



# NET CALL

## 56 SBCT hones skills during JRTC rotation

By Sgt. DOUGLAS ROLES

**FORT POLK**— Soldiers of the 56 Stryker Brigade Combat Team honed their warfighting skills and tested their endurance on the simulated battlefield of the Fort Polk, La. Joint Readiness Training Center in late November and early December. Being immersed in the Iraq-like training area helped prepare the brigade for its real world deployment to Iraq in early 2009.

Soldiers encountered IEDs (improvised explosive devices), mortar attacks on their forward operating bases and, sometimes, irate “villagers” during their rotation. JRTC’s trainer/mentors lent their collective deployment experience to the Pennsylvania National Guard brigade as it worked to partner with the role-playing “Government of Iraq” leaders in increasing security for the fictitious country and building hope for the future.

“I’m immensely proud of the soldiers of the brigade,” said Col. Marc Ferraro, brigade commander. “We have accomplished so much since our September mobilization.”

“Every step along the way thus far the soldiers have amazed me in their abilities to perform and represent their state and their country,” Ferraro said.

The force-on-force portion of the JRTC rotation began Saturday, Nov. 29 and ran to Monday, Dec. 8. The kickoff was preceded by a three-day command post exercise.

Maj. Rob Phillips, JRTC Operations Group public affairs officer, said the purpose of the rotation is to ensure the 56th is trained for its upcoming mission.

“The training the units receive is current with what happens in

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## Congressional visit focuses on soldiers

By Sgt. DOUGLAS ROLES

**CAMP SHELBY** -- Pennsylvania Army National Guard soldiers training at Camp Shelby, Miss. and Fort Polk, La. for deployment to Iraq in early 2009 had opportunity to talk to visiting, U.S. Congressmen from four Pennsylvania districts Wednesday, Nov. 12.

Soldiers from various units of the 56<sup>th</sup> Stryker Brigade Combat Team met with Reps. Tim Holden (D-17<sup>th</sup> PA), Bill Shuster (R-9<sup>th</sup> PA), Charles Dent (R-15<sup>th</sup> PA) and Jim Gerlach (R-6<sup>th</sup> PA) during breakfast in a Camp Shelby military dining facility. The congressmen then met more soldiers from their respective districts during a mid-morning tour of the Mississippi post.

The visit gave soldiers a chance to voice any concerns they have about deployment, training, re-employment upon returning home and other is-

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Photo by Master Sgt. Sean Whelan

Congressmen Bill Shuster (R-9<sup>th</sup> PA) and Charles Dent (R-15<sup>th</sup> PA) talk to soldiers of the 2-104<sup>th</sup> Cavalry at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. The congressmen were part of a delegation of four Pennsylvania congressmen and one U.S. representative from Mississippi visiting Shelby to talk to Pennsylvania Guardsmen who are training for a deployment to Iraq in January of 2009. Officials toured the post following a breakfast with soldiers.

# Congressional

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sues. The officials spent the afternoon at Fort Polk, observing a live fire exercise.

The congressmen said they traveled to the two training sites to hear firsthand how soldiers are doing as their movement overseas draws closer.

"The purpose is to come down here and see what our guardsmen are going through for training," Gerlach said. "It's one thing voting on this stuff on the floor. It's another thing to see it in action."

"This is very helpful. We'll be able to deliver their message to the appropriate folks in Washington," Dent said.

"They've had some issues, which is fairly common. Overall it's been positive," Shuster said of feedback he received from soldiers from his district. "I'm impressed with how eager these soldiers are to deploy and to serve their country."

Soldiers appreciated the opportunity to talk to their representatives. First Sgt. David McCaw, a Schuylkil Haven resident serving with Troop B, 2-104<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, and several other soldiers had break-

fast with Holden.

"He was definitely receptive to what we had to say," McCaw said. "I'm glad I got the opportunity."

"There is obviously concern for us from home," said Lt. Col. Sam Hayes of Lewistown, 2-112<sup>th</sup> Bn. commander. "We appreciate the fact that they're here talking to soldiers."

Brig. Gen. Frederick Hodges, deputy chief of Army legislative affairs, said the congressmen traveled to Shelby out of concern for soldiers and because they have a responsibility to make such trips.

"They have a constitutional duty to make sure the soldiers are properly equipped and trained," said Hodges during the breakfast.

"The members are here because they genuinely are concerned about soldiers. The members really do care about these guys despite varying personal opinions about the war. I've been very impressed by that."

Hodges also said that the congressional delegation visit is done because of the

investment involved in the training.

"The amount of money that's going into this thing here is huge," he said.

The morning's activities included a walk-through of a lane used to familiarize soldiers with various types of IEDs (improvised explosive devices), the biggest threat to soldier safety in theatre. Officials also observed loading of brigade equipment onto railcars at Shelby, as the brigade prepared to move to Polk for a month of training prior to mobilizing to Fort Dix. N.J. enroute to Iraq.

56 SBCT Commander Col. Marc Ferraro explained that the conversion of the 56<sup>th</sup> to a Stryker brigade has meant a \$1.5 billion boost to the state economy and will include building projects for new armories. He said the brigade is training on state-of-the-art equipment that it will use in Iraq.

"When we get in country, we will be the best-equipped brigade in the military," Ferraro said. "This is a success story for the Guard."

The PA Guard is the nation's most de-

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## Brigade's master gunners recognized



Photo by Master Sgt. Sean Whelan

CAMP SHELBY -The 56 SBCT's top guns, Pfc. Chad Morral, (second from left) driver (Everett); 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Derek Wisner, vehicle commander (Belleville); and Staff Sgt. Miles Fenstermacher, gunner (Mansfield), were recognized by brigade leaders Nov. 12, 2008 after a long day on the Shelby ranges. The Stryker crew, from Company A, 2-112<sup>th</sup>, was presented with a brigade coin and MGS Top Gun bags for placing first in mounted gun system firing at Camp Shelby. Making the presentation were Col. Andrew Schafer, 56 SBCT deputy commander (left), and Command Sgt. Maj. John Jones, 56 SBCT command sergeant major. The soldiers received a certificate and a tote bag embroidered with keystones.

# Commander talks family program, employers' support with visiting PA congressmen

By Sgt. DOUGLAS ROLES

Speaking to a congressional delegation visiting Camp Shelby in November (See story Page 1) Col. Marc Ferraro, 56 SBCT commander, said there is "a triade of support" in the National Guard" comprised of solders, family and employers.

The family support mission can be more difficult to carry out in the National Guard than in the active duty component because soldiers drilling in any one unit may be from various regions of the state, Ferraro said.

He told the legislators there are currently two family support groups in the brigade compared to one each at the battalion level in the active component.

"Those two family support groups are very important to me," said Ferraro. "I conduct monthly teleconferences with all the family support groups."

Ferraro said he has worked to get six more family readiness positions funded for the brigade, to bring it up to par with the active component. Ferraro is hopeful that change will soon take place.

Congressmen asked questions about soldiers being re-employed by their civilian employers following de-mob and asked Ferraro about military healthcare for activated Guardsmen..

Ferraro informed the congressmen that a "Boss Lift" in February at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., showed employers of Guard soldiers how advanced the commonwealth's reserve component has become. Employers were amazed at the array of modern equipment used by the Guard, Ferraro said.

"Employers have been very supportive over the last three years, over the transformation," he said of the additional drills and weeks of training required by the 56th's fielding as a Stryker brigade.

Ferraro touched briefly on healthcare for deploying soldiers. He said if the Army requires a mobilizing soldier to have a certain procedure in order to deploy, the Army should pay for that care. Under the current set up Guard soldiers are not covered by Tri-Care as they move through the initial soldier readiness process.

"Tri-Care should go into effect a year in front of the deployment," Ferraro said. "I feel that should be one year out."

## JRTC

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theater," he said. "They are trained in lethal and non-lethal exercises to ensure the familiarity with anything they would encounter in theater."

Phillips, who works as a JRTC trainer/mentor, said there are approximately 700 role players and nearly 200 contracted civilians who participate in the exercise. Soldiers must incorporate the use of interpreters into their missions. The MILES laser engagement system is used on individuals and equipment, making soldiers even more cognizant of the dangers posed

by the JRTC OPFOR.

"When the unit leaves the JRTC they are trained in the soldiering skills required

*"This is by far the capstone training event ...,"*

**Sgt. Maj. James McDonald**  
**56 SBCT Ops sergeant major**

to ensure their mission is a success," Phillips said.

Sgt. Maj. James McDonald, brigade operations sergeant major, said the theatre immersion training is a valuable rehearsal for the upcoming deployment. He said the training "focuses on situations we'll encounter or have the potential to encounter."

McDonald said the Army has made a big investment in the longer-than-normal 42-day rotation for the 56th at Fort Polk.

"We're coming here to hone the edge of the knife," McDonald said. "This is by far the capstone training event, the best thing to prepare our soldiers for their mission."

## Congressional

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ployed Guard and the only reserve component to boast a Stryker brigade, one of seven such brigades in the Army.

"There's a reason they're the most deployed, they're the best," Holden said while meeting soldiers working at the Camp Shelby railhead. "We're very proud of the PA Guard being the only Guard to have a Stryker brigade."

U.S. Representative Gene Taylor (D-4<sup>th</sup> Miss.) hosted the delegation from Pennsylvania. Taylor and Shuster serve on the

Armed Services Committee, with Taylor chairing.

Ferraro told the congressmen that 60 percent of the soldiers deploying with the 56<sup>th</sup> have mobilized before. He explained the Stryker's unique role.

"The Stryker is not a fighting vehicle like the Bradley. It is a capabilities platform," he said, adding that all of the brigade's Stryker vehicles have been outfitted with slat armor for the train-up period, a first for Stryker units preparing for deployment to Iraq.

**Net Call** is a publication of the 56th Stryker Brigade Public Affairs Office.

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56th SBCT Commander

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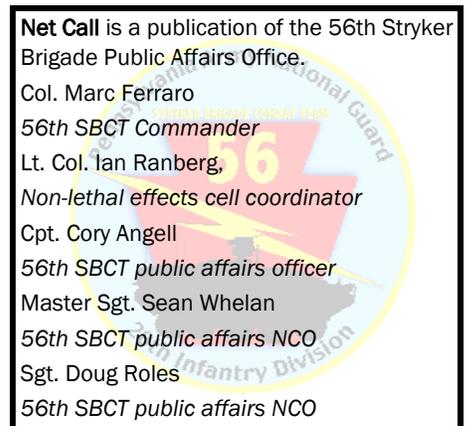
56th SBCT public affairs officer

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Did you know?

## Army National Guard traces lineage to December 1636

By Col. ANDREW SCHAFER

56 SBCT DCO

Did you know that the Army National Guard traces its lineage back to Dec. 13, 1636?

### 1636—The First Muster

When the National Guard's oldest regiments met for their first drill on the village green in Salem, Mass. they were barely three months old, having been organized on Dec. 13, 1636, the date we now celebrate as the National Guard Birthday.

In 1637, the English settlements in North America were a tiny fringe along the eastern seaboard. As settlement pushed west into the interior, the institution of the militia, which the colonists brought with them from England, went with them. The militia tradition meant citizens organizing themselves into military units, responsible for their own defense. The militia, later called the National Guard, has fought in all the nation's major wars, as it fights today in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Its oldest units, like the one pictured here, are the oldest units in the United States military and among the oldest military units in the world.



## PA Guard soldiers make Veterans Day visit to Mississippi vets home

By Sgt. ANNA WHITE

328th BSB Guest Columnist

On Monday, November 12, 2008, HHC 328<sup>th</sup> Brigade Support Battalion took a field trip to the Mississippi State Veterans Home, in support of Veterans Day and honoring those who served - past, present and future. We were greeted by many smiling faces when we arrived. We got to learn about WWII and the Vietnam War, and their experiences. The veterans were proud and moved that we came to visit.

One of the vets we got to meet is Evans Williams, president of the resident council. We presented two Keystone cutouts that said thank you to the home. Williams thanked us on behalf of the home. The Veterans paved the way for the future military. Another person we got to meet is a man named Phillip. He served in OIF, and is the youngest resident. Phillip is 21 years old. Troyce Patrick is the eldest member of the home, he is 96 years old. Mr. Patrick served in WWII. It was an honor and a privilege to go and visit the Veterans and spend time with them.



Submitted photo

Pennsylvania Army National Guard soldiers from the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team took time away from mobilization training at Camp Shelby, Miss. to spend time with residents of the Mississippi State Veterans Home on Veterans Day. The gathering of soldiers represented several generations of military service.