

IRON STRONG DAILY



With a new unit comes a new start in Diyala



Lt. Col James DeMoss, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Kyle Crump, 3-21st Sgt. Maj., case the battalion's colors during the Sept. 11 deployment ceremony for 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division at Fort Wainwright Alaska. The brigade's colors were cased during the ceremony for the trip to Iraq.

Story and photo by By Spc. Opal Vaughn 14th Public Affairs Detachment

The 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, based out of Fort Wainwright, Alaska, is transitioning to take control of operations from 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment while 2SCR is scheduled for redeployment in the upcoming month.

1/25th SBCT is gradually assuming command and control of Forward Operating Base Warhorse located in Diyala, Iraq. In order to prepare for their new mission, 1/25th SBCT underwent months of pre-mobilization and mobilization training.

"Obviously we've been preparing for Iraq for a long time, specifically for Diyala," said Col. Burt Thompson, 1/25th SBCT brigade

commander.

"We established goals early on that we want to be an efficient and effective fighting force," Thompson stated. "Our primary mission is to help Diyala govern itself and make it more independent in support of the governor and his goals and objectives for Diyala. If we can show the people that we're going to take care of them, they will be secure and they have the ability to prosper economically, then they will be successful," Thompson added.

Upon arriving to Iraq, Soldiers of the 1/25th SBCT are training closely with their counterparts to fully understand how to perform and execute their duties.

"This regiment has done an excellent job at Warhorse," Thompson stated. "Warhorse needed major improvements and 2SCR made it happen. The trash has been cleaned up, living quarters renovated, force protection updated and Soldier

morale facilities enhanced."

When it comes to changes Thompson believes in sticking to what has already proven successful. "I would like to continue what this regiment has been doing by getting at security in Diyala," Thompson said. "There is a lot of opportunity here in Iraq, we just need to tap into it, maintain security and get rid of the negative influence by insurgents and al-Qaida."

Soldiers learn to adapt to new environments when relocated. So leaving Alaska's cold weathered environment to deploy to Iraq's hot weathered environment is no different.

"Transitioning from Alaska to Iraq has been fairly smooth," said Command Sgt. Maj. Gabriel Cervantes, 1/25th SBCT command sergeant major. "We're coming from an area that

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Keeping their AO safe; IA, IP sweep city of insurgents

**Story and photos by
Pfc. Adam Carl Blazak
11th Public Affairs Detachment**

Al Bi'aj, Iraq –Just south of Tal Afar near the Iranian border sits the small city of Al Bi'aj. Because its location is a crossroad to many urban areas in northern Iraq, insurgents have claimed the city as their own by using it like a rest stop.

“Historically, the city has been used as a supply area for the insurgency,” said Pittsburgh native Capt. P. Rodgers, executive officer, 0332 Military Transition Team, 2nd Battalion, 11th Brigade, 3rd Iraqi Army Division. “We’re going to close off the area and deny this to them.”

And denying the enemy any sort of sanctuary in this Sunni village is just what happened.

In the early morning of Oct. 7, scores of Iraqi Security Force vehicles, planked by their U.S. counterparts, lined the perimeter of the city. In a bid to stomp out the insurgency, the Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police teamed with U.S. forces in a cordon and search operation. Dubbed Operation Lion’s Gate, the mission was multifaceted.

Each house has been numbered, each vehicle has been registered and residents filled out personal information forms, which will help keep tabs on the traffic in and out of the city, Rodgers said.

During the mission, ISF searched each house in accordance with an elaborate plan established by the commanders of their military alongside with the U.S. military transition team and police transition team representatives working in their area of operations.

Simply put, the ISF was in Al Bi’aj “searching every room in every house,”

in the words of Iraqi Army Soldier Said Maosho, 2nd Battalion, 11th Brigade, 3rd Division.

“We’re here to search for weapons and get names of insurgents in the area,” said Iraqi Police officer Sabah Salem, Iraqi Police Emergency Response Battalion. “It’s good to provide security for the people.”

While this was the largest IP, IA operation, the two security forces have come together in the past to keep their area of operations safe.

The IA and IP have had a habitual relationship, Rodgers said.

“They see the benefits of their work, and they get excited,” he said.

By providing security in their area of operations, the ISF have developed a working relationship with the citizens whom they protect.

Prior to the operation, the ISF spent four days in the city painting numbers on homes, handing out citizen profile sheets and collecting vehicle registration datum, Rodgers said.

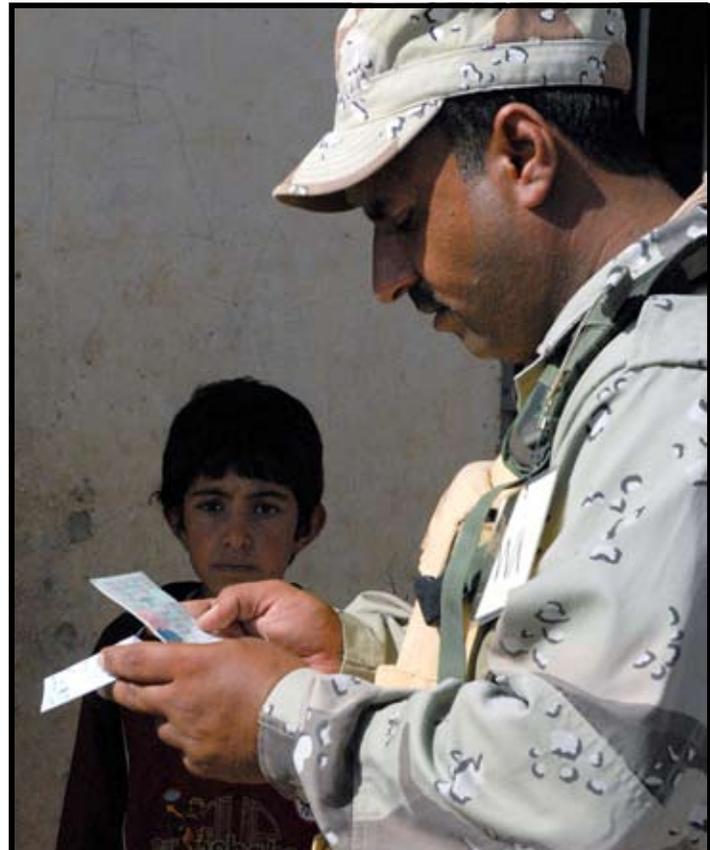
“We feel safer when they’re around,” said Al Bi’aj resident Farhan Hamad. “With their presence, the situation has gotten better.”

After the operation

was successfully completed, plans were already in the works to provide the citizens with a humanitarian drive.

Rodgers said that there will be a medical operation and a food drop in the city after the operation.

“This shows that we can provide them security,” he said. “The Government of Iraq cares about the people in this town.”



An Iraqi Soldier, 2nd Battalion, 11th Brigade, 3rd Iraqi Army Division, carefully inspects an Al Bi’aj resident’s personal identification form during a city-wide sweep to disrupt insurgent activity, dubbed Operation Lion’s Gate, Oct. 7. Both the Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police teamed up with U.S. Forces to help safeguard the city by providing vehicle and house registration along with personal identification forms for each city resident.

Commanding General: Maj. Gen. Mark P. Hertling
Public Affairs Officer: Maj. Margaret Kageleiry
Public Affairs NCOIC: Master Sgt. Nancy Morrison

Contributing Writers: Spc. Ryan Elliott, Pfc. Adam Carl Blazak,
Spc. Karla P. Elliott
Layout and Design: Spc. Ryan Elliott, 14th PAD
Editor: Staff Sgt. Mark Albright, 14th Public Affairs Detachment

Contact the *Iron Strong* at VOIP: 242-1190, DSN: 318-849-0089 or email mark.albright@iraq.centcom.mil

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Gladiators...ready, contenders...ready

**Photos By Staff Sgt. Kyle J. Richardson
11th Public Affairs Detachment**



Corinne Van Ryck De Groot, Panther, originally from Guyana, South America, centers the flag for the tug-of-war match against Soldiers and American Gladiators at a Morale, Welfare and Recreation sponsored event held at the Main Fitness Center located on Forwarding Operating Base Marez.



Chicago native, Beth Horn, Venom, sides with Soldiers during a tug-of-war match during a Morale, Welfare and Recreation sponsored event held at the Main Fitness Center located on Forwarding Operating Base Marez, Mosul, Iraq, Oct. 4. Soldiers and Venom pulled with all of their might to pull the flag to their side of the gym.

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is further than most, so it takes us a little longer to get here; Soldiers and equipment.”

Although 2SCR will be casing its colors and leaving its former responsibilities in capable hands, the unit’s mission is far from complete.

“The success of this organization is evident from Baghdad to Baqubah and from

Muqdadiyah to Mosul; as warriors and ambassadors, 2SCR has brought great honor to the Regiment, the Army and our Nation,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Victor Martinez, 2SCR regimental command sergeant major.

“Although our focus will take on different directions, our enemy’s will not and we need to be cognizant of that. We must continue to be vigilant until the very end,” Martinez added.

Continuing to be vigilant, 2SCR’s new mission will be redeployment and reuniting with family, friends and

loved ones back in Vilseck, Germany.

“In our absence, our spouses, our children and our friends have also endured hardship, separation and loss,” Martinez stated. “As we reunite we must be mindful of that fact and just as we have changed, things back home may have changed as well,” Martinez added.



Just as the excitement of reuniting with family, friends and loved ones is at hand, we must not forget the Dragoon’s who will not be returning at all.

“As we prepare to redeploy, pause to remember those who will not redeploy with us,” said Col. John RisCassi, 2SCR regimental commander.

“Our fallen brothers and sisters left for each of us a legacy we must carry on. We will honor each of them through our actions today and tomorrow, never forgetting their sacrifice and living out their example of selfless service in all that we do,” RisCassi added.

Remaining professional until the end, 2SCR is “always ready.”

“This Regiment has earned a stellar reputation here in Iraq to complement its magnificent history. A history envied by others and carried on the shoulders of even the youngest Dragoon,” RisCassi stated. “2SCR is remembered not only for the courage we’ve showed on the battlefield but for how we will leave Iraq and return to Vilseck.”

ELECTIONS

NEW YORK (AFP) — They stumbled in 2000, and fell on their faces in 2004 -- so can anyone believe what opinion pollsters say about Barack Obama's lead over John McCain today?

Scientific surveys aimed at predicting the winner of the November 4 election are proving harder than ever, polling experts admit.

"It's going to be a very difficult election to predict because we can't use normal statistical models," said Steffan Schmidt, a political science professor at Iowa State University.

In 2000, major media US broadcasters may have helped tip the balance of an extraordinarily tight race in favor of Republican George W. Bush by announcing that he had beaten Democrat rival Al Gore in Florida.

The call, based on calculations of preliminary data, was retracted two hours later, but the issue of who won Florida proved the key to overall victory, eventually awarded to Bush.

Even more embarrassing was the US media's reporting of exit polls in 2004 that showed Democrat John Kerry cruising to victory against Bush. When real votes were counted, Bush emerged the winner.

Now, four years later, pollsters face a new and unique set of problems.

The biggest imponderable is the significance of racism in an election where Democrat Obama is bidding to be the first black president in US history.

One theory -- the so-called "Bradley-Wilder effect" -- is that people tell pollsters they support Obama because they are afraid of sounding racist. Then in the privacy of the polling booth on November 4 they promptly opt for the white Republican candidate, McCain.

The latest national opinion polls show Obama maintaining an average lead of six points over McCain.

In other words, the slim, yet firm lead held by Obama in opinion polls may prove hollow on election day.

The theory took shape when a black former mayor of Los Angeles, Tom Bradley, lost the 1982 California governor's

race to a white opponent, while opinion polls had pointed to victory.

A 1989 race in which the black candidate, Doug Wilder, only just squeaked through as Virginia governor, despite having been forecast to win by 10 percent, appeared to confirm the phenomenon.

Many other elections involving black candidates have not adhered to the pattern, but a presidential election puts unique pressures on voters. "We have no idea exactly how that's going to affect the polling," Schmidt said.

Carroll Doherty, associate director at Pew Research Center, a polling agency, told AFP, "we are entering the unknown."

"The Wilder effect is one of the great issues hanging over this election that we've never encountered before."

Doherty said there was little evidence of any Bradley-Wilder effect during the Democratic primary battles Obama fought against Hillary Clinton and other white contenders.

Yet in a tight election, as many predict on November 4, every element counts.

"We know that race is a factor in the consideration of some people. How big is not clear. But even a two- or four-percent change can make a difference."

Another hurdle in making accurate polls this time is the reliance on the landline telephone for reaching respondents -- automatically excluding almost the fifth of the population that uses mobiles or other communications.

"We are now down to only 79 percent of the population using landlines," Humphrey Taylor, chairman of The Harris Poll, said.

"Particularly among the young and college

students, almost no one has a landline. Then you have Skype and there are... (those) with no phone at all."

Polling by Pew that does incorporate responses from mobile phone users results in a small but significant upturn for Obama, whose supporters tend to be younger and higher-tech than those of McCain, Doherty said.

"Perhaps Obama could get as much as two to four points more support if cell phones are included. That doesn't sound like a great deal, but then the last election was decided by three points."

What reputable polling organizations, such as Pew, Harris or Gallup, stress is that their own questioners bear primary responsibility for producing accurate results.

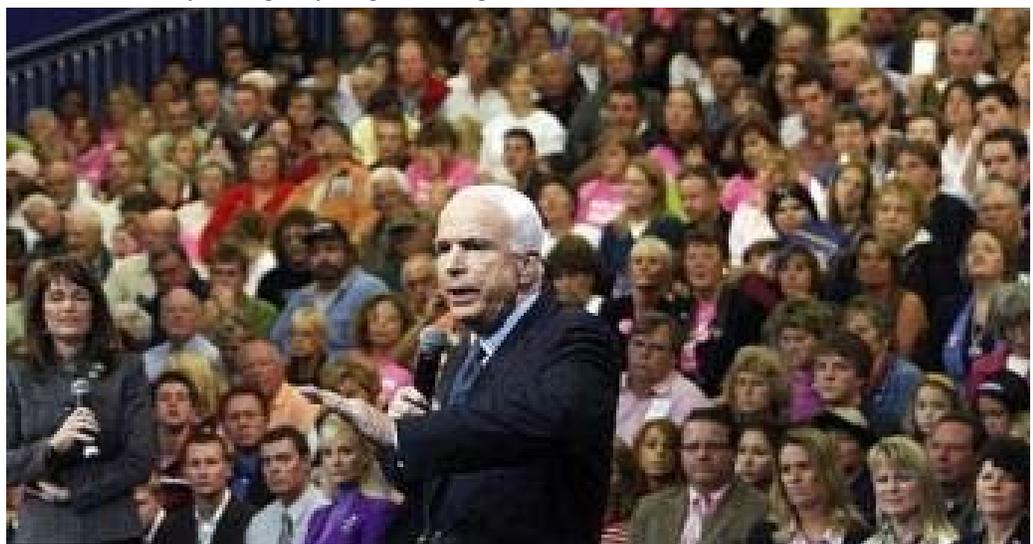
A one word change in a question can elicit a different response.

For example, in the aftermath of the Wall Street meltdown, the phrasing to describe Congress' multi-billion-dollar response was especially loaded. Was it a rescue, an intervention, or a bailout?

The National Council on Public Polls, an association of polling agencies, warns that the order of questions can also have a subtle impact.

"If people are asked what they think of the economy before they are asked their opinion of the president," the council says on its website, then "the presidential popularity rating will probably be lower than if you had reversed the order of the questions."

As Taylor, of the Harris Poll, said, there is no rest for the conscientious pollster.



BASEBALL



All the fun came in the first few innings Sunday night, and by the time the game cruised to an end the Los Angeles Dodgers were right back in the National League Championship Series.

The Dodgers scored five in the first, led by a bases-loaded triple from Blake DeWitt, on the way to an emotional 7-2 home victory over the Philadelphia Phillies that left the best-of-seven at 2-1 Philadelphia. Game 4 is Monday night on the west coast.

Hiroki Kuroda threw six-plus innings of excellent work to earn the win, and he precipitated a low-action bench-clearing argument by throwing one right over Shane Victorino's head in the third inning.

That toss seemed to even things out for one that went behind the head of L.A.'s Manny Ramirez in Game 2 and the affair settled down from there in front of a record Dodger Stadium crowd of 56,800.

Moyer pounded

Philly starter Jamie Moyer looked every one of his 45 years, lasting just 32 pitches through 1 1/3 innings of six-run, six-hit work.

Dodgers put up that five-spot up in the first before the veteran lefty had broken a sweat.

With two on, Ramirez singled to left field, scoring Rafael Furcal from second base and it was 1-0. Moyer then plunked

Russell Martin on the knee to load them again before getting Nomar Garciaparra looking at strike three.

Casey Blake then singled home Andre Ethier to make it 2-0 and, an out later, DeWitt bounced one deep into the right field corner at Chavez Ravine, clearing the bases and giving Los Angeles a huge cushion.

Philadelphia got a run back on a single by Pedro Feliz that plated Ryan Howard in the top of the second but Moyer gave up a home run to Furcal in the bottom of that frame to extend the lead to 6-1.

An out later, oyer was done.

"He had a tough time tonight," said Philly manager Charlie Manuel. "They came out swinging on him.

"They were not taking very many pitches and they hit some balls hard and also seemed like everything they hit went through for a hit."

Much ado led to nothing

The arguing began in earnest at the top of the third inning.

Moyer had hit the Dodgers' Martin in the knee in the first, then reliever Clay Condrey put one up by his head in the second.

Kuroda replied by sailing the ball over Victorino's helmet in the third and, when he grounded out, the dugouts emptied.

Ramirez — who had one thrown behind his own head back in Game 2 by Brett Myers and wasn't happy about the lack of a response from the Dodger pitching staff at that time — was right at the front of the pack over by first base.

The umpires broke everyone up and warned both teams, meaning anyone who hit a batter the rest of the night was likely to be ejected.

Afterwards, Victorino reiterated what he seemed to be yelling at Kuroda while pointing at his helmet during the third inning incident.

"Someone was bound to get hit, the situation called for it," the Phillies' outfielder said. "Just don't throw at my head."

Martin had an answer for that, too.

"It wasn't at his head, it was over his head," the Canadian said. "We're just trying to make a statement. It's part of the game. Manny looked a little more steamed than I was."

Philadelphia threatened one more time, in a promising seventh inning that produced just one run.

Three base hits with none out chased Kuroda in favour of reliever Cory Wade. The righty, who started the season in double-A, got the next three Phillies in order to keep the score at 7-2.

Jonathan Broxton finished up in the ninth for the Dodgers.



CHINA

YANGON (AFP) — Myanmar authorities said Tuesday they had removed seven imported dairy products from store shelves -- one of them from China -- after they were found to contain traces of melamine.

An official statement in the state press did not specify where all of the products had been made but at least one came from China, where four children have died and at least 53,000 fell ill from melamine-tainted milk products.

The announcement came just days after nine Chinese products were banned from Myanmar store shelves.

"Importation, processing, distribution and using... milk powder contaminated with melamine that is unfit for human consumption are hereby prohibited," the statement in the New Light of Myanmar newspaper said.

The health and industry ministries will continue to test all imported dairy products for traces of the industrial chemical, it said.

Myanmar's food and drug watchdog has already destroyed 16 tonnes of imported Chinese baby formula, and authorities had urged people not use Chinese milk and dairy products because of the widespread tainted milk scandal.

Vietnam has complained to Indonesia of possible melamine contamination in Indonesian-made biscuits, a report said Tuesday.

Vietnamese authorities informed Indonesia's embassy in Hanoi that Indonesian-made Khong Guan biscuits could be tainted with the chemical, Trade Ministry Director Subagyo was quoted as saying by the Antara news agency.

Indonesia's food and drug monitoring agency has been ordered to probe the issue, Subagyo said.

"Based on the results of our own tests the product is not contaminated with melamine," food and drug agency chairman Husniah Rubiana Thamrin Akib was quoted as saying.

Khong Guan biscuits had already been tested in Indonesian and Vietnamese laboratories and had come up negative for melamine, usually used in making plastics, she said.

"Our products are safe because we import milk from Europe, Australia and New Zealand," Akib said.

Indonesia ordered food producers to avoid using Chinese-made milk products in

September after four Chinese children died and at least 53,000 fell ill from drinking milk or milk products laced with melamine.

Some manufacturers had been using the chemical to make watered-down milk appear to have a higher protein content.

An array of China-made foods and drinks have been removed from store shelves around the world since the contamination first came to light last month.



FINLAND

(AP) Martti Ahtisaari, the former Finnish president and United Nations envoy, has been awarded this year's Nobel Peace Prize for his work as a mediator in international conflicts.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee said it had chosen Mr Ahtisaari, 71, for his "important efforts, on several continents and over more than three decades, to resolve international conflicts".

Diplomats and analysts said the selection of Mr Ahtisaari should help bolster the fragile peace dividend in both Kosovo and Aceh.

They added it also returns the prize to its traditional focus of conflict resolution after politically tinged awards in recent years. The 2007 award was shared by the United Nations' International Panel on Climate Change and Al Gore, the former US vice-president, for their work on raising awareness about climate change.

Mr Ahtisaari's first big success was helping to secure Namibia's independence from South Africa in 1990 as special representative of the UN secretary general.

At the end of a long and complex negotiating process South Africa was finally

persuaded to end its occupation of neighbouring Namibia in return for the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.

"Namibia was absolutely the most important because it took such a long time," Mr Ahtisaari told Norwegian broadcaster NRK on Friday.

He also successfully mediated in 2005 to end the three decade-long conflict in Aceh between Indonesia and the free Aceh Movement rebels that had killed 15,000 people.

Most recently, Mr Ahtisaari helped broker the deal that ended Nato's 1999 Kosovo air campaign and more recently, his blueprint is



the basis for the newly independent Kosovo's constitution.

Pieter Feith, the EU's special envoy for Kosovo who also led the international Aceh monitoring mission -- which oversaw the implementation of that peace deal, said it was a "very deserving" choice and "very helpful" in Kosovo and Aceh.

"It sends a clear signal that his proposal is the best one for reconciliation [in Kosovo]," he said. "It will energise the people working together for reconciliation in Kosovo and Aceh."

He has also been involved in mediation in Iraq, Northern Ireland, Central Asia and the Horn of Africa.

"Today Ahtisaari is an outstanding international mediator," said the Nobel committee.

Mr Ahtisaari, a former secretary of state in the Finnish foreign ministry, is in the proud tradition of Nordic diplomats who have gone on to play important roles at the UN, which he joined in 1977.

His international prominence as a UN diplomat helped him win the first direct election in 1994 to become the Finnish president.