

Merry Christmas

The Ivy Leaf

Established in 1917 to honor those who serve

VOL. 2, NO. 27

MULTI-NATIONAL DIVISION - BAGHDAD

"STEADFAST AND LOYAL"

DECEMBER 22, 2008



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jason Thompson, MND-B PAO

Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond (center) and Command Sgt. Maj. John Gioia, command team for 4th Infantry Division and Multi-National Division – Baghdad, cut a cake to celebrate the 91st birthday of the 4th Inf. Div. during a cake cutting ceremony in the division's headquarters building Dec. 10.

By Sgt. Jason Thompson MND-B PAO

BAGHDAD – The 4th Infantry Division has a long and distinguished history that includes combat in four wars – which is proudly displayed by the 23 campaign streamers that adorn its organizational colors.

Nicknamed the Ivy Division, it is the fourth oldest division in the Army and was formed Dec. 10, 1917 at Camp Greene, N.C., under the command of Maj. Gen. George Cameron.

During its "Steadfast and Loyal" service to the United States of America and the U.S. Army, more than 550,000 Soldiers have proudly worn the distinctive Ivy patch on their left shoulder, creating a legacy of dedicated service to the nation that has spanned more than nine decades since its inception to fight in the "Great War" of World War I.

It is fitting that as an infantry division born of

war, with a history forged by conflict, the 4th Inf. Div. celebrated its 91st birthday Dec. 10 while engaged in combat operations in Baghdad.

"I truly love this division," said Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond, a Hattiesburg, Miss., native, the commanding general of the 4th Inf. Div. and Multi-National Division – Baghdad. "This division is the only division in the Army which uses the word "Loyal" within its motto. The Soldiers are indeed loyal – they are Steadfast and Loyal.

"The Soldiers of the Ivy Division have done a magnificent job, both past and present," he continued. "I am most honored to celebrate this division's 91st birthday with each and every Soldier who shares the same patch on their left shoulder."

The division first saw action during World War I, seeing combat in five major campaigns.

see **Birthday** Pg.3

Solar power project provides energy for Ameriyah Clinic

By Sgt. Brian Tierce
2nd HBCT PAO, 1st Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – The citizens of the Ameriyah district of northwest Baghdad have found a way to not only provide power for themselves but to also provide power where it matters most.

The Ameriyah Clinic was fitted with solar power panels Nov. 25 with the hopes of becoming energy independent from the Baghdad power grid – and the use of solar power is perhaps the most appropriate approach to achieving energy independence in this area of predominant sunlight.

"In Baghdad we have, on average, 10 hours of sunlight on a daily basis," said Mahdi Johnny, electrical engineer advisor for the solar panel installation project. "What we are getting out of these rechargeable batteries is about 72 hours of power for every 10 hours of sun."

Johnny went on to add that providing much-needed power to the clinic will not only give the staff the ability to conduct patient care on a non-stop basis, but it will also provide the clinic the ability to store its medications and various other medical supplies, which require refrigeration to remain stable.

Providing solar power in Baghdad is not a new concept. Solar lights have been installed in other sections of Baghdad to reduce the freedom of movement of extremists. The unique aspect of this solar project is that the Iraqis took the lead right from the beginning.

"Coalition involvement in this project was actually very minimal," said Capt. Michael Nau, Joint Projects Management Office, 2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, who is a native of San Diego. "This is an Iraqi-planned, Iraqi-led operation from start to finish."

For the citizens of Ameriyah and the surrounding area, the electricity to the clinic will not only allow a place to receive care, it also alleviates the need to go in search of care.

"By providing the electricity right here, the patients in the clinic can stay here rather than having to be transferred somewhere else," added Johnny, who also added that the clinic hoped to power up the panels within the next 20 days.

For the MND-B Soldiers who worked as oversight on the project, seeing the Iraqis plan and execute the task of harnessing the sun's energy made all the sense in the world.

"One thing this country has a lot of is solar power," said Nau. "The sun is abundant out here – it only makes sense to use it."



Recently installed solar panels sit atop the roof of the Ameriyah clinic Nov. 25 in northwest Baghdad.

The Ivy Leaf **Commentary / Editorials**

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2nd SBCT, 25th Inf. Div.
4th BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.
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All editorial content of The *Ivy Leaf* is prepared, edited, provided and approved by the Multi-National Division - Baghdad Public Affairs Office.

Do you have a story to share?

The *Ivy Leaf* welcomes columns, commentaries, articles, letters and photos from readers.

Submissions should be sent to the Editor at ivyleaf.editor@gmail.com or the Public Affairs Sergeant Major at eric.d.lobsinger@mnd-b.army.mil and include author's name, rank, unit and contact information.

The *Ivy Leaf* reserves the right to edit submissions selected for the paper.

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CG sends holiday greetings to all MND-B Servicemembers

From Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond
Commanding general, MND-B and 4th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – To all Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines:

Holiday Greetings and a Happy New Year!

I am proud to serve with you this Holiday season. Your sacrifices are great, but these sacrifices have made a difference for Americans and for Iraqis.

We are away from our Families at home, but we are part of a Family here.

Our bonds with each other are strong, forged by combat, never to be broken.

Nothing replaces time with our Families, but there is no other place I would rather be than here with you this Holiday season.

You nobly serve your country – just as so many have done before, fighting for Liberty and Freedom. You inspire me every day.

Your accomplishments are tremendous. You have the enemy on the run, improved the capabilities of the Iraqi Security Forces and improved the lives of so many Iraqis. You have given the people of Iraq hope – hope of a brighter future of Freedom.

Many Soldiers have paid the ultimate sacrifice for this freedom. Eighty-nine of our Soldiers were killed in action and 607 of your comrades were wounded. Remember them and their Families in your prayers.

There is still much to do. Many challenges face us, and I know you are up to the task. We must remain vigilant in our mission.

We will not relax, and we will not let up. We will maintain an offensive spirit in all we do. We cannot, and will not, give up the gains achieved through our sweat and blood. We must continue to Attack, Attack, Attack, in everything we do.

During this Holiday season, I ask you to take care of one another. Make sure you contact your Families at home. Talk to them, but most important, listen to them.

On behalf of a grateful nation, thank you for serving your country with character and moral courage in defense of freedom. You are the strength of our Nation – our Nation's Credentials.

May God bless you, your Families and the United States of America.

Mission – Soldier – Family – Team.

Ironhorse 6.

Steadfast and Loyal.



From Command Sgt. Maj. John Gioia
4th Inf. Div., MND-B

BAGHDAD – For those of us here in Iraq, the holiday season is a time for us to reflect upon the past years accomplishments of the Ironhorse Division and Multi-National Division – Baghdad. It's a year in which we have seen go by with a great deal of progress here in the Baghdad area.

It is also a time for us to reflect on what we truly appreciate and miss most of all: Our Families back home. There is comfort knowing that this Christmas we won't be alone for we will share this holiday with our brothers and sisters in arms. It is a unique but strong extended Family.

It is also a time to remember our 89 fallen and their Families, who will not be able to celebrate in this joyous holiday. So I encourage you all to reflect on those loved ones back home, the great Soldiers here and our fallen comrades.

It seems like it was just yesterday that we celebrated Christmas when we arrived in theater 13 months ago – December 2007 – and here we are once again. There is a significant difference this time however. It's not something you can necessarily put your finger on, but there is a bit of a different feel this year. The streets of Baghdad are different, the people have changed and, for the first time, there's a certain sense of hope.

When we first arrived, for most Soldiers, the meaning of Christmas and the holiday season was really centered more on their Families back home. Although we were a strong team back home at Fort Hood, at Fort Carson, and at the various other installations from around the globe, we were trying to figure out where we all fit into the MND-B team.

Our team has now bonded and continues to grow even stronger. Over 13 months in combat, I am convinced that our Soldiers have developed a greater appreciation for their fellow Soldiers – those of whom they serve with on a daily basis.

Their fellow warriors have become new additions to their Families.

Although the holiday season is about their relationships with Families back home, the celebration will be here with

their comrades – and that should be special in and of itself.

Across the division, our goal is to provide Soldiers with a special feeling of home this holiday season. This is clearly evident when walking down the halls and seeing Christmas and holiday decorations going up.

In fact, as I came in today from out in sector, I admired the huge Ivy Leaf that now adorns the front of the headquarters building. When lit at night, you can see the festive lights from across Z-Lake.

The decorations are significant because anything you can do to bring a feeling of home here for Soldiers is important. For many, the deployment marks their first time away from home, so we make every effort to bring a sense of home to them.

Of course, as we reflect upon this special holiday season, it is also time to set our sights forward as well.

After Christmas, we all look forward to welcoming in a New Year. And after the New Year, we welcome in our 1st Cavalry Division comrades from Fort Hood as we prepare for the closure of this mission and reunions with our Families – which is probably the best gift that we can give to our Soldiers.

To all our Families, I thank you for being there for these great warriors – through the good times and the hard times – we know it has not been easy. In some aspects, there are times where it can be harder being back home than being here. Your sacrifices do not go without notice and we appreciate everything you do.

When a Soldier receives a piece of mail from home, and the smile spreads across his or her face, it is kind of like a Christmas all by itself.

You are a large part of our world, and we couldn't be as successful as we have been without your support.

Once again – Thank You.

Take care of yourself; take care of your comrades, and take care of your Families.

Happy Holidays.

Ironhorse 9

Steadfast and Loyal.

Ivy Division celebrates 91 years as Army's 4th oldest division

from **Birthday Pg. 1**

The 4th Inf. Div. again was called into action to serve during World War II, where it was most notably recognized as the first allied unit to assault the beaches of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Soldiers of the division proudly served throughout Europe, seeing combat in five major European campaigns.

Two decades would pass before the division would again be called upon during time of war, when the 4th Inf. Div. arrived in South Vietnam in Sept. 1966. Here, its Soldiers would see combat in 10 separate campaigns over the next six years.

In March 2003, the 4th Inf. Div. again deployed into harms way. This time, more than 17,000 Soldiers left their Families behind and deployed to Iraq into an area known as the Sunni Triangle, seeing combat in the Global War on Terrorism. The 4th Inf. Div. spearheaded numerous combat operations, ultimately leading to the capture of Saddam Hussein.

Following redeployment in March 2004, the 4th Inf. Div. was one of the divisions that led the charge in transforming from a division-based Army to a brigade-based Army. The new design implemented by the division was a significant change from how the division fought in the past, and it encompassed the most comprehensive restructuring in the Army since World War II. Of even greater significance is that this was accomplished while the Army was still engaged with the enemy and fighting a war.

The division was then called back into combat in 2005, and again in 2007, to spearhead combat operations in and around Baghdad as the driving force behind Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

In addition to the wartime and counter-insurgency missions during all three deployments to Iraq, the Division was instrumental in opening and supplying thousands of schools, hospitals and clinics within its area of operation. Division personnel also repaired bridges, roads, power plants, oil pipelines, water mains and many other essential parts of the Iraqi infrastructure.

“This division has had some tough fights, collectively, since its existence,” said Command Sgt. Maj. John Gioia, senior enlisted leader, 4th Inf. Div. “We have suffered more than 50,000 casualties, and more than 10,000 Soldiers have made the ultimate sacrifice defending America’s freedom.

“Here, today, it’s very clear in everybody’s mind what is at stake here as we finish this mission in Iraq.”

The 4th Inf. Div. staff celebrated 91 years of rich history within the division during a ceremony in front of the MND-B



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jason Thompson, MND-B PAO

Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond (right), commanding general of the 4th Infantry Division and Multi-National Division – Baghdad, and Command Sgt. Maj. John Gioia, senior enlisted leader of 4th Inf. Div. and MND-B, add the Iraq campaign streamer to the division’s organizational colors during the 4th Inf. Div.’s 91st birthday ceremony Dec. 10. In recognition of service in Operation Iraqi Freedom, the campaign streamer with the colors of the Iraq campaign medal and inscribed “Iraq” is authorized to be flown from the 4th Inf. Div.’s organizational colors.

headquarters building in Camp Liberty. However, this was by no means the first time the division celebrated a birthday during combat operations. Through six tours of duty throughout the globe, the Ivy Division has been deployed during 10 of its birthdays.

“This is a historical event,” said Gioia. “The division was formed in 1917 for the sole purpose of going to war, where it fought the ‘Great War.’ Ironically enough, here we are again, 91 years later, in combat, in Baghdad, defending our freedom.

“I’m humbled to be in the formation with these great Soldiers and what they do every day, and the sacrifices and the hardships that they take, and the Families who are also mak-

ing sacrifices back home. If you’re going to celebrate a birthday, and you can’t be with your immediate Family, then you celebrate with your extended Family. In this case, it is the great warriors of the 4th Inf. Div.”

The 4th Inf. Div. is organized with five brigade-sized elements – four maneuver brigades and a multifunctional aviation brigade. The division is split-based, with the division’s headquarters, 1st Brigade Combat Team and Combat Aviation Brigade, stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, and the 2nd, 3rd and 4th BCTs, stationed in Fort Carson, Colo. Upon redeployment from Iraq, the division’s headquarters and 1st BCT will relocate to Fort Carson and the CAB will be reassigned outside of the 4th Inf. Div.

Word on the Street:

What is your favorite Christmas movie and why?

By Spc. Douglas York
MND-B PAO



Sgt. 1st Class Mark Cockrell
Columbus, Miss.
Co. A, DSTB, 4th Inf. Div.

“Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer; because Rudolph is an over comer. He overcame his friends and Family and gave to the community.”



Maj. Dave Spies
Saint Peters, Mo.
101st MHD, 4th Inf. Div.

“It’s a wonderful life with Jimmy Stuart because it is a heartwarming movie. It’s a classic.”



Sgt. 1st Class Kristina Scott
Lincoln, Neb.
101st MHD, 4th Inf. Div.

“Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer because it is hauntingly creepy.”



Capt. Richard Knapp
San Antonio, Texas
Co. B, DSTB, 4th Inf. Div.

“It’s a wonderful life; because it goes back to a different time with my parents and my grandparents.”

News briefs

IA, MND-B Soldiers find weapons caches in greater Baghdad

Multi-National Division – Baghdad PAO
BAGHDAD – Iraqi Army and Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers found weapons caches in the greater Baghdad area Dec. 11.

At approximately 8:20 a.m., Iraqi Army soldiers serving with 3rd Battalion, 43rd Brigade, 11th IA Division, found an empty 105mm shell and an empty illumination shell west of Baghdad in the Abu Ghuraib area.

At approximately 11 a.m., Soldiers serving with Company C, 2nd Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, working with soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 53rd Brigade, 14th Iraq Army Division, found four 60mm mortars and two 81mm mortars just south of Joint Security Station Taji, north of Baghdad. The munitions were destroyed in a controlled detonation.

Approximately forty minutes later, Soldiers from Company B, 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, followed up on a tip from an Iraqi citizen and seized a white bag with an unknown substance and an explosively formed projectile array encased in foam east of the Abu Ghuraib area. The munitions were destroyed in a controlled detonation.

At approximately 1 p.m., Soldiers from Company C, 1st Bn., 21st Inf. Reg., found a rocket-propelled grenade launcher and 11 RPG rounds north of the Abu Ghuraib area.

Raiders detain wanted criminal

1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers detained a wanted criminal during combat operations Dec. 12 in the Rashid district of southern Baghdad.

At approximately 6 a.m. in the Jaza'ir community, Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, MND-B, conducted a target-specific raid to capture the wanted criminal.

The Soldiers transported the individual to a nearby forward operating base for further processing.

“The 1st ‘Raider’ Brigade is committed to keeping Rashid free of violence and anything that threatens the safety and security of the Iraqi people and Baghdad,” said Maj. Dave Olson, 1st BCT Spokesman, 4th Inf. Div., MND-B. “The Iraqi Security Forces also remain steadfast and vigilant against the enemies of Iraq.”



U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Todd Frantom, attached to the 1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Man's best Friend

BAGHDAD – Staff Sgt. Christopher Ogle, a native of Beaver Creek, Ohio, who serves as a military police dog handler, leads “Liaka,” a Dutch Shepherd, along the streets of the Hadar community during a mission with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, attached to the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, and Iraqi National Police on a combined security patrol Nov. 29 in southern Baghdad's Rashid district.

Raiders detain two suspected criminals, ISF find munitions

1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers and Iraqi Security Forces discovered munitions and captured wanted criminals during combined combat operations Dec. 12 in the Rashid district of southern Baghdad.

At approximately 9:30 a.m. in the Hadar community, Soldiers from Company C, 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, attached to the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, MND-B, working with policemen from 1st Battalion, 7th Brigade, 2nd National Police Division, detained a suspected criminal while serving a search warrant. The suspect was detained on conspiracy to attack Coalition Forces with explosively-formed penetrators.

The Soldiers turned the criminal over to the NP unit for processing.

Soldiers from Company A, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div., MND-B, working with policemen assigned to 2nd Bn., 5th Bde., 2nd NP Div., captured a suspected bomb-cell member at approximately 11:15 a.m. in the Aamel community.

The Soldiers transported the detainee to a nearby combat outpost for processing.

At approximately 12:15 p.m., Soldiers from Troop A, 7th Squad-

ron, 10th Cavalry Regiment, 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div., MND-B, discovered an 82mm mortar round, a 57mm projectile, one RG31 fuse, and three blasting caps in the Zubaida community.

An explosive ordnance disposal unit responded to the scene to properly dispose of the munitions.

Iraqi Army soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 53rd Brigade, 14th IA Division, discovered and secured a hand grenade in Shurta community at approximately 8 p.m.

At approximately 11:45 p.m. in the Masafee community, Soldiers from Co. A, 2nd Bn., 4th Inf. Regt., attached to the 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div., MND-B, responding to a tip from a Sons of Iraq member discovered a roadside bomb.

The Soldiers contacted an EOD unit, who responded to properly dispose the bomb.

“The 1st ‘Raider’ Brigade is outside the wire everyday patrolling the streets providing a safe and secure environment for the Iraqi people,” said Maj. Dave Olson, 1st BCT Spokesman, 4th Inf. Div., MND-B. “The Iraqi Security Forces continue to do a magnificent job of bringing the criminals to justice and finding weapons caches so the citizens may live in a peaceful Rashid district.”

Patriot Brigade detains suspected weapons smuggler

4th BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div.

BAGHDAD – Soldiers attached to 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, captured a suspected criminal in the New Baghdad district of eastern Baghdad, Dec 11.

Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 66th Armor

Regiment conducted a late night operation and detained a suspected weapons smuggler and recruiter of militants shortly before midnight.

The suspect was on a 2nd BCT, 1st Armor Division's list of wanted criminals.

“This is an evil man who brings violence

and illegal activity to the doorsteps of good, law-abiding citizens of Iraq,” said Maj. Joey Sullinger, spokesman for 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division.

“We are happy to help the government of Iraq and Iraqi Security Forces bring stability and peace to the people.”



Mission – Soldier – Family – Team

Added armor provides more protection for National Police

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

JOINT SECURITY STATION SULEIKH, Iraq – In early November, a group of Iraqi National Policemen from the Sayafiyah Battalion based at Joint Security Station Suliekh in Baghdad's Adhamiyah district, were traveling in a convoy when their vehicles were struck by an improvised explosive device. One policeman died at the scene and three others were wounded, one of the wounded later died.

Policemen later determined the armor on their vehicles was not thick enough to stop the blast.

The police asked the Sayafiyah Battalion's attached National Police Transition Team which is attached to the 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, for help.

"They help us get materials and some guys to help us to upgrade the armor for our vehicles to protect our guys and to give us a chance to defeat the enemies and the terrorists," said Iraqi Police 1st Lt. Hatif Aziz Hussien, the commander of the Sayafiyah Battalion's Motor Pool Platoon.

For six days, spanning from the end of November to the beginning of December, a team of Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers from Company B, 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div., supplied heavier armor and trained the police battalion's welders how to properly up-armor their vehicles.

Staff Sgt. Matthew Kasten, who serves as the NCOIC of the service and recovery shop, Co B, 64th BSB, 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div., led the team.

"They have two or three (vehicles) that are up-armored and are very thin and very poorly done. We came down here to show them how it's done with thicker metal," said Kasten, a native of Hoyleton, Ill.

"They have the capabilities here to weld. They just didn't quite know how to put it all together to make it work the way they wanted to,"

Kasten and fellow welder Pfc. Courtney Nance, a native of Newberry, S.C., using the heavier armor, built an armored box in the back of one truck as a model. They then tried to show the Iraqi's how they did it.

"They keep pushing us off the equipment. We'll go in and start welding on something and 'No, No, No, we'll do it. This is our truck, we'll weld it, or we'll cut it or we'll measure it,'" said Kasten. "They were really good. I just showed them how to turn it on and they took it."

Kasten and Nance spent most of their time supervising the Iraqi's.

Bashir Mohmed Kadhum, who serves in the Motor Pool Platoon of the Sayafiyah Battalion, joined the National Police seven months ago after the violence closed the small welding shop he used to own in Baghdad.

"I try to help up-armor the vehicles to help try to protect our guys," said Kadhum. "When you join the National Police, you think maybe tomorrow you're going to die. You don't know when you're going to be injured or die, so you expect you're going to sacrifice for your country."

The heavier armor protects the police not just physically.

"It gives the shurta (policeman) more confidence to ride in these vehicles," said Hussien.

The police were also fitting steel plates into the cab of the truck.

"They're having a lot of anti-personnel IEDs, they said, and it keeps a lot of that away from the Soldiers in the back," said Kasten.

Besides providing the armored plating which the police were not able to acquire on their own, Kasten provided the tools.

"They've still got a ways to go with the standard welding and cutting equipment nowadays, but they've got the basics and they can make it work with what they have," said Kasten.

This factored into the way the vehicles are re-armored.

"We had to design it and build it so they could duplicate it with the tools and resources they had available here. This is a more field expedient way to build this armor for them. It utilizes the metal better for the pieces that we had," said Kasten.

Watching his men work filled Hussien was extremely grateful for the aid.

"This shows us the truth, how the coalition cares about our forces. They try to raise our forces against the terrorists, to defeat the gangsters and to give us a chance to prove ourselves in the streets, to show the people there is an Iraqi government," said Hussien. "It (the up-armored vehicles) make a torch inside the chest, a courage torch, to chasing the terrorists and defeat them."

For Nance, this was not just another welding job.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jerry Saslav, 3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div. Bashir Mohmed Kadhum, a welder who serves in the Motor Pool Platoon of the Iraqi National Police's Sayafiyah Battalion, welds an armor plate onto a police vehicle at Joint Security Station Suliekh in Baghdad's Adhamiyah district Dec. 2.

"It makes me feel like I'm doing something; It makes me feel like I'm helping the Iraqi people out," said Nance. "They're fighting this war just like we are, and it's their country. I'd like to see them run things so I can go home, so I'd do anything to help them out."

Sadr City residents take pride in their neighborhood

By 2nd Lt. Clayton Merkly
Co. C, 1-35 AR, TF 1-6, 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – In the not too distant past, Sadr City was considered by many to be one of the worst places to live in Iraq. There was trash in the streets, violence throughout the district, sewage-filled gutters that overflowed onto the roads and children played on trash piles containing concertina wire and rubble from houses – the remnants of the violent fighting that drove Special Groups elements out of the area.

Now, when Soldiers with Company C, 1st Battalion, 35th Armor Regiment, Task Force 1-6, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, which is currently attached to 3rd BCT, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, go on patrol they see a radically different landscape.

Parks have emerged from previously

vacant lots; children run rampant, enjoying themselves on previously prohibited playgrounds. Trash piles disappear seemingly overnight and concertina wire no longer blocks sidewalks and passageways. The streets are clean. The sewers function as they are supposed to, thereby eliminating not only an offensive odor, but also a pressing health hazard to the citizens of Sadr City's Tharwa 1 neighborhood.

Buildings are freshly painted in bright colors and storefronts are redone to present a welcome appearance. While some of this work has been done by private business, much of it has been completed due to the efforts of Iraqis volunteering to clean their own sectors and neighborhoods. These local nationals are showing pride in their communities and it is beginning to show.

Recently, there was a big push to remove

trash from the main streets and collect it into one or two locations for pick up by the Beladiyah, the office responsible for many of the public services in Iraq. U.S. forces have noticed and appreciated this effort.

"It is good to see the Iraqis cleaning their neighborhoods. After being here for almost eight months I am beginning to see a real change in attitudes of the people. The people are friendlier and while security is still our primary mission, I am able to enjoy both an educational and cultural experience each time I go out on patrol. We are definitely seeing results of our hard work during this deployment," said Spc. Richard Parr, a native of Nebraska who serves with Co. C, 1-35 AR, TF 1-6.

The overall effect of the volunteer efforts is a cleaner, and safer, Tharwa 1. Removing trash and painting buildings means it is hard-

er to hide roadside bombs in trash piles and snipers cannot lurk in the bombed-out shells of buildings. The people will also benefit from a more hygienic environment.

"I feel safer out in sector," said Pfc. David Beveridge, a native of Virginia, who serves with Co. C, 1-35 AR, TF 1-6. "The clean streets make it easier to see obstacles and means that we can spot suspicious objects faster, saving both our own lives and any innocent bystanders."

A member of the District Advisory Council, a mid-level government official, and a local sheik gave their support by providing tools and labor for the many projects happening in Tharwa 1. Their participation is a clear signal to the people that it is time to unshackle themselves from the grip of Special Groups and instead enjoy the opportunity to better themselves and their communities.



1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

Raiders assist ISF become self-reliant

1st BCT Soldiers work with NP, train to sustain forces

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

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FALCON, Iraq — Part of an ongoing mission to develop Iraqi Security Forces, the Soldiers of the 4th Support Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, bring more to the fight than food, fuel or parts; they bring years of experience and technical expertise.

The “Packhorse” Battalion, deployed to Forward Operating Base Falcon, located in southern Baghdad, provides advanced training and over sight to prepare the Rashid district’s Iraqi National Police to transform into a self-sustainable force, said Maj. Jeff Britton, support operations officer, 4th Spt. Bn., 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

The goal of the 1st BCT’s forward support battalion, partnered with the Iraqi NPs, is to assist the ISF in developing their logistics systems to a point where the Iraqis become self-reliant, supporting their own operations, said Britton, a native of New Ipswich, N.H.

Where once the brigade’s mission was to augment the ISF supply system by providing fuel and parts, the 1st BCT now provides support to the ISF, primarily by offering technical expertise in the form of “Train the Trainer” programs, he explained.

“Our focus right now is in three areas: one being basic maintenance procedures, operator-level Preventive Maintenance Checks and Services; ‘base mechanics’ on the M1114 (Humvee) and any other vehicles the Iraqis would like,” said Britton.

The Packhorse Bn. also develops the Iraqis’ welding, medical and specialty skills to train the ISF on the occupational expertise needed to maintain a force, he added.

“We are beginning to focus those efforts on the Iraqi Police and NPs as they are beginning to transition into a centralized system for Baghdad-proper,” Britton said. “The ISF have to take over (Baghdad’s) Provinces, and we have to focus more on those guys to get them where they can maintain their operations.”

Britton also said that the brigade provided logistics support to the NPs, handing over empty water tanks and fuel tanks at the combat outposts and joint security stations as Coalition Forces realign their operations and ISF transition into an independent role, taking control of the Rashid district.

“We are getting to the point where we are able to assist them with some supplies, some of the stuff that we can no longer use or we have classified as fair wear and tear; we are able to resource and distribute like the (Defense Reutilization and Management Office) process to increase their capabilities at the COPs and JSSs,” he said.

The ISF’s first priority continues to remain national security operations, but as security continues to improve, the NPs must focus on their logistics and sustainment operations to continue to accomplish their mission, he said.

“It is a critical aspect,” he explained. “If they are not able to sustain their day-to-day operations, then they will only be able to go a certain period of time before all their vehicles will be broken. As in all logistics, it is critical for logistics to be working so that the operators can do what they need to do.”

The Iraqi NPs will not become truly self-sufficient until Iraq’s Ministry of Interior is able to allocate more funding and acquire more resources for the police units, Britton said.

“They can fix just about anything we put in front of them as long as they can get the repair parts and the proper equipment,” he said. “They have just as much mechanical capability as any U.S. Soldier has.”

Every Thursday, Sgt. Bryan Dewey, a wheeled-vehicle mechanic from Elizabethtown, Ky., assigned to Company B, 4th Supt. Bn., 4th Inf. Div., spends two to three hours-a-week



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Charlie Vance, 4th Supt. Bn., 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

Sgt. Bryan Dewey, a wheeled-vehicle mechanic from Elizabethtown, Ky., assigned to Company B, 4th Support Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, instructs Iraqi National Police from the 7th Brigade, 2nd National Police Division, on how to service an M1114 High Mobility Multi-Wheeled Vehicle at a joint security station in the Rashid district of southern Baghdad.

teaching Iraqi NPs how to operate, maintain and service their vehicles, lately their M1114 High Mobile Multi-Wheeled Vehicles.

Dewey, the lead maintenance trainer for the three NP brigades in Rashid, said his leaders selected him for the task due to his background of working on civilian and military vehicles and equipment and his experience as a noncommissioned officer.

“It’s actually a change of pace, gets me out of the shop, and is contributing to the cause of the mission – making sure the NPs are self-sustaining for the overall mission in Iraq,” Dewey said. “It’s a small part of the big picture; the Iraqis are very top-notch and are very fast learners and catch on very well.”

Using only a translator, Dewey said that he teaches the NPs operator maintenance and services in a classroom, followed by two to three hours of on-the-job training with the Iraqis accomplishing all of the work.

“The Iraqis work together well,” he said. “It’s a team effort. They all want to know; they have a dire need to learn, and they want to learn.”

Maintaining the technical side of operations is important to keeping the Army running, and the ISF are no different, he explained.

“We are looking to get as many Iraqis as possible trained on the new systems,” he said. “We are getting ready to leave, and they will have to maintain the mission and that means keeping their equipment operational.”

The ISF are working to standardize the supply systems so lines of communication can run more efficiently, said Dewey.

“If (the ISF) have a standardized system, parts can be ordered across the board, making the pieces more readily avail-

able to the units,” he explained.

Centralizing the NPs supply system eliminates the costly and time-consuming requirement to outsource work or import equipment and parts, said Dewey.

As the lead medical trainer for Rashid’s NP brigades, Sgt. Vicente Ayala said that he trains the ISF medics to operate as confident medical specialists proficient in emergency response skills, ranging from patient assessment and casualty triage to casualty medical evacuation and trauma training.

A combat medic assigned to Co. C, 4th Supt. Bn., 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div., Ayala said he also teaches the Iraqi medics how to operate and maintain a medical clinic, running sick call and administrative operations – jobs that require dependable logistics support systems.

During his training, Ayala said he allows the Iraqi medics to come up with their own ideas and solutions to problems in order to teach themselves how to run their medical operations, all the while supervising the NPs to ensure that they work to prescribed standards and maintain a uniformed system.

“They have the means,” Ayala said. “They do have strong leaders and putting it in the hands of the strong leaders and letting them take control is the only way they are going to get the supplies distributed to the units.”

Ayala said the NP brigades would benefit from an organic sustainment unit responsible for maintaining supply lines and support operations for the ISF.

“We need to let them do it their way so that they can produce their steps, their procedures, their way of doing things,” Ayala said. “That is the only way they are going to find success.”

“With our little bit of tutelage and our little bit of managing, they will achieve success in their logistics system.”

8th MP Bde.



Former Sol make history at Furat

By Staff Sgt. Jessika Malott
8th MP Bde. PAO

BAGHDAD – Only one month ago, 1,031 former Sons of Iraq (Abna al-Iraq) signed on to become Iraqi Police recruits at the al Furat Iraqi Police Training Center. After completing weeks of police training to include proper checkpoint procedures, arrest tactics, community policing techniques and marksmanship qualifications, these recruits have earned the title Shurta or certified Iraqi Police officers in their graduation ceremony Dec. 2.

Although there have been many previous graduates of the center these recruits are unlike any before them; they are the first complete group of former Sol to enroll in the program.

Beginning Oct. 1, the Sol program, which was previously organized by Coalition Forces, became the responsibility of the Government of Iraq to fully integrate the personnel into the ISF or other forms of civilian employment.

The pride beaming from the hearts of the men and women standing in formation was evident, as some of the most profound words and demonstrations were displayed and shared with an audience of Iraqi forces and citizens as well as Coalition Forces.

The ceremony began with the playing of the Iraqi National Anthem, followed by a passage from the Qaran and a moment of silence for fallen comrades.

The host of the ceremony, Iraqi Police Maj. Gen. Kadhim, the commander of the

Provincial Directorate of Police, through an interpreter said, “Today’s graduation and this training is for Iraqi’s and Iraqi soldiers. These men and women stood up for Iraq. They put their lives on the line. They are heroes.”

Coalition Forces were impressed with the progress that the IPs have made in recent history.

“This is a great day for the Iraqi people. We need to keep moving forward. We are making progress and this is a great day for them,” said Col. Byron Freeman, commander, 8th Military Police “Watchdog” Brigade, Multi-National Division – Iraq. If you think back to four years ago we were training Iraqis and now there are Iraqis training Iraqis”

Ameel, who made her dreams of becoming an IP a reality, was one of three recipients of a gift presented by Kadhim. She received the award for best shooting during the marksmanship portion of the course.

“I am very happy,” said Ameel, one of the 19 newest female Shurtas, through an interpreter. “Words cannot express how proud I am today, all of my family is very happy. I thank the Coalition Forces for transferring the Sol and for making this opportunity.”

Another class of all SOI begin training at the al Furat Iraqi Police Training Center on Dec. 7. Approximately 1,100 more recruits will train to become Shurta fulfilling the government’s promise to transition the Sol.



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Jessika Malott, 8th MP Bde. PAO
Iraqi Police Recruits, march during the graduation ceremony. They were the first class of former Sons of Iraq to complete training and integrate into the Iraqi Security Forces at al Furat Iraqi Police Training Center, Dec.2.

4th BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.



Spc. Hailey Dimond, an intelligence analyst assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 94th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, cleans a laptop computer at Forward Operating Base Hammer near Baghdad Dec. 2.

Patriot Support Soldiers pick up stakes, move to FOB Hammer

By Sgt. Jeremy Todd

4th BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE RUSTAMIYAH, Iraq — A battalion of support Soldiers stationed on Forward Operating Base Rustamiyah since last year relocated to FOB Hammer the first week in December.

Soldiers from 94th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, packed up shop and headed to FOB Hammer through Dec. 5.

Coalition officials built FOB Hammer during a “troop surge” to house incoming Soldiers, and its services and amenities include a post exchange, a pizza shop, a sandwich shop and basketball courts.

“We hit the ground running,” said Capt. Angela Sands, a battalion operations officer for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 94th BSB, from Fort Polk, La., which is scheduled to move to Fort Stewart, Ga., in early 2009.

Sands said the Soldiers of the 94th BSB “have applied the full-court-press on getting the job done.”

Despite the chaos of such an intricate move, the Patriot Brigade support Soldiers seem ex-

tremely positive about moving to FOB Hammer. They are nearing the end of their deployment and are reflecting about their time in Baghdad.

Sgt. Brisseyda Molina, an HHC, 94th BSB personnel non-commissioned officer from Morristown, N.J., keeps track of all the Soldiers arriving and departing on FOB Hammer. Her mission is to ensure everyone on the FOB has a place to stay. She said she is thrilled about returning home.

“I am extremely ecstatic about going home,” said Molina. “I can’t wait to eat at the Famished Frog and enjoy a bowl of crab dip; but first, I’d like to thank God for getting me home safely (when I arrive).”

Spc. Hailey Dimond, a battalion intelligence analyst from Wellesley, Mass., assigned to HHC, said she has learned a lot during this deployment in addition to gaining greater love and appreciation for friends and family.

“Back in the States, I took a lot for granted; and being over here for such a long time has opened my eyes to how precious my Family is to me,” expressed Dimond, whose mother lives in Chosun, South Korea. “I hope to see my mother soon; it has been too long since we spent quality time together. I want her to see how much I have matured during this deployment.”



2nd BCT, 1st Inf. Div.

Iron Dagger aims to improve Ghazaliyah, Shulla

By Spc. Dustin Roberts

2nd HBCT PAO, 1st Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – As the security in Iraq improves significantly following the U.S. troop surge of early 2007, Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers from the 2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team "Dagger," 1st Infantry Division, now focus on an operation that will make long-term neighborhood improvements along its western operational environment.

In the areas of Ghazaliyah and Shulla, Operation Iron Dagger, in concert with Iraqi Security Forces, will emphasize making improvements in the area with programs such as route sanitation, essential service improvements and better communication with the local populace.

"The purpose of this operation is to execute a focused non-lethal effort with integrated programs to improve security, disrupt the enemy in the area and fill the gap between the population and the Iraqi government," said Col. Joseph Martin, commander, 2nd HBCT, 1st Inf. Div.

"Most people know there is a problem with electricity in Iraq," said Maj. Todd Auld, Dagger Brigade civil affairs officer. "What we're going to do in Ghazaliyah, Shulla and throughout Baghdad is what we have started in Ameriyah – putting up solar-powered lights and increasing the quality of life."

Auld said solar lights are advantageous because where there is light, businesses can stay open later and the streets can be illuminated, resulting in the economy to improve.

Troopers from the 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd HBCT, 1st Inf. Div., are patrolling the streets of Ghazaliyah daily with Iraqi Security Forces.

"The Soldiers have been engaging the local leaders in meetings and the populace when they go on patrol to get a feeling of what Ghazaliyah needs," said Lt. Col. John Richardson IV, commander, 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd HBCT, 1st Inf. Div. "We have been working hard to make sure we know what the people need."

As the Iraqi government, ISF and Coalition Forces continue to improve security and life conditions throughout Baghdad, al-Qaeda in Iraq and extremist groups try to find new places to base their operations in.

"Terrorists will be driven out of Ghazaliyah and eventually they will have no place to go," Atar said. "They will be forced out of Baghdad and ultimately out of the country."

Richardson said the ISF have led the patrols to locate and neutralize the enemy and that they are ready to take the lead security actions.

With basic essential services such as solar light, street cleanup and sewer work, ISF and Coalition Forces work together every day to progress Baghdad neighborhoods in the areas the Dagger Brigade operates.

"We're not just going in and fixing broken infrastructure, but we are implementing real sustainable improvements," Auld said. "It's really a win all around for all of us."



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Daniel Owen, Joint Combat Camera, MNC-I Sgt. 1st Class Deondre Lory, a native of Galveston, Texas, stands guard on patrol in Ghazaliyah Dec. 1. Coalition Forces and Iraqi Security Forces show their presence daily to ensure the safety and security of the local neighborhoods.

School opening offers hope for children of Ghazaliya

By 2nd Lt. Cait Smith

2nd HBCT, 1st Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – The day was bright – as were the smiles on the faces of the families and children in attendance at the Nov. 25 opening of Nahwaran School in the Ghazaliya district of northwest Baghdad.

With more than 100 people in attendance, the event began with local Iraqi Police, Iraqi Army and teachers handing backpacks, notebooks and pencils to the school children.

The talk among the Ghazaliya citizens present was of the growth and changes that have taken place, allowing such a happy event to occur. This opinion was echoed by the Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers present.

"The ceremony went really well," said 1st Lt. Thomas Wilson, fire support officer, 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division. "It was great to see the Iraqi Police, Iraqi Army and the Sons of Iraq come together for a great event that shows the movement forward in this community."

The troopers of 5-4 Cav. Regt. are responsible for security in the Ghazaliyah district. The unit's leaders attended the ceremony and observed the festivities.

Guest speakers at the event talked of the progress already completed in mak-

ing Ghazaliya a safe place to live and of the potential of this newly thriving community.

They spoke of the improved security in the area and said that not very long ago, the building now housing Nahwaran School was a dilapidated shell and was not safe enough to house the school. But with the diligent efforts of Iraqi Security Forces, the area has become secure enough to develop.

This school, they added, is only one part, albeit a very significant part, of the beautification of the muhallah. The attendees were excited about the progress the school embodies.

"I was impressed by the facilities that the school now has, to include a computer room. It is a model for the standard of what schools should be in Ghazaliya," said Maj. Thomas Downey, civil affairs team chief, 5-4 Cav. Regt.

This occasion, as well as other school openings in recent weeks in the 'Long-knife' operational environment, represents a return to normalcy in Baghdad. But more than that, they represent the foundation for Iraq's future. Schools like Nahwaran School strive to teach the Iraqi children the skills they need to help them develop themselves so that they can play a role in advancing their country economically and politically.

Public Works Sub Stations making Baghdad neighborhoods more efficient

By Sgt. Brian Tierce

2nd HBCT PAO, 1st Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – The citizens of Baghdad are on a new type of mission these days. Instead of worrying about the violence that once plagued their city, citizens are now focused on making their home town a cleaner place to live.

In Baghdad, the citizens most responsible for the cleanup process are the belladiyahs. With a central focus on water, sewage and trash removal, the workers assigned to belladiyahs are hard at work trying to ensure that their fellow Baghdad citizens are afforded clean streets and clean water.

For a senior leader in the 2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, making sure the belladiyah workers have what they need to complete their mission and teaching the workers what it will take to sustain their city is a crucial part to the Dagger brigade's mission of returning Baghdad to normal.

"We try to make sure all the essential services: sewer, water, electricity and academics, are being watched after and taken care of by the city of Baghdad," said Lt. Col. Christopher Beckert, deputy commanding officer, 2nd HBCT. "These things are all essential for the people who live in the area."

With routine trips into Baghdad to check up on the three belladiyahs in the brigade's operational environment, Beckert said he

knows that putting in the hard work at the beginning of the Dagger brigade's tour will amount to a long term success for the citizens of the Mansour, Kadhamiyah and Karkh districts of northwest Baghdad.

"While we are securing the population, it is important that we tend to the needs of the population," explained Beckert. "By being responsible partners with the city of Baghdad, we can create a better relationship."

This improved relationship with the workers and citizens of Baghdad has not only led to safer streets, but it is also paving the way for a much-improved infrastructure and improved living conditions, he added.

"The easiest way for the population to see that the government is doing its job is to have their basic needs taken care of," said 1st Lt. Conor Browne, civil military affairs officer, 2nd HBCT. "If they see their government is taking care of them, then they will buy into the government."

The mission to clean up the streets of Baghdad may have taken on a new meaning over the past year in Iraq, but the intensity of the mission is higher than ever, and the Soldiers of the Dagger brigade intend to stay focused on the task at hand during their time in northwest Baghdad.

"This is just another example of Coalition Forces not just being ready for the lethal fight," said Beckert. "They are oriented in the non-lethal fight as well."



'Iron Eagle' brigade pumps 2 million gallons

By Sgt. 1st Class Brent Hunt

CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – The "Iron Eagle" brigade of Multi-National Division – Baghdad has reached another milestone less than six months into their deployment to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Fuelers at the forward refueling point on Camp Taji have pumped more than 2 million gallons of aviation fuel into Coalition aircraft Dec. 9.

"Pumping 2 million gallons is a significant milestone in less than six months, but doing that without incident is the big success story," said 1st Lt. Thomas Sopko, platoon leader, Company A, 404th Aviation Support Battalion, 4th Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, who hails from Mathews, Va. "The Soldiers out here have just been doing a magnificent job. They work a lot of long hours and they do their job very well."

To put the feat into perspective, 2 million gallons would fill more than three Olympic sized swimming pools and fill up the automobiles of 134,000 average American cars. This accomplishment was completed by a company of only 40 Soldiers, whose chief responsibility is to supply aircraft with Jet Propellant – 8 aviation fuel 24/7.

This support includes fueling air ambulance helicopters that save lives on the battlefield, Chinooks, the transporter of critical sustainment supplies needed throughout the region, Blackhawk helicopters, the transporter of passengers and the Apache helicopters, the protector of troops on the ground with their arsenal of missiles, rockets and 30 mm automatic gun.

Despite the fact security in Iraq has dramatically improved over the past two years, aviation support operations have increased as the brigade has become responsible for additional missions throughout the region.

The significant security gains permit a greater influx of aviation support due to the fact Air Weapon's Teams don't get bogged down supporting areas previously known as "hot spots," and can now more frequently equalize their coverage over the battlefield.

Collectively, the "Iron Eagle" brigade has pumped more than 5 million gallons of aviation fuel in support of their mission in Iraq.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Brent Hunt, CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

A Soldier from Company A, 404th Aviation Support Battalion, 4th Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, refuels a Blackhawk helicopter on Camp Taji's Forward Arming and Refueling Point Dec. 9. This put the company at more than 2 million gallons of aviation fuel pumped into aircraft. Soldiers from the refueling point have reached the milestone in less than six months since deploying to the region.

While the majority of company level fuel distribution occurs at the Taji refueling point, various other fuel companies within the brigade have also contributed their fair share to the milestone via Heavy Expanded Mobile Tactical Truck tanker.

When the war birds don't make a stop at the refueling point after a mission, Soldier manned HEMTT tankers make their rounds to ensure all the aircraft are topped off directly on the flight line.

For the 4th CAB's fuelers, the expanded aviation support plus the blessing of sustained optimal flying weather means

a lot of hours pumping fuel into aircraft wherever and whenever the thirsty war birds need it.

"We are out here all the time, and pumping 5 million gallons is a Soldier success story," said Staff Sgt. Jimmie Miggins, noncommissioned officer in charge of his refueling squad, Co. E, 2nd Bn., 4th CAB from Chicago. "The Army doesn't move without us and keeping aircraft in the sky is the aviation mission."

"By keeping aircraft in the air, we are supporting the overall MND-B mission," he added. "My Soldiers are a part of that."

New communications tower, vital 'Iron Eagle' component

By Sgt. Jason Dangel

CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Signal Soldiers from the 4th Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, completed a project recently that will greatly enhance brigade radio communications capabilities throughout Iraq.

With the completion of a new 55 foot communications tower project at the brigade's Tactical Operations Center on Camp Taji in late November, high-quality radio frequency modulation is now available to all "Iron Eagle" Soldiers regardless of geographical location.

"As our battalions spread out to different locations away from our brigade tactical operations center, we saw an increase of latency and degradation in our FM radio communications – in some instances, even on the same (Forward Operating Base)," explained Master Sgt. William Carty, brigade communications noncommissioned officer-in-charge, 4th CAB, 4th Inf. Div.

"This problem did not exist in the past because the preceding units were all co-located and didn't have the massive area of responsibility that we do," he continued.

"Our brigade has aviation support responsibilities for both Multi-National Corps – Iraq

and Multi-National Division – Baghdad, so it is essential that our communications be up to par to enable us to perform our mission successfully."

It was determined a fixed communications tower was needed after the completion of a lengthy terrain imagery analysis in September. The analysis indicated problems associated with the battalion TOCs and their geographical locations.

The analysis confirmed numerous "dead spots," or areas radio signals cannot travel, which prompted the brigade communications team to find an answer to the problem, Carty said.

After a detailed pricing evaluation, the project was estimated to cost more than \$250,000; however, due to the expedient nature in which the project had to be completed, Carty and his team of Soldiers could not wait for funding approval. They decided to explore other options that were readily available to them at Camp Taji.

Luck prevailed shortly after the search ensued as Carty and his team quickly acquired a used radio tower and several COM-231 Very High Frequency microwave radio antennas that were left behind by a redeploying unit.

Additional supplies required to complete the project, such as cables and antenna

mounts, were obtained through the Communications and Electronics Command Reutilization Yard at Camp Taji.

"We were able to complete the tower project with no funds from or charged to the brigade – a remarkable achievement considering the amount of time we had to complete its construction," Carty said.

From the inception of an idea to the construction of a project worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, the signal Soldiers completed the tower in just over three months.

The new 55-foot "Iron Eagle" radio tower has already proven its worth during its short existence.

"From the pilot's perspective, this retransmission capability is absolutely critical to the communications architecture of the battalion as the MND-B (operational environment) expands," said Maj. John Cochran, executive officer, 4th Bn, 4th CAB, from Los Angeles.

The new tower provides rapid communications between both air and ground units that will enable ground maneuver elements throughout MND-B to call for air support more efficiently, he said.

"The bottom line is this; the tower is a true combat multiplier, linking sensor to shooter and ground element to Air Weapons Team 24/7."



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jason Dangel, CAB PAO

Master Sgt. William Carty (left), brigade communications noncommissioned officer-in-charge, 4th Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, along with his team of Soldiers, stands in front of a newly constructed 55-foot radio tower outside the "Iron Eagle" brigade's Tactical Operation Center at Camp Taji Dec. 4.



2nd BCT, 25th Inf. Div.

MND-B Soldier, famous actress join forces, contribute to local school

By Spc. Daniel Turner

2nd SBCT, 25th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – A Soldier from Multi-National Division – Baghdad and a famous U.S. actress joined forces recently to invest in the future of Iraq – its children.

Actress Leah Remini, better known for her role as Carrie Heffernan on the CBS sitcom, *The King of Queens*, received an e-mail from 1st Sgt. Jonathan White, 66th Engineer Company, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, who hails from San Francisco, with a request – please help with these kids.

“I decided to do this because Mr. White asked for help to provide for the children of Iraq,” Remini said. “Mr. White asked me to donate school supplies and soccer balls to hand-out to the Iraqi children. I found this to be amazingly selfless.

“By reaching out to me for help to ease the suffering of the children of this war, I was honored to be able to serve them,” she added.

The all-girls school in Saab al Bour reaped the benefits of the donation and was supplied with notebooks, pencils, pens and other school supplies.

The supplies, which were bought by Remini and delivered by White and his Soldiers, brought smiles to the children of the school north of Baghdad and raised the morale of the Soldiers who distributed the supplies. In addition, Remini has sent hundreds of soccer balls to the children and is now rallying others to do the same.

“To be able to do something like we did today is incredible because it breaks the routine and it brings a face to what we do,” said White. “It’s the effort of individuals like Ms. Remini that continues to amaze me and other people who continue to donate.

“People who are selfless in their giving and willing to help out these children of Iraq by their donations and for children they have never even met before is incredible,” added White. “It’s incredible what she’s done, by adopting us, by adopting the Soldiers and supporting these children.”

Not only did this instance bring joy to the children at the



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Daniel Turner, 2nd SBCT, 25th Inf. Div.

1st Sgt. Jonathan White, 66th Engineer Company, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad from San Francisco, California, hands out pencils to children at an all-girls school in Saab al Bour. Soldiers from the company and actress Leah Remini, better known for her role as Carrie Heffernan on the CBS sitcom *The King of Queens*, joined forces to help the children with supplies at the school north of Baghdad.

all-girls school in Saab al Bour, Soldiers of the unit have also benefited from Remini’s goodwill.

Remini has funded numerous care packages, DVDs, CDs and a Wii game system for the Soldiers of the company. In addition, she now advocates the adoption of all Soldiers on her website.

“She coordinated an effort to send us a huge banner signed by hundreds of people supporting our Soldiers,” added White. “She sent Chapstick and playing cards with ‘Sappers Lead

the Way” logos on them and sunscreen from some Hollywood Boutique. After numerous conversations, she now advocates the anysoldier.com web site in support of all of our Soldiers. Almost every donation has been paid for by her.

“In recognition, we had a plaque made for her and we have also sent her a Certificate of Appreciation with a flag flown here in Iraq,” he added. “Her generosity has impacted hundreds of children and directly impacted the morale of our Soldiers.”



926th Eng. Bde.

MND-B engineers build historic protective screen

By Capt. Angela Smoot

and Sgt. 1st Class James Dean

46th ECB (H), 926th Eng. Bde.

JOINT SECURITY STATION UR, Iraq – It all began in early July when the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, contacted the 46th Engineer Combat Battalion (Heavy) and asked them to construct a sniper screen. But, this would not be the normal sniper screen design the engineers were used to constructing but a super-sized version.

This gigantic sniper screen was needed to provide concealment for Soldiers at Joint Security Station Ur and to obscure a large piece of equipment. It would be a 40 foot tall, 300 foot wide stretch of sniper screen (a green mesh material), nicknamed the “Mother of All Sniper Screens.”

“The MOASS represents the collaborative efforts of a team dedicated to force protection of Soldiers and civilians,” stated Capt. Lisa Landreth, 46th ECB (H) construction operations officer, a native of Fair Play, S.C. “The original concept/design dates back to over a year ago, but due to the magnitude and scope, the final design was not approved until an exhaustive re-design process.”

The planning and design of the final MOASS included input from numerous engineers from the 46th ECB (H) and the 926th Engineer Brigade based in Montgomery, Ala., serving with Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

“The MOASS is engineering at its best,” commented 1st Lt. Chad Bacote, 926th Eng. Bde. project engineer, and a native of Darlington, S.C. “Once we had the initial design, it then became about how can we make this design better and still accomplish its original purpose.”

With designs finally approved, Company A and equipment platoon of Headquarters Support Company, 46th ECB (H) Soldiers began work in the peak summer heat and commonly referred to the structure as a large erector set.

By early October, the final phases of construction were underway, which included excavating materials for the emplacement of the gigantic footers which were 8 foot by 8 foot by 4 foot slabs of concrete with metal flange mounted on the top side.

Within six days, the motivated engineers assisted by two civilian crane operators, em-

placed 32 of the 4,000 pound footers. At the same time, the welding team, led by Chief Warrant Officer 2 Langston Washington, engineer technician, 46th ECB (H), a native of Houston, worked rigorously to weld the large I-beam frames together.

Crane operators hoisted 16 large steel structures into the air while the welders worked to fuse together the flanges that were mounted on the footers. The first section was an end section that was made up of three A-framed I-beams. This phase took an additional five days to complete, but this was the end of the mission for the welders.

Next engineer Soldiers went to work in bucket trucks, suspended 40 feet high above the protective barrier walls of the military compound. These are similar to the bucket trucks of electric companies in the states.

“This kind of work is great. I was kind of nervous at first, being suspended in the bucket of the truck, 40 feet in the air and knowing that there was a threat of sniper fire, but I’m good at my job and no one was hurt,” stated Pvt. Jobe Tucker, a heavy equipment operator, who hails from Abbison, N.Y.

While high above the compound, the

Soldiers placed the sniper screen, fence and cable onto the steel frame. There was a lot of trial and error as the Soldiers figured out what worked for the construction of the MOASS.

“Every day was a challenge,” stated Sgt. 1st Class James Dean, 46th ECB (H), senior equipment supervisor, a native of Colliers, W.Va.

“It took the hard work and the minds of every Soldier that went out on that mission. This was the first time that any of us had ever constructed anything of this sort. We are horizontal engineers, truck drivers, generator mechanics and welders. Every phase of the project was different in its own way.”

“In the end, the MOASS is a testament to the capabilities of brigade and battalion design cells, and the ingenuity of our engineer Soldiers,” declared Landreth.

The first of its kind project took engineers from all areas of MND-B; vertical, horizontal and surveying to make the MOASS a reality.

“It took a lot of hard work and teamwork amongst all that were involved,” stated Bacote. “The end result was a quality product that far exceeds anything that has been done before and a very satisfied customer.”



Local contractor goes above, beyond to reopen Ishtar substation

By Pfc. Evan Loyd

2nd BCT PAO, 1st Armored Div.

BAGHDAD – Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 35th Armor Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, assisted in the reopening of the Ishtar Water and Electric Substation during a ceremony Dec. 7 following an extensive renovation paid for by Coalition Forces CERP funds.

The Soldiers have helped numerous Iraqi communities since their arrival to Iraq in April 2008; but the town of Ishtar, a mere five minutes away from Combat Outpost Cashe in the Mada'in Qada, southeast of Baghdad, had received only general help with no specific reconstruction project directed specifically for the people of the town.

"They are our close neighbors but this is the first time that we have had a chance to do something just for them," said 2nd Lt. Brian Callahan, from San Diego, Calif., the team leader of the Civil Affairs Team 33, 1-35 AR.

"Before this project, the villagers used to be indifferent to us; but now, they are happy to see us and thankful for our help."

Before the substation was refurbished, the local Iraqis had only sporadic power and had water shipped in from outside sources.

"We solved the two big problems of water and electricity in the town of Ishtar," said Fadil Mottleck, the assistant chairman of the Jisr Diyala Council. "This should be considered great progress in Ishtar's steps toward recovery."

Despite the \$166,000 project being paid for by Coalition Forces funds, one of the biggest contributors to getting the substation up and running was Assum Abed, the contractor who oversaw the entire project and lives in Ishtar.

"He went above and beyond the scope of the work," said Sgt. Christopher Nishio, from San Diego, the team sergeant of Civil Affairs Team 33. "I think he took extra pride in his work since he was working for his community's water and electric supplies."



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Evan Loyd, 2nd BCT PAO, 1st Armored Div.

2nd Lt. Brian Callahan, from San Diego, the team leader of the Civil Affairs Team 33, 1st Battalion, 35th Armored Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, Multi National Division – Baghdad, along with Lt. Col. Rod, an officer in the Iraqi Ministry of Science and Technology; Fadil Mottleck, the assistant chairman of the Jisr Diyala Council; and Assum Abed the project's contractor, cut a ribbon to signify the opening of the Ishtar electric and water substations, southeast of Baghdad, Dec. 7.

Although his original contract was only for the electrical substation, Abed notified the civil affairs team that work needed to be done on the water substation that is co-located in the same complex while working on the electrical system.

"The pipes were rusty and in disrepair, and there were no pumps whatsoever," said Callahan. "Thanks to Mr. Abed, all the pipes are new and there are two pumps pushing water to the town."

Abed has gone above and beyond the simple work of making the two substations work. Where once the two stations

where unprotected from the elements, they now have roofs that do not leak, sturdy new walls and even cement walkways connecting the two substations.

To top everything off, Abed gave everything a good wash and a fresh coat of paint.

"I am really happy and excited for my village. We now have running water and electricity that works," said Abed. "I would like to thank the Coalition Forces for their support in funding this project, and I look forward to working with them again in any future projects."

Task Force Arrowhead assumes mission from the Bowie Team

By Staff Sgt. Jason Kendrick

56th IBCT PAO, 36th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – What began in June as an insurmountable hill of training for the Texas Guardsmen of the 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team has now come to an end as they close one chapter to their story and begin anew. As of Dec. 1, the 'Arrowhead Brigade' Soldiers have taken responsibility for several missions from the 'Bowie Brigade' of the Arkansas National Guard across Iraq.

The Transfer of Authority Ceremony marked the end of mission for the 39th Infantry Brigade Combat Team and the beginning for the Texans of the 56th IBCT.

For more than 50 percent of the Arrowhead Soldiers, it marks their second deployment to Iraq. The 56th deployed to Iraq in 2005 and performed many of the same missions it now faces. The 'Arrowhead' Brigade will conduct convoy security and force protection missions.

The Convoy Security mission is vital to the overall success of the Coalition. The primary function of the mission is to ensure the timely delivery of needed supplies. The Arrowhead Soldiers conducting these missions work out of Al Asad in the Al Anbar Province and Tallil in southern Iraq. These convoy operations cover up to 700 miles per round trip and can be upwards of 50 miles in length.

Leaders face challenges during any mission, said Lt. Col. Christopher Link, 56th IBCT operations officer. A mission that arrays your forces across 50 miles of roadway in a combat zone pushes even these tough Texans to test their limits. For two weeks leading up to Dec. 1, the 'Arrowhead' Brigade and the 'Bowie' Brigade have conducted a left seat/right seat ride or relief in place. This allowed Soldiers to watch their counterparts conduct the mission so that they could observe and learn what it takes to be successful. After a week, the incoming and outgoing units trade places and allow the new Soldiers to conduct the

missions with the outgoing Soldiers providing guidance and feedback as they observe.

The training received during post-mobilization and during the relief in place set the Texas Guardsmen up for success and enabled them to assume this critical mission with the highest levels of confidence, said Link.

"Every single widget we use, from a slice of bread at chow to the fuel that runs our generators is brought in by ground convoy and Texan Soldiers are the ones protecting it. The convoys run from out west in Jordan all the way to Baghdad and south towards Kuwait, covering about two-thirds of the country," said Lt. Col. Christopher Link, 56th Brigade Operations Officer.

The force protection mission is multifaceted. It includes gate guards who are responsible for checking vehicles, personnel and their belongings prior to their access to the various bases.

"Our mission is more than just perimeter security; it is also controlling access to the Victory Base Compound and the relationships that our battalions have with the townships near our entry control points and towers," said Col. Lee Henry, commander of the 56th IBCT.

The force protection mission also involves perimeter security which includes the manning of towers, and patrols in and outside of the base. The mission being taken over by the brigade headquarters is the defense of Victory Base Complex. Its primary function is to secure and protect up to 70,000 Soldiers and contractors that live and work on the Victory Base Complex in Baghdad. The Arrowhead Brigade is ultimately responsible for the manning of the guard towers, entry control points, and who is granted access to Victory Base.

The Texas Guardsmen will also be leading three active component battalions that will have the responsibility to secure specific portions of Victory Base as well as the continuing development of positive relationships with Iraqis who live around the base.



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Jason Kendrick, 56th IBCT PAO

Sgt. Jeremy Amis (behind flag) and Sgt. Jeffrey Anderson, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, raise the brigade colors during the Transfer of Authority ceremony Dec. 1 between the 56th IBCT and the 39th IBCT.

WRESTLE MANIA INVADES BAGHDAD



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Lyndsey Dransfield, MND-B PAO
Soldiers from 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, cheer as World Wrestling Entertainment wrestler “R Truth” climbs out of their mine resistant ambush protective vehicle and takes the ring during the Tribute to the Troops Tour held in front of the Al Faw Palace on Dec. 5.



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Lyndsey Dransfield, MND-B PAO
Troops from all over the Victory Base Complex gathered to cheer for their favorite World Wrestling Entertainment wrestlers at the Tribute to the Troops Tour held in front of the Al Faw Palace Dec. 5.

By Spc. Benjamin Crane and Pfc. Lyndsey Dransfield
MND-B PAO

CAMP VICTORY, Iraq – Hundreds of service members gathered in front of Al Faw Palace Dec. 5, to watch World Wrestling Entertainment wrestlers lay the smack down.

John Cena, Chris Jericho, The Big Show and the WWE Divas headlined the Tribute to the Troops Tour.

Troops from all of the Victory Base Complex came out to cheer on their favorite stars. Some even waited in line for three hours before the barriers were opened so they could get a ring side view of the action.

“I was extremely excited when I heard about this because I grew up watching wrestling with my dad and my friends back home,” said Spc. Scott Snow, a Garland, Texas, native, with Company B, Special Troops Battalion, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad. “I got here at 8:15 a.m. and there was already a line”

The troops stormed toward the ring when the gates opened at 10 a.m. for a day to enjoy and boost their morale.

“I really appreciate it because they realize we do so much for the country. Then by them coming out here, they support us. It raises a lot of morale for a lot of people and I really enjoy watching,” said Sgt. Molly Stoklosa, a native of Ely, Minn., and part of the 4th Inf. Div. Band.

Before the fights began, Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond, commanding general of MND-B re-enlisted one hundred Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers.

Spc. Jerry Ewell was one of the soldiers that decided it was a good opportunity to rededicate his service to his county and see his favorite wrestlers at the same time.

“I want to make the Army a career,” said Ewell, an Idaho native, who serves with the Special Troops Battalion 2nd Brigade, 1st Inf. Div., MND-B. He talked to his retention NCO and was told he could be ringside when he was sworn in.

“My favorite wrestler is John Cena and I really hope to meet him,” said Ewell. “He knows what the troops are like because his dad was a Marine.”

Whether or not Ewell got the chance to meet Cena

is a mystery, but most likely he was thrilled when at the end of the show Cena proudly held his championship belt over his head and paid a special tribute to the service members.

“This vacation means a lot to me and it means a lot to spend it with you guys. I am surrounded by the most disciplined, courageous unbelievable bunch in the universe and I am proud of each and every one of you,” he yelled to the crowd as they threw their hands in the air and cheered in unison.

This is the sixth year the WWE wrestlers have volunteered to perform for the troops in Iraq and according to Vince McMahon, chairman and promoter of the WWE, it certainly won’t be the last.

“All of our performers want to come year after year. It’s an extraordinary personal experience for them to be able to interact with our Armed Forces,” McMahon said. “It’s the biggest event we do all year, bigger than Wrestle Mania. We get more out of it than any other event. It’s the least we can do as patriots; to come over here and show some appreciation for all of the good work these men and women do.”

Wrestler and entertainer, The Big Show, has been coming to Iraq since 2003 and personally continues to come back each year because of the feeling he gets when he’s around Soldiers.

“I know we are supposed to be a big morale booster for the Soldiers, but I find myself being inspired when we come over here,” said The Big Show. “I love everything about the Armed Forces and I’m a proud American.”

Over two months ago Maj. Michael McGregor, a Roaring Springs, Penn. native, deputy of personnel office with 4th Inf. Div, MND-B, was appointed as officer in-charge of coordination and planning for the event.

“We met with the set design staff, who came over before time and gave us a layout of how the venue would work,” said McGregor. “When the staff landed they just needed to add the finishing touch.”

But McGregor said, it’s not the set design or the venue layout that make the event so significant each year. It’s the unique opportunity service members in theater have to meet and see people they may not otherwise have the opportunity to see.

“WWE wrestlers are larger than life to most of our Soldiers, so they carry a certain amount of mystery or amazement for people,” said McGregor.

“When you go to a concert in the United States the entertainers don’t do a meet and greet after the show where everyone gets an autograph, but they do here because they are appreciative of what the Soldiers do for them and our country, he said. “I don’t think these entertainers realize that for some, this is a dream come true.”



World Wrestling Entertainment’s wrestler, John Cena, holds up the United States Flag while paying a tribute to the troops in Iraq during the Tribute to the Troops Tour held in front of the Al Faw Palace Dec. 5.

U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Lyndsey Dransfield, MND-B PAO



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Lyndsey Dransfield, MND-B PAO
World Wrestling Entertainment wrestlers “The Big Show” and Cryme Tyme’s “Shad” greet Soldiers in the crowd after the show during the Tribute to the Troops Tour held in front of the Al Faw Palace Dec. 5.



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Lyndsey Dransfield, MND-B PAO
Baghdad Soldiers gather around the World Wrestling Entertainment ring, raise their right hand and re-enlist to serve their country before the WWE wrestlers took the ring during the Tribute to the Troops Tour held in front of the Al Faw Palace Dec. 5.



World Wrestling Entertainment Divas Kelly Kelly and Eve, leave the ring after their fight as part of the WWE’s Tribute to the Troops Tour Dec. 5 in front of the Al Faw Palace.

U.S. Army photo by Spc. Benjamin Crane, MND-B PAO

Day in the life ...

Patriot Brigade support Soldier thankful for opportunity to fight

By Sgt. Jeremy Todd

4th BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE RUSTAMIYAH, Iraq – The holiday season offers people the opportunity to show appreciation for what they have achieved throughout the past year – and deployed, fighting Soldiers are no exception.

Spc. Chad Reed, a Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldier serving with the 94th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, in southern Baghdad, is thankful for the opportunity to fight – in the ring that is.

Reed is an amateur boxer. He is somewhat of a superstar on his home base of Forward Operating Base Rustamiyah, especially after recently having defeated a Golden Gloves boxer on nearby FOB Loyalty.

“When I’m not on mission, I’m in the gym or in the ring practicing,” expressed Reed, whose time in the ring just about equals the length of his deployment, a little more than a year.

He said he wants to prove that he is a boxer now and no longer a street fighter.

“A boxer is patient,” said Reed. He’s not just going for the knockout hit, and that’s where the difference lies between the two.”

The New Orleans native grew up in the rougher part of town and made the life-changing decision to join the Army not only to improve himself but also to provide a better life for his wife at Fort Polk, La.

The 24-year-old fighter weighs in at 148 lbs and stands 5 feet, 7 inches tall.

Reed said all his punching power comes from his heart and that his love for his mother, wife and stepson keep him on the straight and narrow path of always doing what is right – no matter what the circumstance.

A handful of people have helped Reed strive for success in the squared circle. One such supporter is Sempa Wilson, a security guard on FOB Rustamiyah from Kampala, Uganda, who works with Reed on his footwork and speed.

“He doesn’t like to be hit in the face, but who does? My job is to make sure he is not hit unnecessarily,” commented Wilson.

“We often spar to keep him aware of the unpredictability of this sport. This is not a nice sport, but it is a team sport (and) many others helped Reed win this fight,” he said, referring to the bout with the Golden Gloves opponent at FOB Loyalty.

The task of ensuring Reed is in the best fighting shape possible goes to Staff Sgt. Anthony Nelson, a medical supply Soldier with 94th BSB. Nelson’s responsibility is building Reed’s stamina and muscle strength. Nelson works with Reed for three hours a day, six days a week.

Nelson said Reed is one of the most dedicated Soldiers he has worked with during his deployment, both on the clock and off.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jeremy Todd, 4th BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.

Spc. Chad Reed (right), a New Orleans native, assigned to Company A, 94th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, spars with Sempa Wilson, a Kampala, Uganda, native, and base security guard, Nov. 19.

“Boxing has motivated him to be a better Soldier, just as being a better Soldier has motivated his command to ensure he becomes a better boxer,” expressed Wilson, a Jacksonville, Fla., native.

Reed said he has received tremendous support from his peers and his leaders. When he fought the Golden Gloves boxer, his command arranged to convoy 34 Co. A, 94th BSB Soldiers to FOB Loyalty to root for him.

“It is gestures like those that really make me want to be a better Soldier,” said Reed. “My command has faith in me both on the battlefield and in the ring, and that means a lot to me.”

First Sgt. Dan Donald III, a Fort Polk, La. resident, who is the senior enlisted leader for Co. A, said he wanted Reed to know his fellow Soldiers supported him.

“Spc. Reed is one of my hard-charging Soldiers,” said Donald. “He totally out-classed his opponent at FOB Loyalty. It was the least I could do for him. He does a lot for his

platoon, the battalion and the brigade. In the end, it provided positive motivation for the Soldiers who attended as well as Reed.”

“Mike Tyson’s Greatest Hits” and “Ali” are Reed’s favorite movies. He said he models his fighting style after the two. He compared stepping in the ring to driving out the gate on to the streets of Baghdad.

“When it’s time to maneuver, it’s time to maneuver no matter what the case may be,” explained Reed. “When it’s time to go, it’s time to go; and that’s what I do as a Soldier and a fighter.”

Reed added that he hopes someone will notice his drive to succeed, his dedication to be a better fighter, and he hopes to fight professionally some day. For now, however, he just wants to make it safely home to his Family. This holiday season, the promising pugilist is thankful for all those who have supported him, both fighting in the ring and on the streets of Baghdad.

Army specialist travels across continents to provide for Family

Ex refugee reflects on hardships of life in Africa

By Sgt. David Hodge
1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FALCON, Iraq – At the age of 20, he has experienced more adventure and traveling across more countries, oceans and continents in search of a better life than most people his age.

“It was miserable because of the war,” said Samuel Ladu, describing his life in Sudan between 1983 and 1994 amidst the Second Civil War. “We were living to survive. From day to day, if we woke up in the morning, we thanked god.”

Ladu called a small farming community on the fringes of Juba, Sudan, his home for approximately 20 years before embarking on a remarkable journey across eastern Africa as a war refugee, who flew to the U.S. to become a citizen.

In Juba, Ladu and his Family were surrounded by two fighting factions.

“In the city, there were bombings every day,” stated Ladu, who currently serves as a translator in southern Baghdad for the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

Ladu’s father died when he was six. Soon after, his older brother, Charles, developed glaucoma. Two unsuccessful surgeries by under-qualified doctors left Charles blind for life, said Ladu.

This left Ladu and his mother to care for Charles in a war-torn area with little food or money. His opportunity to leave Sudan came shortly after receiving a blessing from his mother to move away and search for a better life.

Ladu led Charles and his cousin to neighboring Ethiopia in search of treatments and an education. While in Ethiopia, he continued his high school education while living on rations of beans and corn provided by shelters and refugee camps. Surviving in Ethiopia became more difficult as time passed.

“While I was in Ethiopia, I considered going back to Sudan,” he explained. “I couldn’t go through with it though. In Ethiopia, I didn’t talk to anyone, and I didn’t have any food to eat, so life became so difficult.”

At one point, he said he realized anything could happen to him and his Family while at the camp, so he took a chance and went to Kenya on the little amount of money the group could produce.

“When I went to Kenya, I assumed a refugee status at a camp on the Kenya and Somalia border,” Ladu explained.

Disease and famine plagued the camp. Ladu said he believes he was lucky to have stayed only four months before his processing became complete and he boarded an aircraft to the United States.

“Some people stay for years in the camps and even die there waiting to get out,” he added.

Arriving in New York in 1994, Ladu immediately became eligible for work and other benefits, and moved across the country to San Diego. He struggled to find steady work there, often spending up to 80 percent of his wages toward rent.

Working at a convenient store as a cashier, armed criminals robbed Ladu at gunpoint on three separate occasions. The local police caught the criminals each time. His employer offered him an additional four dollars an hour to remain with the store, but he decided against the raise.

“I decided I had better move on before I ended up getting hurt,” Ladu said.

He moved to Rochester, Minn., in 1996, where he attended welding school and worked as a professional welder at a factory. He eventually flew his girlfriend and brother to the United States to live with him.

Since Ladu was a small child, he said he often envisioned becoming a Soldier to serve his country. In fact, he attempted to join the Army three separate occasions but was not profi-



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. David Hodge, 1st BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.

Spc. Samuel Ladu, a translator attached to Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, speaks with Iraqi Army soldiers from Company 2, 1st Battalion, 24th Brigade, 6th IA Division, at a traffic control point Dec. 3 in the Saydiyah community of southern Baghdad. Ladu, who hails from Juba, Sudan, sought refuge in Kenya due to the Second Civil War in his country and became a U.S. citizen after joining the Army. The 34-year-old father of six children said he always dreamed of serving his country.

cient enough in the English language.

In March 2007, he received his chance when he enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves and attended Advanced Individual Training at Fort Jackson, S.C., to become a translator.

“When I look at my life, I see that the U.S. has done a lot for me,” stated Ladu. “They brought me from Africa and gave me many opportunities. I asked myself what I could do to pay the government back, so I decided to join the Army.”

Upon completion of AIT, he immediately deployed to Iraq and arrived at Forward Operating Base Falcon in early August.

Shortly after his arrival, he bumped into Bol Madut, a linguist attached to Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div. The two immediately recognized each other from middle school in Sudan.

Madut said he heard that a person from Sudan was coming to work, and he was surprised to find out it was his childhood colleague.

“In Sudan, Ladu was a very religious man,” explained Madut. “He carried a Bible around with him all the time, trying to spread the word of Christianity. When I saw him in Iraq, I asked him where his Bible was.”

Ladu currently translates for Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Bobb, the senior enlisted leader for the 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div.

His duties include providing assessments on culture, politics and significant information released by the Iraq media before each patrol.

“Ladu is very informative, and he isn’t from Iraq, so we know his assessment is impartial to the different religious groups,” said Spc. Sam Krasnican, an infantryman from Bloomington, Ill., assigned to the personnel security detachment, HHD, 1st BCT, 4th Inf. Div. “He is a major asset to the Army and the unit.”

Krasnican, who serves as Ladu’s first-line supervisor, said he believes Ladu is an outstanding individual, who will do well when given an opportunity to lead.

Following the deployment, Ladu plans to either teach at his AIT in Fort Jackson or work in a recruiter’s office to encourage others like him to enlist.

He is the father of six children and he married his girl-



Spc. Samuel Ladu, with 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, is originally from Juba, Sudan, and works as a translator for Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Bobb, the senior enlisted leader of the 1st “Raider” BCT, on missions throughout southern Baghdad.

friend before leaving for basic training. Charles, his brother, now holds a bachelor’s degree in International Relations and another in Political Science.

“When I was younger, I would point out airplanes flying in the sky and tell my mother that someday she will be sitting next to me flying to the U.S.,” Ladu stated.

He plans to someday fly his ill mother to the States for treatment. Ladu does not know if he will continue to serve in the Army, but he will never forget the opportunity the United States gave him and his Family.

Ironhorse Soldier honors Family's 4th Inf. Div. lineage

By Pfc. Lyndsey Dransfield
MND-B PAO

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Most people don't particularly like the suggestion that they are merely products of their environment. But whether the implication appeals to you or not, it is perhaps apropos in that it describes the situation for many people fairly accurately.

Maj. Therese Obidinski, who serves as the engagement operations and plans officer with the engagements cell for the 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, may have grown up in a much different environment if it wasn't for her parents: Eugene and Mary Obidinski.

When the couple married, they found themselves longing for a child of their own. Unable to conceive, Eugene and Mary decidedly felt a strong need to provide for a child in need.

In 1975, Eugene and Mary made a special trip to Bethlehem. It was in an orphanage that they found their daughter, Therese.

Abandoned during the Israel-Palestinian Conflict, the young Obidinski was among the thousands of children in Bethlehem who had been abandoned or had lost both parents.

Growing up in New Smyrna Beach, Fla., Obidinski had no way of knowing who her biological parents are, but said she is content. She described her childhood as happy and considers her adoptive parents her real Family.

"My parents are the one who raised me and took care of me. I think a real father and mother are those who take care of you and love you no matter what: and that's who they are," said Obidinski. "My dad used to take me fishing and always let me help out anytime he was fixing or building something. My parents are very patriotic, and we celebrated all the patriotic holidays."

At the age of five, Obidinski became a citizen of the United States and said she attributes her own patriotism to her

father, who was a member of the American Legion. Eugene had served with 4th Inf. Div. as a private first class in the Army at the end of the Korean War. Her uncle also served with 4th Inf. Div. – during the historic invasion of Normandy in World War II.

"My dad would always tell me stories when I was a child, and I used to think: 'Maybe one day, I'd like to serve too'."

Throughout her school years, Obidinski was heavily involved in academics and ran cross-country track. Toward the end of high school, she decided that she wanted to attend a service academy, preferably the United States Naval Academy, but submitted packets to multiple service academies.

Before graduation, she paid a visit to the academies and had a change of heart.

"I had always wanted to go to the Naval Academy, but I changed my mind when I visited West Point (Military Academy). I thought it was the best of the schools. It is the oldest of the service academies, and with all the traditions and history and great leaders that have come out of West Point, I couldn't even consider the other schools.

"One day, I got this thing in the mail from the Military Academy saying: 'Congratulations, you have been accepted to the United States Military Academy, class of 1998.' I was so excited and my parents were so proud."

Obidinski studied engineering and Spanish during her four years at West Point Military Academy and graduated with a Bachelors of Science. She highlights the day of her commissioning as one of her most memorable – when her father and uncle pinned the second lieutenant bars on her Army service uniform.

As an officer in the Army, she has been stationed in multiple locations, teaching fellow Soldiers and developing new projects, such as the Information Operations Tactical Training Course.

Shortly after Obidinski was assigned to the 4th Inf. Div. as

the engagements operations and plans officer, she deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"I thought it was cool because my father and uncle both served with 4th Inf. Div. Plus, I get to be part of something bigger than myself and serve in Iraq," said Obidinski.

Her primary responsibility in the engagement cell is to prepare general officers for engagements with Iraqi leaders. She gathers and packages information for her senior leaders in order to assist them in resolving any issues that may arise – a vital role in daily operations.

Her fellow Soldiers who work alongside her in the engagement cell describe her as positive, cheerful, boisterous and full of energy.

"The key leader engagements cell is a rather new organization and is a very dynamic and diverse cell," said Lt. Col. Anthony Scotto, a Pensacola Fla., native, and prior chief of engagements for MND-B.

"She fits in very well and has learned a lot as well as helped with the structure and formation. She's brought a fresh perspective into the cell."

Obidinski said she enjoys working in her position and believes that her work, along with her fellow Soldiers, has a vital impact on the overall situation in Iraq.

"We are synchronizing and massing the effects on the battlefield to make lives better," said Obidinski. "It's great to go home and say we defeated the enemy, but it's even better to go home and say we helped promote 'x' amount of school openings and people returning to work. We are promoting nation building – what more experience could you want then the hands-on experience here?"

After serving almost 11 years in the Army, and now a proud mother herself, Obidinski said she plans on continuing her career in the Army and said none of her success would've been possible without her parents, who are currently taking care of her daughter at home.

"As long as I can continue to find a good balance between my Family and the Army, I don't see any reason to leave. I don't mind staying in and see where it takes me," she said. "I have been so lucky because my parents have supported my and helped me though it all.

"I'm a product of my environment," she added, with a heartfelt chuckle.

“My dad would always tell me stories when I was a child, and I used to think: ‘Maybe one day, I’d like to serve too’.”

Maj. Therese Obidinski
New Smyrna Beach, Fla.
engagement operations and plans officer
4th Inf. Div., MND-B

Dagger Soldier earns honors as Fort Riley 'Paralegal Soldier of the Year'

By Spc. Dustin Roberts
2nd HBCT PAO, 1st Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – A Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldier from the 2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team "Dagger," 1st Infantry Division, won 1st place in the annual Fort Riley, Kan., Paralegal Soldier of the Year competition at the 1st Inf. Div. headquarters building via video teleconference from Camp Victory Dec. 5.

Spc. Nickolas Heystek, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd HBCT, a paralegal specialist, who is a native of Kalamazoo, Mich., competed against three other Soldiers in the brigade to determine who was fit as the most knowledgeable junior paralegal Soldier in the division.

Heystek, who has served in the Army for 2.5 years, will be presented an Army Commendation Medal for his achievement.

Col. Joseph Martin, commander, 2nd HBCT, 1st Inf. Div., also presented Heystek with a Dagger Brigade coin for excellence.

"This has definitely brought me to a new level in my knowledge of the job," said Heystek. "It feels good to have bragging rights."

Throughout the year, the division held four Paralegal Soldier of the Quarter boards and selected three Soldiers, all of whom are Dagger Brigade Soldiers, in the process to compete for the honors.

Heystek, along with Spc. Efran Leal, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd HBCT, opera-

tionally attached to 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division., and Spc. Marcos Brito, HHC, 2nd HBCT, 1st Inf. Div., were all asked questions on topics they would usually see in a promotion board, such as map-reading, leadership and land navigation.

The primary focus of the board however, were specific to their job, Heystek said.

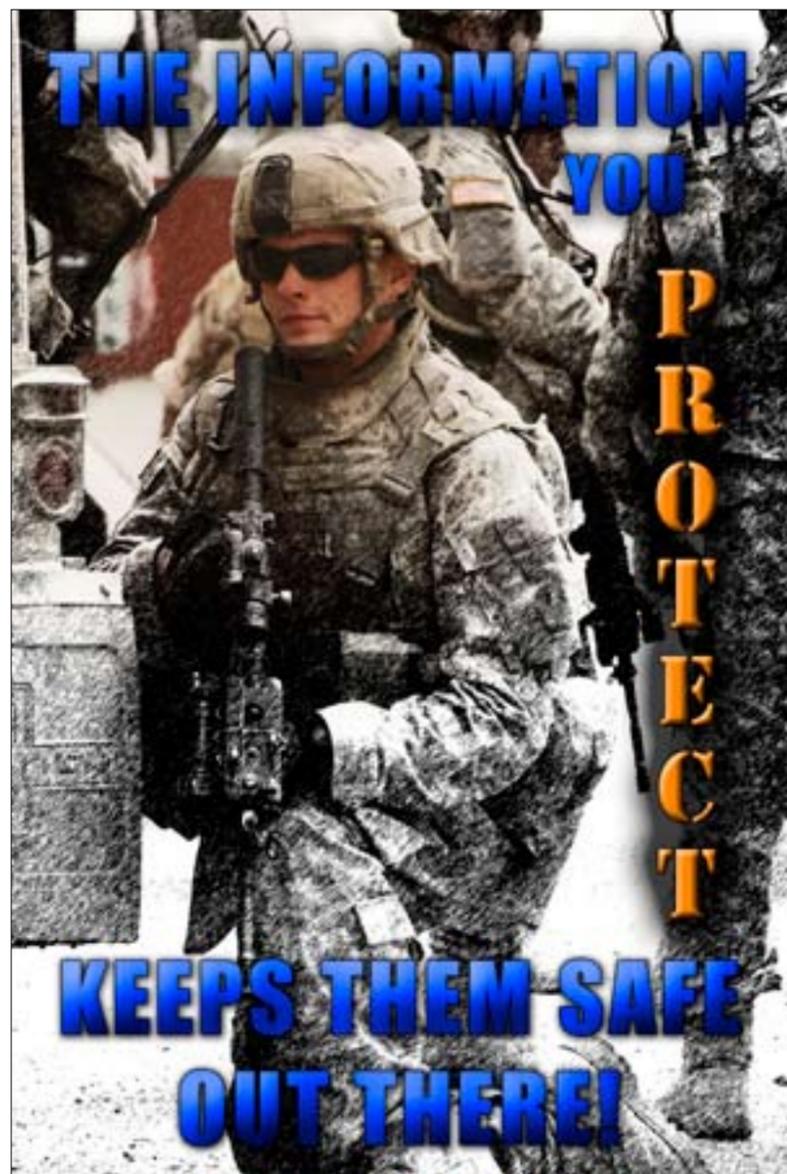
"We were asked questions on Army regulations concerning legal assistance, claims and military justice," he said. "Spc. Brito and I threw questions at each other every night for the past few weeks to study for it, and he and Spc. Leal did an outstanding job in the competition."

Sgt. 1st Class Mark Dennison, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the brigade legal office, said he was proud that all three competitors were Dagger Soldiers who worked with him.

"It was a great feeling that they competed against each other because all three of them do outstanding work," said Dennison. "They all take initiative and make sure the job is done correctly all the time. They really make my job easy."

Unknown to Heystek, his wife, Bethany Heystek, took the initiative and showed up at the 1st Infantry Division headquarters at Fort Riley to watch the VTC competition.

"She showed her face at the end – and surprised me," said the smiling Heystek. "She told me she was proud of me, and she knew that I could do it."



Strikers learn combatives

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

FORWARD OPERATING BASE WAR EAGLE, Iraq – “It only hurts for the first couple days ... but after a while you get used to it,” the instructor told his fellow Soldiers as they gathered Dec. 8 in an Iraqi Army dining facility at Forward Operating Base War Eagle in Baghdad’s Adhamiyah district.

Sgt. Dwan West, a native of St. Louis, was training the troops in the Army Combative style of fighting; back in the United States, he is ranked as the number-one mixed martial arts amateur fighter for his weight class in Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico.

On this evening, West and Staff Sgt. Keith Reiss, his co-instructor, who serves as the supply NCO for 3rd Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, were teaching members of the Striker Brigades Command Security Detachment and Soldiers from the Military Police Platoon, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd STB, 3rd BCT, 4th Inf. Div., how to throw a kick to different parts of an opponents body, how to subdue a person and how to escape after being grabbed.

These are useful skills for Soldiers to have, especially those who go outside the wire.

“A lot of times, we walk down the sidewalk with the locals,” said Reiss. “I know it gives them confidence that if something happens, where someone grabs a hold of them ... they have to be able to defend themselves.”

West and Reiss teach the students techniques not only to help them physically defeat an enemy but to be mentally stronger as well.

“Fighting is not only physical ... it’s mental. Fighting is just like chess; I’m teaching these guys a chess game,” said West, who serves as an operations NCO in HHC, 3rd STB. “I’m trying to teach Soldiers that no matter what you do, you have to think one or two steps ahead of your opponent.”

West and Reiss, a native of Colorado Springs, Colo., host the two-hour class six nights a week at the Iraqi Army dining facility.

Most of the students show up every night, but an ongoing mission is usually the reason for an absence.

“They listen, everybody listens. When you have a group of fresh people ... they’re green ... they’re new to the sport,” said West.

Because the students pay such close attention, it makes it a little easier for West and Reiss to instill the valuable knowledge.

“They’re going to listen to you. They don’t have their own way of doing it. They don’t think they’re better than anyone else,” said West. “They’re there to learn and they’re eager.”

Sgt. Crystal Jimenez, a native of Pueblo, Colo., who serves as a military policeman with the Military Police Platoon, HHC, 3rd STB, has been taking the class for three weeks.

“It definitely helps a lot. We go over the same moves every night. We definitely see all of us getting better every night,” said Jimenez.

Jimenez stands nearly a head shorter than most of the other students in the combatives class.

“It doesn’t matter what size we are,” she said. “Sgt. West pairs us up with small people, with big people. We’re all here for the same learning experience, and we’re never going to get any better if we don’t go up against anybody that’s bigger than us or better than us.”



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jerry Saslav, 3rd BCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.
Sgt. Dwan West, a native of St. Louis, adjusts the fighting form of Spc. Russell Mullen, a native of Lynchburg, Va., at Forward Operating Base War Eagle in Baghdad’s Adhamiyah district Dec. 8. West is ranked as the number one mixed martial arts amateur fighter for his weight class in Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico.

Spc. Matthew Vitug is not a small guy; he power lifts weights multiple times a week. This was his first combatives class.

“It’s more fatiguing than power lifting. It gets you more into shape as far as (physical training) goes. You’re using multiple muscles at multiple times: flexing, stretching, pushing, pulling, every movement you can think of, you’re using in a matter of seconds,” said Vitug, a native of Crofton, Md., who serves as a military policeman with the Military Police Platoon, HHC, 3rd STB.

The fatigue is hard-earned and well thought of for these Soldiers, who encounter

various stresses being deployed more than 5,000 miles from friends and family.

“Every day it’s stressful, getting closer to home and (we) want to pass time. It helps relieve a lot of the stress that we go through every day,” said Jimenez.

The training will continue until the Striker Brigade redeploys. Some of the Soldiers intend to attend the same school where West and Reiss train. It also has drawn them closer together.

“We watch fights together; we hang out,” said West. “We’re starting to become a small family.”

FAST cooks ensure Soldiers eat well

Capt. Katharine Lubinski
225 BSB, 2nd SBCT, 25th Inf. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – At many of the combat outposts and joint security stations north of Baghdad, Soldiers enjoyed a traditional Thanksgiving meal Nov. 28 thanks to a few dedicated cooks and other support personnel.

Forward Area Support Team Soldiers from the 225th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Stryker Brigade “Warrior,” 25th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, worked tirelessly to prepare a home-style Thanksgiving meal for Soldiers throughout the Warrior Brigade battle space.

More than half of the Warrior Brigade spent Thanksgiving at their combat outposts and joint security stations. To prepare for the meal, Warrant Officer Reginald Lemon, the 2nd Stryker Brigade food service advisor, coordinated with the cooks to provide food to each site. Sites requested the food more than a month in advance. One week prior to Thanksgiving, the logistics convoys began delivering the supplies to the sites.

“The [cooks] at the sites used their food service knowledge to take ownership of the mission, putting on the best Thanksgiving meal possible despite their limited resources,” Lemon said.

Each site has only two cooks to serve approximately 200 Soldiers. To feed so many people such a massive meal, many cooks worked until the early

hours of the morning, returning after a brief respite to finish the meal. At the larger sites, cooks worked throughout the night until the meal was finished.

To thank the cooks for their hard work, Lt. Col. Mark Collins, 225th BSB commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony Johnson, the 225th BSB senior enlisted leader, visited the outposts and security stations on Thanksgiving.

“We want to recognize the hard work these food specialists devoted to preparing a great meal,” Collins said. “Cooks work hard every day. On days like this, they willingly go above and beyond. They wanted to give the best possible holiday meal at their sites because of their commitment to the Soldiers they support.”

“It’s important for us to see the fruit of their labor and let them know we appreciate their hard work,” Johnson said.

Soldiers from the logistic convoys volunteered to escort the commander and sergeant major on this mission, sacrificing their holiday relaxation to thank others for their hard work.

“This was a good mission to be on. I know I’ve never had a Thanksgiving where I got to do something like this. Showing these Soldiers that we appreciate what they do is important,” said 1st Lt. Miles Haurtiz, the logistics convoy commander for the Thanksgiving mission, during his mission debrief.



U.S. Army photo by Capt. Katharine Lubinski, 225th BSB PAO, 2nd SBCT, 25th Inf. Div.
Spc. Jodi Dunn, Headquarters Company, 225th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team “Warrior,” 25th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, stirs sweet potatoes to ensure they cook evenly before they are mashed for sweet potato casserole, Nov. 27.

Flat Stanley visits Iraq

By Sgt. Carmen Guerrero
890th Eng. Bn., 926th Eng. Bde.

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – The imagination of a child goes far above what most adults can even begin to fathom. The famous storybook character, Flat Stanley, visited various places in Iraq and with the help of the 890th Engineer Battalion, 926th Engineer Brigade, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, the tradition of the Flat Stanley Project can continue, thus furthering the minds and imaginations of children at Eastview Elementary School in Connorsville, Ind.

Capt. Timothy Sastic, native of Swedesboro, N.J., and chaplain for the 890th Eng. Bn. from Gulfport, Miss., had the opportunity to participate in the Flat Stanley Project through the second grade class of his wife's cousin at Eastview Elementary School in Connorsville, Ind.

The story behind Flat Stanley dates back to 1964 when author Jeff Brown wrote of a little boy named Stanley Lambchop who was flattened by a bulletin board used for pictures and posters, that was given to him and his brother by their father. In the middle of the night, the board fell and flattened Stanley while he was sleeping.

Stanley survived and uses his altered state by sliding into rooms through the opening at the bottom of closed doors and manages to even catch museum thieves by posing as a painting on the wall.

There are several books in the Flat Stanley series in which his many adventures are captured.

The Flat Stanley Project was started in 1995 by a schoolteacher in Canada, and the tradition of cutting out photos of Flat Stanley, decorating them, sending them out to pen pals, who are then photographed with

Flat Stanley, and documenting Stanley visits via letters has been a tradition many teachers and children keep going.

While in Iraq, Flat Stanley visited the Specialized Search Dog team, went out on a route clearance mission, and even spent the day at the International Zone with Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Talley, native of South Bend, Ind.

While at the IZ, Flat Stanley went to Green Beans Coffee, was an observer at a Soldier's reenlistment ceremony, saw the famous Crossed Swords and the Iraqi Tomb of the Unknown Soldier before heading back to base on a Blackhawk.

"I think Flat Stanley is a great way to motivate students to learn more about their world. Flat Stanley is a great way to show students more than just what appears on TV and in text books," said 1st Lt. Clark Neal, native of Punxsutawney, Pa., and member of the 926th Eng. Bde.

"When I received a request to take some pictures with Flat Stanley from a second-grade class in Indiana, I didn't know what I was getting into," said Sastic. "In fact, I had no idea who Flat Stanley was."

Flat Stanley is a paper man that travels the world, and then writes back to students about his experiences.

"When word got around the battalion that Flat Stanley was here, he became an instant celebrity! Soldiers volunteered to take him on trips around the camp and even out into Baghdad. Perhaps the highlight of Flat Stanley's trip was a helicopter ride with Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Talley to the IZ. He is returning to the states now, but not without many of our Soldiers participating in the fun of showing Flat Stanley around Iraq," said Sastic.

Popular storybook character tours Iraq with Soldiers help



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Philip Crosby, 688th Eng. Co., 890th Eng. Bn., 926th Eng. Bde.

Capt. Timothy Sastic, native of Swedesboro, N.J., proudly displays his new friend, Flat Stanley, Nov. 24. Sastic participated in the Flat Stanley Project in honor of a second grade class in Connorsville, Ind. Sastic is the chaplain for the 890th Engineer Battalion, 926th Engineer Brigade, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

Sister, brother reenlist at Camp Striker



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Scott Wolfe, 2nd BCT PAO, 1st Armd. Div.

Pfc. Marlene Banuelos and her older brother, Staff Sgt. Normando Gallardo, hold up their Oath of Enlistment certificates after reenlisting in the U.S. Army for another six years. Both are from El Paso, Texas. Banuelos serves with Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, and Gallardo serves with Company A, 40th Electronic Signal Brigade, in Balad.

By Staff Sgt. Scott Wolfe
2nd BCT PAO, 1st Armd. Div.

BAGHDAD – It's not unusual for Soldiers to reenlist while deployed to Iraq. In fact, with all the incentives, it is common place. For two Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldiers however, reenlisting together during a special reenlistment ceremony Dec. 7 at Camp Striker, Iraq, proved to truly be an Army "Family" adventure.

Such was the case for Staff Sgt. Normando Gallardo, who, along with his sister, Pfc. Marlene Banuelos, made the commitment to stay with their Army Family for six more years during a ceremony at the headquarters of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division.

And overseeing the Family gathering was none other than Col. Pat White, the Iron Brigade's commander, who is a native of Apple Valley, Calif.

Gallardo and Banuelos, both of whom are natives of El Paso, Texas, are serving together in Iraq, albeit at different bases. Gallardo serves with Company A, 40th Electronic Signal Brigade, which is based in Balad. Banuelos serves with the 2nd BCT, 1st Armd. Div., at Camp Striker.

It was perhaps fitting for the siblings to reenlist together, since the two have been influential to each other. Banuelos said she had ini-

tially intended on joining the Navy. However, things didn't work out as initially planned and she changed her mind and decided to join her brother in the Army. In fact, he was at the wheel when she went to speak with the Army recruiter about enlisting. Almost two years later, he was there again when she raised her right hand and committed herself to staying with the team.

"It was her own decision," he said, speaking of the day he took her to the recruiter. "She couldn't go Navy, so I told her I could take her down to the Army Recruiter."

Gallardo, a cable system installer, has reenlisted for the sixth and what he says will be his final time in his career. With 15 years in the army, he has his sister beat by a few years both in service and age.

"I'm 22, he's 35. There are 13 years between us," said the younger sister with just a hint of tease in her voice.

Banuelos, who signed her second enlistment contract, serves as a gunner with the command security detail team for the brigade's command sergeant major.

Gallardo said his younger sister had the final word on when the two would commit to their new service obligations.

"I had to call her up to ask when she wanted to do this," he quipped.

Father, son serve together in Iraq

By Staff Sgt. Matt Meadows

4th BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div. (L)

FORWARD OPERATING BASE LOYALTY, Iraq – A father and son deploying to Baghdad with the same active-duty unit is fairly unique; but when they only see each other about one week during the deployment, that is even more unusual.

Sgt. Maj. Ronald Slawson, from Waynesville, Mo., and 2nd Lt. Shaun Slawson, his son, from Leesville, La., both deployed with 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division. However, the father and brigade operations sergeant major redeployed about a week after the son arrived as a late deployer.

Slawson met his son, a platoon leader assigned to the brigade's 3rd Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment, at the helipad when he arrived on the base in mid-November, and Shuan saw his dad off when he redeployed as part of the brigade's torch party a week later. Other than spending a couple of hours together and sharing a few meals, they really didn't see each other much.

"We haven't got to spend a whole lot of time together, but it is neat having him here," said Ronald. "I know his mother hates having both of us gone at the same time, but I'm proud of him; that he has done what he has done and he's over here and we're in the same brigade together.

"Of course, she doesn't like either one of us being deployed, but she gets along with it," he continued. "She knows that's the life we live, and that's what we've got to do."

Shuan said he thinks his mother worried more about him the first time he deployed even though his dad stayed at home with her. This time around, she knew her husband was returning shortly and her son was only deploying for a few months.

Just as the situation of a father and son being deployed together is uncommon, Shuan is not a typical second lieutenant fresh out of school without any military experience. To the contrary, he is a seasoned Soldier who deployed previously to Baghdad as an enlisted National Guard cavalry scout.

"I was one of four guys in my OBC (Officer Basic Course) that had prior deployment experience, and it definitely makes it a lot easier coming in here with these guys," explained Shuan. "They kind of look at you a little differently because they know you've had that experience and you've walked in their shoes before, especially being right here in Baghdad (before), patrolling just the other side of the (Tigris) River doing the exact same thing we are doing right now."

Shuan joined the Guard as a 17-year-old high school student to pay for college after his father recommended service to him. "Son, we have got to figure out some way to pay for it because pop doesn't make that much money." After completing 2.5 years of college, Shuan's unit was activated, and he deployed to Forward Operating Base Liberty from 2004 to 2005.

Following his first deployment, Shuan volunteered to remain activated for a short time to train Military Transition Teams with the 91st Training Division at Fort Carson, Colo. His leadership wanted Shuan to reenlist to go active duty, offering him a \$10,000 bonus and an opportunity to travel to Hawaii. He called his parents to get their opinions, and his dad wasn't shy about letting his son

know how he felt.

"I said hell no, bring your butt home and finish school. He only had a year and a half left," expressed Ronald. "It took some talking to convince him. He was telling me, 'Well, they are going to make me a sergeant.' I ... (said) come home and finish school. Once you finish school, if you want to go back out there and reenlist ... that's fine, but finish school first."

Although he really enjoyed what he was doing and wanted to remain on active duty at the time, the newly commissioned armor officer admitted he is glad he listened to his dad and made the right decision to finish school.

"I have never told him what to do in life. I've let him do what he has wanted to do; with that one exception when I told him to (come) home and go to school," commented Ronald. "Other than that, he is going to do what he wants to do just like I did when I grew up. I did what I wanted to do, (and) it didn't matter what my parents thought, except go to school."

The sergeant major might not dictate what his son does in life, but Ronald did ask his son about his interest in coming to 4th BCT, 10th Mtn. Div. to deploy with the same unit. At the time, Shuan was slated for an assignment with 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment at Fort Hood, Texas. Shuan wasn't interested at first, but his father convinced him to change his mind.

"He only has 2.5 years until he retires, so I went ahead and made that decision," explained Shuan. "I think it would be cool to serve over here together right before he gets out. How many people have the opportunity to serve with their fathers in the same unit?"

Ronald is proud of his son's accomplishments and said he thinks he will continue to do well as an Army officer. He still has concern for his son's safety, however, as a father and senior enlisted Soldier.

"As a father, especially as a father who has been over here twice now, I know what he goes through out on the streets, and yeah, I do worry about him," expressed Ronald. "I do not want to see anything happen to him, just like I don't want to see anything happen to any of the other guys in the brigade, but even more so because he is my son."

Ronald said he has no problems saluting his son, but introducing him to comrades can be a little strange. "It is weird to bring my son in and introduce him to my peers (when) they say, 'Sir, how are you doing today?' versus



U.S. Army courtesy photo from 4th BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div.

Sgt. Maj. Ronald Slawson (right) and his son, 2nd Lt. Shaun Slawson, stand in front of the national colors and the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light) brigade colors at Forward Operating Base Loyalty. The elder Slawson is the brigade operations sergeant major and his son is a platoon leader for the Patriot Brigade's 3rd Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment.

what most fathers would think that their sons would be saying (which is) 'Sir, how are you today?' It's weird!"

Having a father who is the brigade operations sergeant major can be a bit uncomfortable for a new platoon leader. Shuan said his Soldiers teasingly refer to him as "the local superstar." He takes the teasing well though and knows he has to prove himself. Besides, he is still getting used to being an Army officer.

"It is still weird for me when people call me sir because of being prior enlisted," said Shuan. "It really hasn't struck me yet. I take the position I have seriously ... but being called sir by a sergeant major is definitely a

different experience for me, and I'm sure it is for him too."

Even though they only had about a week together during this deployment, the Slawson father and son duo might have another opportunity to deploy together, or at least be stationed together for a couple of years at Fort Polk, La. Ronald is trying to attain a position as the Fort Polk operations sergeant major. If that works out, both Slawson Soldiers will remain at the installation until the sergeant major retires, although they won't both be in the Patriot Brigade. If he does not get the post, Ronald will remain the operations sergeant major for 4th BCT and the two Slawson Soldiers might deploy together one more time.



Spc. Douglas York

Doug's 'dig' on Hollywood:

'Tis the season' for another 'all-time' movie list

By Spc. Douglas York
MND-B PAO

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Now that the snow's started falling back home and Christmas is only a short time away, I thought it would be fun to comprise a list of the best films about this special day.

In the spirit of Christmas I present this list in poetry and rhymes. Some of you will have fun reading and others a hard time.

These films involved little people, a Grinch, the singing of carols, a red-nosed reindeer or even Will Ferrell. Without hesitation, let our lists become undone. Here is my listing of the best holiday films ever, from number five to one.

#5 *It's a Wonderful Life:* This 1946 film, which Frank Capra produced and directed, has been adored for generations and never rejected. The film is based on Philip Van Doren Stern's short story: "The Greatest Gift," written in all of its glory.

The film takes place in a fictional town, Bedford Falls and stars James Stewart as "George Bailey"; a man whose luck is down.

Bailey's imminent suicide on Christmas Eve gains the attention of his guardian angel, "Clarence Odbody," played by Henry Travers. Clarence was sent to help George in his hour of need shortly after a 'run on George's bank,' fueled by terror and greed.

The film tells the story through flashbacks of George's life. How he arrived at his suicidal point and lassoed the moon for his wife, "Mary Hatch Bailey," played by Donna Reed. The film's ending is touching and everyone sings. George's life is renewed and Clarence gets his wings.

#4 *How the Grinch Stole Christmas! (TV special):* The 1966 animated television special from the famous "Dr. Seuss" tale was directed by "Tom & Jerry's" Chuck Jones and makes our hearts swell.

Like the book on which it's based, we see the mean old Grinch trying to take Christmas away from the people of 'Who Ville,' which he does in a pinch. The 26-minute dandy stars horror film icon, Boris Karloff, as both the narrator's and Grinch's voice, and we laugh while the Grinch's heart's softened by "Cindy Lou Who," who gives him a choice:

Keep all the stuff and ruin Christmas for all or realize the true meaning of Christmas before that sleigh-full of stuff falls! The Grinch barely retrieves the sled from falling over the cliff. He brings everything back to the Who's in more than a jiff. The true spirit of the season is felt, and he's invited to the Who's holiday feast – where he gives thanks for everything and "carves the roast beast."

#3 *Elf:* Elf is a Christmas comedy directed by Jon Favreau and released in the United States on November 7, 2003, if you didn't know.

The film stars Will Ferrell as the main character "Buddy," who's been adopted by Santa Claus, played by Ed Asner, who unwittingly brought an infant Buddy back to the North Pole, during a brief 'delivery' pause.

Not knowing to which human being Buddy belonged to when they found him, Santa's elves decide that he would be



raised by them even though he out-grew them by the age of 10. Whatever their intentions and no matter how nice, Buddy overhears the other elves talking about the fact that he is human and he goes to his adoptive father, Papa Elf, played by Bob Newhart, for advice.

Papa Elf acknowledges that Buddy is indeed a human's child and tells him the entire story of how he came to be raised by elves instead of left in the wild. More importantly though, Papa Elf tells Buddy about his human dad, a guy named "Walter Hobbs," by actor James Caan, who lives in New York City and is quite often mad.

Despite this, Buddy heads off on a quest to find his father, which leads to all kinds of humorous trouble and all sorts of mess. Like most Christmas stories, this film is not without its happy ending; it's full of great laughs and lots of befriending.

#2 *A Christmas Story:* The movie is based on the short stories and semi-fictional anecdotes of author and raconteur Jean Shepherd. It was directed by Bob Clark and released in 1983 – or so I've heard.

The movie takes place in the late 1940s in the fictional northern Indiana town of Hohman, based on real-life Hammond, Ind., and is about a couple of "shorties" (kids). Nine-year-old Ralph "Ralphie" Parker, played by Peter Billingsley, wants only one thing for Christmas – "an official Red Ryder carbine-action 200-shot range model air rifle (BB Gun)" with a built in compass.

Despite the warnings of all the adults he knows about "shooting his eye out," Ralphie still wants the present he chose. Eventually he does get the gift that he wants – and just as he was warned, the gift comes back to haunt. Every year this film gets shown way too much, but its themes still ring true and will never be out of touch.

#1 *"The winner and still champion...": "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,"* had a very shiny nose, and if you've ever seen this short animated (using marionettes) film, you'd see why it's the one that I chose.

As it used to (every year since 1964), Rudolph no

longer airs just once a season, but the film is an endearing classic: just watch it and you'll see the reason. As one of only four 1960s Christmas specials that have been telecast throughout the ages, old or young, you'll love this film; and, you are now almost to the end of these pages.

All of these films easily get three rockers and three chevrons, but its only "Rudolph" who gets to don the Sgt. Maj. of the Army's rank on!

Safely continue your missions and keep up the good the fight: "Merry Christmas to all and to all a goodnight!"

If you would like me to consider a movie for future review or to give feedback on these films or these films' reviews feel free too email me at mndb_pao@yahoo.com.





Rockstar hits City of Angels, brings plenty of speed in tow

By Sgt. Jason Thompson

MND-B PAO

BAGHDAD – Rockstar Game's bread and butter may be a little series known to some as Grand Theft Auto, but the world of Liberty City isn't the only open world creation the company has up its sleeve. Indeed, Midnight Club has been tearing up the streets of the world for years, and the latest iteration is upon us in the form of Midnight Club: Los Angeles.

The game marks the series' first appearance on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, and with it comes some rather impressive visual work, very cool uses of scale and an extremely quick racing experience. The game has a whole lot going for it, and racing fans would do well to check it out. However, it's not perfect, with a few bumps in the road here and there that keep it from being the undisputed king of the streets. Content-ender though? Most certainly.

I'll start with the city of Los Angeles. Midnight Club did a fantastic job of bringing the city to life in this game, a version that isn't exactly like the real thing but features all of the highlights that I would expect to see throughout the city.

But accuracy isn't the key; it's how much fun there is to be had, and here the city scores huge points. With plenty of shortcuts scattered throughout the thing, lots of interconnecting freeways and even a smattering of winding back roads, the variety here is about as vast as you could hope to see in a single city. The number of simple squared blocks is kept at a minimum as well, ensuring that you won't just be driving down straight roads for more than a block or so.

Despite all of the landmarks scattered about, it'll still take you a while to learn exactly where everything is, especially with regards to being able to hit the shortcuts in the middle of a race.

For the most part, the race markers on different races do a good job of pointing you in the right direction, though there are times where the markers are tucked around a corner when they should have been placed at the corner to help you know you need to make the turn. However, while you can always refer to the overhead map in the corner of your screen, often times you drive so fast that taking your eyes off the road for a split second means certain death.

Your other alternative to navigating the world is the GPS system, which is practically stellar from top to bottom.

As for the racing itself, Midnight Club: Los Angeles is downright awesome. The producers did a great job with the handling, general physics and overall feeling of the driving. Cars kick and squeal when you hit the gas and then take off in a plume of smoke. The controls are intentionally not as tight

as what you'd find in other games, making you rely more on power slides for taking turns, and this works extremely well.

The difference between each of the cars in the game is also great. Muscle cars handle very differently from tuners, and both handle very differently than the exotics.

Muscle cars are generally the hardest thing to handle in the game, but they're also incredible fun, making the tradeoff from going with a steadier ride totally worth it. Personally, they are my favorites.

The event variation in the game is generally very good, with everything from time trials to delivery missions, series events and much more.

The story is quite basic, as it should be, and does a good job of staying out of the way of your progression. Speaking of staying out of the way, the game keeps you in the seat of the car at pretty much all times. Race results come up in a little pop-up window that pauses the game for just a second, and once you've OK'd the results, you're back in control again.

You will, however, have to deal with the cops, and they can slow down your experience a bit. If they catch you speeding, you can just pull over and pay a small fine or speed away and test the abilities of the cops trying to stop you.

Getting away can be a challenge, and while it's certainly fun, you'll find yourself in chases more often than you'd like.

This, however, brings me to my biggest complaint, which is a very simple one: the game is just too dag-gone hard. After the first few tutorial events, you'll find yourself having a hard time finishing first in most any event. Even if you do, most events are a series race, which means you have to win more than once to actually win, so you can't just get lucky once and then move on.

The AI scales to your vehicle, but pretty much no matter what, they're faster than you off the line. Starting with your beat-up car, you'll get burned, but it may just seem like you need a couple upgrades to catch an edge.

Upgrading cars won't help – even the guys in the opening races will wind up having Lamborghinis and Corvettes if you go out and earn enough cash to have something similar, and vehicles that should be able to beat you, will.

While the scaling would normally be fine, it's the rubber-banding that makes the races as hard as they are.

The AI will take off and stay a good 500 feet in front of you for the bulk of the race. If you can manage to catch up to them, you'll likely just see them hit the boost and fly right past you again. Even if that doesn't happen, racing anything less than perfect on the second half of the race will result in a loss. While the game may let you catch back up after

an early crash, you'll never get far enough ahead to be safe from a late race mistake.

While that may make it sound like you'll never be able to advance, that's not true. Everything you do, be it escape the cops or even finish last in an event, will earn you reputation points. Rep goes towards earning you new driving titles (like Rookie, Racer or Elite), and also earns you the ability to buy new upgrades and cars.

A lot of the content is locked at the start, and will only be available for purchasing once you reach certain reputation levels, even if you have the cash for it.

I personally feel like I should be able to buy a new engine any time I'm willing to hand over the cash, especially since the AI compensates for it, but that's how it is.

One way to sort of cheat the system is by way of highway races. To start these, you simply find someone willing to race on a highway, flash your lights and you're off to whatever the goal happens to be, weaving in and out of traffic on your way. You can beat even the hardest opponents in these events by flying up behind them and flashing your lights just before you pass by then drive off into the horizon.

It's not incredibly exciting to grind cash and reputation like this, but it does work.

While the single-player difficulty level certainly could have been set lower, your true test of skill is real people and, fortunately, Midnight Club: Los Angeles has a number of great online options.

Getting online is a breeze – hit Start, select Online and then your preferences from the little pop-up menu and you're off and running.

This is a great racing experience with a few mars on its paint job. The cars handle fantastically; the city is nearly perfect; the GPS stuff is awesome, and customizing your ride is great. It is way too hard, even right from the start. Reputation points help to make sure you progress even if you can't win anything, but it's annoying to keep coming in at the end of the pack and rarely nabbing the top of the podium.

Fans of street racing, and especially the Midnight Club series in general, will find a lot to like here, but don't expect an easy time on the streets.

Overall, I give Midnight Club: Los Angeles a manageable 4 finely tuned pistons out of 5.



Sgt. Jason Thompson

Collecting hers and 'his'tory

MND-B historians record Soldiers' acts, deeds throughout deployment

By Spc. Douglas York
MND-B PAO

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – An old moniker states that ‘those who don’t learn from those mistakes are doomed to relive them.’

Keeping that thought in mind, there are Soldiers within the Army who try to prevent history from repeating itself while simultaneously ensuring remarkable people and events are remembered.

“It is one of the most important jobs in the Army,” said Spc. Teri Bupp, a native of Roxbury, Kan., who is currently serving as the administrative specialist for the Army Reserve’s 101st Military History Detachment out of Wichita, Kan. “We have to learn from our mistakes, and we have to remember the Soldiers that have given their lives here. ‘I really like being a part of that: being able to help people remember that,’” she added.

Bupp is part of a three-Soldier unit that provides military history collection support to Army units. Currently, she and her fellow combat historians provide that support to the 4th Infantry Division and Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

“Anybody who has anything to do with 4th Inf. Div., we cover down on them and we collect their history: what they did while they are here,” said Sgt. 1st Class Kristina Scott, a native of Lincoln, Neb., who serves as the 101st MHD’s noncommissioned officer in charge.

“Kinetic and non-kinetic, anything they’ve done,” Bupp added. “We collect it and send it off to writers that write about what they (the various Ironhorse units) have done.”

She said in addition to conducting oral interviews, they collect documents, photographs, videos and artifacts in order to aid in writing the Army’s official history.

Amongst the obscure objects or artifacts this trio and previous MND-B MHDs have collected are: confiscated enemy weapons, uniforms from Soldiers that have been involved in firefights, lighters or matchbooks with ‘wanted’ posters, telephone-tip-lines on them and, oddly enough, water bottles.

Moreover, they are looking to acquire a commonly used warning sign (written in Arabic), which asks the local national people to ‘stay back 100 meters’ from military vehicles and checkpoints, as well as a Soldier’s personal journal documenting his or her time over here: provided he or she would

be willing to part with it.

The collected items are then cataloged, linked to specific significant events, which the 101st MHD identifies for the collected time period. The items are then sent to the Army’s Center of Military History at Fort McNair, Washington, D.C., where they are stored in a secret vault. However, Bupp said it all begins with interviewing the troops.

“The ‘meat and potatoes’ of what we do is, we go around and we interview Soldiers,” Bupp said. “We ask them what they’ve done and a lot of times, in my lane, they will give me the lower enlisted (Soldiers) that have received awards for certain things they’ve done.”

She also added that in addition to the Soldier’s accomplishments, the MHD documents any combat action the troops have endured.

When they are not collecting information and various objects from the Soldiers during their missions, the unit has several other more defined tasks to accomplish.

“We have a specific mission; we’re tasked with specific criteria, such as AARs (After Action Reviews), SITREPs (Situation Reports) and casualty reports,” Scott said. “Some people might not think to collect those things, but we’re here to make sure that it gets collected.”

Scott explained however, that there is a method behind the seeming madness for collecting these types of documents.

“Too often, people don’t think about writing stuff down, about collecting, about preserving and so it gets lost,” she said, of the potentially historic things that Soldiers and their units might overlook. “So, we’re here to make sure that it doesn’t.”

Maj. Dave Spies, the unit’s commander, agreed with his

team’s NCOIC but also looks at their mission from a different angle.

“The uniqueness of being in the ‘history-business’ is that you get out and about and see many different people and units, and you get exposed to a lot of things,” said the native of Saint Peters, Mo. “That’s what makes this a special job.”

As with any ‘special’ job, the MHD has many behind the scenes things that must transpire before and after they fall in on a unit and begin documenting what that unit has done or is currently doing.

“We spend a lot of time on the computer digging up documents that we consider important, anything that will back up what we’ve been told in interviews with Soldiers,” Bupp said.

“We tend to do that before we go out to cover down on a unit; we’ll data mine and look up everything we can on them and find out what they do.”

Bupp said one or all three of them will go out for three or four days to a forward operating base or a joint security station and spend that time getting their goal of 10 interviews per company. Once on site, Bupp will usually interview all the enlisted Soldiers, from staff sergeant down to private. Scott handles the interviews with enlisted Soldiers above the rank of staff sergeant, and Spies conducts the interviews with the officers.

“We tend to go out quite often, and then when we come back, we enter all of the data that we’ve collected in a database specific for MHD’s called MH-CSI (Military History Collection System

Integrator / cataloguing software),” Bupp said. “That (info) goes into a database at which point, once we’re done collecting, we load it all on to a hard drive, send the artifacts to An-niston Army Depot, Ala., and then start all over again.”

She also elaborated that they send the information approximately every six months, and once the Ironhorse Division leaves in early 2009, they will remain behind and start from scratch when the 1st Cavalry Division takes over the MND-B theater.

“The uniqueness of being in the ‘history-business’ is that you get out and about and see many different people and units, and you get exposed to a lot of things.”

Maj. Dave Spies
Saint Peters, Mo.
Commander
101st Military History Detachment

Chaplain's Corner Practice being satisfied

By Capt. Tim Meier
Chaplain, MND-B

BAGHDAD – During the holidays, it’s easy for me to become aware of how much I ‘don’t’ have, especially as stores get engorged with gift items that are all ‘must-haves.’

This time of the year, I become more keenly aware of being far away from home than any other.

The more I dwell on what I don’t have – either for myself or to give away to others as gifts – the more stressed and inadequate I feel. I can lose sight of all the blessings in my life and either become afraid they’ll be taken away or feel upset that I don’t have ‘more’ or ‘what others have.’

If you’ve not read “A Christmas Carol” by Charles Dickens in a long time, download a copy and read the description of Scrooge in the first chapter. Ebenezer Scrooge epitomizes how I feel myself become if I’m not careful.

“He carried his own low temperature always about with him ...” One line in particular stands out for me, “Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it.”

If “A Christmas Carol” is unknown to you, think Mr. Burns from The Simpsons, but without his generous nature, good humor and gentle spirit.

So what’s to be done when I’m getting more Scroogy than even I’m comfortable with?

I’ve been taught a simple spiritual exercise that can help. I practice being satisfied. I act as if it’s OK to be where I am, as I am, right here and right now. I make a conscious decision of the will to accept my situation, just as it is, as being suf-

ficient for this present moment. I deliberately attempt to let go of expectations that situations ought to be different. I focus on gratitude rather than on negativity.

It’s tough but it is possible.

I once found myself in a new city and not particularly happy about being there. One wintry day a couple of months later, I was at an AA meeting, listening to a man talk about how he had been complaining about his life to his AA sponsor.

The sponsor had told him to practice being satisfied.

That was a new concept for the man, but he decided to give it a try. Much to his surprise, it was working, and his life was improving. People in those meetings can spot someone who’s not telling the truth. That guy was telling the truth.

Weird thing was, the guy was homeless.

It was winter, in the Midwest. It was cold with snow and slush covering the ground. I felt grumpy for being there and annoyed at having to scrape off the car before going on my merry way anywhere. I felt put-upon at having to trudge through snow banks and navigate icy sidewalks on my way to and from work and home.

I had what many friends of mine would say are “country club problems.”

That guy, on the other hand, was HOMELESS.

He felt serenity as he practiced being satisfied. I felt restless, irritable and discontented. He made a habit of listing ten things for which he was grateful several times a day. I was rehearsing how wronged I’d been by others, multiple times a day.

He tried to go out of his way to do something nice, anonymously, for someone else at least once per day. I was waiting for “them” to apologize to me.

His serenity was leading him to be able to take actions that he’d never been able to do before, and he had gotten a job, which he’d thus far managed to keep for several months.

He was beginning to pay off some of the huge debt he’d accumulated, and had a line on a place to live, if he could demonstrate his reliability and trustworthiness by keeping the job.

He figured he could be off the streets in a week or two at most. I was in a rut that was keeping me bitter and resentful and endangering my sobriety.

He was loving life as a healthy person. His life was very tough, but as he practiced being satisfied, his life was improving because his attitude kept improving. I kept my focus on what I didn’t have, how much more I deserved, how wronged I was, and how UNFAIR life was – all the while having a job, having a place to live, having food on the table, having friends and Family who loved and supported me. I did not exactly love life.

But that guy at that meeting did!

I was speechless.

If it could work for him, perhaps it could work for me.

It did.

It’s still working – when I apply myself to engaging this spiritual exercise – even over here in Iraq. Even when we get mortared and things here get blown up.

Go figure.



Staff Sgt. Michael 'Mol' Molinaro

Mol's NCAA bowl season breakdown

By Staff Sgt. Michael Molinaro
MND-B PAO

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – As Christmas creeps up on us here at Multi-National Division – Baghdad for a second time, football fans know that the holiday season means there is another season that runs parallel to caroling and decorating trees – the bowl season.

I have always enjoyed the bowl season since I was young. Since I am a football addict, this is the climax for any fan with games on almost every night for two weeks, including a plethora of games on and around New Years Day. Let's take a look at what this years schedule offers us.

Best games that aren't in the BC-mess.

These are the best of the whole bowl season. I enjoy these games almost better than the entire BCS menu of games.

My belief is the players in these games are very excited to be in a bowl and know they aren't playing for anything but the game.

They aren't uptight; they haven't been conducting media interviews before and after every practice; they just want to enjoy the whole experience of traveling to a new city and the hoopla that surrounds the event.

Another factor is the teams last played just a few weeks before their bowl game.

Some teams in the BCS wait six or seven weeks in between games, which can change the dynamic of the team.

A lot can happen to an 18- or 19-year old kid in that time. The quarterback gets dumped by his girlfriend and his mind is far from focusing on football, or the middle linebacker sprains an ankle after practicing for so long without a break.

So what games I am looking forward to watching?

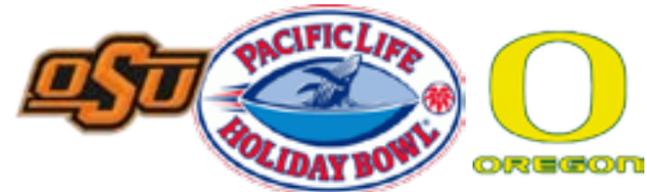


The Poinsettia Bowl on Dec. 23 in San Diego pits undefeated Boise State against Texas Christian.

This should be a wildly entertaining game. Boise got slighted out of the BCS since two non-BCS teams went undefeated.

The other team, Utah, resides in the same conference as TCU, so look for Boise to take out its frustration against the Horned Frogs to show which conference is better.

TCU is no slouch, and this one will be worth watching for sure.



San Diego hosts yet another intriguing game Dec. 30 when Oklahoma State and Oregon meet in the Holiday Bowl.

Both teams are among the nations top ten in scoring offense at more than 41 points a game, so expect the scoreboard operator to be busy.

Everyone talks about the Big 12's Big Three, but Oklahoma State was right there with all of them and is very talented.

New Year's Eve in Atlanta has the hometown Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets taking on defending national champion LSU in the Chick-Fil-A Bowl.



LSU slid to 7-5, did not beat one ranked team and was blown out by Florida and Ole Miss but almost defeated Alabama.

Georgia Tech ended the year beating cross-state rival Georgia, an SEC team that earlier handed LSU one of its losses, so Tech will not be star-struck.

The Tigers are sure to have some fire under its belt after



a disappointing year and looking to build momentum going into next season.

The Cotton Bowl on Jan. 2 has one-loss Texas Tech taking on the Ole Miss Rebels in Dallas.

The Red Raiders lost their next-to-last game against Oklahoma and was the third wheel in the Big 12 conference's South division. They will be looking to take out all of their frustration on the Rebels.

Ole Miss, however, has won five in a row and handed Florida its only loss of the season on Florida's home field and lost to Alabama by four.

Now onto the games the college presidents think really matter.

The slew of BCS games this year are for the most part good and intriguing matchups. The thing is, however, that besides the BCS Championship, they mean the same as the Papajohns.com bowl in the whole scheme of things, hence the need for a playoff.



The first BCS game is on New Year's Day, the Granddaddy of them all, the Rose Bowl.

This is going to be a good one. Penn State and the 11-1 Nittany Lions take on the 11-1 USC Trojans.

USC's defense had one of the best seasons in the history of college football and, if there was a playoff, would be a team no one would want any part of.

The Lions senior class is full of recruits who came into the program after a rough period in Penn State's football history and would like nothing more than to seal the deal on a highly successful career.



Later that night, Cincinnati plays Virginia Tech in the Orange Bowl. That's all I really have to say about that game.



The next night in New Orleans, the Sugar Bowl pits undefeated Utah in a 'Crimson' showdown with Alabama.

The Crimson Tide had a surprising year that saw them at the top of the rankings for more than a month. The Nick Saban rebuilding project was supposed to be a year away so things look good for the future of the program.

Utah comes in undefeated to a BCS bowl for the second time in four years. Last time, they got their feet wet against top competition and scorched my hometown Pittsburgh Panthers in the Fiesta Bowl (yes, Sgt. Thompson, I still remember).

But now they're going up against the big boys. Alabama is stronger, faster and more talented than the Utes, just like Oklahoma was when it played Boise State in the Orange Bowl in 2007.

We all know how that turned out.



The Fiesta Bowl on Jan. 6 matches up Texas and Ohio State. Texas fans feel ripped off that they aren't playing for the championship and so do the players.

The difference is while the fans keep crying on deaf ears, the players have to refocus and turn their attention to a solid Buckeye team, which is looking at this game as the national championship for a group of seniors who have had the best four-year run of any senior class in Ohio State history.

In an ironic sidebar to the game, the Longhorns get to go up against freshmen quarterback Terrelle Pryor, who draws comparison to another quarterback who tormented teams the same way when he played: Texas' own Vince Young.



Finally on Jan. 8, the BCS champion will be crowned in Miami. Florida and Oklahoma square off in a terrific game – at least on paper. I don't like the whole BCS system, but in my own personal opinion, this is the game I would want to see.

After losing to Ole Miss, Florida's closest win was 30 points until the SEC championship, where they beat top-ranked Alabama. They average 49 points a game.

Heading into this game, Oklahoma has strung together a streak of five games where they have scored more than 60 points and have not scored less than 35 all season. They beat five ranked teams this year, including second-ranked Texas Tech by 40 points.

So who wins? The team that devises a defensive game plan that slows the others high-powered offense just a little bit. Or more likely, the team that has the ball last will have its season in its own hands in what could be a classic.

MND-B Soldiers get into Christmas spirit



CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Lt. Col. William Geiger (center), aka Santa Claus, who serves as the deputy chief of staff for Multi-National Division – Baghdad and the 4th Infantry Division, along with his elves: Sgt. 1st Class Jimmy Garcia (left) and 1st Lt. Stephanie Davison, from the secretary general staff, 4th Inf. Div., rallied the holiday cheer by sharing jolly laughs and the jingling of bells during a Christmas tree lighting ceremony at the division’s headquarters Dec. 5.

U.S. Army photo by Spc. Douglas York, MND-B PAO



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jason Thompson, MND-B PAO

▲ CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Christmas lights adorn the entranceway into the Multi-National Division – Baghdad headquarters building at Camp Liberty. The 4th Infantry Division’s command group decorated the entry to the building to serve as a small piece of home for the Soldiers.

► CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – The lights around a Christmas tree brighten the hallways of the Multi-National Division – Baghdad headquarters building at Camp Liberty. The tree, along with many other decorations throughout the building, serve as small pieces of holiday cheer while the Soldiers are deployed away from their Families back home.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jason Thompson, MND-B PAO