

# IN THE ZONE

MAGAZINE



**Business as usual for IZ Police on  
Iraqi Election Day**

**FOB Prosperity  
goes Polynesian**  
during Fijian cultural event

JASG-C bids farewell to  
**3/29th Field  
Artillery Bde**

Soldiers speak out on  
**violence in  
video games**



**READY FOR RHINOS** - Coalition personnel get ready to ride the Rhinos Feb. 11 from the vehicles' new departure point on Forward Operating Base Union III.

# DEPARTMENTS

**LEADERS' LOG 3**

**CHAPLAIN'S WORD 7**

**JAG CORNER 15**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS 19**

## NEWS

JASG-C bids farewell to 3/29th Field Artillery Brigade **4-5**

Government of Iraq takes receipt of former United Nations building **6**

Chapel offers diverse options for worship **7**

Iraqi Election Day proves peaceful for IZ Police **10-11**

Fijian soldiers host cultural event for coalition forces at FOB Prosperity **16-17**

Air Force rock band Falcon descends upon Union III **18**

## FEATURES

Soldiers fight boredom on virtual battlefield **8-9**

Badging section plays pivotal role in IZ security **12-13**

Air Force couple shares war experience in Iraq **14**

## PHOTOGRAPHY

“Rhino Yard” hot spot for personnel on the go **2**

Battle-scarred architecture offers window into war **20**

## ON THE COVER:

Tech Sgt. Brandon Wolfgang of the IZ Police gives two Iraqi children a lift during a patrol in the International Zone on Iraqi election day Jan. 31. An uneventful day for Wolfgang and his fellow officers meant peaceful polling for Iraqis. For more photos and complete story, see pages 10-11.

*Photo by Sgt. Bill Addison*

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MAGAZINE

*Produced by the Joint Area Support Group-Central Public Affairs Office*

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## LEADERS' LOG

# Green Zone transition success continues



Since the last news letter, the 50<sup>th</sup> Joint Area Support Group – Central witnessed the successful and historic provincial elections Jan. 31. What a proud day for the country of Iraq to provide a secure environment and conduct free and fair elections across the country. This now sets the stage for the remainder of 2009 and full implementation of the Security Agreement.

The JASG-C continues to succeed in the complex task of Green Zone security transition. The first 45 days have gone very well and the Baghdad Brigade is on its way to taking full control of Green Zone security. There are many moving parts, sub committees and working groups all supporting Green Zone security transition and this has been a true team effort across the JASG-C, 1-7 FA and IZ Police.

I want to take this opportunity to welcome the new GZ Security Force Battalion, the 1-7<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. The 1-7 officially took control of this vital mission Feb. 11 and stepped in at a critical time to maintain the synergy, training and certification process for Iraqi Security Forces.

Under the leadership of Lt. Col. Robert Bailes and Command Sgt. Maj. Garry Hunt, this mission is in good

hands and we look forward to working together as one team to maintain a safe and secure environment for the Iraqi government.

Our primary focus will continue to be execution of the Green Zone transition plan and setting the conditions for the Green Zone steady state footprint by Dec. 31. We are well on the way to completing phase II and returning additional properties to the GoI. The planning, budgeting, contracting, construction, renovation projects and overall team effort to coordinate with multiple entities has not gone unnoticed. Keep up the great work!

Reminder to keep our thoughts and prayers with Capt. Wes Glisson and his family as he recovers from his gunshot wound back in the U.S. Let's never forget the sacrifices so many make while defending freedom around the world.

As always, a big thanks to our families, friends, family support groups and Rear Det personnel. Their support and overwhelming generosity continue day in and day out; our mail handlers are never bored. Never forget to say, "Thank you," to these great Americans.

Always look out for each other and be safe. One team, One Mission!

Thanks for all you do!

**Col. Steve Ferrari**  
**Joint Area Support Group – Central**  
**Commanding**

# Remember to focus on self, not just mission

As the intensity of our operations levels off, everyone needs to put some time aside for themselves.

The reason for this is to recover from the hard charges you made during the ongoing transition inside the International Zone. This seems to be a good time to explore all the benefits of the Morale, Welfare and Recreation programs at FOBs Union III and Prosperity.

It might just be the best time to spend more time e-mailing or writing some additional letters home to your family. It's important you maintain those strong bonds with friends and loved ones. Sometimes communications have been sporadic for all of us to get messages back home; you may have just wanted to know the big picture at home; you may have put aside important questions about back home activities. Start to talk about the growth and change in all your family members and relationships so you can be better prepared for the changes you may face when you return home. When you are communicating back home, try not to leave any issues unresolved and always end the communications on a positive note.

There is plenty to explore at Union III and Prosperity. Many local nationals operate shops and they are more than

happy to spend time talking to you about their culture, or even the local delicacies. Take a battle buddy with you and make this opportunity a fun outing.

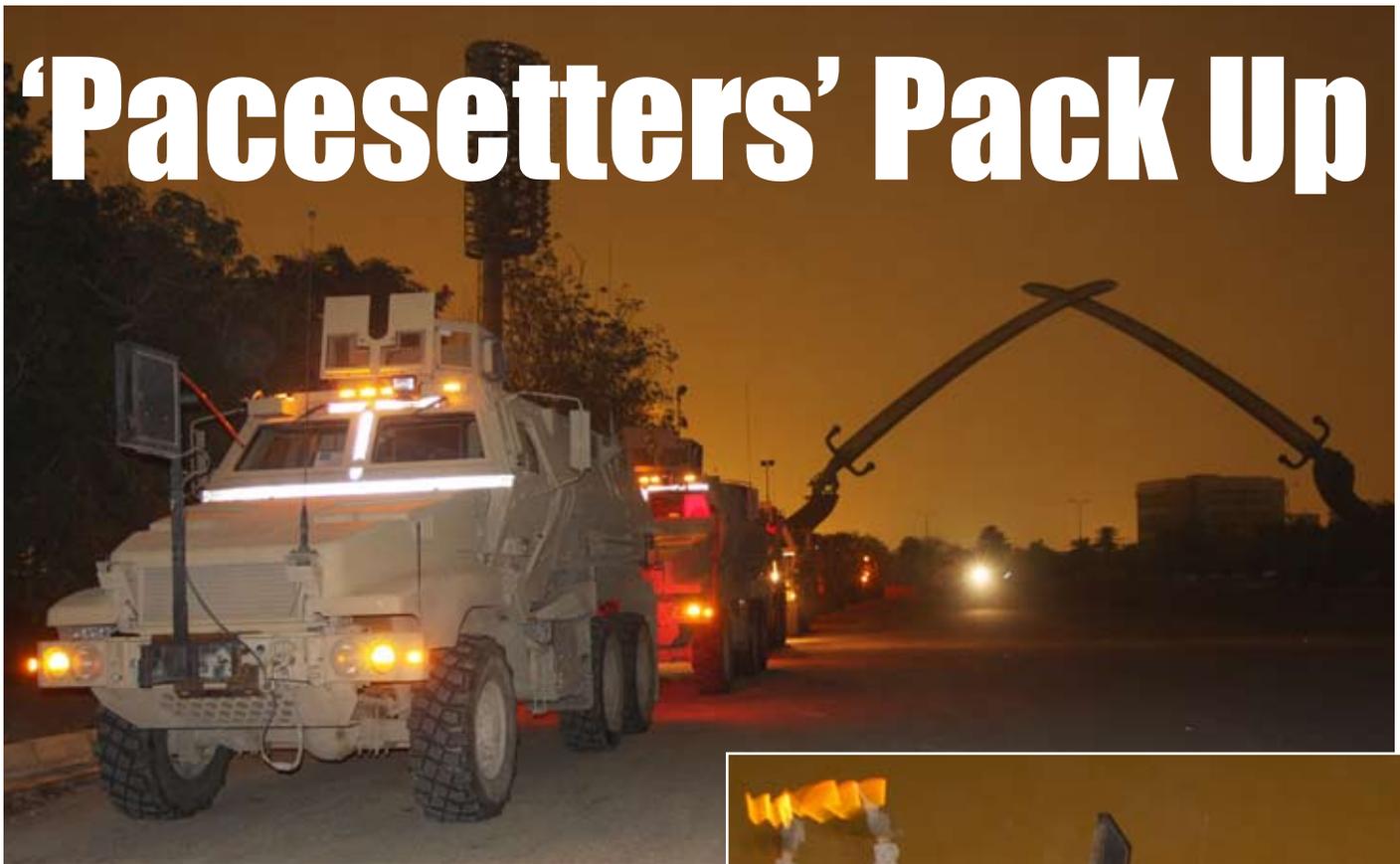
We are well within the four-month mark to redeploy - that's two-thirds toward our mission completion date. But we all must remain focused on the mission. Don't let available time turn into a bad time by misbehaving or spreading rumors.

While we have all faced speed bumps in more ways than one on this highway of deployment, I want each and every Soldier, Sailor and Airman to know that you have remained focused and continue to do an excellent job. And for my NCOs, stay the course and remain steadfast in your standards and your pursuit of excellence.

**Command Sgt. Maj. David Kenna**  
**Joint Area Support Group – Central**



# 'Pacesetters' Pack Up



## Soldiers of 3/29th Field Artillery Brigade end 15-month Iraq tour

*Story by Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris  
JASG-C Public Affairs*

After serving under the Joint Area Support Group-Central since December 2007, Soldiers of the 3rd Battalion, 29th Field Artillery Brigade, are heading home.

The 3/29th "Pacesetters" of the 4th Infantry Division's 3rd Brigade Combat Team spent most of the past 15 months manning the Entry Control Points (ECPs) that allow access in and out of Baghdad's International Zone (IZ).

"I challenge anybody to show me a more challenging job, day in and day out, than standing on an ECP for 12 hours in the heat of the summer in full battle rattle," said Lt. Col. Kevin Gregory, 3/29th commander serving his third combat-zone tour. "It's tough duty."

Tougher still when you consider that the ECPs not only handle approximately 100,000 visitors per week, but are the first line of defense for the IZ - and for the Soldiers who work them.

"We came in and took the ECPs, and understood they were fighting positions, and put a lot of time and effort and money into those to make sure they were straight," he continued. "I believe, in the end, they saved lives from the rocket attacks. That in and of itself proved the worth of all the work we did."



**MOVIN' OUT** - Soldiers of the 3/29th Field Artillery Brigade load their MRAPs onto flatbeds as they prepare to redeploy after 15 months serving in Iraq. Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Robert Stephenson, JASG-C Public Affairs.

The 3/29th Soldiers work the ECPs along with Iraqi Soldiers, and since this past November, Iraq's Baghdad Brigade has taken control of the ECP mission, with U.S. troops taking a supporting role.

Despite this shift, 3/29th Soldiers continue to work with the fledgling Baghdad Brigade troops to help them develop their young Non-Commissioned Officer corps.

"We've done extensive work trying to help them establish a structure," explained Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Miller, 3/29th command sergeant major.



*photo by Sgt. Bill Addison, JASG-C Public Affairs*



*courtesy photo*

**JOB WELL DONE** - Sgt. Andrew Montes, above left, oversees an Iraqi "Jundi," or Soldier, of the Baghdad Brigade as he checks the credentials of an Iraqi driver at an Entry Control Point (ECP). Sgt. 1st Class Jason Maynard, top right, inspects a local Iraqi's truck. Pvt. David Jones, bottom right, interacts with Green Zone children at the 215 Apartments during a population census mission conducted this past May.

"We have NCO professional development where we talk about duties and responsibilities, we talk about battle drills, we talk about that role and that relationship between officers and NCOs; how you do all those basic things that a Non-Commissioned Officer does" added Miller, who's also on his third tour in a combat zone.

In addition to their ECP mission, the 3/29th Soldiers also participated in Department of State escort convoys, carrying personnel and equipment to distant locations in Iraq. These missions taught the troops valuable lessons in coordinating with units whose battlespace they were transversing, communicating with air-support assets, and other valuable Soldier skills.

"We travelled right under 300,000 miles," explained Gregory, who added that only two Improvised Explosive Device attacks were suffered during those missions, resulting in no significant injuries.

While those Soldiers were lucky to escape serious harm, not everyone in the 3/29th was as fortunate. The battalion has paid a price with several lives lost since arriving in theater in December 2007.

"The most challenging times have been the three memorial services we've had to do," said Gregory.

"You put all your effort and focus into not losing anybody," he continued, "but this is my third tour, and we've lost Soldiers every tour."

"Soldiers understand that's the business you're in, and that it's going to happen," he added. "The hardest thing to deal with is the families, knowing that there are children back there now without a dad or mom."



*courtesy photo*

But Gregory lives by his own word: He knows the business he's in, and focuses on the positives rather than dwelling on the negatives.

"The Army's about people, and the bonds you build over here," he said. "The people who are here and experience this with you; these Soldiers can go through anything."

The 3/29th is being replaced this month by 1st Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Brigade. 🇮🇷

# Signposts to progress

Story and photos by  
Maj. Jon Powers  
JASG-C Public Affairs

The meeting with the Government of Iraq officials came at approximately the half-way point in Maj. Robert Hughes' time in the Green Zone. But the nature of the security functions inside the International Zone has evolved dramatically.

In early February, Hughes met with Hazim M. Hamed, Republic of Iraq Office of the Vice President chief of staff, for a simple exchange of responsibility for the security of the old United Nations compound. With contractors and Iraqi Army present, this non-ceremony held meaning beyond the obvious. Over the course of the last four months, the JASG-C Security Directorate has witnessed a sea change.

"We were prepared that the mission of the JASG was going to be to transition property from DoD and DoS control back over to the Iraqis and today is a perfect example of the transition," said Hughes. "As the Security Directorate we're responsible for making sure the IZ is secure. It's changed because how we conducted that security has changed immensely since we started. What once was only coalition forces and contractors is now done in cooperation with our Iraqi partners."

Hughes, who works closely with the security contractors, has been a part of the return of Forward Operating Base Union I and the Jan. 1, 2009, transfer of responsibility for the Green Zone entry control points.

"It started out that the transition on January 1 was for entry points into the IZ as well as very specific, important pieces of property. We have seen the Iraqis and Americans with contractor involvement that



the transition has gone exceptionally well. And that has led us to be able to transition other properties that much quicker," Hughes noted.

In the end, it is not who is pulling security but how they are doing it. By instating a gradual training program, the Green Zone maintains the same level of safety throughout any transition. "The lack of events has shown that we are successful, that the transition with keeping security in mind is successful," said Hughes.

Hughes is restrained when he speaks of Security Directorate's

place in history, despite its obvious accomplishments.

"When we came into this, we knew our place in history really was to give a country back to its people, and at the end of the day that is the thing we should be most proud of. We did what we were asked to do. We transitioned their property and their land back to them," he said.

The reason for this may be that he has taken the long view on whether their efforts are successful. "When we will be able to tell our story is in 10-15 years when our children are grown," Hughes concluded. 



## MARCHING AHEAD

Maj. Robert Hughes, JASG-C Security Directorate, meets with Hazim M. Hamed, Republic of Iraq Office of the Vice President chief of staff, top, and other Iraqi officials Feb. 5 to exchange security responsibility for the old United Nations compound. Iraqi soldiers, left, enter the former UN compound to begin their new security mission.

CHAPLAIN'S WORD

# Friendship best possession

Chap. (Maj.) Jan Koczera  
JASG-C Chaplain

We've just passed Valentine's Day, and this is a good time for us to look at our significant relationships, especially since we only have around one hundred days left until our homecoming. There are things that we can do right now that will help when we see our loved ones again in June and, even more importantly, keep relationships healthy in the long term. I'm not only talking about our marriages, but also our relationships with our children, parents, and any other close friends.

Isn't it amazing that all of us (including myself) go to such pains to make sure that we have all that we want in terms of material goods and forget the incredible mystery that surrounds us every day; that each and every person we meet is a universe in themselves, full of mystery, worthy of our time and respect, and a product of the very hand of God? And if you believe in eternity, everything we own will break and wear out, except our relationships—they will last forever.



Shouldn't we give them the time and effort that we give to everything else in life?

So first and always foremost, focus on friendship. Being a friend means to remember the positive qualities that attracted us to each other in the first place, the qualities that we affirm in each other. We can even be friends with our children and still be a parent (I know this seems unbelievable to some!) and when we affirm their strengths, that gives us common ground to work together on the problems. Always work from the strength of the relationship into the weaker areas; problems can always be surmounted when we confront them as a team.

Take the areas of frustration and

make them to-do's by answering the question, "what can I do today to make my relationship better?" Just having a plan can be enough. Be up front; what's the real issue? Usually it's not the other person at all but something outside of both of you. And if you find that you're too angry to deal with it, maybe the solution has to begin with facing your own issues. Escalating into hostility doesn't help and threats aren't the answer. Compassion and understanding do help by building bridges but they require us to take a step back and study the issues with maturity. That's why it's a good idea to look at relationships now, while we have a bit of time before we return.

I think this quote from "The Message" translation of the Bible of I Peter 3 8-9 speaks to what I'm saying:

"Summing up: Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble. That goes for all of you, no exceptions. No retaliation. No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless—that's your job, to bless. You'll be a blessing and also get a blessing."

## Chaplain Services

### Sundays

Protestant Service  
0900 in the DFAC

Catholic Mass  
0915 in the FOB Prosperity Chapel

Latter Day Saints Service East  
1300 in the CSH Compound Chapel

Catholic Mass  
1630 at the Bldg 5 Basketball Court

Contemp. Protestant Worship  
1815 at the Bldg. 5 Basketball Court

Spanish Catholic Mass  
2000 in Bldg. 1 Conference Room

Tuesdays and Thursdays  
Catholic Mass  
1200 in Bldg. 1 Conference Room

Wednesdays and Fridays  
Catholic Mass  
1200 in the CSH Compound Chapel

Fridays  
Eastern Orthodox Service  
0930 every other Friday in Bldg 1  
Conference Room

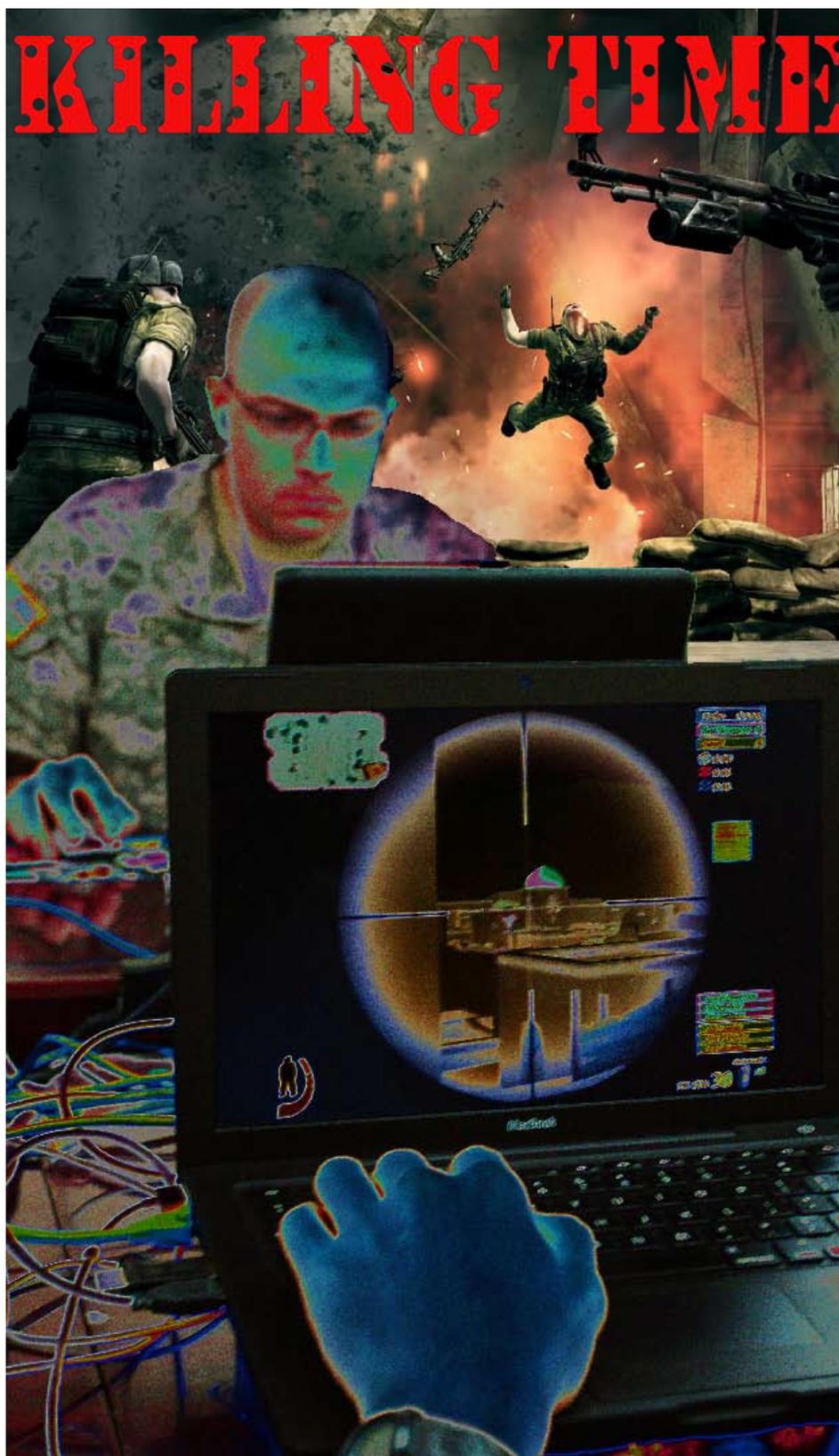
Juma'a Prayer Service  
1300 in the Embassy Muslim Prayer  
Room (SDA 1, 5th floor foyer)

Latter Day Saints Service West  
1500 in Bldg. 1 Conference Room

Jewish Shabbat Service  
1800 in Bldg. 1 Conference Room

Saturdays  
Catholic Mass  
1100 in the CSH Compound Chapel

Denominational Protestant Service  
(Anglican, Episcopal and Lutheran)  
1800 in Bldg. 1 Conference Room



## Troops take aim at boredom on virtual battlefields

*Story, photos and graphic by  
Maj. Jon Powers  
JASG-C Public Affairs*

If Nietzsche really said, “Religion is the opiate of the masses,” it is obvious he never played **URBAN TERROR**. Or any video game for that matter; too bad, because Nietzsche ain’t seen nothin’. More masses play video games now than lived in all of Europe when he was quoted.

The popularity of video games is readily visible in the JASG-C too. Consoles are in the MWR and talk of video games can be heard almost every day. In fact, video games are one of the most common activities for Soldiers in Iraq.

So it is not surprising that a dozen dedicated JASG-C Soldiers gather every week to kill each other virtually in an everyman-for-himself video game of snipers and flanking assaults. Others, who play alone, find refuge in the chaos of World War II, covert CIA Ops in Las Vegas or the mean streets of Vice City. Whether they play solo or in a gang, the focal point of the most popular games is shooting - shooting everything from aliens to zombies.

The Urban Terror league began during the mobilization phase at McGregor Base Camp, N.M. Spc. Jonathan Pierce and Cpt. Ben Stoner began playing more than six months ago and continue today.

“It’s a way to vent; you can get angry during the week and it starts to build up. This you can play with your comrades and have a good time. I think with the training that we do you can implement that in the game, use it for tactical advantage,” said Pierce. “It’s exciting, and you feel like every move you make there is someone behind you getting ready

**BULLETS AND BITS** - Capt. Ben Stoner, pictured above, faces off against Sgt. Bill Addison in a friendly game of Urban Terror. A dozen or more service members gather every Tuesday evening to face off in a digital warzone. The Urban Terror league began during the mobilization phase of the New Jersey Army National Guard’s 50th Infantry Brigade Combat Team at McGregor Base Camp, N.M., this past summer. Soldiers cite relieving stress and boredom as the main motivators for playing these types of video games, and don’t believe that virtual violence leads to destructive behavior in the real world. (Screen capture used in graphic taken from Fuel of War.)

to shoot you. You have to be aware of everything.”

Starting with two players, soon there were more than 20 Soldiers involved. Inside the game, teams of armed soldiers can attack and defend a variety of terrains from European towns to remote desert villages. Realistic environments are a mainstay in this new wave of war-games. Some allow players to interact randomly with the surroundings rather than follow a determined story line. Not all the Soldiers who enjoy video gaming play in a group. Cpt. Brian Stramaglia primarily plays video sports games in the evenings alone or against his roommate.

“It’s something to do. I am into baseball and football back home so I can play that, I can play baseball on Xbox to pass the time, something to maintain a link to my interests back home,” he said.

But he also plays the shooters “There’s the cross-hairs on the screen and you pull the trigger. They’re mindless, there is no intricate plot to them, it’s simple, it’s fun and not too complicated. For some people, they may be taking out some frustrations.”

Mike Snyder wrote in a USA Today article describing the genre’s growing reach. The U.S. Army has created its own online games – America’s Army, and a sequel, America’s Army: Special Forces — recruitment programs played on PCs (free at [www.americasarmy.com](http://www.americasarmy.com)). The games have drawn more than 1.9-million players. Ubisoft, which publishes the Tom Clancy games and has Brothers in Arms, a World

The Urban Terror league meets every Tuesday night to relieve stress, battle boredom and bond as brothers.



War II game, in the works, has a deal to publish America’s Army for consoles such as the PS2 and Xbox. Full Spectrum Warrior, which grew out of Pandemic Studio’s creation of an Army training simulation, is “technically, tactically very real,” says retired Army Captain James Ytuarte, who served as a consultant on the game.

Stoner noted the military aspect of the games. “Here we are, we are Soldiers and we are trained to fight. To do that for real is obviously very dangerous, but in the virtual world you can hit the reset button. We are sitting around the table at computers and we are communicating with each other on the same team, ‘Hey look to your left! I’ll cover you!’ It’s almost practicing your Soldiers skills.”

Even stand alone consoles have incorporated the ability to play with a group. Online services are part of

the draw for Xbox 360 and Playstation 2. In Call of Duty, players can join others. “It is much more interesting because of the multiplayer aspect of it, being with your friends in this virtual shoot-em-up world... you get your mind off your daily routine,” said Stoner.

For console players, only one game in the top 10 is not a shooter. From Grand Theft Auto to Call of Duty, Metal Gear to Halo, all these titles are combat-oriented and violent.

Lt. Col. David Grossman, a former West Point psychology professor, has written several books that pertain to the subject of violence in the media, including On Killing and Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill. During heights of video game controversy, he has been interviewed on the content of his books, and has repeatedly used the term “murder simulator” to describe first-person shooter games. He argues that video game publishers unethically train children in the use of weapons and, more importantly, harden them emotionally to the act of murder by simulating the killing of hundreds or thousands of opponents in a single typical video game.

Though Soldiers don’t see it that way. Not one JASG-C Soldier agreed with Grossman.

*continued on page 17*

**“ Here we are, we are Soldiers and we are trained to fight. To do that for real is obviously very dangerous, but in the virtual world you can hit the reset button. ”**

- Capt. Ben Stoner, JASG-C

# IZ offers peaceful voting venue

Story and photos by  
Sgt. Bill Addison  
JASG-C Public Affairs

Routine badge checks on the 14th of July Bridge, one minor escort violation, and teenagers hanging out on the causeway at dusk and stopping to play with some children - no major incidences of violence, no indirect fire, not even a minor traffic accident.

For the International Zone Police, it was a typical day with one exception: It was Election Day.

“It really wasn’t all that different. We saw a lot more Iraqi army and Iraqi police out on the streets, and a lot less of the public was out as well. Other than that, it really hadn’t changed all that much,” said Air Force Staff Sgt. Steven Baumann, IZ Police officer from the U.S. Forces Police Squadron in Vogelweh, Germany.

But it could have easily gone the other way. While Iraqi citizens in Baghdad celebrated the day as a holiday, inside the IZ heightened security and restricted travel was the theme, anticipating the worst possible scenarios.

“We didn’t quite know what the expectations were for today. We knew there might be a little bit of hostile activity in the area, possibly some indirect fire attacks. So we were kind of expecting that. But it’s been pretty routine throughout the day, pretty uneventful,” said Tech Sgt. Brandon Wolfgang, IZ Police.

**“We gave Iraqis the freedom to vote for who they want in office and that’s just a special feeling.”**

**- Airman 1st Class Ryan Patrick Meehan**



**SECURING SUFFRAGE** - Air Force Staff Sgt. Steven Baumann, above, and Tech. Sgt. Brandon Wolfgang of the IZ Police patrol Baghdad's International Zone during election day in Iraq Jan. 31. Political posters can be seen in the background.

In fact, the only real difference was the purple index fingers of the Iraqis whom the police stopped to talk to. Dipping their finger into purple ink is the last step in the voting process and a badge of honor for the citizens who voted.

“I asked them about their finger and they looked at me with a big smile and said, ‘I voted.’ That’s just a special thing,” said Airman 1st Class Ryan Patrick Meehan. This is his first deployment to Iraq, and one

he said he will remember fondly.

“It’s one of the best things to know that Iraqis can vote without consequences and elect who they want in office,” he said. “It’s something I’m going to remember for the rest of my life and my kids are going to learn about in their history classes. I can help them on their school reports tell them what it was like over here.”

Meehan said that he identifies with the people of Iraq. The 19-year-old Airman participated in his first U.S. presidential election in the last year, albeit absentee.

“Voting, to me, is one of the best things you can do as an American citizen. Vote for who you want in office and who you want to represent your country,” he said.

The elections marked another success story in the overall pic-



ture of Iraqi independence since the implementation of the Security Agreement Jan. 1, where control of securing the International Zone was transitioned to the Iraqis.

For Wolfgang, it's another sign that Iraqis are eager to take full control of their country, a scene he sees played out almost daily in his interaction with the Iraqi Police.

"We're already transitioning. When they are riding with us, we let them take the lead on any incidents that involve the Iraqi people and the local nationals in the area," said Wolfgang.

While he said he can't speak for the Iraqi Police in other parts of the country, he feels confident that the IZ will be in good hands under the watch of the Iraqi Police.

"They take the International Zone being a safe zone very seriously," he said. "I think it shows how seriously they are taking this. They've shown a lot of force in the area and they've done a really good job of actually securing the International Zone for the elections."

"The people in Iraq have been shown that they have a voice and they can vote. I knew that it would be a special day for Iraq and their history. I expected a little more chaos for us, but it's been a pretty good day," he said. 🇮🇶

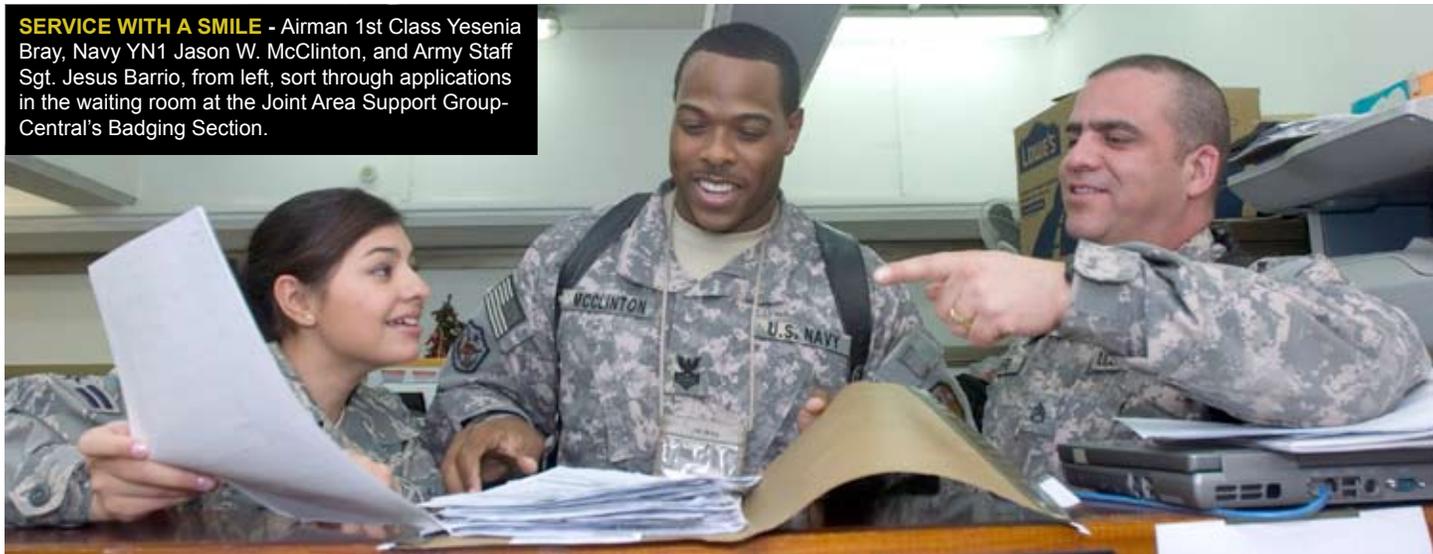
**BUSINESS AS USUAL** - Jan. 31 was election day in Iraq, but for the International Zone (IZ) Police, it was just another day on patrol - which meant peaceful voting at the polls. Air Force Staff Sgt. Steven Baumann of the IZ Police, above, checks a local man's credentials while an Iraqi police officer looks on. Senior Airman Adam Thompson, who is also with the IZ Police, plays soccer with neighborhood children, right, and inspects a civilian vehicle near the 14th of July Bridge, below.



Getting an  
all-access  
tour of ...

# BADGING

**SERVICE WITH A SMILE** - Airman 1st Class Yesenia Bray, Navy YN1 Jason W. McClinton, and Army Staff Sgt. Jesus Barrio, from left, sort through applications in the waiting room at the Joint Area Support Group-Central's Badging Section.



Story and photos by  
Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris  
JASG-C Public Affairs

Whenever the Joint Area Support Group-Central's Badging Section is mentioned, someone within earshot invariably quotes a very well-known movie line.

Typically spoken enthusiastically and with a Mexican accent, the quote is usually met with half-hearted chuckles and barely cracked smiles from people who have heard it one too many times before.

Now imagine working in Badging and having to endure a daily dose of this dialogue. And to add insult to injury, the quote isn't even accurate, since people moving in and out of the International Zone *do* need their "stinkin' badges."

The Security Directorate's Badging Section is located at Ocean Cliffs, where most of its personnel work in containerized offices on the ground floor of a former parking garage. The low ceiling, tight

walkways, and menagerie of service members, contractors and local nationals hustling and bustling from office to office makes Badging seem like a buzzing beehive.

"Badging is like Motor Vehicles," explained Staff Sgt. Jesus Barrio, waiting room Non-Commissioned Officer In Charge. "It's a constant

**The low ceiling, tight walkways, and menagerie of service members, contractors and local nationals hustling and bustling from office to office makes Badging seem like a buzzing beehive.**

barrage of (people without appointments), also 300 to 400 scheduled appointments a day, plus VIPs coming in."

Barrio and his fellow badgers process, on average, more than 3,700 badges per month, and also handle 3,000 badge applications, biometric appointments and biometric enrol-

ments in that same time period.

"It gets very crazy," Barrio noted.

A visit to Badging easily validates Barrio's claim. Trying to enter the waiting room is like merging onto a busy freeway as employees, sponsors and applicants constantly flow in and out as they try to take care of business. Once in the room, one has to stake a claim to any piece of available real estate; it's often standing-room only, and those lucky enough to grab a seat are envied like a high-school quarterback dating the prom queen.

After wading through a sea of humanity, one reaches the desk where Barrio and his fellow service members review badge applications for accuracy.

"We have thousands and thousands of applications that we have to deal with," explained Airman 1st Class Yesenia Bray, who works for Barrio in the waiting room. "It's not as easy as it looks; we take this very seriously."

And serious business it is. The process of obtaining a badge begins when sponsors bring in new subjects to have their applications screened, receive a control number, and be entered into the system.

“Accuracy is most important,” said Capt. Kristina Murphy-Brownlee, Badging executive officer.

“It’s really important what they put in because that’s how we track it.”

The next step is a visit to the waiting room for a final paperwork check before biometric screening.

“Once we receive the application, we enter it in the database,” explained Peter Cubberly, tactical biometric operator. “The badge has to match the physical description of the applicant – hair color, eye color, height, weight.”

“There is a series of pictures that we take, facial profiles to FBI standards that we use in the States. The same thing with fingerprints,” he continued. “We also do the iris or retina scan. All this information goes into a shared database.”

The biometric information can

**“Badging is like Motor Vehicles: It’s a constant barrage of people without appointments, also 300 to 400 scheduled appointments a day, plus VIPs coming in.”**

**- Staff Sgt. Jesus Barrio, Badging Section**

then be used to determine if the applicant has a biometric history on file, and if they have any kind of “derogatory” information listed. If the applicant “comes up hot,” he or she is sent for further security screening. If the applicant is clean, his or her file then moves to Adjudication where background checks are conducted to make sure applicants are not “flagged” for any reason.

“If they are, we deny them a badge,” said Sgt. Paul Burke, Badging adjudicator.

If the badge is denied, or if the applicant fails biometrics, he or she is sent for several more screenings. If applicants pass these rescreenings, they have a good shot at receiving a badge following a re-evaluation by

Adjudication. If not, the badge is denied, as is the applicant’s access to the IZ.

“The most important aspect to badging is to be fair and equitable to everyone,” explained Maj. John Tumino, Badging Officer In Charge. “The Iraqi laborer is as important as the Iraqi prime minister, and they deserve the same attention to detail and respect with regards to the badging process.”

And if mistakes are made on badges, it’s up to Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Barry Douglass, Badging NCOIC, to correct them.

“I’m basically the fix-all, end-all,” he explained. “I deal with Iraqis, I deal with Americans, I deal with any nationality you can imagine; it’s a very stressful job.

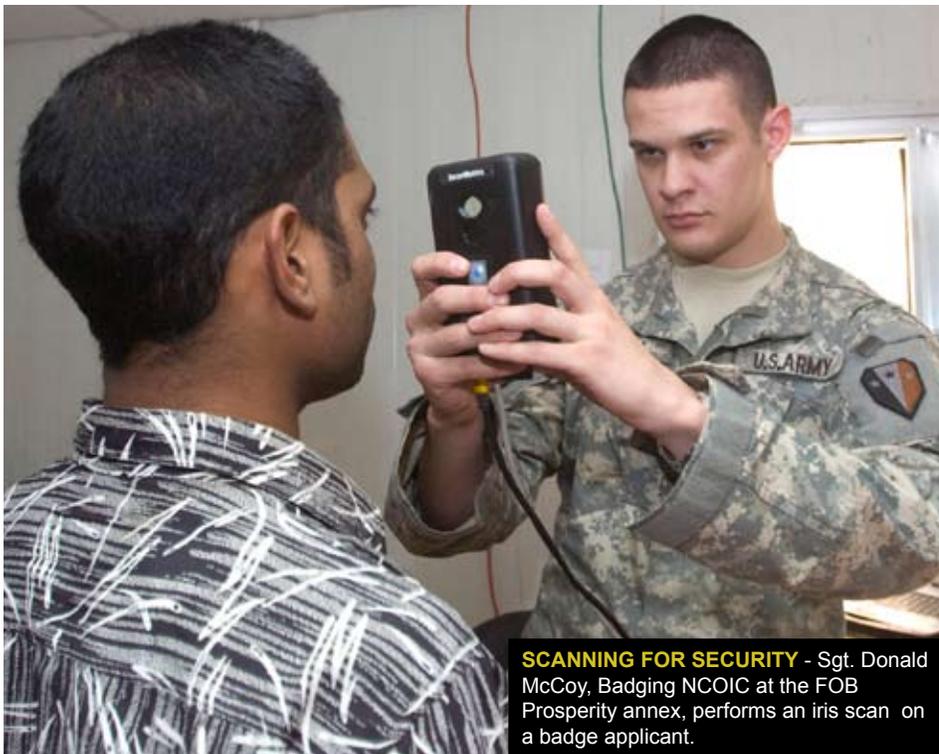
That stress almost brought Barrio to the breaking point this past November.

“Thanksgiving Day. We thought it was going to be easy, we thought we’d be out of here early – it was nuts,” he said, the memory of being delayed from his holiday dinner still painful to recall.

“We processed about 500 appointments, plus some walk-ins,” he continued. “It was hot; it didn’t even feel like Thanksgiving. It was the craziest, worst day.”

Concerns of PTSD (Post-Turkey Stress Disorder) aside, Barrio seems proud to be part of a process that helps keep the IZ safe and secure.

Even if it means he’ll never be able to sit through *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* again.



**SCANNING FOR SECURITY** - Sgt. Donald McCoy, Badging NCOIC at the FOB Prosperity annex, performs an iris scan on a badge applicant.



**PRIDE IN SERVICE -**  
Airman 1st Class Yesenia Bray answers an Iraqi's application questions at the Joint Area Support Group-Central's Badging Section.

# Honeymoon in Iraq

**Air Force newlyweds share deployment experience**

*Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris JASG-C Public Affairs*

“There was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to volunteer for this,” said 21-year-old Airman 1<sup>st</sup> Class Yesenia Bray of her deployment to Baghdad.

As a clerk in the Joint Area Support Group-Central's Badging Section, she's responsible for helping to review, process and manage thousands of badge applications each month, while also dealing with the day-to-day issues of her job.

As one half of an Air Force couple currently serving in Iraq, her married life that began this past March had to be put on hold before it even had a chance to truly begin.

And considering both her age and newlywed status, she has neither the life experience that brings perspective to a deployment and makes it easier to cope with, nor a lengthy marital foundation

upon which to lean during tough times. She has to learn both how to be a spouse, and how to do it long-distance, while relying on newly wedded bliss rather than years of nuptial commitment to see herself through the difficult days.

But all that's okay with Bray; she wouldn't want it any other way.

“We both knew that it was our calling,” said Bray, a California native stationed with her husband, 25-year-old Senior Airman Matthew Bray, at Nellis Air Force Base, Calif., when not deployed.

“I think that while we're both in theater, it really helps us out because even though we're not together, we're near each other.”

The pair is separated by about 150 miles - he's been stationed in Kirkuk since January, while she's called Baghdad home since December 2008. Though vast tracts of desert keep the couple apart, modern technology has helped bring them together, albeit sporadically.

“We try to communicate every day, but it's really hard,” Bray explained. “Where I'm at is paradise to where he's at; I have Internet whenever I want it, and it's really hard for him to get access.”

“We try to tell each other, ‘You've got to make it through, you've got to stay strong for me,’” she said. “Just hearing his voice makes a huge difference.”

Hearing her husband's voice is more than just a comforting reminder of her true love; it also lets her know he's safe and unharmed.

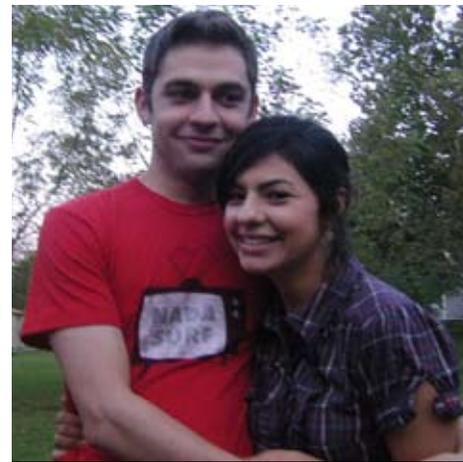
“He gets hit more than we do, and that really worries me,” she said about the rocket attacks her husband endures on a consistent basis. “It gets hard sometimes; it gets rough. We have to just stay strong.”

Bray draws strength from the the knowledge that she and her husband will soon be reunited.

“We missed our first Christmas together, we're missing our first anniversary, but the fact is that we're getting to experience this together,” she added.

Both Bray and her husband are scheduled to arrive home by June, but she knows this will not be the final deployment for either of them.

“There are many more to come, and when our number's called, we'll be right there,” she promised. “We're really proud to serve our country.”



**DEPLOYED DUO -** Senior Airman Matthew Bray and Airman 1st Class Yesenia Bray will celebrate their one-year wedding anniversary in Iraq this March.

## JAG CORNER

# Combat service equals tax benefits

Col. Daniel G. Giaquinto  
Command Judge Advocate

It's February, W2 and other tax information items are in the mail, and April 15 is just around the corner. For some, the bad news is that it's income tax time again. However, for members of the U.S. Armed Forces serving in a combat zone, the good news is twofold: Exclusion and extension.

Let's first deal with combat zone exclusion of pay, something you should already be aware of, due to the increase in "take home pay" you received since you first arrived in-theatre. Enlisted members, warrant officers, and commissioned warrant officers may exclude all of their basic pay per month, and officers may exclude a current amount of up to \$7,100.10 per month, from income for any month in which they served a part of the month (1 day or more) in a combat zone. The exclusion is not actually shown on your tax return, because the income that qualifies for the exclusion is not included in wages listed on your W2.

The pay that is eligible for exclusion does not have to be received in a combat zone, but must represent pay for service, or pay for a period during which hospitalization occurs as a result of service, in a combat zone. The exclusion also applies to pay for accrued leave earned in any month that is served or for a reenlistment bonus if the voluntary extension or reenlistment occurs during a month in which the member served in a combat zone.

By Presidential/Executive Order, both Kuwait and Iraq are considered to be in a combat zone

Next, let's deal with the "extension" aspect. Most Americans realize that income tax returns, for the prior calendar year, are due on or before April 15. However, members of the U.S. Armed Forces

who serve in a combat zone are allowed additional time to take care of tax matters, called a "deadline extension." Spouses of military members serving in a combat zone also qualify for the same deadline extension treatment. The deadline for filing your income tax return with the IRS, and paying income tax that is owed, is extended for 180 days after the later of:

1. The last day the taxpayer is in a combat zone (or the last day the area qualifies as a combat zone), or

2. The last day of any continuous qualified hospitalization for injury from service in the combat zone. (Hospitalization that resulted from an injury in the case of a Persian Gulf area injury must have occurred between Aug. 2, 1990, and the date the president, by Executive Order, terminates the combat zone, which has not yet happened.)

Other tax actions, such as paying estate or gift taxes, filing a petition with the tax court for a redetermination of a deficiency, filing a claim or suit for credit or refund of tax, making a qualified IRA contribution, etc., also receive the benefit of the deadline extension.

Military members who wish to take advantage of the combat zone deadline extension need not file for the extension. All you need to do is write on your income tax return "Served in a combat zone, Iraq/Kuwait" and include the dates of the service, and make sure you file within 180 days of your departure from the combat zone. Likewise, if the IRS takes any tax actions against you or sends a notice of examination before learning that you, the taxpayer, qualify for a deadline extension, you should return the notice with the same general information regarding dates and place of service. If you wish to avoid this possible occurrence, you can play it safe and actually file a request for an extension, in which

case it is recommended that your request contain the same information regarding your service, specifying your location and date, or expected date, of departure. Also be aware that New Jersey affords the same period of combat zone extension, and requires a statement explaining the extended, late filing. You may utilize the following or similar language whether you are dealing with a federal or N.J. deadline extension:

*"I am a member of the New Jersey Army National Guard who was deployed in a combat zone, specifically Iraq and Kuwait, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom from (date of arrival), until (date of departure). I am filing this return and paying any tax due and owing within the 180 day combat zone extension afforded to me by law and by virtue of my described service."*

So should you file your tax return from in-theatre or take advantage of the deadline extension? Only you can answer that question. There are many advantages in waiting to file after you depart a combat zone, not the least of which is that you will have easier access to necessary documents (particularly if you itemize your deductions), and to your usual tax preparer if you use one, and of course you'll have one less concern to deal with during a deployment. The answer may very well depend on whether you expect to receive a refund or whether you expect to owe taxes, and the amount of money. When making that decision, you should be aware that no penalties or interest will be imposed for failure to file a return or pay taxes due and owing during the extension period. The IRS, however, will pay interest on a refund from the due date of the return if the return is timely filed after applying the deadline extension. If you have questions or concerns, contact your personal tax preparer or legal assistance office.

# Polynesia comes to Prosperity



*Story by Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris  
Photos by Sgt. Bill Addison  
JASG-C Public Affairs*

Service members were transported from the Middle East to the South Pacific Jan. 29 as soldiers of the 1st Battalion, Fiji Infantry Regiment put on a cultural dance show at FOB Prosperity.

“We needed this program in order to, firstly, show you what our culture is all about and, secondly, create an understanding and an awareness between the two forces,” explained Capt. Ropate Cabealawa, Fiji Infantry Regiment.

Cabealawa and a few dozen male and female Fijian Soldiers, who serve as the United Nations Guard Unit in Iraq, treated other coalition members to an hour of traditional music and dancing.

A group of male soldiers in Polynesian garb kicked off the evening

singing harmonies to ukulele playing, evoking visions of palm trees swaying in the warm breeze and dazzling sunsets casting an orange hue across the sea.

This euphoric dream was interrupted by a distant battle cry, followed by the entrance of a dozen Fijian warriors bearing spears and war paint. They chanted, danced and

of their genetic makeup. Their fluidity of movement, combined with traditional outfits, made quite an attractive combination.

Coalition members also got a chance to participate in the “Snake Dance” with both the male and female Fijian soldiers. This dance was something like a conga line that continually changed directions, causing

**“We’re fighting the same war; we’re on the same team.”**

- Fijian Capt. Ropate Cabealawa



thrust their spears while the band traded its ukulele for war drums.

Once the spearmen had left the floor, it was the women’s turn. Their entrance was more subdued than their male counterparts, but their performance was every bit as engaging. They danced with natural ease as the ukulele played, as if the music of their homeland were part

plenty of accordion-like expansions and contractions as the uninitiated attempted to stay in step. It also led to an abundance of laughing, cheering and clapping from both audience members and participants.

“It was a lot of fun,” said Snake Dance-participant Senior Airman Holly McDonald, NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I).



**ISLANDERS INVADE IZ** - Members of the 1st Battalion, Fiji Infantry Regiment put on a cultural awareness program at the Forward Operating Base Prosperity Dining Facility Jan. 29. The service members and civilians who attended the program were treated to traditional Fijian singing, left, and dancing, below, and were later invited to join in the festivities, opposite page. The Fijian soldiers are serving in Baghdad's International Zone as the NATO Guard Force.

“They’re all Soldier-related dances; even for the women,” added Air Force Staff Sgt. Doreen Prasad, and native of Fiji also serving with NTM-I.

Prasad is the embodiment of a U.S.-Fiji relationship that dates back nearly seven decades.

“It started in the Pacific when we were part of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry,” said Cabealawa. This U.S. division arrived in Fiji in June 1942 and as-

sumed control of the Fiji Defense Force. The Fijian troops distinguished themselves fighting Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands campaign, the Battle of Bougainville and other engagements.

More than 60 years later, Fijian and U.S. forces once again face a common enemy.

“We’re fighting the same war; we’re on the same side,” Cabealawa said. 



# Troops take aim at boredom

*continued from page 9*

“That is people looking way too deep; they’re reading into everything. People are violent for other reasons, I don’t think video games have a big influence on that,” concluded Pierce.

The only killing video players claim is killing time. The virtual world has nothing to do with how they spend their day and because of that simple fact they enjoy them. Deployments can be dull and dangerous to varying degrees, and according to these players video games relieve both boredom and stress.

“We are just enjoying a little bit of time with each other,” said Stoner. “I mark the weeks left in the deployment by the number of Tuesday nights.”

Stramaglia also believes that events like movie nights or game clubs keep people going. “It’s something to look forward to every week that marks the passage of time,” he said.

“You can get wrapped up in a video game. I am going to beat this team, I am going to beat this level of the game and I will sit here until I do it; next thing you know an hour is gone, then two hours, three hours. It is a good way to stay out of trouble. If you play Xbox by yourself it is really hard for trouble to come find you,” noted Stramaglia.

True, unless trouble is a level-seven Zombie Warlord boss; they are everywhere these days. 

**GEARED-UP GAMERS**  
First Lt. Anthony Salvani, foreground, faces off against Sgt. Bill Addison and other JASG-C Soldiers during Urban Terror night.



# FALCON



Staff Sgt. Dennis Pack



Master Sgt. Shawn Stanley



Tech. Sgt. Jeremiah True



Staff Sgt. Amber Grimes



Staff Sgt. Charles Roberts



Staff Sgt. David Diamond



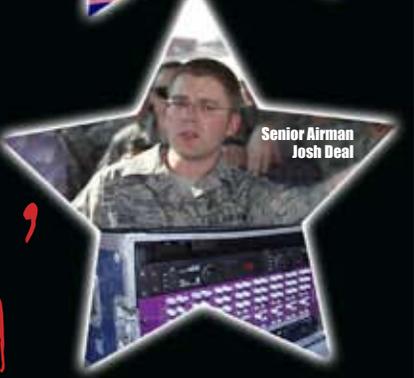
Senior Airman John Sayre



Staff Sgt. Shane Spanier



Airman Rogan Allen



Senior Airman Josh Deal

A building that was a centerpiece of President Bush's "shock and awe" campaign in 2003 became the center of a rock-and-roll show at Forward Operating Base Union III Feb. 1.

Nearly six years after Bldg. 5 received its explosive makeover, the U.S. Air Force's Central Expeditionary Band "Falcon" put on a two-hour concert for coalition forces serving in Iraq.

"It's actually very gratifying to come out and support the people who are doing this," explained Air Force Master Sgt. Shawn Stanley, bass player and band leader. "It lets us know that we're doing our part to support the entire effort."

They played their part well, filling the Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) Center with an enthusiastic audience. While song genres varied, the band's top-notch performance remained constant.

"Everybody has their piece of the puzzle that they do, and they're all professionals at doing it," said Stanley, a 23-year Air Force band veteran. He explained that each musician in the band has a unique story: Some are self-taught, while others have years of formal training; some are pursuing or hold degrees in music, while others teach the art to students of their own; and some are finishing careers while others are just starting out.

But one thing they all share is the ability and desire to entertain troops.

"They played a nice mix of music: Rock and roll, jazz, R&B," said Air Force Maj. William Martin, JASG-C deputy comptroller. "Any time we get a live band, that's a pretty big event for us."

"We're over here doing a job to entertain them," said Air Force Staff Sgt. Amber Grimes, band vocalist. "I couldn't ask for a better job."

'Rocks the Kasbah'

# Getting To Know **FOB UNION III**

## **Mayor's Cell**

MAJ Thomas McGhee  
 FOB Union III mayor  
 DSN 318 239-0232  
 Asia Cell 0770-444-1653

CSM Scott Lewis  
 FOB Union III deputy mayor  
 DSN 318 239-0234  
 Asia Cell 0770-444-1705

## **Dining Facility**

The Union III Dining Facility (DFAC) across from the Bldg. 1 parking lot offers four meals a day. Meal hours are:

Breakfast: 0530 to 0800  
 Lunch: 1130 to 1330  
 Dinner: 1730 to 2000  
 Midnight Meal: 2330 to 0100

## **Post Office**

Free mail, which is limited to 13 ounces, still exists for the letter home and a mailbox is located in front of Bldg. 6. But if you are looking to mail pictures, a small souvenir in an envelope or packages, then you must go to the Post Office located in Bldg. 5.

Your packages will be inspected and limited to three packages or items, such as footlockers, per visit. You are also required to have a military ID card for the transaction. Civilians are required to have two forms of identification to conduct postal transactions.

Items that are forbidden to be shipped include weapons items, drugs, alcohol, and perishable material. For a complete list of items, consult CENTCOM AR 25-200 or HRSC Policy 07-26.

The hours at the Post Office are 0800 to 1730 daily.

## **Finance**

The times and location for Union III finance operations are Bldg. 6, Rooms 1-4A and 1-4B, from 0900 to 1600, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Finance operations include check cashing, Eagle Cash Card transactions, military pay issues, collection and review of travel vouchers and other military pay-related documents, and more.

Eagle Cash Card (ECC) applications are available. The service member must provide a current bank statement or LES to verify bank routing and account numbers. As a reminder, you can load up to \$350 per day to your card. You can get cash back up to \$200 per month. Checks can also be cashed for up to \$200 per month.

For more information, call Sgt. Genea L. Michael at DSN 318 239-8570/8571 or send e-mail [genea.michael@iraq.centcom.mil](mailto:genea.michael@iraq.centcom.mil)

## **Gym/MWR**

The Union III Gym is located in Bldg. 5 and is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The MWR facility, adjacent to the gym, offers a large-screen television, DVDs, books, board games, Xbox and other fun activities. The MWR facility is also open 24/7.

The gym/MWR facility host several weekly events, including Karaoke Night Sundays at 1900, Movie Night Saturdays at 2000, ping-pong and pool tournaments Thursdays at 1930, ab workout classes Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 2000 to 2100, and Texas Hold-Em Tuesdays,

Fridays and Saturdays from 2000 to 2300. Times and events are subject to change.

## **Common Access Cards**

The IZ Common Access Card (CAC) office is open in Bldg. 1, Room 107, Monday through Saturday from 0830 to 1800. For questions, call DSN 318 239-0641 or 703 270-0641 or e-mail [jasgchrn@iraq.centcom.mil](mailto:jasgchrn@iraq.centcom.mil)

## **Laundry Service**

Since dirty laundry is serious business, the FOB has a seven-day-a-week laundry service that at a maximum takes three days to complete. Individuals using the service can only have 20 pieces of laundry in each bag. Blankets and comforters must be separated from clothing or uniform items. The hours of operation are 0700 to 2000 daily.

## **Medical Treatment**

The Union III Troop Medical Clinic, located behind the Mayor's Cell in Bldg. 1, is open for routine health care needs. Sick-call hours for walk-ins are Monday through Friday from 0800 to 1100 and 1300 to 1500, and Saturdays from 0800 to 1100. The clinic is closed on Sundays.

Those eligible for care include active-duty U.S. and Coalition Forces, retired U.S. military and Department of Defense federal government employees.

Routine immunizations and Post Deployment Health Assessments are available for individuals during sick call hours. For groups of 10 or more call 239-0680 to schedule.

# Art of WAR



Baghdad's buildings bear silent witness to Iraq's recent history, their scarred facades making them look more like ancient Mesopotamian ruins than 20th Century structures. Pictured above is the peak of the FOB Prosperity palace; at left, a chopper flies past Bldg. 5 on FOB Union III; fighting has left a two-legged lion to guard a villa on the Tigris River, below; and the old United Nations compound stands pock-marked with bullet holes at far left. Photos by JASG-C Public Affairs.

