



Wounded warriors return to Iraq



Photo by Lee Craker

Retired Army Sgt. Juan Arredondo from Coachella Valley, Calif., embraces his brother, Staff Sgt. Julio Arredondo, who surprised him with his attendance at the Operation Proper Exit V welcome ceremony April 4 at the Al Faw Palace at Camp Victory. Arredondo returned to Iraq with five other Soldiers and two Soldier mentors previously injured in Iraq as part of Operation Proper Exit V.

Story by Spc. Britney Bodner

United States Forces-Iraq Public Affairs

The rotunda in Al Faw Palace buzzed with conversation April 4, as service members and civilians gathered around a stage beneath an enormous American flag.

The room momentarily fell silent and then filled with applause as six wounded warriors and their Soldier mentors made their way through the crowd of about 250, returning to Iraq for the first time since they were injured.

After waiting for the applause to stop, Command Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Wilson, command sergeant major of United States Forces-Iraq, introduced the Soldiers as they walked on stage. The Soldiers are a part of Operation Proper Exit V, a program that provides Soldiers injured in combat the chance to come back to Iraq and see the progress made here since they left and help them

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Kidnapping threat a concern; vigilance is key to safety

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Roger Dey

United States Forces-Iraq Public Affairs

In the last two months, five suspected kidnapping attempts were reported on Victory Base Complex as members of United States Forces - Iraq remain high-

value targets for terrorists and criminals.

To some, kidnapping may seem unlikely on an installation like VBC, but the dangers of working in a war zone remain high and to prevent a kidnapping, everyone needs to stay alert and pay constant attention to their surroundings.

“It’s good to feel confident as service members, but there is a time to be vigilant,” Lt. Col. Kevin Dennehy, director of USF-I’s Personnel Recovery Division said. “Remember where you are;

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God's will for our lives is to give

By Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Ira Houck
United States Forces-Iraq Chaplain

Someone asked me, "What is God's will for my life?"

"To give," I replied.

The Soldier looked puzzled and responded with another question, "Give? Give to whom?"

"Give to God, to your neighbor and to yourself," I said.

The will of God is to give. Everyone has something to give, the rich and poor alike. Everyone everywhere is meant to give, the human being is created to give.

"How much?" someone may ask.

Give what is meaningful, give what is joyful, give what is beneficial to others, but give from your heart.

Consider for a moment the

practical ways a deployed civilian or military member might give to God joyfully, cheerfully and to the benefit of others.

In prayer one can give thanks; in conversation one can give a kind word; at work someone can recognize a worthy effort with praise; while riding the Rhino one can offer intercessory prayers for others. It is easy to find ways to give.

Wake up to the many ways that giving can enrich your life and strengthen your resolve.

"The more we advance in age, wisdom and knowledge,

the more we are obliged to reach out and help others," said a Protestant minister who had written to me, "We cannot live another's life, nor take away that person's freely chosen decisions, but we can offer advice, friendship and a helping hand."

Another insight on God's will is that God wants us to be happy.

Doing God's will is not always easy, but when one knows for certain that he or she is doing his will, happiness is a consequence.

The Reverend Joseph Ziliak said that the keys to lives of happiness and inner peace come from exercising our own

free powers and sharing them with others. We learn from others. We open doors and offer a

"Wake up to the many ways that giving can enrich your life and strengthen your resolve."

vision of good things for others.

Selfishness brings all good things to a screeching halt. In giving away we discover more is given to us.

God is good to us; we are meant to be good to others. That is the way we say thanks to God, and lift others up to their full potential. We give thanks to God and to others who are our support system. We pass on to others the wisdom of shared gifts. We give thanks for all that we have given, for all that we are and for all that we will be.

SARC Smarts



Not stopping when someone is indicating that they want you to stop, be it with words, actions or both, is sexual assault. If a person seems hesitant, don't try to convince them to give in, just stop!

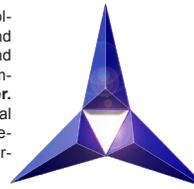
Call the USF-I Deployed Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (DSARC) at 485-5085 or 435-2235 for help. Army members should seek assistance with their Unit Victim Advocate (UVA) or DSARC.



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you're in Iraq."

Master Sgt. Robert Service, force protection noncommissioned officer-in-charge with the 939th Military Police Company, shares Dennehy's belief that Soldiers need to be aware of the threat and work to avoid complacency.

"We still have an enemy," he pointed out. "We can't just say everything's one hundred percent secure. I think that obviously is not the case."

Dennehy said anybody is at risk of being kidnapped. While Soldiers who take part in missions outside the wire run the greatest risk of being isolated and captured, anybody, even on U.S. bases, is a potential target.

When the MPs encounter lone Soldiers or civilians in an unpopulated part of VBC, they provide the person with a list of anti-kidnapping protective measures and talk to them about the risks.

"It's good to feel confident as service members, but there is a time to be vigilant."

~Lt. Col. Kevin Dennehy

The MP's guidance puts the bottom line right up front - don't be caught off guard.

The information they provide reminds Soldiers that they need to know their surroundings, remain alert and look for anything unusual. In other words, maintain situational awareness.

For Dennehy, those aren't just ideas that look good on paper.

"I actually live this stuff," he said. "I look behind me, I look around, I check under bridges ... It's easy for three guys to

grab you and throw you in a car if you don't see it coming."

Dennehy understands the importance of traveling with a battle buddy or wingman whenever possible as well.

"Anybody can be perceived as low-hanging fruit if they are walking alone," he said, adding that Soldiers need to know where they are, where they're going, and stick to well-lit areas at night.

Service's force protection measures go even farther, with guidance on maintaining a low profile and avoiding predictable patterns, such as traveling the same routes consistently.

He advises everyone to make sure their supervisor or co-workers know where they are going and when they expect to return.

According to Service, everyone needs to protect themselves at their living quarters as well, citing a recent incident in which suspicious individuals were knocking on doors to Soldiers' rooms at 3 a.m.

Service said people need to keep their rooms secured at all times and be cautious when answering the door.

"Make sure when you open that door, you recognize who the person on the other side is, day or night," he said.

When something suspicious does happen, it needs to be reported it to the Provost Marshal's Office immediately. Service said sometimes people won't talk about an incident for a couple days

"The PMO desk is a 24-hour operation," he explained. "We need to know when something happens as soon as possible. The longer it goes, there is less we can do about it and less information we can get."

Navy Lt. Cmdr. KC Chhipwadia, the senior intelligence officer for the PRD, like Service and Dennehy, said military members, civilians and contractors sometimes need to be reminded where they are, that they understand the threats, and know how to keep themselves and their Soldiers safe.

None of the PRD staff wants another face added to their posters of isolated, missing, detained or captured individuals.

"You're not here on vacation," Chhipwadia said. "Do not end up on an IMDC poster. Your family needs you."

To report suspicious incidents or activities, dial 911 from any DSN phone or call the PMO on Camp Victory at 485-2758.

**WEAPONS
SAFETY**

Treat every weapon as if it's loaded

Handle every weapon with care

Identify the target before you fire

Never point the muzzle at anything you don't intend to shoot

Keep the weapon on safe and your finger off the trigger until you intend to fire

**T.H.I.N.K
TO SAVE LIVES**

Slayer CrossFit offers high intensity workout

Story and Photos by Staff Sgt. Dan Yarnall
United States Forces-Iraq Public Affairs

Chief Warrant Officer Richard Lawrence holds himself in an upside-down L position. His hands, planted firmly on the ground, support the majority of his weight.

He is bent at a ninety-degree angle at the waist, balancing his feet on two tractor tires. He slowly lowers his head to the ground and pushes himself up as he demonstrates how to do an inverted push-up.

This is one of the many exercises performed during a CrossFit training program led by Lawrence, the officer in charge of intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance, Company B, Task Force Phantom, Special Troops Battalion, United States Forces-Iraq.

CrossFit is a physical fitness training program that incorporates naturally-occurring movements exercised at a high intensity. It is designed to enhance movements such as throwing, lifting, pushing, pulling, climbing and running, which greatly enhances combat readiness.

"In CrossFit you do a lot of multi-joint movements. It greatly improves one's anaerobic functionality," Lawrence said.

CrossFit training has grown in popularity recently with the military because of the program's ability to improve overall fitness and readiness of service members, not just prepare them for the physical fitness test, said Navy Lt. Ronald Matthews from Gig Harbor Wash with Camp Slayer Joint Information Operations Center.

"For me it's definitely more interesting. I find that just normal unit PT is very boring and monotonous," he said. "This is more creative and it really challenges you. It challenges your body in ways that normal unit PT never would."

While the variety of exercises and intensity of the workouts



Chief Warrant Officer Richard Lawrence from Jupiter, Fl., with Task Force Phantom, Special Troops Battalion, United States Forces-Iraq, warms up as he leads a session of the Slayer CrossFit exercise program.

can intimidate some people from starting a CrossFit program, Lawrence said the program can be started no matter what fitness level a person is at.

One of the highlights for him is seeing people improve their fitness through the program.

"We get all kinds of people out here, people that can hardly do anything at first. But it's great seeing them stick with it and make improvements," he said. "Eventually they are out there doing the full workouts with everybody else."

Lawrence said his personal fitness has really improved since he began cross fit training upon arriving in here in November 2009.

"I see improvements in my run already, push-ups, pull-ups, all that stuff has gone up phenomenally," he said.

Other service members who regularly attend the training sessions said they are benefitting from the CrossFit program and from exercising in a group setting, which pushes them to achieve their goals.

"My overall fitness has improved through this program," said 1st Lt. Justin Bramblett from Powel Ala., with Company A, 110th Chemical Battalion, Task Force Troy, Explosive Ordnance Disposal. "Keeping high intensity for short periods of time has significantly built up my cardio."

"You work a twelve to fourteen-hour day, you get out of the office, come down here and hang out with the group," said Matthews. "We push each other to do our very best; it's very much a team-building type of atmosphere," Matthews said.

Camp Slayer CrossFit training sessions are held Monday through Wednesday, Friday and Saturday behind Building 21-B. The training starts at 5 p.m. Training sessions vary from 15 minutes to one hour.



1st Lt. Justin Bramblett from Powel, Ala., with Company A, 110th Chemical Battalion, Task Force Troy, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, does front squats during a CrossFit training session.

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bring closure to their personal situations, said Rick Kell, the executive director for Troops First Foundation, the nonprofit organization that sponsors Operation Proper Exit. It lets them see that their sacrifice was not made in vain.

Taking part in this program and seeing the appreciation of their fellow service members means a lot to these Soldiers.

"I was very proud to be a Soldier," said Sgt. Juan Arredondo from Coachella Valley, Calif., Arredondo lost his left arm below the elbow, has damage to both calf muscles, and can no longer bend his right foot as a result of an improvised explosive device detonation. "The people who attended to showed their support, from the higher echelon all the way down to the private, they showed us that they were proud of us. It was very moving."

Major David Underwood from Harrison, Ark., lost his left arm below the elbow and had additional trauma to both legs when an IED carried by a suicide bomber exploded. He is currently a history student at the University of Texas and expects to graduate in May.

Retired Staff Sgt. Brian Neuman's left arm was amputated above the elbow due to shrapnel wounds from a rocket-propelled grenade blast. He lives in Portsmouth, R.I., and currently recruits transitioning service members for positions for a banking and insurance company.

Corporal Roberto Cruz of San Sebastian, Puerto Rico received a spinal cord injury and nerve damage to his left side from a gunshot wound. He plans to earn a bachelor's degree in sports medicine.

Corporal Bryan Hinojosa from McAllen, Texas, received shrapnel wounds to his face and neck from a pressure-plate IED explosion. He is currently finishing his degrees in political science and international relations at the University of North Texas.

Corporal Andrew Powers of El Cerrito, Calif., was also injured by an IED explosion on his deployment, which resulted in facial burns, lacerations, and the loss of his left eye. He is currently a licensed representative for a brokerage company.

These Soldiers will spend the week visiting the areas in Iraq where they were injured and speaking with service members about their personal stories and the programs that are playing a large role in their recovery.

"For me, it's a great experience to come back," said Arredondo, "I keep telling everyone that I was carried out the first time." It's a big thing for me to take this next step in my life and have some closure."

During his introduction, Arredondo received a surprise when he was joined by his brother, Staff Sgt. Julio Arredondo, currently deployed in Iraq with the 486th Civil Affairs Battalion.

Staff Sgt. Arredondo mentioned that organizations like the Troops First Foundation and United Service Organization really



Photo by Lee Craker

Soldiers with Operation Proper Exit are introduced by Command Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Wilson, command sergeant major of United States Forces-Iraq, in Al Faw Palace, April 4.

help service members like his brother, and said he is thankful they could bring his brother back here as part of Operation Proper Exit V.

This is the fifth time in two years the program has brought wounded Soldiers back to Iraq.

"Including this trip we have brought up to 30 Soldiers back, and that does not include the mentors that we've had back two or three times," said Kell.

"We look for Soldiers that thrive during their recovery. Soldiers that are moving forward both mentally and physically to what's next. That they've begun to implement those plans and they've shown that they've made great adjustments and great strides in not only pursuing, but embracing what's next" Kell said.

And for these Soldiers, the opportunity to return to Iraq definitely helps them see the benefit that came from their sacrifices.

"By bringing us back to where we were injured; it will hopefully bring some closure," Arredondo said. "We were in a bad situation at the time, and we can see that it all happened for something good."

VBC Focuses on Water Conservation

Story by Spc. Britney Bodner
United States Forces-Iraq Public Affairs

As the extremely hot summer months now approach, water conservation is becoming an issue that service members and civilians living and working on Victory Base Complex cannot ignore.

To help ensure there is an adequate water supply throughout the summer, a series of policies put into effect focus on reducing water waste and limiting water use except for vital functions.

“Water is a finite resource,” said Capt. Ronald Wieser a part of the 561st Task Force Twister Garrison Command and the officer in charge supply and services, “There’s only so much of it, depending on the water that you drink and the water that goes back into the waste treatment system for recycling.”

Most of the water used on VBC come from the Tigris and Euphrates river, said Lt. Col. Kevin McKelvy, director of Public Works for VBC.

“We want to make sure we are using the water responsibly,” McKelvy said. “We’re in a desert and water is important to people who live here. It doesn’t make sense as guests of the country not to treat that commodity with respect that it deserves.”

The water VBC uses is purified by military units and two contracting companies on VBC, McKelvy said.

Wieser said they create more than 2.5 million gallons of potable water daily and almost all of it is used.

On average, each person on VBC uses 50 gallons per day, McKelvy said. That includes showers, drinking water, and laundry.

McKelvy said that while deployed, people need to realize that the resources available here are not like those available back in the states. People just can’t use as much water as they want here assuming there is an abundant supply.

“A mindset that I’d like to see people take is that they would

use as little water as they need ... We want to make sure we are using the water responsibly,” McKelvy said,

Beginning an April, several water usage policies were released, and while some may seem restrictive, they are geared toward the goal of ensuring there is enough water for critical life support and hygiene missions and to reducing the amount of water wasted doing non-critical tasks such as washing vehicles.

According to Wieser, conserving water starts with the individual. Some of the best ways for everyone to contribute to water conservation is to reduce the length of showers to no longer than five minutes and turn off the water when brushing teeth or shaving.

Specialist Lia Murphy, a human resources clerk with Task Force Phantom Special Troops Battalion, United States Forces-Iraq, agrees that individuals need to take water conservation seriously and do their part.

“I think its very inconsiderate when people let the water run while their brushing their teeth and washing their faces because there are people here that don’t have water that need it,” said Murphy.

“It’s simple, little stuff, but these are the important things,” Wieser said.

If water usage doesn’t drop sufficiently to ease supply concerns, Wieser said the next step could be more restrictive

policies, including limiting the days that shower facilities are open.

While nobody wants to increase water restrictions, this is a serious issue and everyone needs to be responsible with their water usage and adhere to the current policies, said Wieser.

Using water responsibly should be part of the way that we, as Soldiers and as partners with Iraq, should live, McKelvy said.

“It just will take everybody’s effort to make sure the quality of life is maintained,” said Wieser, “because we can give you a lot of rules, we can tell you to do a lot of different courses of action, but without the basic Soldier’s help, conserving water won’t work.”



Courtesy Photo

Victory Base Complex has implemented a water conservation policy to ensure adequate supply and responsible use as the hot summer season approaches.

Sexual Assault Awareness Month – “What Hurts One, Hurts All”



Photo by Spc. Britney Bodner

Command Sgt. Maj. Kevin Stuart, 1st Medical Brigade command sergeant major, cuts a cake at an April 1 ceremony at the Sports Oasis Dining Facility on Camp Victory, Iraq. The ceremony announced that April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. The theme this year is “What hurts one, hurts all.” Other events taking place this month will focus on preventing sexual assault and how it hurts the mission.

Easter Sunrise Service at Al Faw Palace

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Ira Houck, the United States Forces-Iraq world religions advisement chaplain, speaks to service members and civilians during the Easter Sunrise Service on the Al Faw Palace grounds April 4. The Easter morning service was attended by about 450 personnel.



Photo by Spc. Britney Bodner

VBC Facility Operating Hours

Coalition Cafe DFAC
Breakfast 5:30 - 8:30 a.m.
Lunch 11:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Dinner 5 - 9 p.m.
Midnight Dining 11 p.m. - 1 a.m.

Sports Oasis DFAC
Breakfast 5:30 - 8:30 a.m.
Lunch 11:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Dinner 5 - 9 p.m.

Education Center
8 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Camp Liberty Post Exchange
8 a.m. - 10 p.m.

Camp Victory Post Exchange
8 a.m. - 10 p.m.

Paul Smith Gym
Open 24 Hours

Victory Main Post Office
Monday - Friday 7:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
Saturday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Sunday 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

USF-I Unit Mail Room
Customer Services/Mail Call:
Daily 3 - 6 p.m.

Al Faw Palace Post Office
Wednesday and Sunday
12:30 - 5:30 p.m.

Golby TMC Sick Call
Monday - Friday 7:30 - 11:30 a.m.
Saturday & Sunday 9 - 11:30 a.m.

Mental Health Clinic
Monday - Friday 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Saturday 9 a.m. - noon

Pharmacy
Monday - Friday 7:30 a.m. - noon;
1 - 4:30 p.m.
Saturday & Sunday 9 a.m. - noon

Notice

To all USF-I personnel:
Remember to apply
OPSEC to your
e-mails, blogs, Facebook,
and other social networking
sites.

Use the USF-I and
Reduction of Forces critical
information lists if you are
unsure whether or not it
should be posted.

This applies to any time on
a NIPR computer or personal
computer.

Make sure your families
know about OPSEC as well.

Iraqi youth scout organization receives spicy support

Photos by Staff Sgt. Dan Yarnall
United States Forces-Iraq Public Affairs

Chili cook-off event raises \$700 for Iraqi Boy and Girl Scouts



Staff. Sgt. Talisaha Castro, retention NCO for Task Force 1st Medical Brigade from Everan Ala., takes home 1st place in the chili cook-off.

Col. Hussein Radhi, deputy commander of Iraqi Special Operations Forces, receives a \$700 donation for the Iraqi Boy and Girl Scouts from Col. Michael Canders, Sather Air Base commander. All proceeds from the April 4 chili cook-off event were donated to the organization.



Sgt. Jon Deason from Festus, Mo., plays with his group, Pounding Sand, as part of the entertainment at the cook-off. Deason is a member of the 1st Armored Division Band.

Capt. Curtis Schmidt from Milan, Ind., and Maj. Cristin Mount from Lakewood, Wa., with the 28th Combat Support Hospital, each prepare chili recipes during the event.

