and George Lucas came up with this film. Not only was it really lame in some parts (see actor Shia LaBeouf swinging from vine to vine with monkeys), but it was also completely unbelievable.

As one of the last films I watched before coming over here, this movie and its stellar cast, director and producer broke my heart and that of many “Doctor Jones” fans, despite what the international box-office numbers say otherwise.

Star Wars: Clone Wars: This completely CGI knockoff which takes place chronologically between “At-



tack of the Clones” and “Revenge of the Sith,” is not only being avoided by regular movie watchers, it is being avoided by even the most die-hard Star Wars fans! The movie should have stayed as the direct to DVD release it was intended to be, or as a two to three part movie on the “Cartoon Network.” It is just another example of how out of touch George Lucas has become. My, how the mighty have fallen.

Actor Shia LaBeouf: Coming off of last summer’s blockbuster “Transformers,” LaBeouf has been nothing short of disappointing since.

His role in “Indiana Jones: K.C.S.” was lame, but he can only be blamed for accepting the role as Jones Jr., not for the script. However, his declining star notwithstanding, LaBeouf went on to make the brilliant choice of drinking and driving.

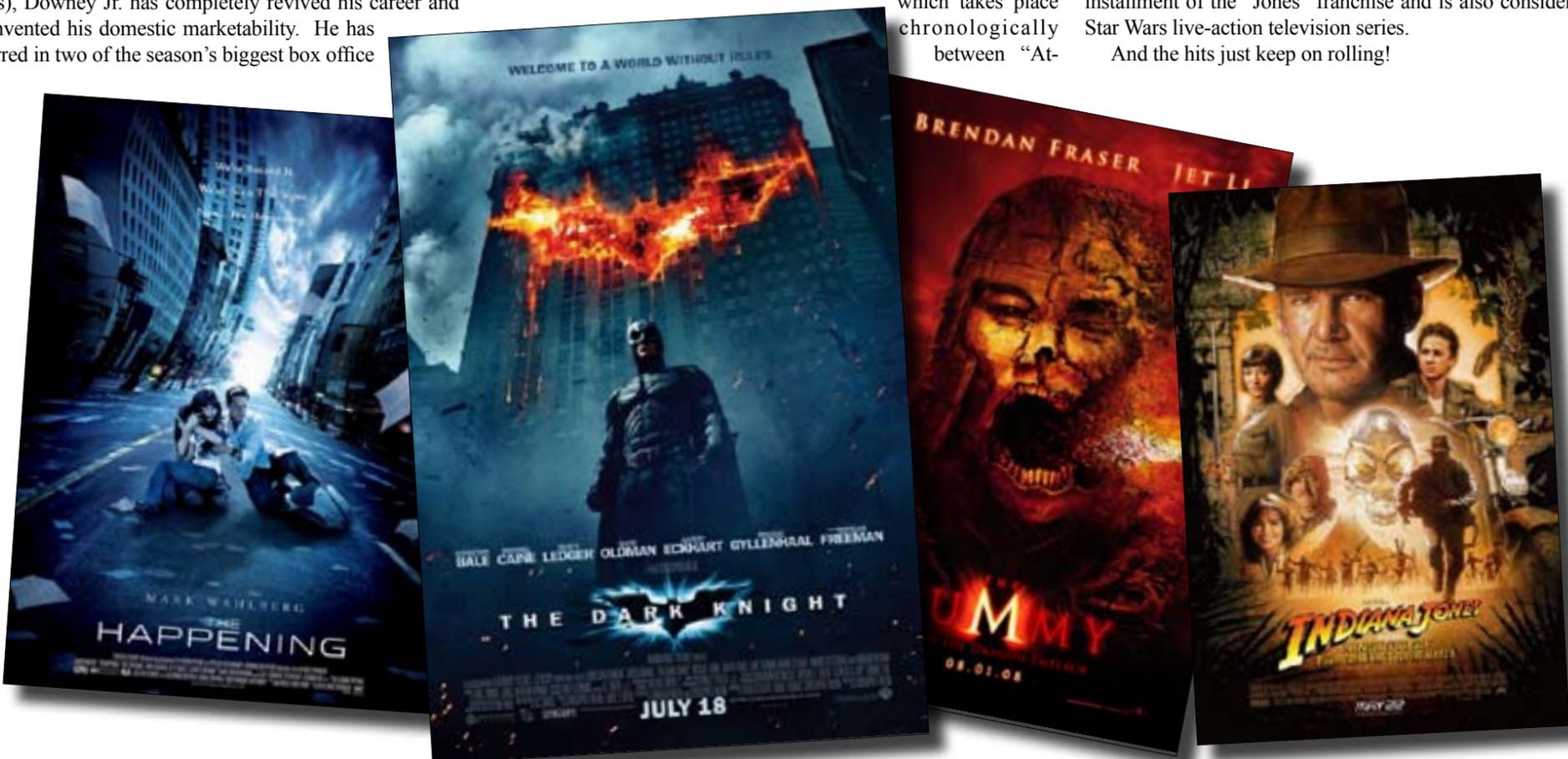
The 22-year-old star suffered serious hand injuries and was charged with driving under the influence (DUI) after a serious car crash in Hollywood July 27.

And this summer’s biggest loser is...

George Lucas: Writer, director, producer and recluse, George Lucas. Wasn’t life better when George Lucas was in hiding, leaving his fans clamoring for more of his genius? His brilliance was sadly left behind in the early 90s and he has yet to come up with anything other than a visual achievement since.

Moreover – are you ready for this – including the two previously mentioned summer bombs, Lucas is hinting at a fifth installment of the “Jones” franchise and is also considering a Star Wars live-action television series.

And the hits just keep on rolling!



Star Wars: Force Unleashed

Darth Vader's new apprentice seeks way of Sith

By Sgt. Jason Thompson

MND-B PAO

BAGHDAD – Imagine a world where George Lucas hadn't felt the need to go back to the creative well and "complete" his "Star Wars" movies.

A world where he didn't direct and write the cinematic war crime that was "The Phantom Menace," the vacuous – albeit pretty – light show, "Attack of the Clones," and the-best-of-the-three-but-still-quite-crappy "Revenge of the Sith."

What a world that would be. We could continue to speculate as to how Anakin became the James Earl Jones-voiced force of evil. We could imagine what the Clone Wars were like – those two words conjuring up so many evocative images – and wondering where the Force came from.

These were good topics of conjecture, harpooned horribly by the answers: Anakin was just a grumpy little boy who hit puberty and went through that awkward "evil phase," the Clone Wars featured a bunch of, well, clones with Kiwi accents and the Force was made up of (deep breath) Midi-chlorians: intelligent microscopic life that lives symbiotically in all things.

Oh, and Anakin made C3PO ... for, um, some reason. And neglected to ever mention it again. Oh George, why? Why-for do you hate the fans so much?

Look, all of that aside, the prequels were a misstep of epic proportions. As were pretty much all the games that followed for a little while.

It's been bloody ages since we've had a decent action-based Star Wars game so at first when word of "Star Wars: The Force Unleashed" was announced it was given the arched eyebrow of incredulity. Said eyebrow smoothed out a little as trailers came and was in fact replaced by wide-eyed joy when the demo was released on the PlayStation Network and Xbox Live.

It was fun, and not a Jar Jar Binx or large farting quadruped to be seen.

So, did the game live up the lengthy period of hype, advertising and word of mouth?

Well ...

The titular unleashing of the Force is certainly on display and is the game's biggest strength.

Not wanting to go too much into the plot – because believe



Sgt. Jason Thompson

it or not, there actually is one, and it's quite good – Vader takes the infant apprentice, that'd be you, trains him in the Dark Side, calls him Starkiller and bungs in a droid named Proxy who can deliver much-needed exposition and a sporty little ship called The Rogue Shadow.

Vader has you to do his secret network. No need to tell the Emperor; these are secret missions with no witnesses – allied or otherwise. This is part of Vader's super secret plan to overthrow the Emperor.

This story takes place between Parts III and IV of the "Star Wars" canon and while they don't give you any jaw-dropping moments of narrative revelation, the feel and aesthetic certainly nods more to the old school trilogy than the prequels.

So, at the start of the game you're off to kill some bloody Jedi, replete with Proxy, Rogue Shadow and a suggestion that Starkiller goes through pilots like Spinal Tap through drummers.

One of the coolest things about Force Unleashed is that from the first level, Starkiller feels like a Force-wielding mean motor-scooter. You can pick up objects like crates or combustibles with your mind and fling them at your enemies. You also have Force Push which isn't much chop at the start but as you start to upgrade your powers you'll soon be bending bridges, scuttling an entire cadre of rebel scum or seeing what happens when you throw a Tie Fighter at a bunch of Storm troopers. Spoiler Alert: it involves a large explosion.

From epic-sized level to epic-sized level you go, gaining powers like Force Lightning, the ability to throw your light saber and have it come back to you like a laser boomerang of doom! You can also pick up certain objects, fill them full of Force Lightning and hurl the powered-up item for an explosively good time.

These powers are a lot of fun but could've been better.

The environments look great, the characters are actually interesting and the Jedi boss fights are frequently entertaining but your powers lack a fine touch. The lock-on mechanism for the Force Grip is squirrely. You'll press R2 hoping to lock onto the very useful floating engine thing that, once zapped, will make a delightful explosive. So, you think you pluck the engine from out of the air. Nope, you picked up a totally useless rock.

If that happened once or twice, well, I'd probably look the other way. But it happens all the time. The lock-on mechanic, is just too loose, plus you can't walk while Force Gripping anything. It's a great feeling zipping through the air and shooting a lightning bolt at a skiff full of well-armed enemies ... but not so much fun when your electric tendril of death

zaps the crap out of a piece of garbage.

Actually, that's another thing. The game encourages, nay, demands you explore each level to the fullest. There are power-ups everywhere, allowing you to evolve into the kind of Sith you want to be. However, exploring is often a dangerous experience. On the Garbage Planet, for instance, I saw a ship that looked suspiciously detailed for just background so off with a double jump I went only to find out that, despite being completely flat, that part of the ship was out of bounds. So my Sith-in-training slid off the damn thing and fell to his death. What the hell? If you're going to demand the players explore don't give us invisible walls and interesting looking ships – give us some way of telling the ground and the 'not-ground' apart.

Sadly there are quite a few bugs and glitches. It's hard to jump with much accuracy as the camera seems intent on filming the inside of your head and the apparently amazing enemy AI is just downright stupid at times. The number of occasions where I'd search a level only to find one storm trooper trying to walk through a wall was, frankly, unforgivable after all the talk of the super duper enemy engine. Although, to be fair, seeing storm troopers try to hang on to ledges, poles and even each other rather than be flicked into the far distance was absolutely hilarious.

The main problem with your frequently fantastic powers is inconsistency. Charge up a Force Push and breach a solid metal door. Do the same to a nearby fern and you might rustle its leaves. The controls lack polish, that fine touch where you can call the move you're about to do. Far too many times Starkiller was saved by a lucky shot rather than serious Sith skills.

This is not a long game, although the levels are very iconic, if a little repetitive at times. The story is compelling and the graphics are very decent. You really do feel powerful as you swagger through armies of enemies, chucking them around the place or filling them with lightning.

Ultimately, "Star Wars: Force Unleashed" is a solid game. It certainly does the Star Wars brand no harm and really does hark back to the original trilogy – which is a good thing.

However, some overlong levels, repetitive enemies and the inconsistent effect of your powers stop this from being great. As it is, it's a lot of fun but once you've played through it a few times it's hard to imagine dusting it off years or even months down the track. Certainly, it's better than the Star Wars movie prequels – but then again, so is being hit in the groin with a brick. Overall, it's a consistently diverting action title with a few stand-out moments.

I give "Star Wars: Force Unleashed" 3.5 Vader helmets out of 5.



The Ivy Leaf Team

MND-B Soldiers perform as 'Mission Continues' during flag football scrimmage

By Staff Sgt. Jody Metzger
MND-B PAO

CAMP VICTORY, Iraq – Crowd clamoring, dust billowing, a moment of suspense as the quarterback sent a perfect spiral to the hands of a waiting receiver – a touchdown. Flag football was on their minds and it wasn't even 6 a.m. The sun had barely made its path to peak over the palaces of Camp Victory Sept. 13 before Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers began hiking, passing, tagging and flagging their way down the dirt field of Camp Victory's Samuel Castel park.

In contrast to a quiet morning on the base, the players shouted advice to their teammates as their fans hooped and hollered from their perch on the bleachers.

The 10th Mountain Band piped happy tunes and the grill sizzled with healthy helpings of hamburgers – all in the tradition of football spirit.

Though this game might have seemed like any other day in the States, the cause was anything but ordinary. Soldiers were able to do more than re-live their football glory days, they were able to show support to the Wounded Warriors new transitional program, "Mission Continues" – a nonprofit program dedicated to raising money and awareness for the Center of Citizen Leadership.

The game plan, as it was organized by Capt. Armando Kuppinger, set a unique twist to the day's events. Not only was the game to be played here in Camp Victory, but another game was to be played in Kansas City. Kuppinger is a logistics executive officer for Multi-National Corps – Iraq.

Kuppinger wanted to give the deployed Soldiers a chance to support their fellow disabled veterans, as well as raise awareness in the U.S. communities that war veterans are coming home and are in dire need to have a mission to fulfill once back at home.

"The 'Mission Continues' gives those folks a mission to serve, and we know that these warriors have the skills, leadership and mentorship to give our communities back home a needed boost," said Kuppinger.

Many of the wounded warrior's back home are aware of the game and are excited that we are raising awareness for the cause, explained Kuppinger.

The teams were broken down into four teams named after the wounded warrior's – Sonia Meneses, Tim Smith, Mathew Trotter and Readan Clavier.

In between games, a sweaty and exhausted Sgt. Maj. Nathaniel Hatchett, who serves with Company C, Divisions Special Troops Battalion, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, huffed on the sidelines, elated for the morning of football. Hatchett and his team were in their element, and it wasn't hard to see that they were enjoying themselves.

Playing sports, Hatchett explained, is a military tradition that reminds Soldiers about the spirit of being part of a team.

"This opportunity is letting our wounded warriors know that there is still a vital and important mission as leader and influencer of their community. They need to realize that they are



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jody Metzger, MND-B PAO

Team Trotter's quarterback looks down field for an open receiver while evading Readan's Raiders pursuit during a flag football game at Camp Victory's Samuel Castel Park Sept. 13. The event was organized by Capt. Armando Kuppinger, logistics executive officer for Multi-National Corps – Iraq, to raise awareness for the Wounded Warriors new transitional program, "Mission Continues" a nonprofit program dedicated to raising money and awareness for the Center of Citizen Leadership.

apart a new team within their community, where they can be leaders and a voice of strength through their community," said Hatchett.

Capt. Roger Ates, an MND-B engineer and Readan's Raiders team member declared that the game "was a lot of fun" and explained that the event offered Soldiers a chance to get out of the office and build some team spirit for a good cause.

"It lets them know back home that even though we are here, we play as if we are right there with them. The biggest thing you can give someone is time. It lets them know that we are thinking about them."

For most out on the field, it was a chance to relive, for a moment, being at home. Tossing a football with the guys. As one Soldier remarked, he, like most here, are sports fanatics and to be able to be out on a field again, playing – whether in Baghdad or Kansas City – it offered a sense of freedom.

Infantry Soldiers compete in Ironman competition on FOB Loyalty

Sgt. Whitney Houston

2nd SBCT PAO, 25th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Two Soldiers who work at the Detainee Holding Area Annex at Camp Taji, northwest of Baghdad, were awarded Army Achievement Medals Sept. 6.

Spc. Denver Hankis, a native of Calico Rock, Ark., and Spc. David Misicka, a native of Chicago, both assigned to Company B, 225th Brigade Support Battalion "Mongoose," 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team "Warrior," 25th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, were recognized for their consistency and excellence in performing their daily duties.

"There are a lot of rules and regulations these guys have to follow," said Master Sgt. Nicanor Mendez, a native of San Antonio, and Military Police liaison officer to 2nd SBCT, assigned to the 411th MP Company. "These guys get here every day, do monotonous work, and they continuously do their duties, without skipping steps which could cause a mishap."

Capt. Alberto Pantoja, native of Miami, and commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 225th BSB, said he was pleased to recognize Soldiers for a job well done.

"More often than not, Soldiers working in detainee operations are recognized for their mistakes," said Pantoja. "It's time these guys were recognized for their consistency in performing their duties."

The daily routine for Soldiers working at the DHAA requires controlling check points, making sure that the detainees are accompanied during meals, hygienic functions and religious practices.

"On any given day, we control entry control points or hold

two guard tower positions," said Hankis. "And if you're not on one of the points, we are inside as an escort, whose primary responsibility is escorting detainees to and from the latrine and also to the shower points throughout the day so they can wash their hands, face and feet before they pray. We also



Photo by Sgt. Whitney Houston, 2nd SBCT, 25th Inf. Div.

Capt. Alberto Pantoja, native of Miami, and commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 225th Brigade Support Battalion, "Mongoose," 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, "Warrior," 25th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, awards Spc. David Misicka, native of Chicago, an Army Achievement Medal during a ceremony at Camp Taji, northwest of Baghdad, Sept 6.

serve them three square meals a day."

Working in the DHAA all day is taxing to a Soldier's mind. However, they are given time each week to recuperate.

"Being in a prison area, these Soldiers, from time to time, feel like prisoners themselves," Mendez said.

Despite incarceration for their suspected unlawful acts, it is paramount that MND-B Soldiers treat prisoners as human beings, said Pantoja.

"One thing we put emphasis on is ensuring detainees are treated with dignity and respect," said Pantoja.

"So when they leave here, they leave here understanding Americans are good people, and we are here to help them."

Since opening, the facility has an impeccable record concerning propriety and inprocessing.

"We've been here since January and have processed over a 1,000 detainees with no incidents," Hankis said. "We were recognized today for being two of the most awesome Soldiers here."

Hankis and Misicka said they strive to maintain a good attitude, stay motivated and assist their comrades to do the same.

"Staying motivated and motivating other people is done by staying motivated yourself," Hankis said. "Good spirits and jokes raise the morale of the people who are around you."

The devotion of these two Soldiers to their mission and country has reflected through their tireless actions, setting a high standard for others to look up to regardless of occupation.

Mol's Wide World of Sports

Best rivalries in sports

By Staff Sgt. Michael Molinaro

MND-B PAO

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – As many of you can tell by now, I love sports. I just returned from leave that was planned around the opening weekend of college and pro football. Checking the scores helps me relax at night and getting any chance to read some sports news is like a receiving a Vitamin B shot. But what I enjoy even more than sports in general are sports rivalries.



Staff Sgt. Michael
'Mol' Molinaro

I believe that rivalries are what transcend sports from entertainment into something we really care about. You have to take it with a grain of salt and realize it is entertainment, and if your team loses, it's not life or death. However, it isn't like watching a movie and forgetting about it two minutes after you walk out of the theater. Many times, there are territorial rights involved, such as with high school and college sports. And when it comes to professional sports rivalries, the results often relate to your team's chances of making the postseason. There are some great rivalries today that even you aren't a fan of either team, you are glued to the set to watch the game unfold.

Since it's fall, let's begin with football rivalries. College football feasts off of rivalries. Some go back as far as the 19th century. They get so heated because they play year after year. Often times, they are playing for not only bragging rights but championships – and maybe most important of all, recruits. In-state rivalries often carry over grudges from high school games. It is awesome!

Ohio State-Michigan is one of the best rivalries and of late has had the most on the line when the fierce rivals have met. "The Game," as it is known, usually has one, if not both, teams ranked in the top five. The stakes?

Normally,

the victor moves on to a BCS bowl and, as we have seen with Ohio State and the past two years, the BCS championship.

Down south, a number of rivalries are as good as any you will find. "The Iron Bowl" between Alabama and Auburn is as heated as any and often is the deciding factor for top recruits from the state for which school they will attend. Florida and Georgia play at a neutral site every year in what is known as "The World's Largest Outdoor Cocktail Party." Texas and Texas A&M duke it out every year in a battle for bragging rights as the best in the Lone Star State. Out west, "The Civil War" between Oregon and Oregon State sometimes literally pits brother against brother, and the "Big Game" matches up Stanford and California. And who can forget the always-classic annual Army-Navy game.

Pro football has some established rivalries as well. Some of these are born over a period of time due to the two teams' success. Jumping out at me are two obvious ones – Green Bay-Chicago and Pittsburgh-Cleveland. The Packers-Bears have the longest rivalry in the league with some of the most intriguing matchups in the game's history, such as: Butkus-Nitchens. Halas-Lombardi. Soldier Field-Lambeau Field. It is a storied tradition, and the two teams face off twice a year. Also facing off twice a year are the Browns and Steelers. Separated by a mere 140 miles and a turnpike, these two franchises hate each other with a hidden respect. Fans would never, ever suggest that they root for the other team at any point of a season, but the two cities are so similar and the fans made from the same DNA that it is like they are looking at a mirror – except the Browns have those ugly uniforms. The Colts and Patriots have formed a rivalry this decade, much like Dallas and San Francisco did in the 90s.

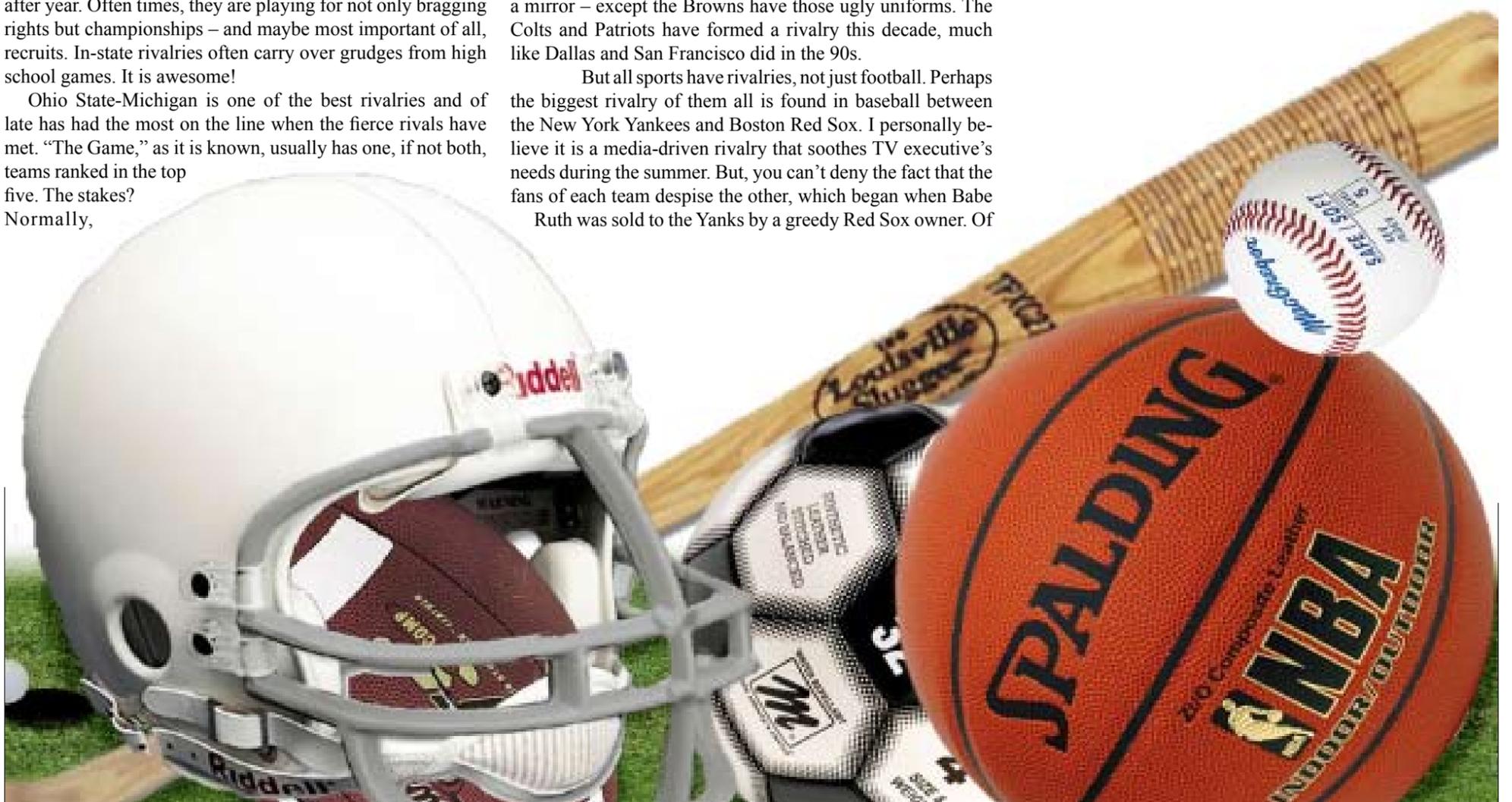
But all sports have rivalries, not just football. Perhaps the biggest rivalry of them all is found in baseball between the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox. I personally believe it is a media-driven rivalry that soothes TV executive's needs during the summer. But, you can't deny the fact that the fans of each team despise the other, which began when Babe Ruth was sold to the Yanks by a greedy Red Sox owner. Of

course, the fans then witnessed as the Bambino helped create the Yankees into maybe the most well-known sports franchise in the world. The second city also has a great rivalry between the Cubs and White Sox.

College basketball has one of the fiercest and best rivalries in all of sports between North Carolina and Duke. The two schools, separated by a mere seven miles, battle it out every year for supremacy in the ACC – and for potential recruits. The NBA on the other hand saw the revival of the great Boston-Los Angeles rivalry this past summer in the finals.

Rivalries don't belong only to team sports. Individual sports have their rivalries as well. Golf has attempted for years to market a rival for Tiger Woods, but let's face it, Phil Mickelson is his rival – even though Tiger almost always has his way with Phil on the course. In Tennis, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer own the sport right now, not only with their talent, but with fan's desire to see the two rivals meet in every tournament's final match. NASCAR may have seen a rivalry sprout this summer between Kyle Busch and Carl Edwards that could be worth watching for years to come.

Rivalries keep us coming back year after year. Some say that a rivalry only exists if both teams win from time to time, but I disagree. Rivalries are created by the traditions and disgust for the other team. When your team wins the big game against the cross-town rival, no matter what the records are, you carry that happiness into the offseason for months of gloating and flexing those muscles. Until next time ...



Around the F O B



Photo by Sgt. Whitney Houston, 2nd SBCT PAO, 25th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Ugandan soldiers perform a traditional tribal dance at Camp Taji, northwest of Baghdad, Sept. 14. The Ugandans volunteered to dance in commemoration of those that lost their lives to a terrorist attack on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001.



Photo by Capt. Clint Rusch, Co. C, 1-68 AR, 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

BEIDHA'A, Iraq – Sgt. Ben Rohan, a native of Crofton, Md., hands out bubble gum to children outside Mahmud's Chai and Hookah Shop in the Beidha'a neighborhood of northern Baghdad Sept. 5. Rohan serves with Team STEEL, Company C, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Guillermo Allen, 2nd SBCT, 25th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Pfc. Silas Giberti (left), Sgt. Nicolas LeMay, a native of Ojai, Calif., and Sgt. Aaron Walters, a native of Wichita, Kan., recite the oath of enlistment given by 1st Lt. Jacob Sweatland, who conducted the reenlistment Aug. 16. Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers from the 2nd Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment "Strykehorse," 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, recently received the flag from Hell's Kitchen firehouse, which was home to Engine 34 and Ladder 21 in New York. The flag flew outside the fire station on Sept. 11, 2001.