

115th Fires Brigade



Cowboy Thunder

Volume 1 Issue 4

October- November 2009



EOD Blows Stuff Up!

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Commanders' Comments

Howdy from COWBOY 6

We each think often of the lives we have at home and long to return to them. We also think of the service members that have paid the ultimate sacrifice for them. Sadly, we have had two service members of the 115 FiB killed while performing duties in support of the Global War on Terrorism. One combat related in Afghanistan and another noncombat related in Kuwait. Both were proudly serving their state and nation in trying circum-



Col. Richard C. Knowlton

stances and under adverse conditions. Both of these Soldiers had a significant impact on their units. We're all better for having known them, and we all mourn their passing.

As the holidays approach, we turn our thoughts to home. The service members of the 115 FiB and the units under its command stand ready at forward locations throughout this theater of operations, conducting many diverse missions in support of the Global War on Terrorism.

Care packages are pouring in and with each come a renewed sense of home and why we are here. Each brings a little of America (or Mexico or Samoa, Etc.) and the culture of home for that service member. Each is quickly opened and special items are searched for, then shared with others in the workplace or barracks. Each sharing of home between service

members solidifies our American culture of a melting pot of cultures and beliefs that when shared in the common good, form an undivided nation, with liberty and justice for all. America is a place where all men are created equal, and have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

We are truly blessed and this is why we are here as we strive to protect our nation from terrorism. We are also enabling, in some way, others to have those same rights and liberties. Rights and liberties are foreign concepts, that have never been experienced by the citizens of places like Iraq or Afghanistan. The belief that individuals can be a part of and influence their government is in many ways a new culture for them.

As we think of home and long to be there, let us count our blessing and reflect on those less fortunate and remember why we are here, doing this difficult mission in foreign lands.

COWBOY 6 OUT

Command Sgt. Maj. Comments

The days continue to count down here in Theater and back home. Many of our Soldiers have either gone on leave or are looking forward to leave. We are definitely on the downhill slide for the mobilization. Many of our units who came into the Brigade family when we arrived in theater are preparing for their replacements. It was really neat to meet some of the units coming in during their pre-deployment site survey. Both the current unit and the unit replacing them are excited when they meet each other. Although we look forward to the day when we get back home, we must continue to focus on safety and doing all the little things that continue to make us successful both here, and at home.

The more things change the more they may seem the same. New York Yankee Fans now feel that there is normalcy in New York with the Yankees winning another World Series. Army Drag Racing Fans may feel that life is normal with Tony Schumacher winning his sixth title in a row. But as we get ready for the holidays here in the Middle East and back home, things certainly don't seem normal

for the majority of us.

When I reflect back on the holidays when my wife was deployed, I remember having to go to dinner with the mother and sister-in-law and thinking how different, and possibly actually painful, it would be to go through those two holidays without my wife by my side. Of course, everything turned out fine, and I actually enjoyed my time with the in-laws during Thanksgiving and Christmas.

While my wife was deployed, the kids and I decided to make the best of the situation and I think it made us a stronger family. I also remember my wife calling me Christmas evening at 11 PM and waking me up to wish me a Merry Christmas



Command Sgt. Maj. Kenton Franklin

because she could finally get to a phone, and how special that phone call was for both of us. I would encourage our Families and our Soldiers, Sailors and Coast Guardsmen to share the holidays with each other to the fullest extent and not withdraw during the holiday season.

We are all in a difficult situation. Separation makes the holidays more difficult but we still have a lot to be thankful for. As long as we have our loved ones with us in spirit, along with our brothers and sisters in arms, the holidays can be a special time, and not one of regret. However, if you do feel depressed over the holidays, I encourage you to seek help from a friend, chaplain, or other mental health professional to discuss your issues.

Last month was a tough one for us in the Brigade as we lost two Soldiers. Staff Sgt. Thomas Rabjohn of the 363rd EOD Company was killed in Afghanistan while attempting to render safe an emplaced Improvised Explosive Device. Spc. Adrian Avila from the 151st CBRN was killed tragically when a gate fell on him at Kabari Crossing. My thoughts and continued prayers go out to their families and the Soldiers of those two units. They are certainly missed in our formations.

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EOD Blows Stuff Up!

363rd EOD conducts a controlled detonation of explosives at Udari Range Oct 1, 2009. (Pages 6-7)

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Safety Begins at the Gate

Story and photos by
Spc. Matthew H. Oda

Getting on base and going through all the security procedures at the Entry Control Point might seem like a long and tedious process, but it's because of those extra checks and searches that people feel safe and secure when they are on Camp Patriot and the Sea Port of Debarkation site. The 1-147 Field Artillery Soldiers from the South Dakota National Guard are deployed to Kuwait to make sure all security measures are enforced to ensure maximum safety when on base.

"We do personnel searches, quick reaction force missions and tower security. Basically, we are the security force for Camp Patriot and the SPOD," said Sgt 1st Class Chad Durfee, platoon sergeant, A Battery 1-147 Field Artillery.

The two batteries in charge of the security are Alpha and Charlie, with A at Camp Patriot and C at the SPOD. They have searched an astonishing number of vehicles and Third Country Nationals while entering those sites. In the few months they've been in country, the two batteries have collectively searched more than 150,000 TCNs and 65,000 vehicles, which is more people than the population in Yankton and Aberdeen South Dakota combined.

"We do roughly around seven to eight hundred personnel searches a day between all the shifts and around four to five hundred vehicle searches," said Durfee. "That doesn't include the convoys and other vehicles and personnel that come and bring equipment in and out of base. They do around six hundred vehicles at a different section a day," he added.

Depending on the size of the vehicle and number of compartments, it



Sgt. Tanner J. Haines, A Battery, 1-147 Field Artillery, South Dakota Army National Guard, searches a Third Country National for any contraband at the Entry Control Point, before letting him enter Camp Patriot, Kuwait.

takes anywhere from five to ten minutes to search. If they see anything suspicious, then the searchers will go a little deeper and go into more specifics of the search.

"As far as searching vehicles

goes, we have a search pit that we use and mirrors to search the underside of vehicles. We look inside and outside, over and under, every-

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thing,” said Sgt. Tanner Haines, operations NCOIC for the day at the ECP. “We also make sure to check for any contraband that is not allowed on camp and if all badging is correct for everyone,” he said. “With personnel searches, we have a walk-through metal detector and search wands, but the best is still the hand search. If they have bags we use an X-ray machine to scan the bags along with a visual search of the bags,” he added.

“All vehicles in the searched lane get searched the same way, whether they’re military, TCN or Kuwaiti,” said Durfee. “The Standard of Operation is the same for military vehicles as it is for TCN vehicles. We have to treat everyone the same,” he said.

According to Durfee, almost the

entire workforce on Camp gets searched at the ECP, whether it’s sewage truck workers, garbage truck workers, people that work at the wash rack, or the daily living personnel such as cooks and servers.

“The personnel searches are done just like any other law enforcement search would be like,” said Durfee. “They start at the top of the head and work their way down to the tip of their toes looking for any contraband items or anything within question. If they have a cap on, then they are asked to take it off so everything can be inspected. It’s basically a law enforcement search technique that we use,” he added.

“Communication seems to be a big barrier at the ECP when something pops up questionable in a TCN’s vehicle. When that happens we call one of our interpreters to translate for us,” he said. “The interpreters work 24/7 with

us and they are really good at what they do. They also help with the paperwork for workers trying to get on base and work with us,” said Durfee.

The Soldiers work in coordination with the Kuwaiti military at the ECP. The Kuwaiti guards have their own guidelines and are responsible for checking Kuwaiti military and vehicles.

“We run certain lanes for certain people. We don’t check any of the Kuwaiti military, only our Kuwaiti counterparts check their own people, so they have their own lane,” said Haines.

The 1-147 had no problems changing operations from the 487th Hawaii National Guard unit to their Soldiers within three weeks after arriving in Kuwait at the beginning of July.

“The unit here before us set things up really



Inside a Third Country Nationals’ vehicle at the Entry Control Point, Pfc. Jordan D. Wilkie A. Battery, 1-147 Field Artillery, South Dakota Army National Guard, performs a thorough search for any contraband that may be hidden in the car before allowing the vehicle to enter at Camp Patriot, Kuwait.

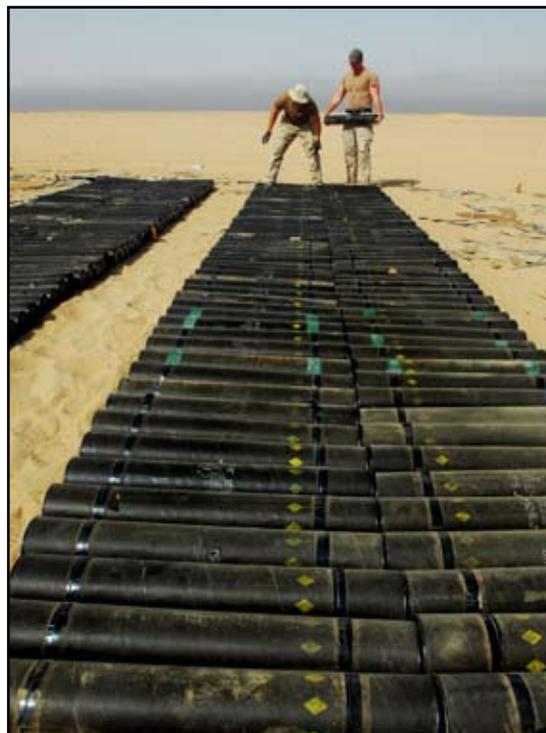


Using a mirror to help him search under a vehicle, Spc. Joseph A. Kraft, A. Battery, 1-147th Field Artillery, South Dakota Army National Guard, ensures the vehicle is safe to enter at the Entry Control Point Camp Patriot, Kuwait.

well in being able to transition into our jobs, but of course there are always refinements and things we like to see done a little better,” said Durfee. “In the last couple of months we fine-tuned the operations around here and got to the point where we changed some of the SOPs to be a little stricter on the standards and the way the guys are doing the searches and everyday operations,” he said.

“Our guys are here and they’ve gone through the hottest part of the season and came out unscathed,” he added. “They really enjoy their job and everything they do and they like being a security factor on base. We work well as a battery between the different platoons, and everyone’s job is the same where you can take one guy out and replace him with another and operations will still keep going. All our guys are doing a great job,” Durfee finished. 🐾

EOD Blows Stuff Up!



The 363rd Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Company, 115th Fires Brigade, destroyed more than 5000 pounds of munitions at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, Oct. 1.

The destroyed munitions were old artillery rounds and grenades that were deemed unserviceable or not cost effective to ship back to the states.

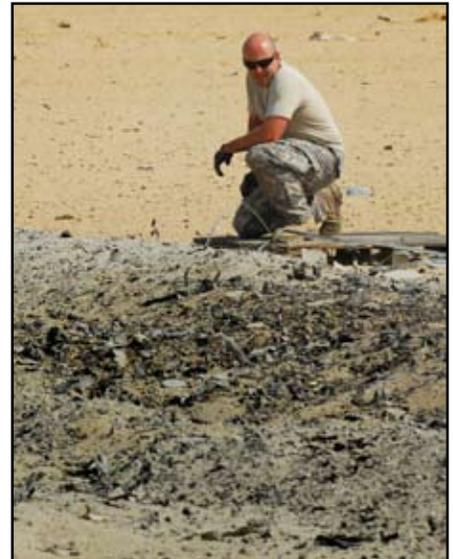
“Much of what we dispose of would cost more to ship back to the states than it would to buy new,” said Sgt. 1st Class Waya Schiller, an EOD technician with the 363rd EOD, Arizona National Guard.

As part of the responsible draw down from Iraq, the EOD team disposes unusable equipment on a weekly basis.

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Divers Clear Debris from Iraq Riverbed

Story and Photos by
Sgt. Robert D Walden

Soldiers from the 86th Engineer Dive Team, 115th Fires Brigade, clear debris from the bottom of the Euphrates River, near Camp Taqaddum, Iraq.

Clearing the way for a bridge to be built across the river will take about two weeks and is scheduled to be completed by Oct. 21, 2009.

The previous bridge was destroyed by an IED, and many pieces sank into the path of the new bridge.

“The Iraqis were building this bridge and they hit something hard under the water and had to stop,” said Sgt. 1st Class Brett Boyer, master diver of the 86th EDT. “They contacted Multi National Force West (MNF-W) and explained that they didn’t have the capability to clear the waterway. The (U.S.) Army offered to help.”

The divers were tasked with traveling to Iraq from Kuwait to assess the construction site and clear the debris.

“Along with other debris they found a pontoon, similar to the ones supporting the temporary bridge, that would need to be removed,” said Sgt.



Soldiers from the 86th Engineer Dive Team watch the line as a fellow diver works below them in the Euphrates River, Iraq, Oct. 10, 2009. The divers are preparing the riverbed for construction of a bridge by removing debris which is blocking the path of the construction site.

Maj. Frost, operations sergeant major, 115th Fires Brigade.

Frost and other leaders from the 115th FiB were invited to visit the operation site to see the dive team in action.

Once the dive team has completed

their task of clearing the waterway, the project will be turned back over to the Iraqi’s so they can finish constructing the bridge.

This project shows that while U.S. forces are conducting a Strategic Withdrawal from Iraq, the military continues to support the local government and help them succeed.

“This helps the Iraqi’s further develop their highways and will improve commerce,” said Boyer. “You can’t drive big trucks across a river without a strong bridge.”



The 86th Engineer Dive Team operates at the base of an incomplete Iraqi bridge, Oct. 10, 2009. Construction on the bridge was halted while the divers clear the riverbed of debris.



A temporary bridge spans the Euphrates River near the 86th Engineer Dive Teams operation site. The divers prepare the riverbed for construction of a bridge by removing debris.



Staff Sgt. Thomas D. Rabjohn



Staff Sgt. Thomas D. Rabjohn

Memorial conducted for EOD Soldier

Story by Spc. Matthew H. Oda

Service members, friends, and co-workers came together for a memorial service held at the Camp Arifjan chapel Oct. 14th, to honor the love and sacrifice Staff Sgt. Thomas D. Rabjohn made to his country.

Born Feb. 19, 1970, Rabjohn joined the United States Marine Corps at 19 years old and served as a rifleman until April 9, 1993.

After serving a four-year term in the Corp, Rabjohn got out and joined the Arizona Army National Guard Nov. 26, 1996. His first duty assignment in the Guard was the 1st Battalion, 180th Field Artillery in Mesa, Ariz. as a fire direction survey chief. He later transferred to the 363rd Explosive Ordnance Disposal Company in Coolidge, Ariz. in May 2005 and attended EOD school, served as an EOD team member and later become an EOD team leader.

Rabjohn deployed with his unit earlier this year in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and was serving in Afghanistan, when he was Killed in Action Oct. 3rd, in the Wardak province of the country.

“His life was a life of selfless service. A Marine, a police officer, an Army Artilleryman, and later an EOD technician,” said Col. Richard Knowlton, 115th Fires Brigade commander. “His life was laid down for others long before he made the ultimate sacrifice for this country,” he added.

“I miss Rabjohn. I miss what he brought to this unit and what his loss will mean in the future,” said Cpt. Brian Dudley, EOD commander. “I miss the platoon sergeant he would have been to junior technicians or to a new lieutenant. I miss the type of Non Commissioned Officer he was and his low tolerance for whining. I’ll miss his dependability, his demeanor, his sense of right and wrong, and his professionalism even when things weren’t going his way. Sometimes you recognize that a man has become more than just your Soldier, your team leader, or coworker. When I told his wife of how Tom had made the ultimate sacrifice, it was then that I realized how much I was going to miss my friend,” he added.

“Staff Sgt. Thomas Rabjohn died as he lived, a big brother, a friend, a mentor, and a leader,” said Staff Sgt. David French, a coworker and friend. Another friend and coworker,

Sgt. 1st Class Waya Schiller said, “On the third of Oct. during an on-foot approach to an Improvised Explosive Device in the Wardak Province of Afghanistan, Tom faced a split-second decision and without hesitation sacrificed his own life to save the life of his teammate and the lives of his security elements.” With his final act, he put himself in harm’s way to save the lives of his brothers in arms,” Schiller stated.

In addition to being a Soldier, Rabjohn was also a husband of 15 and a half years to his wife Nikki and a father to Kylee, Koree and Kelsee, the three daughters they raised together. 🇺🇸



Sgt. 1st Class Waya Schiller aligns a helmet for the display prior to the memorial for Staff Sgt. Thomas Rabjohn at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, Oct. 14.

Memorial Held for 115th Soldier

Story By Spc. Matthew H. Oda

Soldiers throughout the 115th Fires Brigade, friends, co-workers, and even those that didn't know him gathered for a memorial service to honor the dedication, commitment, and ultimate sacrifice of Spc. Adrian L. Avila, Nov. 2nd at Camp Buehring, Kuwait.

Nineteen-year-old Avila joined the Alabama Army National Guard at the age of 17, in July 2007.

He completed his basic and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Benning, Ga. where he was trained as an infantryman. After AIT, he was assigned to Alpha Company 1st Battalion 167th Infantry. He transferred to the 1343rd Chemical Company, 151st Chemical Battalion in March of 2009 to deploy with them in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and arrived in Kuwait July 4th, 2009. Avila died as a result of injuries sustained in an accident at Khabari Crossing, Kuwait October 29.

"Spc. Avila loved being a Soldier. He always had a smile on his face and would lift up everyone that was around him. He was always on time and in the correct uniform ready to do his part of the mission. Every day he tried to learn something that would make him a better Soldier," said Lt. Col. Alan B. Naugher, commander of 151. "He was a model Soldier and will be greatly missed. He will leave a void in the 151st



Many items were left by Memorial attendees as they rendered final honors to Spc. Adrian L. Avila Nov. 2nd.

CBRN Battalion, the 167th Infantry Battalion, and the Alabama Army National Guard," he added.

Wanting to have a tight-knit group, his platoon leader, 1Lt. Landon Maroney knew he was heading in the right direction when he realized what kind of Soldier Avila was.

"Adrian was all I could ask for in a Soldier, he bled red, white, and blue," said Maroney. "He always volunteered to help out, worked hard and always had a smile on his face. I came to know him not only as one of my Soldiers, but also as a friend. Even though our time together was short he will always hold a spot in my heart," he said.

His company commander, Capt. Jesse Howard, reminisced about watching Avila grow from a teenager into a man right before his eyes by the tenacity he showed in all of his actions.

"Spc. Avila was a Soldier who wanted to take on any hard challenge," said Howard. "He was small in stature, but had a giant will to accomplish anything asked of him. He would take on the biggest guys and the hardest objectives without a second thought. There was no mission that was above who he was. He would always tease his bigger friends when they didn't want to do the task because they were a little older and maybe a little wiser. The Company will sorely miss this Soldier and his positive go get'em attitude. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all of his friends and Family," he added.

As a young man in the Army Guard, Avila impacted everyone



Spc. Adrian L. Avila

he met; reminding them of how the youth can have a positive outlook on life and be so full of energy.

"I met Avila while training for this deployment," said 1st. Lt. Benjamin G. Abbott. He was a great kid who I would always joke with every time I saw him. He always had a smile on his face and the energy that reminded us of what being a young man was all about. I took the news of his loss hard. He will be missed but never forgotten," he added.



Spc. Adrian L. Avila (Photo provided by 151 CBRN)

Maintenance Personnel Share Techniques with Kuwait National Guard

Story and Photos by
Master Sgt. David Largent

Maintenance personnel from Kuwait National Guard and 115th Fires Brigade, met at Camp Virginia, Kuwait mid Oct. for a seminar designed to learn and share ideas with each other about vehicle maintenance processes and procedures.

Seeing how other units run their maintenance program helps both units streamline and improve their own processes.

The Kuwaitis brought about 30 Soldiers to participate in the joint training which included both classroom and a hands on portion. Chief Warrant Officer 2 Timothy E. Chamberlain and Master Sgt. Mark E. Beyl from Headquarters, Headquarters Battery, 115th FiB taught the classroom portion, and maintenance section Soldiers from the 2-300th Field Artillery Battalion, a Wyo. unit assigned to the 115th FiB, conducted the hands on training.

Instructors discussed the function of software used to track repairs, the roles of vehicle operators, maintenance supervisors and personnel, and ordering and stocking spare parts.

After the classroom portion the participants headed to a maintenance tent where they viewed maintenance operations being conducted on Humvees and MRAPs.

It wasn't just the vehicles that caught the Kuwaitis attention.

Col. Hashem Al-Rafee, commander, Combat Service Support, Kuwait National Guard, walked through the 100 degree maintenance tent with a slight breeze blowing through it, observing as the mechanics described their maintenance process, checked out the temporary floor and eyed the tent itself.

"I think I need to check into getting one of these tents... maybe a

little smaller one," said Al-Rafee. "I'm amazed with the conditions here and how you keep it so clean. I want my Soldiers to see how clean it is and see how professional you are," he added.

According to Al-Rafee, the Kuwaiti Humvees are configured differently than the ones U.S. Soldiers use because the missions are different.

"Well I talked to the Kuwaiti leadership; they told me that I gave them exactly what they wanted. They wanted to mainly focus on PMCS and supervisory PMCS. Also the trouble of getting parts, and our STAMIS system," said Beyl.

"It is very important; we believe the U.S. Army, a very big Army, has a lot of experience on how to maintain their equipment, especially during an operation. That is what we need to know, how they maintain their equipment during peacetime and during combat operations," said Al-Rafee.



Master Sgt. Mark E. Beyl, senior maintenance NCOIC, HHB 115th Fires Brigade, stands by to teach U.S. maintenance processes and procedures to Kuwait National Guard maintenance personnel during a Joint Training exercise at Camp Virginia, Kuwait Oct. 13th.



Kuwait National Guardsmen and Master Sgt. Mark E. Beyl listen as Staff Sgt. Shawn M. Kuykendall (wearing coveralls), mechanic, and Sgt. Martin J. Marquez, mechanic, both of A. Company, 960th Brigade Support Battalion, 115th FiB, talk through the step by step process of conducting Preventative Maintenance, Checks and Services (PMCS) as Staff Sgt. Zachary West, Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 960th BSB follows along in the manual to ensure no steps are missed.



Two M88 wrecking vehicles are used to lift the boat out of the sand and water allowing the workers to evaluate the wreckage and see what needs to be done to finish separating the pieces at Camp Patriot, Kuwait, Nov. 11.

Navigational Hazard Cleared

Story and Photos by
Sgt. Robert D Walden

Soldiers from the 115th Fires Brigade approached the end of a five year project at Camp Patriot, Kuwait, involving a sunken tugboat by removing the navigational hazard from their shore, Nov. 23.

In an agreement with the Kuwait National Guard, the 86th Engineer Dive Team, the 1-147th Field Artillery, along with contractors from DynCorp removed the vessel by cutting it into sections using demolition, and cutting torches. M88 wrecking vehicles were then used to pull the metal remains onto the shore where it will be loaded onto a truck by a crane and hauled off as scrap metal.

The boat is believed to have been sunk farther out in the channel during the Iraq invasion of Kuwait in 1992, said 1st Lt. Joseph M. Lunn, commander of the 86th Engineer Dive Team.

“It was moved here to the beach to get it out of the way,” said Lunn. “Now the Navy and Marines use this area for amphibious landings with LCAC’s (Landing Craft Air Cushioned) so the boat needs to be moved again.”

According to Lunn, at high tide only the boat’s tallest parts can be seen above the water.

Members of dive teams have used the wreckage as a training aid to practice underwater welding and cutting since the ship was moved here five years ago.

“It’s been really nice having a project like this in our backyard where we can throw together an oxy-acetylene cutting set and get some of the new guys to practice their skills so they can become experts underwater,” said Lunn.



Using a torch, Sgt. Chaise Turner of the 86th Engineer Dive Team cuts a hole in the ship for a chain to go through to pull the wreckage from the water at Camp Patriot, Kuwait, Nov. 11.



Soldiers from the 1-147 FA along with contractors from DynCorp attach cables from the winches on M88 wrecking vehicles to the tug boat to pull it from the water.

61st Joint Forces Chemical Training

Story by Spc. Matthew H. Oda
Photos by Master Sgt. David Largent

The 61st Chemical Company Reconnaissance Platoon conducted a joint forces training operation with the Kuwait National Guard Nov. 18, at Camp Tarheer, Kuwait.

The 61st set up a decontamination site to train the Kuwaitis for dismounted reconnaissance, as well as HAZMAT scenarios to practice proper reaction to the incident.

“When we come down to train with the Kuwaitis, we want to make sure they are as prepared and equipped as they can be for any situation or incident that may occur,” said Sgt. Joseph McBride, NCO in charge of the training. “What we do is walk them through each step of the process. They learn how to use the equipment to detect the chemicals in the area and how to take samples. We also made sure they know all the necessary steps and procedures to protect themselves and their country in case a situation should occur,” he added.

The Soldiers and Kuwaitis were briefed on the training scenario, and then they put on the suits and entered the contaminated area to collect samples to bring back and get analyzed for a better understanding of the situation. Once that team came back, the Decontamination Team was ready with different stations to decontaminate the first team.

“Every step of the way, we were showing them new things that they never knew before. We made sure they understood why they did what they did, and how to do it so they properly protect themselves,” said McBride.

Not only did the 61st share their



Spc. Daniel A. Zavala, Chemical operations specialist, Recon Platoon, 61st Chemical Co. 115th Fires Brigade, assists a chemical defense unit member of the Kuwaiti National Guard as they suit up in chemical protective suits during joint training at camp Tarheer, Kuwait Nov. 18.

knowledge of different types of training to the Kuwaitis, but they also shared their equipment as well.

“We got to put on the U.S Army suits which are different from the suits we use,” said Pvt. Hammed Asi, a chemical Soldier for the Kuwait National Guard. “Actually, the suits are not that comfortable but this is what you have to do and you have to be tough to do it so we didn’t mind,” he added.

Teamwork has a vital role when working together with another military force in order to have a successful mission.

“What I liked about the training the most is the teamwork,” said Asi. “We split up into different teams and each member of the team would help each other out. In the end all teams would submit their work together and that felt like such good teamwork,” he finished. 🐾



Spc. Amanda K. Schinkel, Chemical operations specialist, Recon Platoon, 61st Chemical Co. 115th Fires Brigade, attaches an oxygen hose to the protective mask of a chemical defense unit member of the Kuwaiti National Guard at camp Tarheer, Kuwait Nov. 18. Schinkel is from Colorado Springs, Colo., her unit is stationed at Ft. Lewis Wash. and deployed to Kuwait.

“What Soldiers Need”

Story By Chaplain
(Capt.)
Robert Peterson

No doubt you've asked your soldier the following question, "What do you need that I can send you?" Let me attempt to give you a little hint as to what that might be.

When I packed for this deployment we had a very specific packing list. After those items were packed it was pretty much up to the soldier to decide what to bring. I remember packing everything as tightly as I could so I would have plenty of room for 'personal gear.' When everything was packed up I had plenty of leftover space.

I grabbed everything I might need for a year-long deployment half a world from home. The problem was, I couldn't think of much. In the end I was able to put my duffle bag inside my black box, and still had one-third an empty box. The black



Chaplain Robert Peterson

box (with the duffle bag still inside) now sits in my room with a full stack of care packages on top. Most of the items inside the black box haven't been touched. I guess they will remain that way until I send the box home.

I requested friends and family stop sending care packages. I have more candy and flavored coffees than I can use in the next 5 months. When

I try to give the stuff away I'm always met with the same answer... "No thanks, I've got plenty." Still, I regularly receive the question "What do you need?" from people who genuinely care about my happiness and well-being. Lately, that question has affected me more deeply than before. I've been thinking about the thing I miss the most. What does a soldier really need? The answer, you may have guessed, has little to do with stuff.

What I need is to make my annual trip

to Aberdeen, SD (Pheasant Capital of the World) to go hunting with my Dad. I need a few days at home with my daughter before she starts kindergarten. I need to teach my boy to throw a baseball. I need to rock my little girl to sleep before she grows out of the baby stage altogether. I need to hold my wife's hand when we're in the car together, and I need to know that some of the friendships I've formed here will last long after our orders have expired. The soldier doesn't need stuff; the soldier needs a reason to look forward to coming home. If you want to give your soldiers something they need, give them something to look forward to. Assure them in some way that your love and devotion will remain strong and faithful. Give them the confidence that although life may never be the 'same,' life will still be good.

We appreciate your courage and spirit more than you can possibly imagine. In our minds your actions at home are nothing short of heroic; that's why we look forward to coming home, because of you!



Sunsets spills through the clouds of the season illuminating the living quarters of Camp Buehring, Kuwait. The clouds are some of the first seen in months in an otherwise dust-colored sky. (photo by Master Sgt. David Largent)

Soldiers Prepare to Trade Machine Guns for Hunting Rifles

Story and photos by
2nd Lt. Christian Venhuizen

The fact that the nearest huntable elk was 7,000 miles away only fueled the desire of Soldiers from Wyoming's 2nd Battalion, 300th Field Artillery, to sit through four three-hour-long hunter safety classes with their battalion commander.

As a game warden for the state of Wyoming, Lt. Col. Brian Nesvik became the first Wyoming Game and Fish official to teach the course in a combat zone. "It was the Soldiers of the unit that actually approached me and said 'Hey, we know what you do on the civilian side, we don't have hunter safety, is there a chance you can teach a course over here so that we can get certified while we are over here and deployed?'" Nesvik said.

Passing a hunter safety course is a requirement to hunt in Wyoming and many other states, he said. That includes the free hunting opportunities deployed Wyoming Soldiers have if they go home during the hunting seasons.

"It makes me homesick every week, but I look forward to coming to it though," said 2nd Lt. Tony Gerrell, with A Battery, 2-300th Field Artillery.

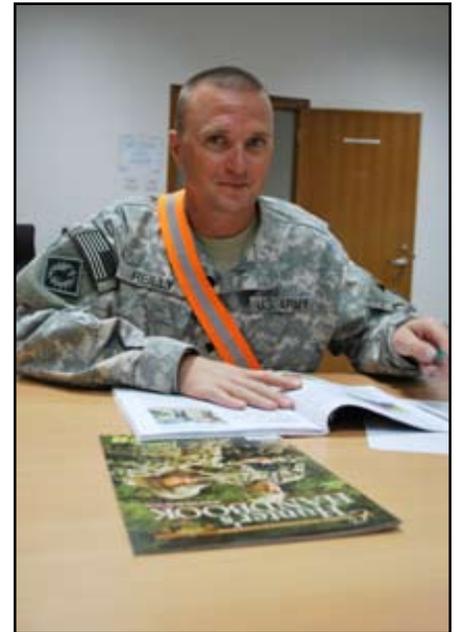
"They look forward to it every week, just because it gets them out of the normal mode of military mode and back in to stuff they were doing back at home: messing around in the woods and in the mountains and stuff like that," Gerrell said of his Soldiers taking

the class.

There are nearly 30 students in the class, which was offered twice a week, beginning in October. Students range from veteran hunters, to aspiring sportsmen with little hunting experience.

Nesvik said the most enjoyable part of the experience has been, "just being able to interact with Soldiers on different subjects other than military subjects."

"I know the Game and Fish is extremely supportive of me doing this," Nesvik said, noting the agency mailed all of the supporting materials to conduct that class and have been extremely supporting of the Guard. "They are a role model employer and have been through my entire career with the department which spans now about 14 years." This is Nesvik's second deployment. 🇺🇸



Spc. Mark Reilly of Lovell, Wyo., with C battery, 2-300th Field Artillery, takes a look at some of the study material for the Wyoming Game and Fish hunter safety class, offered in Kuwait.



Lt. Col. Brian Nesvik, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 300th Field Artillery, took on his duties as a Wyoming Game and Fish warden and donned the department's signature red shirt and badge for the final hunter safety class taught in Kuwait.

United Through Reading



Workers from the USO at Camp Virginia visited the service members at Camp Patriot to help support their United Through Reading program. Through this program, service members are able to video record themselves reading at book aloud. After that, they send the video and book home to their loved ones to watch them read a book to them. The program is offered at most USOs and will send the video home free of charge.



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