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Black Dragons: new home, new partners



Photo by 2nd Lt. Justin Bishop

U.S. Soldiers, assigned to the 5th Bn., 82nd FA Regt., 4th BCT, 1st Cav. Div., execute a dismounted patrol of the objective area during 'Operation Long Island.' The operation was a joint patrol conducted with Iraqi Army Soldiers Feb 24.

2ND LT. JUSTIN BISHOP
4TH BCT, 1ST CAV. DIV.



FOB HUNTER – After two months of patrolling in northern Baghdad last summer, Soldiers from the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division helped reduce the rate of indirect fire received at the base there to its lowest levels since the war started in 2003.

With the intent of duplicating those results at their new location here, the 5th Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regi-

ment., also known as 'Black Dragons,' assisted the 41st Brigade, 10th Iraqi Army Division during 'Operation Long Island,' Feb 24.

"This was the first time we worked with our IA counterparts for an extended period of time," said Sgt. Robert Berceera, a Black Dragon from Winnemucca, NV. "I was surprised at how well they knew the area. They were cool-headed and anxious to take the lead."

The training programs provided by the Americans at

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DRAGONS

From page 1

Camp Dhi Qar and the Besmaya Range Complex, which is where all IA units do their training before being considered ready to conduct operations in southern Iraq, helped lay the foundation for an effective partnership between the Black Dragon and IA units.

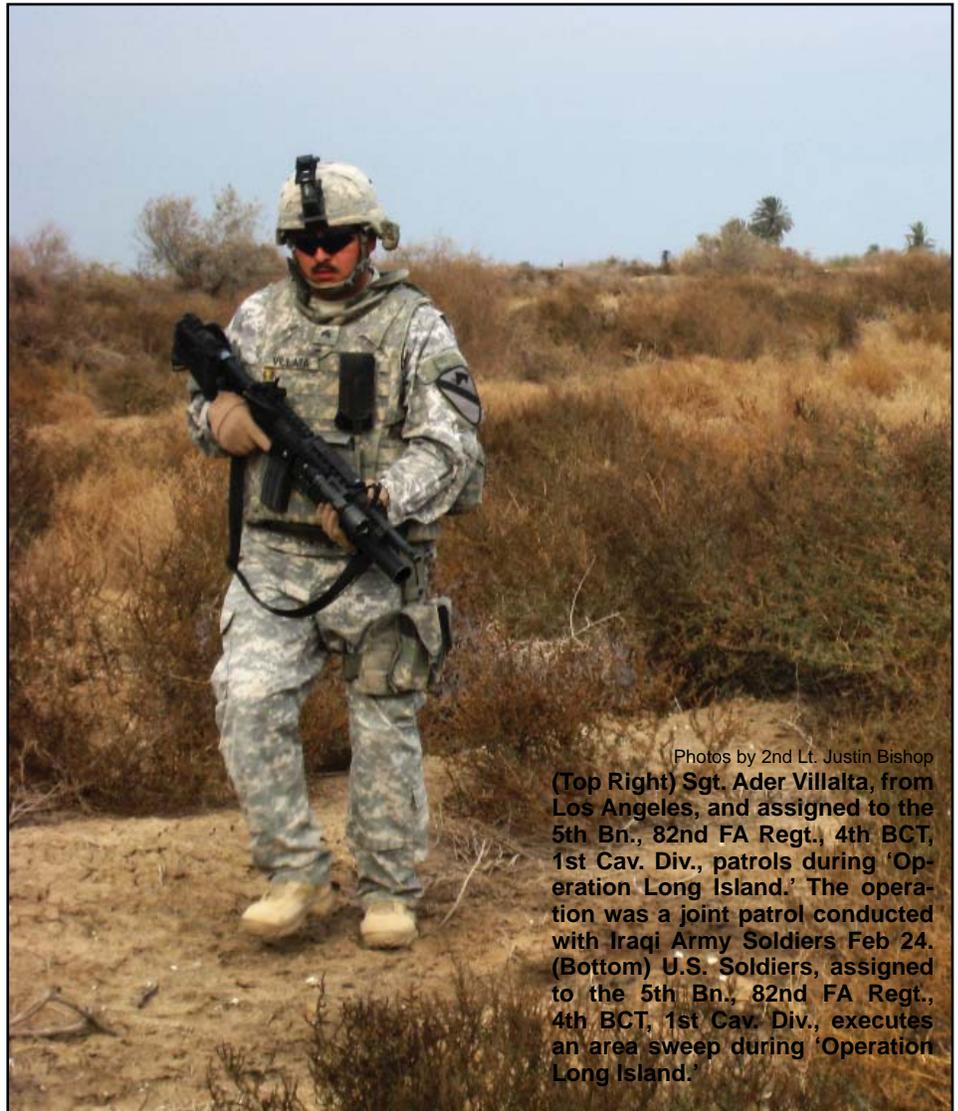
The training involved vehicle and foot patrols, searching vehicles and personnel at checkpoints and small-arms qualification.

By enabling the Iraqi troops to take the lead during joint patrols, the IA Soldiers were better prepared to help continue the steady decline of violence in the Maysan Province.

Iraqis who spoke with Coalition Forces during the mission were grateful for the increased presence, because they also want the negative influences removed from the area.

“In areas where there were coalition-only patrols, people would act indifferent to the patrols,” said Maj. David McCulley, the 5th Bn., 82nd FA Regt. Executive Officer from Springdale, Ark. “With the Iraqi Army Soldiers now leading the patrols, the population is glad to see the IA Soldiers and treat them with a lot of respect.”

The Black Dragons look forward to continued joint patrols with their new Iraqi partners, and hope to help reduce the amount of indirect fire at FOB Hunter.



Photos by 2nd Lt. Justin Bishop
(Top Right) Sgt. Ader Villalta, from Los Angeles, and assigned to the 5th Bn., 82nd FA Regt., 4th BCT, 1st Cav. Div., patrols during 'Operation Long Island.' The operation was a joint patrol conducted with Iraqi Army Soldiers Feb 24. (Bottom) U.S. Soldiers, assigned to the 5th Bn., 82nd FA Regt., 4th BCT, 1st Cav. Div., executes an area sweep during 'Operation Long Island.'



THE Mountain View

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Task Force 449



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Sheik works to improve community

SPC. TIFFANY EVANS
172ND INF. BDE.



FOB KALSU – Somber-looking men gathered in a sitting room prepared to discuss matters in their village with a representative of the U.S. Army, Feb 21. A toddler lightened the mood when he entered the room and headed straight for a distinguished man seated in the room with an air of authority.

Sheik Fadil Youssef broke into a brilliant smile and in clear English told the guests at his house that the boy is his grandson. Youssef went on to explain his children and grandchildren give him reasons to improve the village of Jurf as Sahkr.

“My children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews represent the future of Iraq. We must, here and now, work to improve their future,” said Youssef, Sheik and Sons of Iraq contract holder for Jurf as Sahkr. “We have a few problems and need help from the Coalition to fix them. I have worked with the Coalition forces throughout Iraq since 2004, and I am proud to call them friends and brothers.”

During Youssef’s three-hour meeting with Capt. Brian Weightman, commander of B Company, 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 172nd Infantry Brigade, he continually focused on the people of Jurf as Sahkr and their welfare.

“U.S. forces are working on leaving Iraq and changing their strategy on how to help the people of Iraq until forces leave,” Weightman, a native of Eden Mills, Vt., said. “Even though we will not be funding as many projects as we have in the past, we will work with the villages and towns in our area of operation to receive the necessary funding and help from the Government of Iraq.”

Weightman explained how projects already approved are going to be finished before Coalition forces leave Iraq.

Youssef donated a parcel of land to the GOI, for a high school, which the Coalition agreed to build.

“At this time I can tell you the money for the high school has been approved and now we are searching for a contractor,” Weightman said.

Weightman told Youssef and the

other guest that he understood their concerns and would pass them on.

Youssef voiced a few concerns about the SOI. Many are still waiting to hear about being hired by the GOI or if the government will help to find them other jobs.

The Sheik, who holds bachelor degrees in engineering, communications and education, told Weightman that 95 percent of his SOI’s are able to read and write. He went on to say how the people of Jurf as Sahkr are also highly educated.

Youssef discussed the recent provincial elections following lunch. No Sunni won a seat in Babil province, and Jurf as Sahkr is mainly a Sunni village.

“We are disappointed that the Sunnis who ran for election did not band together, but we are pleased with the results. The elected officials are the right people to help secure Iraq and keep the sectarian violence away,” Youssef said. “Above all else, we want to be secure and stand on our own two feet. We will do our best to always do the honorable thing for our children.”

Weightman asked Youssef and his visitors what else he could do to help them. The captain listened to com-

ments about a man’s house destroyed by a bomb, a military vehicle involved in a crash with a local vehicle and all the men wanted Weightman to look into the arrest of a man accused of violence against many citizens of Jurf as Sahkr.

“I can not promise you that we can fix these problems quickly, but I will look into all of them,” Weightman said. “I will also talk to the military police and Iraqi police to see where the accused man is and if he is being put on trial.”

Youssef and Weightman left the meeting looking forward to working with each other soon, said Youssef and Weightman. Hope and cooperation fueled the process of healing in 1st Bn., 2nd Inf., Regt., area of operations.

“There is an old saying, that we may not accomplish all we set out to do, but if we work together and hold tight to hope things will be fine,” Youssef said. “I have to agree, when things get bad it’s hope and faith that carries me and my people through those tough times. Added to our hope and faith is that of the American people and their fighting forces who continue to help stabilize and secure our country.”



Photo by Spc. Tiffany Evans

Sheik Fadil Youssef, Jurf as Sahkr, Sons of Iraq contract holder, and Capt. Brian Weightman, commander B Company, 1st Battalion, 2nd Regiment, 172nd Infantry Brigade, take notes after having a brief exchange about building a high school in Jurf as Sahkr during a meeting Feb. 21 at Youssef’s house.

Staff Section Round-up

Chaplain's Corner: Running vs. running out

Today's topic is about the issue of morale. According to Merriam Webster's Online Dictionary the word "morale" is defined as (1) the mental and emotional condition (as of enthusiasm, confidence, loyalty) of an individual or group with regard to the function or tasks at hand, (2) a sense of common purpose with respect to a group and (3) the level of individual psychological well-being based on such factors as a sense of purpose and confidence in the future.

In a May 30, 2007 article printed by the Army Times entitled, "Study: Troop's morale up and down". In this article Associated Press writer Pauline Jelinek quotes Specialist Christopher Hagen a Soldier assigned to Baqubah, which is one of the most increasingly violent areas of Diyala province North of Baghdad. He says, "When troops score a big success against militants, "morale goes through the roof," "But when you hear one of your friends gets hurt, it drops to an all-time low." The writer goes on to say that about two-thirds of those surveyed said they knew someone who had been killed or injured. More than three-quarters of Soldiers and Marines said they had been in situations where they could have been killed or seriously injured. Nearly forty percent described events that made them feel "intense fear, helplessness or horror."

The Bible describes an incident in the life of the Prophet Elijah that took place beginning in First Kings 18:21, where King Ahab confronts Elijah, calling him the "troubler of Israel." You need to know that both King Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel were occupying the throne in Israel, and at that time allowed the worship of the idol god Baal. Elijah summons the people of Israel to Mount Carmel to witness the

contest between Baal and God. After they both prepare the sacrifice Almighty God shows out on the Baal worshippers by destroying the sacrifice while the Baal worshippers' idol god never showed up for the contest. Afterwards, Elijah slays the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah with the sword. Here is my point. Immediately, he takes off running for his life when he heard that Jezebel had issued a death threat for his life (First Kings 19: 1-14). Fearful and afraid, he heads to Beersheba in Judah and sits down and falls asleep under a juniper tree. An angel comes to him and instructs him to eat bread and drink a jar of water. On the strength of his brief rest he runs for forty days and forty nights until he reaches the caves of Mount Horeb, where he again hides himself, supposedly from Jezebel. However, this time God shows up Himself and after giving a demonstration of His awesome power He speaks to the man of God in a still small voice. Theologians suggest that Elijah was so desperate that he was about to take his own life.

This illustration says to us that God is always aware of what is going on with Soldiers because He alone is their protector and provider (Psalms 23 and 91). The same God who realized that Elijah needed a break also realizes that we need a break. All service members need a break and a change of scenery. It shows the necessity of a break when this chaplain observes men and women who are refreshed, excited, and rejuvenated, all because their leaders demonstrated their care and concern for them by giving them a break.

Ch. (Capt.) Terry D. Hill Sr.
Chaplain Detachment Chaplain

Blackstreet gives concert to thank Troops



Photos by Sgt. Frank Vaughn
(Far left) Teddy Riley, a founding member of the musical group, Blackstreet, sings at Victory Stage Feb. 27. He said the group owes their success, nearly 13 million albums sold, to the efforts of the military to keep America safe and free. "I was afraid to come here because of the war, but we wanted to thank you all for what you do," said Riley. This performance was the group's first in Iraq. (Left) Pfc. Cantrice Kelley, 10th Mountain Division administrative section awards clerk, sings along with Blackstreet during their concert. The Hopewell, Va., native said she has been a fan of the group since 1993. "It was really a boost to my morale that they came to perform," said Kelley. "It was really special because they didn't have to, but they cared enough to say thank you to Soldiers."

Headline Round-up

U.S. News:

NEW YORK - The number of offenders on parole and probation across the United States has surged past 5 million, complicating the challenges for fiscally ailing states as they try to curb corrections costs without jeopardizing public safety, according to a new report. The Pew Center on the States report, released March 2, says the number of people on probation or parole nearly doubled to more than 5 million between 1982 and 2007. Including jail and prison inmates, the total population of the U.S. corrections system now exceeds 7.3 million — one of every 31 U.S. adults, it said. The report also noted huge discrepancies among the states in regard to the total corrections population — one of every 13 adults in Georgia and one of every 18 in Idaho at one end of the scale, one of every 88 in New Hampshire at the other extreme. The racial gap also was stark — one of every 11 black adults is under correctional supervision, one of every 27 Hispanic adults, one of every 45 white adults. The report notes that construction of new prisons will be increasingly rare as most states grapple with budget crises. It said improved community-supervision strategies represent one of the most feasible ways for states to limit corrections spending and reduce recidivism.

Odd News:

OMAHA, Neb. - A man who tried to cool out his hyper cat by stuffing her into a boxlike homemade bong faces cruelty charges — and catcalls from animal lovers. Lancaster County sheriff's deputies responding to a domestic disturbance call March 1 alleged they saw 20-year-old Acea Schomaker smoking marijuana through a piece of garden hose attached to a duct-taped, plastic glass box in which the cat had been stuffed. Schomaker told deputies 6-month-old Shadow was hyper and he was trying to calm her down. The contraption she had been stuffed inside was 12 inches by 6 inches. Shadow was timid but in good condition Monday at the Capital Humane Society, executive director Bob Downey said.

Entertainment:

NEW YORK - Almost a year after Jimmy Fallon was named new host of NBC's "Late Night," and 10 days after predecessor Conan O'Brien departed, Fallon made his debut March 2. Fallon's scheduled opening-night guests included Robert De Niro and Justin Timberlake, with Van Morrison his musical guest.

Quote of the Day

"Everyone is a moon and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody." — Mark Twain

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For the answer to today's puzzle, go to:



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AROUND THE COMMUNITY

Lions Den

March 7
10th Mountain Division Salsa Band @ 9 p.m.
Fridays
"Gospel Hour: Moments of Joy" @ noon

Fishbowl Gym

March 27
Relay for Life HOPE Ceremony @ 8 p.m.
March 28
Cancer awareness 5K/10K walk run. Free t-shirt and continental breakfast. Race begins @ 7 a.m.
April 11
Pirate's Cove Run 5K/10K. Registration begins @ 7 a.m., race begins @ 8 a.m. T-shirts awarded to top finishers.

Slayer

March 7
Camp Slayer Fishing Tournament, Operation Catch Fish, at Slayer Lake @ noon. For details visit <https://corps.intranet.iraq.centcom.mil/Pages/Default.aspx>.

Liberty

March 5
10th Mountain Division Salsa Band at MWR C-10 @ 9 p.m.

Victory

March 8
Lifting competition at Sgt. 1st Class Paul R. Smith Physical Fitness Center. POC: MA2 Amber Mathwig, amber.mathwig@iraq.centcom.mil

Freedom Chapel

March 4
Seminar: "How not to Marry a Jerk or Jerkette" @ 7 p.m. The program runs for 5 weeks.

Babylon Theater

March 6
Town Hall Meeting @ 1 p.m.
March 17
Fire Warden Class @ 1 p.m.