FORWARD OPERATING BASE WARRIOR, Kirkuk, Iraq — As the security situation in Iraq continues to improve, the number of infrastructure projects around Kirkuk Province are on the rise.

On Jan. 12, local village leaders, Sons of Iraq members, the school head master, teachers and future students, along with U.S. Forces, celebrated one of them - the grand opening of a new elementary school in Atshiyana village.

Overall, the ceremony was a great success according to Hawijah council representative Amar Ali Al Hamdany. "Without a school, how can you educate yourself?" he asked. "We now have 240 students who can look forward to a better future because of this school," he continued. Throughout the day of the ceremony, Sons of Iraq members distributed goods for the school and children. They passed out more than 400 pencils, 75 notebooks and 100 T-shirts.

U.S. Army Civil Affairs Soldiers joined the locals in the celebration. Having followed the project for more than three months, one Soldier expressed his joy for the newly opened school.

"I've been checking on the progress of this project since October," said Spc. Christopher Loflin, with Detachment 1, B Co., 490th Civil Affairs Battalion. "I'm glad to finally see that the children now have a place to learn and grow in an Iraqi community."

In the past two months, the province of Kirkuk has celebrated the opening of four brand new schools and renovated three others.

This school construction, a project under the Iraqi Commander’s Emergency Relief Program, is part of many efforts to come for rebuilding and expanding the education system all around the area.

Although there are many school projects taking place around the province, this school is unique in the region because of where it was built.

"The school lies on the fault line between two sub-districts," said 1st Lt. John Flanagan, platoon leader with D Company, 1st Battalion, 67th Armor Regiment, attached to 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division. "So it was good to see Hawijah council members working well with the Multaka Sons of Iraq to open this school," continued Flanagan, a native of Harrisburg, Pa.

A total of nine schools, a combination of new construction and renovation projects, are slated to open in the next few months.
FORWARD OPERATING BASE WARRIOR, Kirkuk, Iraq – The morning was cool and crisp, yet full of hope for local nationals dwelling in the city of Hawijah and its surrounding villages. On this day, some would have the opportunity to clear their family’s name from the Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition Forces sought-after list.

The Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police, in conjunction with their Coalition Force counterparts, conducted a reconciliation at Forward Operating Base McHenry, in Kirkuk province on December 13, 2008.

“The reconciliation process is where Iraqis, who have committed insurgent attacks in the past either against coalition forces or Iranians, come in and reconcile by swearing allegiance to the Government of Iraq,” said Capt. Chad Cunningham, the officer-in-charge of the fires and effects cell, 1st Battalion, 67th Armor Regiment, assigned to the 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division and Task Force Lightning.

After the initial reconciliation, applicants go through a 90-day probation period. Subsequently, government officials, Iraqi Army, Iraqi Police and their Coalition Force counterparts meet and decide whether or not the applicants are reconcilable, and able to be employed by the Iraqi government.

The reconciliation program has been around before the 1st Bn., 67th Armor Regt. began assisting ISF with security in the area, and it has benefited the locals in many ways.

“The program is beneficial because it’s getting insurgents off the streets legitimately and we don’t have to go out and get them,” Cunningham said, as he supervised his Soldiers during the entire process.

Of the 21 locals who reconciled that day, 13 were brought in by Shaykh Razzq, the Sidera Village Sons of Iraq leader. Hussein Abraham Hamnd, who was accused of housing terrorists, said that he came to reconcile because he takes a great interest in rebuilding Iraq and its democracy and to rid the area of terrorism.

“Coming into the reconciliation will help me clear my name and my family’s name from the wanted list and help build Iraq for the new future,” said Hamnd.

A local national gets his picture taken with his name as coalition forces, with their Iraqi counterparts, start a profile on him during a reconciliation that was held at FOB McHenry, in Kirkuk province, Iraq, on Dec. 13, 2008. During the process, each local will be under probation for 90 days before being fully considered reconcilable for the Government of Iraq.

Another applicant, Abed Nijres Abdulla, did not know how he got on the list but he also came to clear his name and prove to the Iraqi government that he is faithful.

“With the only thing I can think of that I did wrong was grow a beard,” he joked. “I think everybody who is here, the coalition forces and the Iraqi security forces, for their cooperation in bringing us here for the reconciliation,” he continued.

All of the locals who reconciled that day were treated with respect and trust.

“In the past, we have had a small number that reconciled and did go back to doing insurgent attacks, but until they do so, we consider them sincere,” Cunningham said.

Reconciliations are done often with the goal of getting rid of terrorism in the cities and their surrounding areas. It also appears to bring out the best in the locals and give them a reason to work together.

“[Events like these] show a great deal about the local community,” Cunningham said. “They’re turning around and are willing to help us in order to enforce security in their areas.”

TROPIC LIGHTNING HISTORY

1943 – WWII
Tropic Lightning Soldiers were engaged in some of the bitterest fighting of the Pacific campaign, participating in the seizure of Kokumbona, and the reduction of the Mount Austen Pocket.

1945 – WWII
The division, having recently landed in the San Fabian area of Luzon, entered the struggle for the liberation of the Philippines, an action that would have Tropic Lightning Soldiers in continuous combat for 165 days.

1951 – Korean War
25th ID Soldiers were involved in combat operations which resulted in the recapture of Inchon and Kimpo Air Base.

1966 – Vietnam War
Infantryman of 3rd Brigade had just completed a deployment to the Northwest sector of South Vietnam, establishing a fortified enclave from which the division would operate.

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Iraqi Army Trains to “Own the Night”

STORY and PHOTOS BY
By Spc. Jazz Burney
3rd Infantry Brigade Combat
Team Public Affairs, 25th ID

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, Tikrit, Iraq – Non-commissioned officers of the 4th Iraqi Army Division participated in three days of individual combat skills training Jan. 11-13, hosted by the 325th Brigade Support Battalion, 25th Infantry Division, that focused on the use of night vision devices to perform night-time operations more efficiently.

“We have never been trained on operating the ‘Viper’ NVD system - this training is especially valuable to us because we will be able to use this system while conducting our night raids, patrols and other night time missions,” said Sgt. Maj. Abeed Mgeed, sergeant major, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th Iraqi Army Division.

The training was geared toward assessment of the 4th IA Division’s level of expertise in several areas in a train-the-trainer setting, and familiarization of Iraqi soldiers with the Viper NVD system while performing combat life saving techniques, using AK-47 and M-16 assault rifles, and driving military vehicles.

“I understand that I will be training the younger soldiers who are under me, and to do so I must have a base of understanding in the training that I am receiving today,” said Sgt. Razkar Ahmed, Headquarters and Headquarters Co., 4th Iraqi Army Division.

“The overall intent behind this training is to get the 4th Iraqi Army’s non-commissioned officers exposed and up-to-speed with incorporating the civilian night vision devices in their operations,” said Capt. John Liang, company commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Co., 325th Bde. Support Bn, 25th Inf. Div. “The IA division commander stressed the need for training with the NVD system due to his desire that their Army would “own the night” in their region,” he said.

The three day training was broken down into three phases.

The first phase consisted of “round robin training” which included classes in combat life saving, weapons maintenance, and familiarization with night vision devices.

The next day, Iraqi soldiers began their training in phase two where training emphasized advanced marksmanship through dry reflexive fire, house clearing techniques, range rehearsal and additional medical training.

The training concluded at the range on the last day. The Iraqi soldiers zeroed their weapons and moved on to the qualification targets, firing with and without the NVDs.

Because of the training, the NCOs of the 4th IA Division, will now be able to teach these combat skills to one hundred Iraqi soldiers who will participate in the same training over the next two weeks.

Staff Sgt. Vershaw Moses, NCOIC of communication and electronic maintenance, Co. B, 325th Bde. Support Bn 25th Inf. Div., helps an Iraqi soldier adjust a Viper night vision device system during three days of individual combat skills training Jan. 11-13 at COB Speicher, Iraq that focused on IA soldiers using the night vision devices to perform their night-time operations more efficiently.
Our Army is the best in the world for several reasons...we have the best equipment, the best training, the best leaders. But mostly we’re the best because we’re trained to be warriors while still adhering to the professional standards of conduct and behavior that we have set for ourselves. That’s what makes us different, and that’s what makes us the best Army in the world.

The Army has defined our standards of conduct and behavior in a set of core values. These define who we are as people and who we are as an organization. Each of you know that our values are Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage, and you all know they apply equally to life, both in and out of the service. The challenge is to exhibit the inner strength to adhere to and live up to these values, regardless of the situation we may find ourselves in.

Frankly, our values are always tested during periods of hardship and adversity, and we could therefore expect to have our values tested during this combat tour. Our individual and service values may be tested during the conduct of a combat operation as we handle detainees or search an Iraqi home. Our values will be tested as we transform into the partnership mission with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). We must serve as their example to follow. Our values may be tested as we support and assist a family member or loved one at home. The most difficult tests will usually come when we are by ourselves or in small groups, when we think no one is watching, when we’re tired, when we’re stressed, and when we’re frustrated. The true character of a person is displayed by what he or she does when no one is looking. This is when our Army values mean the most...that’s when we all must dig in and see what separates us from the enemies we are fighting.

How we handle these tests – these moral dilemmas – is what makes us who we are...Soldiers of Multi-National Division – North, who wear our uniform proudly, and treat all with dignity and respect.

I challenge each of you to periodically take a step back and look at your personal standards of conduct and behavior. Remember who we are and the values we stand for. I know every leader and Soldier in our Task Force will positively represent the values we cherish.

TROPIC LIGHTNING!
HAWAII
Bearing signs emblazoned with “Impeach Lingle,” “Ceded = Stolen” and “Ku I Ka Pono: Justice for Hawaiians,” thousands of Hawaiian rights activists and supporters marched through Waikiki yesterday in a massive protest against the state’s attempt to overturn a Hawaii Supreme Court ruling on ceded lands.

The march, which was joined by dozens of halau, student groups and Hawaiian sovereignty organizations, proceeded without incident from Saratoga Road, down Kalakaua Avenue to Kapi‘olani Park, where a large rally was staged.

“This is a celebration of Queen Lili‘uokalani and the legacy our ali‘i have left for us,” said Vicky Holt-Takamine, who helped organize the event. “While we come to commemorate the overthrow and how wrong it was, we’re also uplifted by coming together to celebrate our cultural identity, and to acknowledge the struggles we face.”

Gatherings have been held each Jan. 17 in observance of the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893. Most have taken place at ‘Iolani Palace, but organizers this year wanted a more visible presence to draw attention to the ceded lands controversy.

“We decided that we’d get more attention in Waikiki and we’d get to talk to people who don’t know anything about the history of Hawaii,” said organizer Manu Kalama. “It’s about educating people about the history of Hawaii and getting their support on an international level.”

Last year, the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled that the state could not sell or transfer ceded lands until Native Hawaiian claims to those lands were resolved. However, Gov. Linda Lingle has said that the court’s ruling confuses the state’s title to ceded lands, as conferred by the U.S. Congress in the Admission Act of 1957. Her administration has filed an appeal with the U.S. Supreme Court.

Edward Hu, 29, a post-graduate fellow with the University of Hawaii’s William Richardson School of Law, questioned Lingle’s decision.

“I think the issue is pretty simple,” said Hu, who is not Hawaiian. “If there’s property or land whose ownership is in question, the issue ought to be resolved before that property is sold. You don’t even have to believe that the claims are valid, except that the Hawaii Supreme Court has said that we need to resolve those claims before they can be sold. I don’t see why Lingle has to appeal this. The highest court in her state has spoken.”

Dolinda Kaholi, 54, of Waimanalo, pushed her mother, Jennie, 87, in a wheelchair down the middle of Kalakaua in a show of solidarity with the movement.

“It’s time to take a stand,” Kaholi said. “It’s time to take back our land. They want to sell it, but it’s not theirs to sell.”

While the demonstration was peaceful, demonstrators weren’t shy in expressing their dissatisfaction with Lingle.

A trio of protesters carried a giant effigy of the governor during the march, its hands painted with “I want your land.” When the figure arrived at the park, paddy demonstrators took turns pitching their slippers at it.

Frank Damas, 21, of Wai‘anae, marched with hundreds of his fellow Kamehameha Schools alumni, leading a mele calling for all Hawaiians to unite.

“These lands are the lands our ancestors prepared for us to live on because they knew that things in the future might not be the way they used to be.” Damas said. “Linda Lingle might think that she has good intentions, but she needs to realize that the land is the most important thing that Hawaiians have. Everything that we are stems from the land.”

Demonstrators found a sympathetic ear in 57-year-old Paula Kobos of Bellingham, Wash., whose father was stationed on O‘ahu during World War II.

“I don’t know all the details of the issues, but I absolutely support them,” Kobos said.

TEXAS
One dog’s death at the jaws of a loose pit bull could prompt changes in Harker Heights.

A dog-on-dog ordinance, which would allow dogs who attack other dogs to be declared dangerous, will be proposed to the Animal Advisory Committee in February, said the Harker Heights Police Department, which oversees the city’s animal control.

The change is too late for Woogies, John Morales’ 4-year-old Pekingese. Woogies was killed the morning of Dec. 31 when a white pit bull, loose in the 100 block of West Robin Lane, jumped over a 4-foot fence surrounding Morales’ yard and bit the small dog in the neck, neighbors who witnessed the vicious pit bull attack said.

Now Morales’ Japanese Chins are without Woogies, who protected the pups.

“I can’t believe that. If that was a little baby, what would have happened? It was scary,” said Ptl George, a neighbor who witnessed the attack. George said it even brought tears to his husband’s eyes.

The pit bull, still roaming the streets, was picked up by animal control soon after wards.

Several days later, the owner picked up the pit bull from animal control after incurring a citation for dog-at-large, a $20 impound fee and a $6 per day quarantine fee.

The dog was returned to the owner because there is no law for declaring a dog a dangerous dog when it attacks another dog.

Fox said. A dog can only be declared dangerous when it attacks a person.

"Nothing we can do about that dog. If it's a dog on person, HHPD can act," Fox said.

Fox said Morales can sue the owners.

Fox said she plans to propose to the Animal Advisory Committee in February an ordinance to declare animals that attack other animals as dangerous. From there, it would be reviewed by Police Chief Mike Gentry and then go to the City Council.

Dangers dogs require warning signs, fences, proper securing, insurance and many other stipulations, Fox said.

George said the pit bull had run across the street before in her direction, but was stopped at her gate by George’s big dog.

Morales said the pit bull often roamed in the mornings when children were headed to Harker Heights Elementary School.

Fox said they had no previous reports of this pit bull roaming, but they did have one report of the pit bull not having water. If people see a roaming, malnourished or mistreated dog, they should call HHAC.

However, sometimes a response can take time as animal control has only two officers who work seven days a week.

A roaming dog would be kept for three days and if it can’t be returned to the owner and isn’t a danger, the dog would be put up for adoption from a local shelter.

Morales believes he should decide if the pit bull gets returned to the owners or euthanized. He also believes violent dogs shouldn’t be allowed near schools.

“That dog when it left the house was a loose weapon ready to take off,” Morales said. “It was like a bomb with legs.”

NEW YORK
The southbound lanes of Interstate 81 between exits 49 and 50 were closed for more than four hours Saturday night after a tanker truck veered off the highway, spilling a caustic substance into a nearby ditch.

The driver, Jeff Roy, Quebec, reached down to pick up an object in the cab of his truck when the rig hit the roadside guide wires. The truck then traveled down an embankment and overturned, state police Sgt. David M. Morse said.

Mr. Roy was taken by ambulance to River Hospital, Alexandria Bay, with minor injuries. Troopers said he had a difficult time determining what was leaking from the tanker because the driver spoke only French.

“A lot of what happened was done because we weren’t sure what we were dealing with.” Sgt. Morse said. “For everyone’s safety, we wanted to make sure things were done right.”

Southbound traffic from the Thousand Islands Bridge was rerouted onto Route 12.
SPC Travis Cameron  
B Bty, 2-8 FA / TF 3-21 IN,  
1st SBCT, 25th ID  
Springfield, IL

During the last week of December 2008, SPC Cameron performed flawlessly while serving as Team Leader after being tasked to take charge of an Iraqi Fire Team during a combined dismounted patrol. He provided tactical and technical training and knowledge to the Iraqi Soldiers. His ability to lead and train through verbal communication, gestures and applied action assured that the team achieved success during the Key Leader Engagement for which it was providing security.

If you’d like an electronic subscription of the Lightning Weekly to go out to a family member, friend, loved one, or anyone else, send an e-mail request with the recipients’ e-mail address to patrick.husted@25id.army.mil.

Tropic Lightning!

There are only two ways to live your life; one as though nothing is a miracle, and the other as though everything is a miracle.

- Albert Einstein
Obama’s Popularity Grows
A national poll suggests that President-elect Barack Obama is more popular than ever despite recent speed bumps on the road to his inauguration.

The CNN/Opinion Research Corp. survey released Sunday also indicates that most Americans see Obama's inauguration as a chance for the nation to come together.

Eighty-four percent of those surveyed say they approve of how Obama is handling the presidential transition. That's up 2 points from the beginning of December and up 5 points from the middle of December.

The rise in approval also comes after a series of missteps in the Obama transition over the past few weeks: the announcement by New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson that he was withdrawing from his nomination as commerce secretary after news of a federal grand jury investigation in his home state; the disclosure of Treasury Secretary-designate Timothy Geithner's failure to pay $34,000 in taxes; and pushback by Republicans and even some Democrats to Leon Panetta’s nomination as CIA director.

"If the public is blaming Obama for those missteps, it isn’t registering in his approval rating," CNN polling director Keating Holland said. "You know the country is in the middle of a honeymoon when six in 10 Republicans have a positive view of Obama."

The poll also indicates that six in 10 Americans think Obama’s inauguration will be a celebration in democracy. Only four in 10 felt that way when George W. Bush was inaugurated as president eight years ago.

The poll also suggests that those surveyed see Obama’s inauguration as a chance for the country to come together, rather than a political celebration, Holland said.

Thirty-nine percent of those questioned feel that Obama’s Inauguration is a celebration by supporters of the winning candidate, 33 percentage points lower than those who felt the same way about Bush’s 2001 inauguration.

"The public saw both of Bush’s inaugurations as celebrations just for his supporters,” Holland said.

Nine out of 10 African-Americans questioned in the poll say Obama’s election is a dream come true. Six in 10 also say they’re thrilled by Obama’s impending inauguration. Only a quarter of white respondents feel the same way.

AFC Champion Pittsburgh Steelers
Ben Roethlisberger had a sore back after a grueling, yet very satisfying shift at work on Sunday night. And he’s one of the lucky ones.

The Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback is headed to his second Super Bowl in four seasons after a 23-14 victory against the Baltimore Ravens in an AFC title game that was as much a physical survival mission as football game.

When someone asked about his back afterward, there was no macho mystery.

"It hurt," Roethlisberger said of a blow he took in the first half. "Still does. But winning always takes away a little of the pain."

That sentiment was no exaggeration in the latest of the knock-down, drag-out series that has become Ravens vs. Steelers. The Steelers — who got a late TD from safety Troy Polamalu on a 40-yard interception return, a 65-yard catch-and-run TD from Santonio Holmes and three Jeff Reed field goals — survived as much as anything.

Ravens running back Willis McGahee suffered a neck injury in absorbing a vicious blow from safety Ryan Clark after catching a pass over the middle with 3:29 remaining. He was driven off with his head strapped to a gurney, with the most serious casualty from a 3-hour, 35-minute contest that was delayed several times by injury timeouts.

"We pray that he’ll be alright," Ravens linebacker Terrell Suggs said of McGahee. "He was talking and moving his arms and legs when he went off, so that was a good sign. He is our brother. Hopefully, he can ride home with us."

Baltimore flirted with the upset. It limited the Steelers to just 52 rushing yards (1.9 per carry) and besides Holmes’ TD off an improvised pass from Roethlisberger (16-of-33, 255 yards), the Ravens defense held Pittsburgh to three field goals.

Someone asked Mike Tomlin, the Steelers’ second-year coach, if he has seen a game with harder hitting. He chuckled at the question.

"Pick any of the other Ravens games," Tomlin said. "That’s how they go."

NFC Champion Arizona Cardinals
Kurt Warner needed to say something. It was a sentence with the words “Arizona Cardinals” and “Super Bowl” in it. “Arizona Cardinals in the Super Bowl. I like the way that sounds,” Warner said.

The Cardinals. America’s unhappy wanderers. Born in Chicago, moved to St. Louis, then Tempe, Ariz., and now farther west of Phoenix. Never to leave their losing legacy behind. Well, almost never.

Until now. The Cardinals’ 32-25 victory against the Philadelphia Eagles for the NFC championship sends the franchise that was the perennial joke from the penultimate game to the edge of glory.

The Cardinals’ (12-7) will play for the NFL championship Feb. 1 in Tampa in Super Bowl XLIII. Their opponent will be the Pittsburgh Steelers.

As pink confetti showered the field at University of Phoenix Stadium and players embraced their loved ones and the moment, safety Antrel Rolle simply observed, “Miracles happen every day.”

Maybe he’s right. Seems that way now after divine intervention took several decades off.

Division winners for the first time since 1975, underdogs in all three of their playoff games, the Cardinals now boldly go where they’ve never gone before, leaving behind indelible images.

Cardinals fans. Imagine, Cardinals fans. Swathed in red, waving white towels, loving their team. Swaying, cheering, high-fiving players as they ran toward the locker room.

There was team owner Bill Bidwill, 77, holding the George S. Halas Trophy, emblematic of the NFC championship. Bidwill knew Halas, the founding force of the Chicago Bears, whose involvement with the team began in 1920 and ended with his death in 1983. It’s a shrinking crowd of NFL owners who can say they were friends and rivals with Halas. This was something new and different, yet redolent of the old and familiar.

Bidwill said he never doubted this day would come but that “I didn’t know when.”

Capt. Benjamin Boekestein, commander, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, eats a hot pepper offered by Sons of Iraq leaders during a visit to the area in Samarra, Iraq, Jan. 15.

Staff Sgt. Travis Drudge, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, is overwhelmed by children and falls backward, tossing lollipops to throngs of sweet-toothed children, in Samarra, Iraq on Jan. 15.

Greywolves, Welcome to Multi-National Division – North and Task Force Lightning.