



Lightning Strikes Twice

By Task Force Lightning Public Affairs Office

The event on stage at Contingency Operating Base Speicher's main gym must have looked very familiar to many Iraqi and U.S. leaders, military members and civilians in attendance. Only this time the team roles were reversed.

The 25th Infantry Division officially took charge of Multi-National Division – North from the 1st Armored Division during a ceremony Dec. 9. The proverbial passing of the baton between these two distinguished U.S. Army divisions was a reversal of roles, as the 1AD, "Iron Soldiers," began their deployment in Northern Iraq in 2007 by replacing the "Tropic Lightning" warfighters of the 25th ID.

"This Transition of Authority, like all TOAs, is about the departing unit handing off the relay baton while at full speed. No drops of mission, or tasks," said Lt. Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, commanding general, Multi-National Corps – Iraq. "The teamwork both division headquarters displayed during this transition is indicative of the race



Maj. Gen. Robert L. Caslen, Jr., Task Force Lightning commanding general, gives remarks at the Transfer of Authority ceremony held at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq, Dec. 9. He spoke after ordering the uncasing of the 25th Inf. Div. colors, which symbolized the start of the Tropic Lightning Division's deployment to Iraq. Photo by Pvt. 1st Class Jesus J. Aranda, Task Force Lightning Public Affairs Office.

we are all in together, the race towards a stable and prosperous Iraq," said Austin.

Maj. Gen Robert L. Caslen, Jr., the 25th ID commanding general and incoming commander of Task Force Lightning, readily accepted the baton to continue the ongoing partnership with the Iraqi government and Iraqi security forces towards a stable and lasting democracy.

"It is my distinct honor to answer the call of duty, as well as to serve alongside the great Iraqi and

United States patriots, civil and military alike, in this just and noble cause," said Caslen, after uncasing the 25th ID colors and officially marking the return of Task Force Lightning to Northern Iraq.

Caslen stood before a crowd of more than 200 and described the mission ahead to all the service members under his command.

"Our mission is simple, yet tough," Caslen continued. "It is to defeat [Al Qaeda in Iraq] and other anti-coalition and Iraq government elements,

IA and CF execute another 'good neighbor' mission



Eager hands of Iraqi children, as well as Iraqi women, reach out and try to grab onto something that the Jundi with 3rd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi Army Division, toss at them during a food and supply drop on the southeastern region of Mosul, Iraq.

Story and photo by
By Spc. Karla Elliott
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Military leaders and Jundi with 3rd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi Army Division along with 3-5-2 Military Transition Team, executed another humanitarian assistance drop in the southeastern region of Mosul, Iraq.

This has been one of the many good-neighbor missions the 3-5-2 IA has accomplished over an eight-month period with the help of 3-5-2 MiTT.

"We try to go out on these good neighbor missions at least three times a month," said Maj. Chad Arcand, team chief for 3-5-2 MiTT.

The overall mission is to build rapport and relationships between the Iraqi Security Forces and the local

populace, said Arcand, a native of White Bear Lake, Minn.

Forty bags of humanitarian assistance was coordinated through 1st Battalion, 8th Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, were distributed; along with clothes and beanie babies provided by the 18th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion.

"Today was very good because all this that we do shows that we, the Army, are here to help the people" said Iraqi Army Col. Ahmed Abdul Rahman, commander of 3-5-2 IA.

Even though they average three good neighbor missions a month, this month, the 3-5-2 IA, along with their counterparts, achieved 10 of these missions within the battalion's area of responsibility.

"The biggest challenge during these missions is that we are trying to help the people, while also facing

the enemy," said Iraqi Army Sgt. Maj. Chapok, with 3-5-2 IA.

Right now, a lot of the enemy activity that's going on is because a lot of people are poor, so they're supporting insurgency, Chapok said.

"But I think that once Mosul starts more projects and provides more services for the people, the enemy activity will decrease," he continued. The battalion has been quick to act and try to fix things, knowing what the problem is.

"We also have other projects on hand," said Rahman. "For example, we're working to have water well built in a neighborhood that needs water, a soccer field and such."

And so, 3-5-2 IA will continue executing good neighbor missions to help the people of their area and let them know that they are there to help.

"The next step is for the local civilian leadership to form and start acting," concluded Arcand.



Col. Ahmed Abdul Rahman, commander of 3rd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 2nd Division of the Iraqi Army, shakes the hand of a local national who lives in the southeastern region of Mosul, Iraq.

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to protect and secure the Iraqi people, and to build capacity in the Iraqi security forces and the Iraqi government in order to establish a secure, stable, and growing Iraqi government and economy.”

The 25th ID takes responsibility during a critical time in Iraq’s history with Iraq at the crossroads of sustained security and democratic rule of law.

“At stake is whether freedom, opportunity, and decency will remain here in Iraq, or whether the darkness of terror, oppression and extremism will blot them out,” said Caslen. “At stake is whether those who treasure the rights of free individuals will stand firm against the ruthless and pitiless men who wantonly slay the defenseless.”

“You can count on each one of use to do our part to ensure Iraq and her citizens are secure, living within the rule of law, and where each has a hope for the future, for themselves, and for their loved ones,” continued Caslen.

Caslen assumed the title of commanding general of MND – North, from Maj. Gen. Mark P. Hertling, commanding general, 1st Armored Division, who returns with the unit colors and headquarters to Wiesbaden, Germany.

Hertling addressed the civilian and military leaders attending the ceremony from all four Iraqi provinces, Salah ad Din, Diyala, Kirkuk and Ninewa that comprise the operational environment of MND-N.

“Together,” Hertling said about the legacy of Task Force Iron, “Arabs, Kurds, Shia, Sunni, coalition forces

- we have served the future with liberty for all people of Iraq.”

“Today, my good friend General Caslen will take this position, and he is as dedicated to future of Iraq as all of us were.” Hertling said.

“If you give him the great support and friendship you all gave me; together, there is no goal for the future of Iraq which we cannot reach.”

The 25th ID, from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, leads other U.S. units in Northern Iraq as the headquarters of Task Force Lightning. Major units in TFL include 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th ID (Fort Wainwright, Alaska); 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th ID (Schofield Barracks, Hawaii); 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment (Fort Hood, Texas) and the 10th Combat Aviation Brigade (Fort Drum, N.Y.).

ISC dedication delivers hope, promise, change to Iraqis

Story By
Staff Sgt. Kyle J. Richardson
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Kurdistan’s Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani, along with Kurdistan Minister of Interior, Kareem Sinjar, Multi-National Division-North Deputy Commanding General, Brig. Gen. Robert Brown, and other honorable guests attended the International School of Chouiefat’s dedication ceremony in Erbil, Iraq, Dec. 4.

The International School of Chouiefat opened its doors to more than 2,500 students in August; ranging from grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade.

The ISC project took more than 18 months to complete and will inspire and bring hope to the Iraqi people, said Mustafa.

The ISC is a step in the right direction for Iraq, said Baton Rouge native, Maj. Michael Corley, engagements officer for Tactical Operations Center-North.

“The school prepares the children for the future through education,” said Corley. “This school brings in a lot of hope for the future of Iraq; the children of Iraq.”



Brig. Gen. Robert Brown, deputy commanding general of Task Force Lightning, Nechirva Barzani, Kurdistan prime minister, and Samir Aram, general director of Froble, prepare to cut the ceremonial ribbon at the International School of Chouiefat’s dedication ceremony in Erbil, Iraq.

Entertainment

Bob Crowley Conquers Survivor: Gabon

After 36 days of roughing it in a coastal African nation, the five finalists savvy—and dumb-lucky—enough to become members of Survivor: Gabon's catchall Nobag tribe went through one last stretch of challenges to win a chance at winning.

Finally, when placed before a jury of their peers (and sworn enemies) on Sunday's two-hour Survivor finale, aka Day 39, the last three castaways pleaded their cases to the best of their ability.

And when all was said and done, bowtie-wearing Bob Crowley, proving that nice-and-scrawny guys do not finish last, was named Sole Survivor on the 17th-season finale of CBS' pioneering reality show, the oldest winner in the history of the game.

But while everyone figured in the beginning that "mind over manner" would be how Bob would be over the 57-year-old high school physics teacher from Maine would outlast his opponents, the increasingly sinewy dude showed he had more than enough physical prowess to beat an Olympic gold medalist, a personal trainer and a strapping young doctor.

Not to mention 14 others.

Here's how the last few days of Survivor: Gabon played out:

Kenny Huong confronts Bob about not turning over the Immunity Idol at the last Tribal Council. "Get your own idol," the oldest man on Gabon told the 23-year-old gamer.

"All promises are off," says Bob, who has forged a new alliance with the scheming little Sugar, who says she's aiming for a final three consisting of her, Bob and Matty Whitmore (yet tells Kenny she's all about having him in the final as well).

Each member of the still-competing quintet has to dress up warrior-style for the day's first Immunity Challenge. Jeff Probst deems Bob's red getup "very Village People."

Immunity Challenge No. 1: Dig under a wall (like a puppy digging under a fence), make your way across a series of planks (if you fall off, it's back to the starting point) and navigate a maze dotted with 25 Gabonese huts, only three of which house bags of puzzle pieces. When you grab a bag, take it back to the finish platform.

Collect three bags total and use the pieces to build a replica of a Gabonese hut. Winner is guaranteed a spot in the final four.

How is Bob stuck? He weighs 31 pounds! Instead, Susie is the first under the wall. Matty falls off a plank during his first run and has to start over again. Bob is looking a bit peaked as he drags his second bag of pieces up to the building platform. Ultimately, Sugar is the first to collect three bags and start building, while Susie has trouble finding that last bag.

Eh, what did the struggle matter? Bob, now the victor in five straight challenges, wins immunity!

Tribal Council No. 1: Kenny's brain reign ends as he becomes the sixth member of the Survivor: Gabon jury, 4-1. "Just like in a videogame, sometimes it doesn't go your way and...you lose," he says.

The final four are instructed to head to Exile Island, where they'll find tribal masks representing each of the 14 contestants who have gone before them. And then torch those suckers.

After the ritual symbolic cremation, it's off to the final Immunity Challenge.

Immunity Challenge No. 2: Each has 200 wooden tiles to build a 10-foot-high house of cards. Winner (whoever completes the task or has the highest structure after 30 minutes) gets a chance to plead his/her case before the jury.

Sugar makes it to 5 1/2 feet in nine minutes... and the precariously skinny structure promptly collapses. Same thing happens when she makes it to 6 1/2 feet. Meanwhile, Matty's house has yet to topple, as Bob the Physics Teacher struggles. Heading into minute 29, Susie is sitting pretty at 8 feet, not wanting to risk her house's stability.

Susie wins final immunity, as she was going to have to do to have any further chance at that million dollars.

Bob, Matty, Sugar and Susie share a final hug...before the sad honesty begins. Matty informs Bob he'll be writing his name down. Sugar also seems pretty broken up about knocking the shaggy challenge champ, whom she considers a father figure, out of the game. Sugar suggests that she and Bob vote for Matty to ensure a tie, assuming Susie and Matty vote for Bob, and leave the result up to a tiebreaker.

Tribal Council No. 2: Sure enough, it's a tie between Bob and Matty, 2-2. On to a fire-making tiebreaker challenge.

Bob wins, coaxing enough of a flame to burn through his rope first. Well, the tribe has kinda spoken this time, as Matty becomes the seventh and final member of the jury.

After a pancakes-and-champagne brunch, the final three burn their hut down. Good times.

Final Tribal Council: Kenny wants the truth—why does Susie deserve to win, how could Bob lie and still call himself an honorable man, and how did Sugar do it! Randy Bailey: "I genuinely don't like any of these three people." Sugar's made a few decent moves, he admits, but Randy's planning to tear Bob a new one. Tribal is "a chance for me to be me," Corinne Kaplan says. OK.

- Susie: "I feel I deserve this because I came into this just wanting to try. That's all I wanted to teach my son."

- Bob: "I played with gusto, with my heart. I've played hard. My game strategy was to come in here and use my personality, my survival skills to make my life and your lives better. While I was here, I don't think I outwitted you. I don't think I outplayed you. The only thing I did was outlast you."

- Sugar: "I'm sitting up here because I feel like I played the perfect social game. [A concerned-looking Corinne shakes her head.] I surprised myself in the physical department a couple times. But I had to lie—and that's part of the game—a couple times, and I had to sacrifice some innocents, and I'm really sorry. Thirty-eight days and nobody wrote down my name."

Then, the requisite Q&A session: Charlie Herschel asks Bob just how much he enjoyed cuddling when they were Kota members. "You're nice and warm at night, I didn't give a hoot," Bob replies. Crystal calls Susie a coattail rider. Kenny then asks Bob why he lied to him. "Once I became aware of the fact that you were organizing an assassination on me, you became the enemy," Bob says.

"That was not what I wanted to hear from you, Bob," Kenny says gravely.

Marcus Lehman asks how Sugar will use the \$1 million to honor the memory of her father, who died of lung cancer. Corinne, apparently being herself, takes the cake by telling Sugar: "You are an unemployed, uneducated leech on society, and the only thing I would vote to give you is a handful of antidepressants so that no one has to be subjected to your constant crying anymore. And maybe if you got some, then maybe it would sound a little more sincere when you are crying about your dead father."

Football

IRVING, Texas (AP)—After all he and the Dallas Cowboys went through the last week, Tony Romo was one clutch play from the ultimate peacemaker: a victory.

And, for that clutch play, he threw to good pal Jason Witten.

This time, Terrell Owens was fine with that.

Witten gained 11 yards on a third-and-9 late in the fourth quarter, keeping the New York Giants from getting the ball back with time to pull off a comeback. Then rookie Tashard Choice followed with a 38-yard touchdown run and the Cowboys beat the Giants 20-8 on Sunday night to help their playoff chances and, perhaps, ensure at least a week's worth of locker-room harmony.

"It was just something we had to deal with," said Owens, no stranger to controversy. "We just stuck together. We knew what was important and that was the game today."

While the soap-opera offense gets all the attention, the defense is doing much of the work in keeping the Cowboys (9-5) in the playoff hunt.

DeMarcus Ware sacked Eli Manning on New York's first snap and the pressure never stopped. Ware finished with three sacks, upping his NFL-leading total to 19, and Dallas rang up a season-high eight. It was the unit's third straight game with at least five.

Cornerback Terence Newman, involved in his own tiff this week, intercepted two passes and the Cowboys kept New York (11-3) without a touchdown for the first time since November 2004.

The Giants locked up the NFC East title last Sunday, but have lost consecutive games for the first time since starting 0-2 last season. Both losses have come since star receiver Plaxico Burress shot himself and was lost for the season. Yet New York can flush it all away by winning its next game, at home Sunday night against Carolina in a game that will decide the top seed in the NFC playoffs.

"I'm disappointed, a little frustrated, but not concerned," said Manning, who was 18-of-34 for 191 yards with two interceptions. "We have to get back to playing good football. We'll have our hands full. The defense is playing well, but offensively we're not doing our part."

The Cowboys spent more time this week answering questions about their own squabbles than about playing the Giants. It started with

Jerry Jones questioning the toughness of running back Marion Barber for missing last week's loss at Pittsburgh because of a dislocated right pinkie toe, and it ended with Newman accusing coaches of not being as accountable for mistakes as they expected players to be.

The main event was talk of Owens being upset about the close relationship between Romo and Witten. There was a confirmed meeting of Owens and two other receivers with offensive coordinator Jason Garrett, and reports of a late-week confrontation between Owens and Witten, which the Cowboys deny happened.

T.O. was booed during pregame introductions and again when he dropped a long pass on Dallas' first series. But once the Cowboys went up 14-3 midway through the fourth quarter, Romo, Owens and Witten were yukking it up on the sideline. All three were together again for a postgame interview with NBC and continued to laugh it all off.

"It's just part of playing football," Romo said. "We have a lot of highly competitive individuals who want to win. I give a lot of credit to T.O. and Jason for drumming this whole thing up to take attention away."

Added Owens: "Winning cures everything."

Dallas Cowboys quarterback Ton...

AP - Dec 15, 12:15 am EST

Romo was 20-of-30 for 244 yards and two touchdowns—to third receiver Patrick Crayton and seldom thrown-to fullback Deon Anderson, of all people—and no interceptions. Romo was sacked four times, including back-to-back plays at the end of the first quarter that left him wincing in pain with a back problem. He didn't miss a snap, but wasn't moving as well as he usually does.

Witten caught five passes for 44 yards, and Owens had three catches for 38 yards. The offensive star actually was Choice.

A fourth-round pick from Georgia Tech, Choice followed his stellar play against the Steelers with 91 yards on only nine carries, and he was the leading receiver with 52 yards on four catches. Barber started but gained only 2 yards on eight carries.

Dallas went up 7-0 early in the second quarter and made it 14-3 on Romo's lob to Anderson with 12:13 left.

But then Romo was tackled in the end zone for a safety and the Giants followed with a field

goal. Now New York was within 14-8 and a defensive stand could get the ball back to Manning for a go-ahead touchdown, the kind of drive that could've been devastating to Dallas' playoff hopes for so many reasons—from this week's strife to a reminder of last week's late loss to Pittsburgh to their decade-long history of disastrous Decembers.

They quickly faced third down, and had converted only 1-of-9 at that point. Barber got another one with a 9-yard burst around the right end. Then came another third down, the one when Romo threw to Witten dragging across the field. The tight end nearly was tackled shy of the first-down marker but he fought for the extra yards.

Finally, the Cowboys could exhale.

Dallas is guaranteed a playoff spot by winning its last two games, but it won't be easy. Baltimore comes to Texas Stadium on Saturday night, then the Cowboys close in Philadelphia.

Notes

In two games against Dallas, Manning was sacked 12 times; he's been sacked only 11 times in the other 12 games combined. ... New York's pass-blocking was hurt by losing RT Kareem McKenzie (back) in the second quarter and LG Rich Seubert (flu) in the second half. ... Ware is within reach of Michael Strahan's single-season record of 22 1/2. ... Greg Ellis had two sacks, Chris Canty got 1 1/2, Bradie James had one and Anthony Spencer had the other half.



Thailand

BANGKOK, Thailand – Lawmakers chose an opposition leader as Thailand's prime minister Monday in a bid to end months of political chaos, as supporters of the previous government unsuccessfully tried to halt the result by blockading Parliament.

The articulate, Oxford-educated Abhisit Vejjajiva, who heads the Democrat Party, gathered 235 votes against 198 by former national police chief Pracha Promnok, a loyalist of exiled former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

The lower house vote followed six months of instability caused by anti-government and anti-Thaksin demonstrations that culminated last month with a weeklong takeover of Bangkok's two airports.

The selection of a new prime minister was expected to calm the country's politics, at least temporarily. However, several hundred Thaksin supporters tried to block the gates of Parliament in a last-ditch attempt to prevent the outcome. Riot police later cleared a path for lawmakers to leave the compound.

The demonstrators hurled rocks at vehicles and abuse at lawmakers inside but most dispersed peacefully, saying that they would gather again later Monday in the capital's old historic section.

Following the vote, Abhisit — at 44, one of the world's youngest heads of state — thanked fellow lawmakers and the public but said he would not talk about politics until he was officially endorsed as prime minister by the constitutional monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

The chamber normally has 480 members, but because of vacancies currently numbers 437. One MP died on the eve of the voting.

Despite Monday's protest outside Parliament, analysts foresee relative stability in coming months following political chaos and the airport siege which ended after a court ruling on Dec. 2 dissolved the ruling People's Power Party and two coalition partners.

It also handed a five-year political ban to former premier Somchai Wongsawat, who is Thaksin's brother-in-law.

The remnants of the PPP regrouped as the Phuea Thai Party, which were also seeking a majority in Monday's session.

The anti-Thaksin protest movement seeks to purge politics of the influence of Thaksin — who was ousted by a 2006 coup after being accused of corruption and abuse of power — and has threatened new but unspecified activities if Parliament elects a leader with links to him.

Abhisit and his party enjoy strong support from the middle class and many in the business sector. But Sukhum Nuansakul, a political scientist at Bangkok's Ramkhamhaeng University, said the hopes of many for a respite from political instability was likely to be short-lived.

"The fundamental problem has not been resolved," Sukhum said. "A Democrat win sets the stage for another round of street protests, this time by pro-Thaksin groups."

Panithan Wattanayagorn, a political analyst from Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University, predicted that Abhisit was going to face "among Thailand's roughest premierships."

"His leadership qualities are untested. He has not suggested a bold solution (to the crisis). A lot of people have no patience for that, especially when public opinion is so extreme on both sides. That is his weakness and that lack of decisiveness and clear political stance could turn against him very quickly," he said.

Thaksin's popularity among the rural masses remains strong even though he now lives in exile, having fled Thailand ahead of an October conviction on a conflict of interest charge.

He continues to play an active role in politics, and Saturday night Thaksin gave a prerecorded video speech to a rally of more than 40,000 of his supporters who gathered at a stadium in central Bangkok.

Thaksin decried inappropriate interference in the political process — a reference to the army's alleged intervention in favor of the Democrats — and denounced lawmakers who had been loyal to him but switched their allegiances. The army traditionally wields a great deal of influence in Thai politics.

Abhisit told reporters Sunday that his party would focus on national harmony and economic issues.

Thailand's economy has taken a battering due to the global slowdown, a local climate of uncertainty and the seven-day stoppage of international flights that battered the country's essential tourism industry and stranded upward of 300,000 travelers. Some economists are predicting Southeast Asia's second-biggest economy will slip into recession next year.



Thai protesters are seen as they watch a pre-recorded address by former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, during a rally at a stadium in Bangkok, Thailand, Saturday, Dec. 13, 2008. Tens of thousands of pro-democracy activists and supporters of Shinawatra filled a stadium in the Thai capital on Saturday to hear the ousted leader denounce opposition efforts to form a government. (AP Photo/Apichart Weerawong)