

# USF-I CHRONICLE

Volume 1, Issue 1 January 2010



## *United States Forces - Iraq Stands Up*





An activation ceremony at Al Faw Palace, Camp Victory, Iraq, marked a historical occasion, Jan. 1, as all U.S. command groups in Iraq officially transitioned into United States Forces - Iraq.



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Wounded warriors return to war zone for Operation Proper Exit

# USF-I CHRONICLE

The Official Magazine of United States Forces – Iraq

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**Gen. Raymond T. Odierno** (left), commanding general, United States Forces-Iraq and **Command Sgt. Maj. Lawrence K. Wilson**, command sergeant major, USF-I, unfurl the colors of the newly activated command during the official ceremony, Jan. 1, at Al Faw Palace, Camp Victory Iraq. (U.S. Army photo by Master Sgt. Michael Daigle)



The commanding generals and sergeants major of Multi-National Force-Iraq (front), and (rear, left to right) Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Multi-National Security and Transition Command-Iraq, and Task Force 134, cased their colors during the US Forces-Iraq activation ceremony at Al Faw Palace, Camp Victory, Iraq, Jan. 1. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Karin Leach )



# New Command Marks Milestone in Iraq

**Y**ou, our troopers, have been the single element in all that we have done in Iraq with our Iraqi brothers,” Gen. David H. Petraeus said. “You have been the ones who have translated concepts and ideas from leaders like Gen. Odierno and me into reality on the ground, under body armor and rucksack, in tough conditions, against an often barbaric enemy.”

On New Year’s Day, 2010, more than 112,000 American troops deployed to Iraq were in theater during yet another landmark in the evolution of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the merger of five major command groups into one single headquarters command, U.S. Forces – Iraq.

“This ceremony marks another significant transition here in Iraq,” said Petraeus, U.S. Central

Command commanding general. “It represents another important milestone in the continued drawdown of American Forces.”

More than 300 U.S. and Iraqi service members and civilians attended the official USF-I activation ceremony at Al Faw Palace. Gen. Ray Odierno, Multi-National Force – Iraq commander, said goodbye to MNF-I, while subordinate commanders, Lt. Gen. Charles Jacoby Jr., commander of Multi-National Corps – Iraq, Lt. Gen. Michael D. Barbero, commander of Multi-National Security and Transition Command – Iraq, and Major Gen. David Quantcock, Task Force 134 commander, rendered their final honors and cased their colors, signifying the commands official inactivations.

“Though we are activating a new

headquarters today,” said Odierno, USF-I commanding general, “the support we give our Iraqi partners will be no different than they received under MNF-I.”

MNF-I was established May 15, 2004, taking over command for Combined Joint Task Force 7 to handle all strategic level operations for coalition forces contributing to OIF.

“Troops from 30 different countries served in the Multi-National Force – Iraq,” Air Force Maj. Dennis Kruse, master of ceremonies, said at the ceremony. The major subordinate commands included MNC-I, MNSTC-I, the Joint Contracting Command – Iraq, and TF 38, he continued.

Along with MNF-I, MNC-I was also activated May 15, 2004 as the operational level headquarters

*Story by Staff Sgt. Luke Koladish  
and Sgt. Kathleen Briere  
USF-I Public Affairs*

overseeing multi-national divisions and forces in Iraq, which included Multi National Divisions-North, South, and Baghdad, Multi National Force-West, 13th Expeditionary Support Command and Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force, as well as 13 separate task forces, brigades and battalion sized organizations.

To organize, train and equip Iraq’s military and police forces, MNSTC-I was established on June 28, 2004. Working closely with the Iraqi Ministries of Defense and Interior, MNSTC-I assisted in forming more than 250 Army and police battalions throughout the country.

“We’ve made tremendous strides together since the dark days of 2006, 2007,” Petraeus said. “The number of attacks per day, including Iraqi data, has been reduced from well over 200 per day in 2007, to fewer than 15 per day in recent months.”

Task Force 134 was established on April 15, 2004, to oversee all aspects of the conduct of detainee operations within theater and to serve as the executive agent for execution of theater policy as well as military doctrine.

Their mission was care and custody with dignity and respect.

“Over its history [TF 134] has helped cultivate a foundation of security and stability in this important region of the world,” Kruse said.

The respective commanders and command sergeants major from each deactivating unit stood on either side of the colors.

On the order from MNF-I Command Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Wilson, all rendered last honors to their colors.

“Order arms,” Wilson’s voice rang through the rotunda. The colors were then cased and retired. The I Corps, USF-I, and NATO Training Mission- Iraq guidons were then unfurled and posted.

Petraeus thanked the Iraqi leaders present for their “tremendous courage and determination in the face of innumerable challenges,

continuous threats and periodic tragic losses.”

He also expressed his gratitude toward the Iraqi army. “To my Iraqi brothers in uniform, today’s ceremony would not have been possible without your extraordinary courage, devotion to duty and sheer hard work.”

Petraeus said thank you to the ambassadors and leaders from other countries that had supported Iraq since 2003, reminding them that their continued diplomatic, economic and cultural contributions remain very important to the new Iraq.



Gen. Ray Odierno and Command Sgt. Maj. Lawrence K. Wilson casing the colors of Multi-National Force-Iraq in the final phase of its transition into the United States Forces-Iraq, Jan. 1, at Al Faw Palace, Iraq. (U.S. Army photos on this page by Lee Craker)



# Joint Base Balad - Home to First Iraqi Bank on U.S. Base

Brig. Gen. Paul L. Wentz, (right) commanding general of the 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary), Fort Hood, Texas, and Brig. Gen. Craig A. Franklin, commanding general of the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing, flank Said Saleh Mohammed, regional manager of Al Warka Bank for the Salah ad Din province, during the ribbon-cutting portion of the opening ceremony of the Al Warka Bank, Dec. 17, at Joint Base Balad, Iraq.



**JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq** -- Contractors and Iraqi entrepreneurs throughout Joint Base Balad, Iraq now have access to the Al Warka Bank, after the opening of a branch Dec. 17 at the Iraqi Free Zone.

"The importance of today can't be understated," said Brig. Gen. Paul L. Wentz, commanding general of the 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) out of Fort Hood, Texas. "This is the first Iraqi bank to be opened on an American base. We're thrilled that they've chosen Joint Base Balad to open another branch."

Wentz said the bank opening is an important symbol for the independence and sovereignty of Iraq, as well as the growth and stability of the institution.

The Al Warka Bank is one of the largest financial institutions in Iraq,

with 120 branches and 350 ATMs located throughout the country, said Maj. David M. Foster, the officer in charge of the Iraq-Based Industrial Zone, with the 13th ESC.

The bank is considered by the Central Bank of Iraq to be the first private bank in Iraq and was established in 1999, he said.

"It feels real good to finally get the bank done," said Foster, a Newport Beach, Calif., native. "The process has taken almost two years."

Said Saleh Mohammed, the regional manager of Al Warka Bank for the Salah ad Din province, said through an interpreter if contractors or Iraqi entrepreneurs open an account at this branch, it is just like opening an account at any other branch in Iraq.

"We are so glad to open another branch here at JBB, because we are

going to have all the contractors and local nationals invest at the bank to make it easy for them," he said.

Mohammed, who works at the Iraqi Bazaar and prefers to go by his first name, said through an interpreter he is happy about the bank opening because it is a good way for Iraq to begin replacing U.S. currency with Iraqi money.

Mohammed also said he likes the ATM, as it allows them easier access to their money. The debit card the bank provides can be used throughout Iraq and helps business because the Iraqi Bazaar will start accepting them as well, he said.

Foster said the banks are fee-based, offering services such as foreign currency exchange, money wiring, letters of credit, electronic funds transfers, and savings and checking accounts.

Story and photos by  
Sgt. Ryan Twist  
13th ESC Public Affairs

He said the bank will provide services to Iraqis who work at JBB who may not have access to them in their local communities, and will give them the opportunity to learn how to use the banking services Al Warka provides.

Said Saleh Mohammed said the Iraqi bank will also help the local economy by providing jobs.

Bank administrators plan to open another bank in Tikrit, Said Saleh Mohammed said. The process should be go smoother this time, using JBB as a model, he said.

"We would like to thank everyone that helped open this bank, especially the Iraqi-Based Industrial Zone," said Said Saleh Mohammed. "Hopefully, we're going to be able to help the Iraqis and the Americans."

Foster said he was excited to watch the new business open.

"It has been a long journey to be here today," he said. "We've had to overcome numerous obstacles. With the help of various Army, Air Force, and state department organizations, we were able to overcome those obstacles."

(Left to right) Brig. Gen. Paul L. Wentz, commanding general of the 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary), Fort Hood, Texas, Khalid Almoola and Said Saleh Mohammed, local and regional bank manager (respectively) of Al Warka Bank for the Salah ad Din province, and Brig. Gen. Craig A. Franklin, commanding general of the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing, after the opening ceremony of the Al Warka Bank.

Brig. Gen. Paul L. Wentz, commanding general of the 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary), Fort Hood, Texas, Brig. Gen. Craig A. Franklin, commanding general of the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing, and Said Saleh Mohammed, regional manager of Al Warka Bank for the Salah ad Din province, talk with guests after the opening ceremony of the Al Warka Bank, Dec. 17, at Joint Base Balad, Iraq.

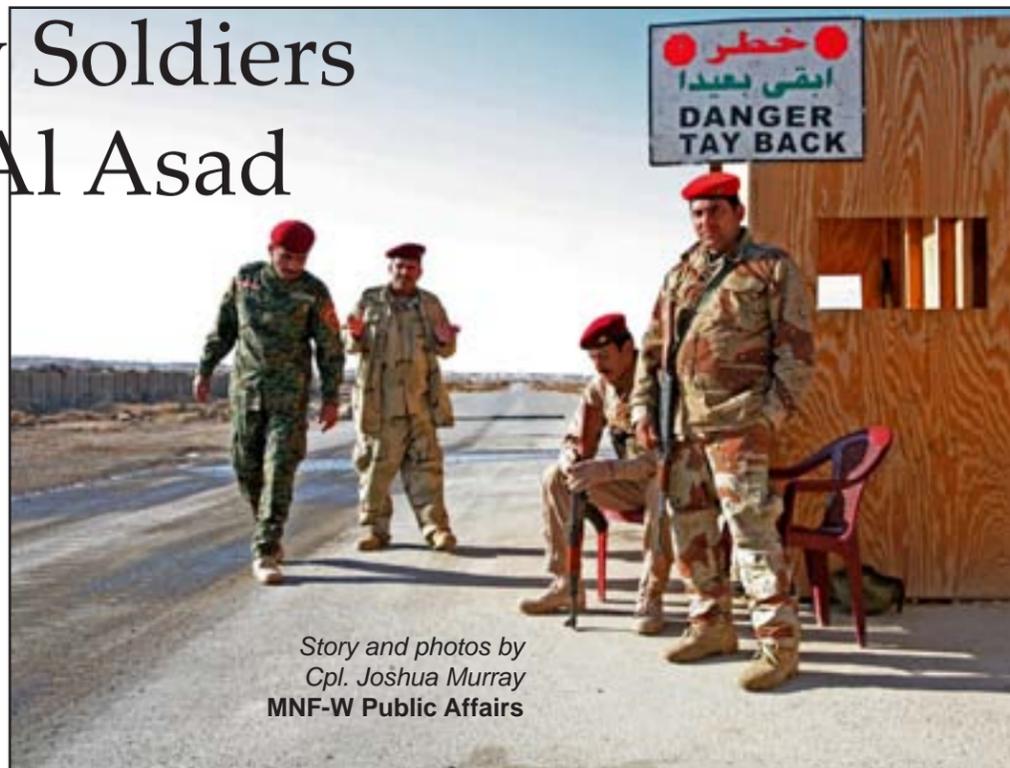


# Iraqi Army Soldiers Reinforce Al Asad Airbase

**AL ASAD AIR BASE, Iraq** – Visitors to the main gate of Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, will find a few changes as they approach the installation. When they read warning signs and twist through a serpentine blockade, it quickly becomes apparent they are approaching a traffic control point, which several days ago was nothing more than a wooden shack positioned a few feet from the road.

Soldiers from the 7th Iraqi Army Division learned construction techniques and operational procedures for a TCP, Dec. 4-14, 2009, aboard Al Asad. The new, reinforced TCP is the first line of defense on approach to the base's main entrance, which now serves as a systematic anti-terrorism tool completely controlled by IA soldiers.

"Before we got there, they had a tower, a compound for a living area and a guard shack," explained Army Sgt. Ryan Johnson, a combat engineer with Company A, 1st Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division (Advise and Assist Brigade). "They were stopping vehicles where there were no Hesco barriers, no security and no defense against a [vehicle-borne



Story and photos by  
Cpl. Joshua Murray  
MNF-W Public Affairs

**Iraqi Army Soldiers** stand guard at a traffic control point, which is also the first line of defense at the main gate aboard Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, Dec. 14. Soldiers from the 7th IA Division learned from service members with Multi-National Force – West the essentials of building and operating a successful TCP.

improvised explosive device]. They were stopping vehicles next to the barracks and all the [IA soldiers] were right there. God forbid [an attack] might have happened and taken out everyone there and their living area."

Without the blockades and speed bumps, traffic previously approached the TCP at potentially unsafe speeds, which gave the IA soldiers only a brief moment to evaluate the oncoming vehicle and its occupants.

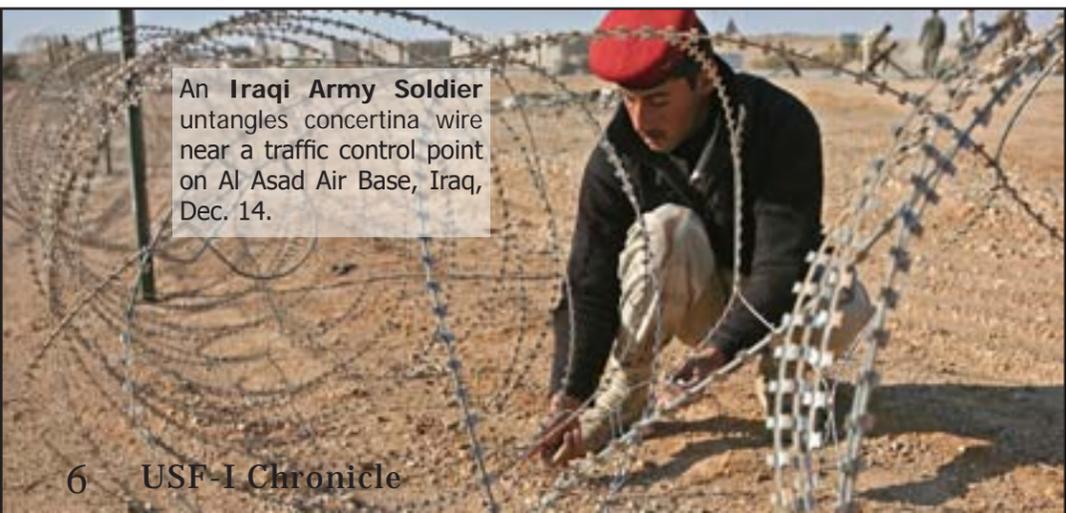
"We showed them how to use escalation of force techniques and in

what instances they should actually use them," mentioned Spc. Michael Baker, a combat engineer with Company A. "If a VBIED approaches now, the TCP will slow the vehicle down and give Iraqi soldiers the opportunity to apply escalation of force if needed."

The reinforcement was referred to as a "train the trainer" course, in which IA soldiers will use the skills they've learned to teach other soldiers in their units.

"This checkpoint hasn't been hit, but I know others that have been, and that is why we had the idea to secure the TCP," said IA 1st Lt. Jalal Hashem. "We learned from Coalition forces how to arrange the TCP, and now we can reinforce other checkpoints to prevent terrorist activities."

After days of instruction and assembly, the men and women who live only minutes from the TCP can feel more secure thanks to Al Asad's new first line of defense and the IA soldiers who guard it.



An Iraqi Army Soldier untangles concertina wire near a traffic control point on Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, Dec. 14.

# Soldiers Help Iraqi Youngster Get New Smile

Story and photo by Sgt. Mary Phillips  
30th HBCT Public Affairs

**F**rom behind his father, a 3 year old Abdullah plays peek a boo with Soldiers of 252nd Combined Arms Battalion, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team.

The Soldiers are there to check on the child who is recovering from a recent cleft palette surgery; a surgery that happened thanks in part to the efforts of the Soldiers there to see him.

It all started with a trip to the trash dump.

2nd Lt. Charles Duggan said he visits the area south of Baghdad regularly while on missions with his Soldiers.

"I was talking to the people there and I asked who the sheik was," said Duggan, of Jacksonville, N.C. "I went to talk to him, and this guy brought his kid and showed me his kid."

Arhim Shakban's son, Abdullah, was born with a cleft palate, a birth defect that happens when a child's mouth does not develop properly during pregnancy.

"It's one thing that I felt like I was in control of, that I could help out," said Duggan. "[Arhim] did not ask me specifically about his son, but his son was there and I wanted to help his son. I had to act."

Duggan got on the internet after that first meeting with Abdullah and tried to find a way to help the boy. The first organization he contacted did not have doctors in the area that would be able to help him, but they referred him to a group who could.

"They referred me to Smile Train," said Duggan. "Smile Train told me they had an associate who worked in the area."

Duggan was soon emailing Dr. Ahmed Nawres, a plastic surgeon working in Babylon, south of Baghdad.

"[Dr. Nawres] told me he'd be happy to do the surgery on any child that I found free of charge," said Duggan.

Dr. Nawres has worked with Smile Train since 2006 and has completed more than 150 cleft palate surgeries, averaging three per week. Abdullah received his surgery Dec. 14.

Duggan and the other Soldiers in his platoon were excited to visit the boy, and they said they were happy to be able to help Abdullah.

"I did this because it was the right thing to do," said Duggan. "It was only a small effort on my part but I am glad to do what I can to make this wonderful event possible."

"We're just glad to be able to help," said Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Boyette, of Southern Pines, N.C.

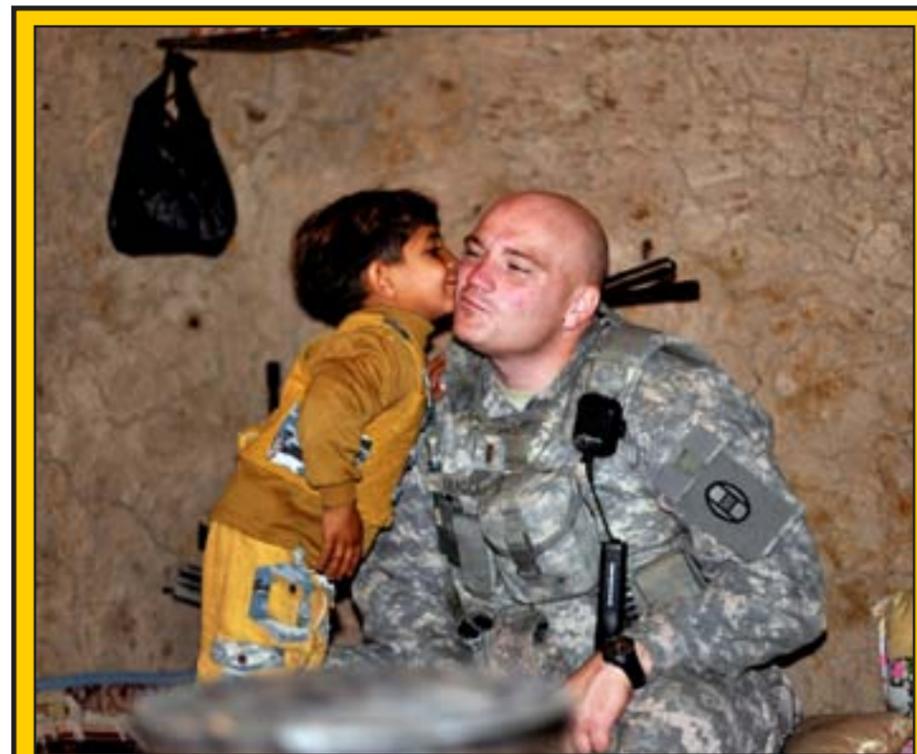
Abdullah's father was the happiest of all.

"Every day I would worry about it and not know what to do," said Arhim. "He would not want

to go outside with the kids, he stayed inside. Now he opens the door and plays with everyone. He can feel that something is different now. It goes away and he looked in the mirror and said, 'I look cute now' after the surgery."

The father smiled as he watched Abdullah laughing and playing with the Soldiers. Boyette showed him how to turn on and off the light on his helmet and Abdullah was eventually taking it off of the Soldiers head, and putting it on his own. The boy kissed the Soldiers and made his way around the room, playing laughing and smiling.

"There are not enough words in any language to express how happy I am feeling right now," Arhim said.



2nd Lt. Charles Duggan, of Jacksonville, N.C., a platoon leader with Company C, 252nd Combined Arms Battalion, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, receives a kiss from 3-year-old Abdullah, in the boy's home, south of Baghdad, Dec. 23.

# IRAQI POLICE GET 'EXPLOSIVE' EDGE FROM CSI TRAINING



Iraqi police officer, **Ahmed Kadem**, lifts a fingerprint from a beaker during improvised explosives crime scene training at Forward Operating Base Falcon, Dec. 15.

**G**loved hands carefully handle little jars of powder, brushes and tape as Iraqi Federal Police officers expose fingerprints from makeshift bombs during crime scene training, here, at Forward Operating Base Falcon, Dec. 15.

Soldier from 252nd Combined Arms Battalion, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, hosted the training for 24 Iraqi officers of 1st Mechanized, 2nd Federal Police Brigade in an attempt to reduce contamination of evidence at improvised explosive sites.

"The purpose of this class is to [give pointers] to Iraqi Federal Police [on the collection of] evidence and preserving a site without contaminating it when they

approach an improvised explosive crime scene," said Capt. August Melchoir, of Wilson, N.C.

Instructors, Sgt. Zulfikar Keskin and Sgt. Hiram Montalvo, both of the Weapons Intelligence Team, 203rd Military Intelligence Battalion, led the officers through several scenarios on approaching crime scenes and how to determine, handle and collect evidence.

"The difference between us and [Crime Scene Investigation] back home is they have days to investigate a crime scene, but when they tell us [we are] out, we pack up our stuff and go," said Keskin. "Wearing full battle rattle makes it a little more difficult too."

Keskin, of Phoenix, Ariz., planted shrapnel among rocks and an unexploded makeshift bomb on the drive shaft of a military vehicle to observe how Iraqi officers approach and handle evidence. He gave instruction on handling small pieces of shrapnel and where to find legible fingerprints on unexploded bombs.

"Once the [explosives ordinance disposal team] clears the scene it's our job to recognize and collect the parts from the IED," said Keskin. "The information from the [blast site] is sent up, analyzed and can lead to the identification of IED cell leaders; helping in overall war-fighting here."

"That's why it is so important you don't touch anything without your gloves because your fingerprints will get on it; then everyone on the scene will have to be fingerprinted," said Montalvo, of Bronx, N.Y., as he addressed the officers.

After the evidence was properly contained they began lifting prints. Montalvo pointed out that although an individual's prints are unique, there are three main types of prints which helps officials determine a positive match.

Iraqi police officers asked several questions, making sure they understood exactly where to look for good



Story and photos by Spc. Ruth McClary  
30th HBCT Public Affairs

Bronx, N.Y., native, **Sgt. Hiram Montalvo** (right), of the Weapons Intelligence Team, 203rd Military Intelligence Battalion, points out a fingerprint highlighted with black powder during improvised explosives crime scene training at Forward Operating Base Falcon, Dec. 15.

solid prints.

"Can you get a print from a dead body?" asked one officer.

"How long does a print stay on the surface of an object?" said another officer.

Montalvo and Keskin put fingerprints on objects and the officers took turns lifting legible prints. Iraqi officer, Ahmed Kadem, asked that he not be shown where Keskin placed a print on a beaker the print, so he could discover it.

Obscuring his view, Keskin placed a print on the beaker. Kadem dusted the inner and outer surfaces failing to locate a print. They all laughed when Keskin said, "Did you check the bottom?"

Keskin, Montalvo and the officers came up with more challenging scenarios as the little brushes highlighted print after print. The officers admitted that the hands-on training will help them be more keen and alert with their approach.

"This was good training," said Maj. Hussain Ali Latef, the Federal Police route clearance commander. "This is the first time these [officers] have trained on [containing improvised sites and materials]."

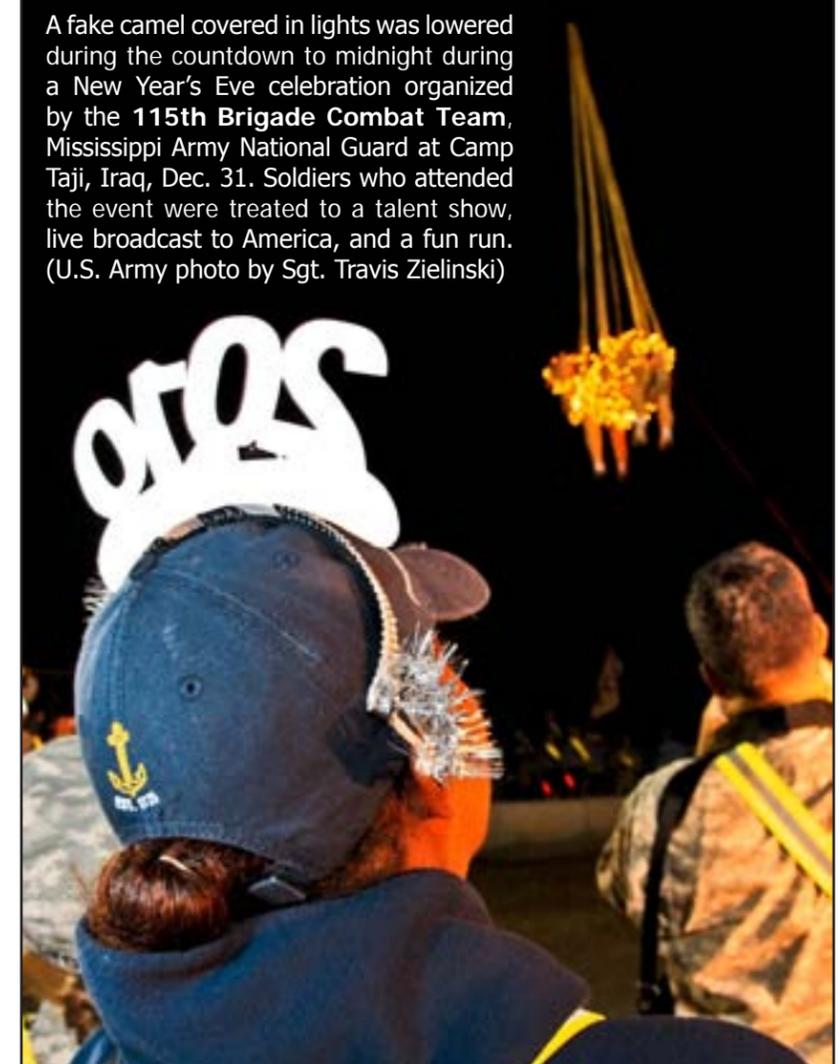


**Husham Saddam Raad** (middle), 1st Mechanized, 2nd Federal Police Brigade, looks for fingerprints during improvised explosives crime scene training at Forward Operating Base Falcon, Dec. 15.

Staff Sgt. Joshua Minor, from Atoka, Okla., the battalion's communication noncommissioned-officer-in-charge, 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, holds a special coin awarded to all 1st ACB commo troopers, Dec.12. ((U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Alun Thomas)



Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is greeted by U.S. Army Gen. Ray Odierno, commanding general of Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), Dec. 18, at the Al-Faw Palace, Iraq. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Staff Sgt. Guadalupe M. Deanda III)



A fake camel covered in lights was lowered during the countdown to midnight during a New Year's Eve celebration organized by the 115th Brigade Combat Team, Mississippi Army National Guard at Camp Taji, Iraq, Dec. 31. Soldiers who attended the event were treated to a talent show, live broadcast to America, and a fun run. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Travis Zielinski)



U.S. Army Sergeant Suhun Sung with the 218th Military Police Company, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team teaches Iraqi Police officers the proper hand placement during a self defense class at IP Station Mama, near Kirkuk, Iraq, Dec. 29. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. David M. Sharp)



U.S. Army Spc. William Stafford, attached to B Battery, 1-10th Field Artillery BN, shows his new combat patch before a ceremony at Forward Operating Base Delta, Iraq, Dec. 20. The ceremony commemorates the fourth deployment by 3rd Infantry Division in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Brien Vorhees)

A U.S. Army servicemember embraces an Iraqi servicemember after a basic military training Top Off course graduation ceremony at the Iraqi Air Force Training School Dec. 28. The U.S. Air Force played an advisory role in this completely Iraqi Air Force-led training course. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Trish Bunting)



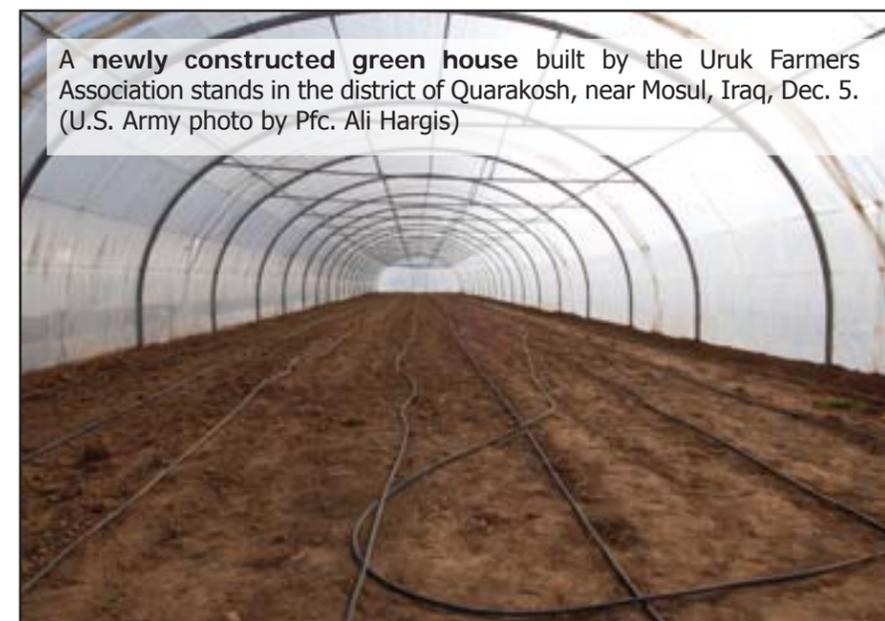
Standing close to the flames, Pfc. Lorenzo Clark, of Cleveland, Ohio, controls his area of ground clearance, during the last phase of a five-day training course on the ground system. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Tracy Knowles)



Pfc. Misty Raines, from Mayville, Mich., assigned to Company C, 701st Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, speaks to a class of Iraqi Army medical staff at Ordnance Park, Tikrit, Iraq, 17 Dec. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Canaan Radcliffe)



U.S. Staff Sgt. Brice Berry, assigned to the 114th Military Police Company, 112th Military Police Battalion, 184th Transportation Brigade, Mississippi National Guard, stands by as an Iraqi Police warrant officer explains to a personal security detail how they can improve their shot groupings, at Blickenstaff Range, near One West Police Station in Mosul, Iraq, Dec. 9. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Ali Hargis)



A newly constructed green house built by the Uruk Farmers Association stands in the district of Quarakosh, near Mosul, Iraq, Dec. 5. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Ali Hargis)



Pvt. **Mustafa Aala Jamaeal** (center), of the 6th Iraqi Army Field Engineer Regiment, explains to his platoon leader, **Lt. Ammar** (left) how he uses the circular saw as **Pfc. Joshua Tillman** of Burr Oak, Mich., 1434th Engineer Company, observes. Tillman and Jamaeal are working on the construction of a new Joint Operations Center being built on Joint Security Station Constitution by members of the 101st Engineer Battalion and 6th IA FER. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. April Mota)



**Capt. Joseph M. Coleman**, physician assistant, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 130th Engineer Brigade, shows Iraqi Army 4th Field Engineer Regiment medics how to set up IVs during a combat-lifesaver training class at the IA base in Kirkuk, Iraq. (Courtesy Photo)



At Al Faw Palace, Dec. 13, **members of the 101st Engineer Battalion**, the oldest unit in the Army National Guard, along with Servicemembers from the National Guard Bureau, assist the youngest member of the 101st Eng. Bn., **Pfc. Jeramie Burgos** (right), of Worcester, Mass., in the cake-cutting ceremony celebrating the Army National Guard's 373rd birthday. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Tracy Knowles)



An Iraqi baker teaches **SPC John Russell**, 1-36 Infantry, how to make bread at COB Power, Iraq, Dec. 27. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Rufus Hucks)

(Below left to right) **Sgt. Debra Lukan**, **Capt. Trish Barker**, **Staff Sgt. Misty Seward** and **Chief Warrant Officer Andrea Galatian** of Company C, 3-238th Medical Evacuation, became the company's first all-female crew just before Thanksgiving 2009. They are currently serving in Iraq as part of Task Force Keystone. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Neil Gussman)



# Wounded Warriors Return to the War Zone

Story by Sgt. Lindsey Bradford  
Photos by Lee Craker  
USF-I Public Affairs



(Left to right) Sgt. 1st Class Mike Schlitz, Sgt. Bill Congleton, 1st Lt. Jim Kirchner, Capt. Sam Brown and Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Olson stand next to Multi-National Force-Iraq Command Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Wilson as they are introduced to a crowd of Servicemembers, Dec. 28 at Camp Victory's Al Faw Palace in Baghdad. Each soldier returned to Iraq as a part of Operation Proper Exit to talk to troops about their injuries and to find closure by visiting the places they were injured.

**A**live day is a term dubbed by a number of injured combat veterans to describe the day they escaped death. Some were left with scrapes and bruises, others lost their limbs and, for some, there would be emotional wounds they will struggle with for the rest of their lives.

Five combat veterans returned to Iraq Dec. 28, as part of the program Operation Proper Exit, to revisit the places they were injured in hopes of finding emotional closure.

This is the third time this year Operation Proper Exit, sponsored by the Troops First Foundation, has brought troops to Iraq to participate in the week-long event.

The five soldiers come from different backgrounds, different ranks and have different stories to tell. What they share is an

understanding of living life as a wounded combat veteran.

Sgt. Bill Congleton joined the Marine Corps in October 1998 and gave the Corps 10 years before joining the Army in October 2003. Originally from Sutherlin, Ore., Congleton served with the Oregon National Guard and deployed to Iraq in 2004. He was two miles outside Camp Taji when he was injured June 23, 2004. He suffered a below-the-knee amputation of his right leg and an incomplete spinal cord injury. His left foot was able to be salvaged after multiple surgeries. He retired from the Army in June of 2006.

Sgt. 1st Class Mike Schlitz, an Army Ranger, joined the service in March 1996. The Moline, Ill., native was on his first tour, serving with Fort Drum's 2nd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, when he was

struck by an improvised explosive device Feb. 27, 2007. Schlitz suffered burns covering 85 percent of his body, lost both hands, suffers vision loss and has a limited range of motion.

First Lt. Jim Kirchner, now retired, joined the Army in 1986. He was serving on his first tour to Iraq when his forward operating base in Mahmoudyiah was attacked with mortars. The Douglasville, Ga., native suffered injuries to his right arm, back and had internal organ damage.

Capt. Sam Brown was commissioned in the Army in March 2006 after graduating from West Point. Brown, a San Antonio native, was serving with Fort Hood's 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, in Kandahar, Afghanistan, when he was struck



Sgt. 1st Class Mike Schlitz (right) talks to Brig. Gen. Peter Bayer (left), Multi-National Corps-Iraq chief of staff, and Maj. Gen. John Johnson, MNC-I deputy commanding general of operations, after arriving in Baghdad, Dec. 28. Schlitz is taking part in Operation Proper Exit, and will return to the place he was severely injured in 2007 in hopes of finding closure.

by an IED in September 2008. He suffered third degree burns to 30 percent of his body, including his face. Although Brown was serving in Afghanistan when he was injured, he came to Iraq because his wife, Capt. Amy Brown, is currently serving with the 47th Combat Support Hospital from Fort Lewis, Wash., and because, he said, he wants to speak to others about his experiences.

Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Olson first came to Iraq as a part of Operation Proper Exit in October of this year. He is returning as a military mentor for his fellow soldiers. Olson of Spokane, Wash., joined the Army in November 1997. He was on his first tour in Tel a Far, Iraq, when

Capt. Sam Brown hugs his wife, Capt. Amy Brown, after arriving in Baghdad, to take part in Operation Proper Exit. Brown suffered third degree burns to 30 percent of his body in Kandahar, Afghanistan, but returned to Iraq to tell his story to Servicemembers and help find closure. Wife, Amy, is in Iraq with the 47th Combat Support Hospital from Fort Lewis, Wash.

he was injured Oct. 27, 2003, by a rocket-propelled grenade blast. His right leg was amputated at the hip. He continues to serve on the United States Marksmanship Unit at Fort Benning, Ga.

The soldiers will spend the next six days travelling throughout Iraq

with Command Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Wilson, Multi-National Force-Iraq command sergeant major, visiting the places these soldiers experienced their own "alive day."

"We welcome these heroes. They are here to heal, and we are here to help them do that," Wilson said.





**U.S. Army 1st Lt. Pat Barone**, a platoon leader with Company D, 1st Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division (Advise and Assist Brigade), and **Sgt. Daryl Appling** explain small-team movement tactics to their Iraqi border security partners before conducting a partnered foot patrol along the Iraqi-Syrian border at night, Dec. 9.

*Story and photos by  
Spc. Michael J. MacLeod  
MNF-W Public Affairs*

# U.S.-Iraqi partnership halts smuggling across Syrian border

**CONTINGENCY OPERATING SITE UBAYDI, Iraq** -- Since U.S. advise and assist forces began partnering with Iraqi border patrols along the Syrian border in mid-November, instances of smugglers circumventing port-of-entry stations have all but ceased, according to several sources within the Department of Border Enforcement.

To prevent arms smuggling prior to the 2010 Iraqi national elections, Soldiers with Company D, 1st Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division (Advise and Assist Brigade), began partnered operations and training with border security forces of the 15th Iraqi Brigade, DBE.

Attempts to smuggle contraband

across the border berms have been greatly reduced since the Americans showed up, according to Staff Brig. Gen. Dhamin, commander of 15th Brigade.

The Americans bring highly-skilled manpower, armored trucks, night-vision optics and satellite imagery, while the Iraqis bring knowledge of the terrain and local smuggling patterns, said 1st Lt. Pat Barone, whose platoon of paratroopers was conducting nightly operations with the Iraqis north of Husayba.

Barone acknowledged that Dhamin and USF are sharing intelligence, and that Dhamin seemed eager to make the best use of the partnership.

At a border fort near a well

rumored to have been visited by Saddam Hussein in his early years just before stealing across the border into Syria, the American troops were assisting DBE forces maintain border security through the night and training with them during the day.

"The idea is to establish patterns of behavior so that, when we leave, the Iraqis will continue to implement successful strategies against the enemy," said Barone.

Following one of the coldest nights on the border, Col. Salah, commander of 2nd Battalion, 15th Brigade of the DBE, drove to the American encampment to thank them.

"Thank you for leaving your families and staying out here in the

cold to help us with this important mission," said Salah.

Iraqi detainees at the fort - cigarette smugglers trying to take advantage of the high price of tobacco across the border - reported that, since the Americans showed up, even cigarette smuggling has ceased.

"The smugglers know that the Americans are watching from the sky," said a suspected smuggler detained by the DBE, who preferred to remain anonymous. "The smugglers are afraid."

After a night of partnered patrolling in the wadis, or dry washes, between border forts in areas suggested by the local Iraqi commander, Barone was very pleased with the performance of the DBE soldiers who accompanied his paratroopers on patrol. The Iraqi-American partnership goes beyond operations and training, and includes trading food for fuel and

recreational soccer and baseball. "We are so happy to be sharing food, conversation, and training with you," said Iraqi Staff Sgt. Qasim, who has served with DBE for five years and was busy planning his third marriage. "With you here, the smugglers do not try to smuggle across the border."

Lt. Col. Ayad, a company commander in the 15th Brigade's 2nd Battalion, reported that his greatest limitations are manpower and lack of night-vision optics, issues they are working to resolve. "We can no longer give them equipment like we did in the past," said

Barone, adding that the Iraqis must make their requests from their own government. Barone's company commander, Capt. Scott Haggas, said he expects their battalion to continue partnered border operations until after the Iraqi national elections.



**Pfc. Tyler Kuhn**, a paratrooper with Company D, 1st Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division (Advise and Assist Brigade), stands watch on a rooftop with Ali, a member of the Iraqi Department of Border Enforcement, Dec. 8.

Right: **Staff Brig. Gen. Dhamin**, commander of 15th Brigade, Department of Border Enforcement, discusses suspected smuggling routes with **1st Lt. Pat Barone**, a platoon leader with Company D, 1st Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division (Advise and Assist Brigade). U.S. and Iraqi forces are sharing intelligence, training and operations to halt smuggling of arms and other contraband across the Iraqi-Syrian border.



Left: **U.S. Army 1st Lt. Pat Barone**, a platoon leader with Company D, 1st Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division (Advise and Assist Brigade), meets with **Lt. Col. Ayad**, a company commander with 2nd Battalion, 15th Brigade, Iraqi Department of Border Enforcement, in Ayad's office along the Iraqi-Syrian border, Dec. 7.

## **True to the Colors - Airman Carries 3rd Generation Wartime Family Heirloom**



*Courtesy story and photo  
332nd AEW Public Affairs*

**Staff Sgt. Heriberto Gonzalez**, a force protection escort with 332nd Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron, now owns the American flag that has now been carried by three generations of his family during a time of war.

**JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq** -- The American flag has been seen in some of the most memorable moments in history. Whether it was at the Battle of Baltimore that inspired our national anthem, the monumental victory at Iwo Jima, the landing on the moon, or after the 9/11 attacks when firemen draped “Old Glory” over the pentagon, the flag has always signified our nation’s fortitude.

For one Airman stationed here, the flag means even more.

Staff Sgt. Heriberto Gonzalez, a force protection escort for the 332nd Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron, now owns an American flag that has been carried by three of his family generations during wartime.

“Gonzo,” as he is referred to by his flight line coworkers, is on his eighth deployment since joining the Air Force. An avionics craftsman by trade, he volunteered to deploy to Iraq to provide security for local and third-country nationals working on base.

His grandfather, Beningo Santiago-Arroyo was born, March 12, 1921, and enlisted in the Army in World War II, June 10, 1944. He served as a cement finisher and building inspector assigned to the 1557th Engineer Combat Company. While stationed in Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico, he earned the award of marksman on his primary weapon, the semiautomatic AR-44. At the end

of his wartime service, Santiago-Arroyo’s superiors presented him an American flag as a gesture of thanks for a job well done.

Gonzalez’s grandfather passed the flag down to his own son right before he was drafted and sent to fight in the Vietnam conflict. Gonzo’s father carried the flag with him during his entire two-year combat tour.

Gonzo’s deployment here offered him the opportunity to have the 65-year-old flag flown over the skies of Iraq.

For Gonzalez, the decision to fly the flag during a combat sortie here was his way of honoring the military heritage within his family.

“Eighty percent of the men in my family have been in the military -- mostly Army and Navy, but I’m only the second one to enlist in the Air Force,” he said. “It just seemed like the best choice for me.”

Gonzalez has deployed several times -- once to Saudi Arabia, four times to Turkey, twice to Qatar, and now to Iraq. When asked about his heritage and why he chose this deployment over all others, Gonzo recalls all of his military family. He felt this was the right time to have this family heirloom honored -- on the jet he works on and loves, the F-16 Fighting Falcon.

Gonzo says he isn’t sure if he will have children, or if they will even join the military, but if so, he hopes to continue the family tradition in future generations.

# IN MEMORIAM

NAMES OF SERVICEMEMBERS WHO DIED BETWEEN DECEMBER 1 AND DECEMBER 31, 2009 WHILE SERVING IN OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

**GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS: THAT A MAN LAY  
DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS.**

*JOHN 15:13*

**December 8**

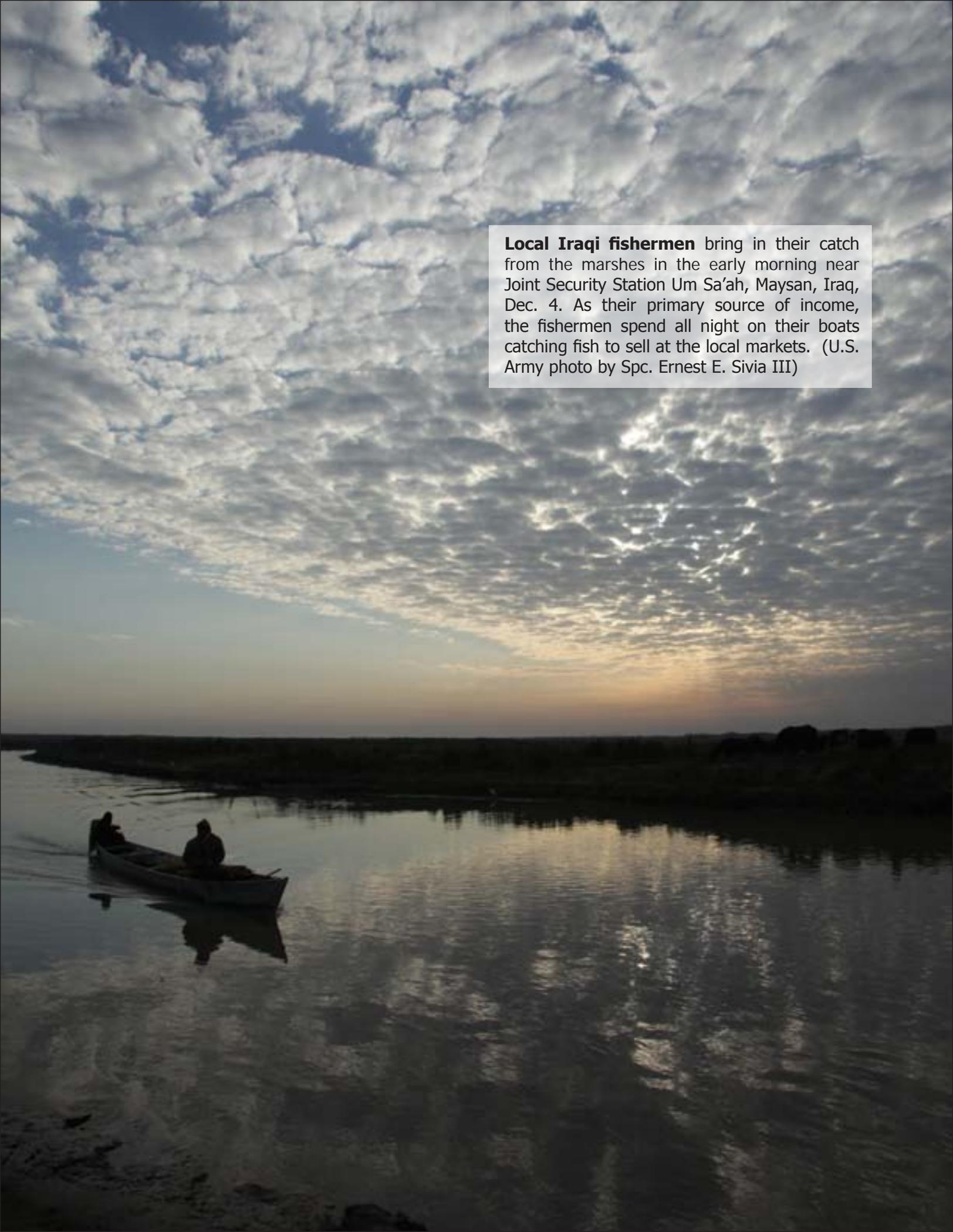
***Sgt. Ralph Anthony Webb Frietas, 23***

**December 10**

***Pvt. Jhanner A. Tello, 29***

**December 11**

***Pfc. Jaiciae L. Pauley, 29***



**Local Iraqi fishermen** bring in their catch from the marshes in the early morning near Joint Security Station Um Sa'ah, Maysan, Iraq, Dec. 4. As their primary source of income, the fishermen spend all night on their boats catching fish to sell at the local markets. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Ernest E. Sivia III)