



IRONHORSEMAN

Volume 3, Issue 1



A FRESH START



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ON THE COVER



Iron Warrior Stakes closes out with Soldiers completing the 12-mile ruck march in under 3 hours.

Photo by Spc. Kim Browne

IRONHORSE BRIGADE HISTORY

The IRONHORSE troopers deployed in support of Operation Iraq Freedom II in March 2004. There the IRONHORSE Brigade Combat Team fought full spectrum of operations on a daily basis on its streets and spent hundreds of million dollars on infrastructure improvements and equipping of Iraq Security Forces.

Throughout 2006, the brigade reorganized to a Heavy Brigade Combat Team, deploying to Iraq in Oct 2006 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 06-08. Taking over the largest and one of the most populated areas in Multi-National Division-Baghdad, the IRONHORSE Brigade Combat Team was an integral part of the surge operation on Baghdad. The initial focus on combat operations provided a safe, stable, and secure environment which allowed reconciliation efforts of both Sunni and Shia tribal leaders and led to a significant expansion of Iraqi Security Forces, local government, and infrastructure improvement followed by a flourishing economic and cultural growth.

From Feb 2009 to Jan 2010, The IRONHORSE BCT deployed again in support of Operation Iraq Freedom 09-10 to the North Rusafa, Istiqlaal, Taji and Tarmiyah area in and around Baghdad. They partnered with seven Iraqi Army Brigades, two Division Headquarters, one Iraqi Federal Police Brigade, thousands of Iraq Police and 7,000 Sons of Iraq.

Implementing the various stages of the Security Agreement, the unit historically transferred responsibility of numerous significant bases to the control of ISF and the Government of Iraq prior to June 30 and withdrew combat forces out of Baghdad. The changes to the mission enabled the Brigade to increase the forces available to partner with the ISF outside the city. These relocations enabled operational success against enemy in their support zones, while strengthening relationships with Iraq units in the more rural area.

The unit also implemented the Super Military Transition Team, which was a restructure to both prepare for the transition to full Iraqi control and set conditions for the arrival of the Advisory and Assistance Brigade in 2010. It led to great success such as intelligence gathering and target development.

The Brigade expanded the capability of the Iraq local government, and improved the quality of life for the Iraqi people through their Civil Capacity focus. The unit completed over \$33.8M in projects that further returned normalcy to the people of Iraq.

The BCT successfully accomplished its mission of assisting their Iraqi Security Forces partners inside the city of Baghdad in conducting combined counterinsurgency operations with the ISF to disrupt and to defeat the enemy outside the city all the while rebuilding and further enhancing the quality of the life for the Iraqi people.

1st Brigade Combat Team 1st Cavalry Division Fort Hood, Texas

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Do you have a story to share? The *Ironhorseman* welcomes columns, commentaries, articles, letters and photos from readers. Submissions should be sent to the BCT Public Affairs office at bailey.kramer@conus.army.mil Phone: 254-286-6580 Include the author's name, rank, unit and contact information. The *Ironhorseman* reserves the right to edit submissions selected for the paper.

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IRONHORSE SIX

From the desk of Col. Scott L. Efflandt

Ironhorse Family and Teammates,

It is good to be home! I cannot tell you how elated Ann and I were when we found out a year ago that we our next assignment would return us to 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division. While I have never had a bad assignment during my +25 years on the Army, I have never had my first choice, until now. As I write this, I have just reached the 60 day mark as a member of the Ironhorse team and am happy to report all of our expectations have been exceeded. Col Green and team, did a great job maintaining 1st Brigade as the flagship of America's 1st Team.

One of the things I have always enjoyed about the Ironhorse is the larger sense of team shared across the Brigade Combat Team. Not only are Soldiers within companies fully linked to their battalions, but also across battalions. Moreover, we enjoy an immense amount of support from friends in the community and family members in the local area as well as across the United States. This is a powerful condition that serves us all immensely. To further support "our family" we are looking at other ways to better communicate with everyone using things like this newsletter, our Facebook (Ironhorse BCT), DA web site (<http://www.hood.army.mil/1stcavdiv/units/1bct/>), and emails. Please check these out, become a fan, and let us know what works for you, or send us a photo of your Soldier in action.

This week we just finished a great field exercise that trained and tested Soldiers on Army basics, ranging from physical toughness to land navigation to the employment of machine guns. Without mastery of these fundamentals any other specialization is lost. What makes being a Soldier distinct from another contractor is membership in an ethics based profession (as codified in our oath) and mastery of inherent military skills. The inculcation of values and individual toughness/ competence are the foundation upon which any MOS competency rests.



Col. Scott Efflandt (right), commander of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cav. Div., receives the colors from Maj. Gen. Allyn, the 1st Cav. Div. commander, during the change of command ceremony April 23. Five battalions also received new commanders at the ceremony. (New battalion commanders pictured on pages 6-7)

1BCT COMMANDER

My command philosophy, below, encapsulates these thoughts. Fulfilling these tenets will continue the Ironhorse tradition of excellence, allowing us to accomplish our mission and take care of each other.

1. We conduct ourselves in accordance with the Army Values. While not all interpersonal interactions are pleasant, at the end of the day all of these should recognize a base line level of dignity and respect.
2. We fulfill the Warrior Ethos. When not engaged in close combat this ethos still applies, we always strive to become better as failing to do this means we accept defeat.
3. We play team ball. In this sense “the team” is those we work with, those in other units and our families.
4. We have exceptional discipline throughout the ENTIRE command. In this context discipline goes beyond protocol and courtesy and gets to the heart of Soldiering—doing what is right when no one is looking, regardless of rank. When really good or bad things happen, the determining quality usually comes down to discipline.
5. We enforce and achieve the Army standard.



The summer season is upon us now, children are out of school, the weather is hot, and many of us are taking our annual vacation. I encourage all of you to make the most of our brigade’s opportunity to enjoy some summer leave. If you are staying in the area, check with the Fort Hood MWR programs to see what events are happening. They are doing some great things for Soldiers, children, and families here. Whatever you do- please be safe! At the same time, please look out for each other. Across the Division and within the BCT there have been several suicide ideations. Many of these were thwarted by concerned family members or friends who contacted the chain of command or the chaplain. Here at Fort Hood there is nothing worth serious injury or death. Help is out there, we can solve problems.

Looking forward to talking to you all in the future, take care.

Scott L. Efflandt
Ironhorse 6

Our Battalion Commanders &



Lt. Col. Dolph Southerland assumed command of 1-7 Cav., "Garryowen", from Lt. Col. Charles Costanza.



Lt. Col. Flint Patterson assumed command of 2-5 Cav., "Lancers", July 12, 2009 at JSS Ur.



Lt. Col. Robert Rodriguez assumed command of 2-8 Cav., "Stallions", from Lt. Col. Mark Solomons.



Command Sgt. Maj. Mervyn Ripley



Command Sgt. Maj. Ricky Linton



Sgt. Maj. Richard Burns

Command Sergeants Major



Lt. Col. Miles Brown assumed command of 1-82 Cav., "Dragons", from Lt. Col. Eric Schwegler.



Lt. Col. Jason Carrico assumed command of 115th BSB, "Muleskinners", from Lt. Col. Gregory Holmes.



Lt. Col. Stephen Dawson assumed command of 1 BSTB, "Centurions", from Col. Maria Zumwalt.



Command Sgt. Maj. Steven Brown Sr.



Command Sgt. Maj. Natividad Lopez Jr.



Command Sgt. Maj. Charlie Davis

Iron Warrior Stakes Gives all Troopers an Infantry Experience

Story by Spc. Kim Browne

A Soldier's ultimate responsibility, regardless of his or her job, is to be an infantryman. These pivotal skills are what allow them to perform all mission requirements regardless of the situation in which placed.

To hone these skills, Soldiers from 2nd Battalion 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division participated in the 1st BCT Iron Warrior Stakes competition, June 21-25, on Fort Hood training areas.

The Iron Warrior Stakes competition was set up to resemble the Expert Infantryman Badge test. This test included tasks such as communicating on a radio to maintaining several weapons systems.

For a Soldier to earn his EIB, he requires an 11 or 18 series military occupational specialty. However, leaders from 1st BCT wanted all Soldiers in the brigade to participate in the training and competition.

"We took the training straight from the EIB manual," said Lt. Col. Robert Rodriguez, commander of 2-8 Cav.

The first task was to pass an Army Physical Fitness Test. From there they went on to receive either a "go" or "no-go" on several tasks spread out over three lanes.

One lane was the traffic control point lane that consisted of tasks such as loading, correcting a malfunction, unloading and clearing a M240B machine gun. They also had to call in reports over a radio and perform first aid.

Another lane was the patrol lane, which included tasks like moving under direct fire, engaging targets with a hand grenade and identifying terrain features on a map.

The final lane or the urban lane had soldiers searching detainees, preventing and control shock, and calling for a medical evacuation.

The last portion of the training was a 12 mile road march. Each soldier had three hours to

complete the march carrying at least 35 pounds in their ruck sack.

"This competition is just like the EIB test without the EIB instructors," said 1st Lt. Scott Hall, native to Bradenton, Fla.

The competition was a part of the battalion's redeployment reset training and was designed by leadership to bring out the best in their Soldiers.

Sgt. Michael Williamson, from Birmingham, Ala. and Sgt. Chris Williamson, of Saint Louis, Mo., both tank gunners, said this is





great training for new Soldiers and it's a nice refresher for older ones.

The battalion's Soldiers were not able to earn an EIB for completing all tasks and lanes with a "go" since the test itself has many guidelines to be achieved before even being allowed. However, Soldiers were given challenge coins and awards for recognition of their accomplishment.

LTC Rodriguez said it would be interesting to see a non-infantry Soldier standing in front of the formation upon conclusion of the training, and he will be proud no matter the MOS.

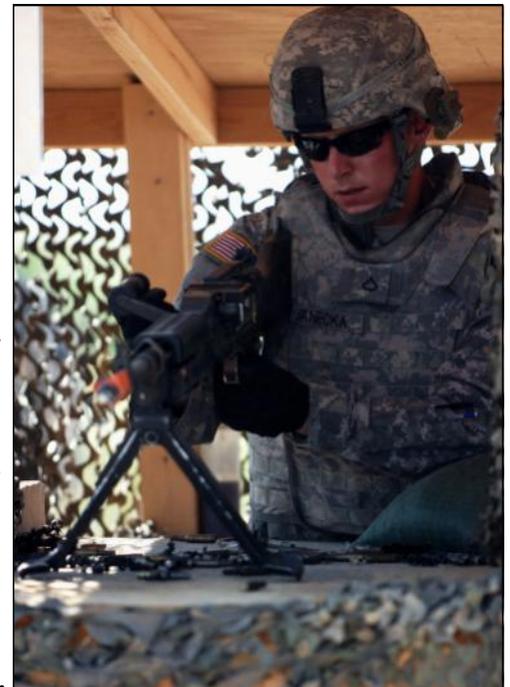
The training concluded early, June 25, with several Soldiers finishing the 12 mile road march in under the three hour requirement. Rodriguez stood by the finish line waiting for these Soldiers with a challenge coin in-hand for them.

Spc. Jeffrey Miller, from Standish, Mich., a forward observer, made the march with three minutes to spare. He said he was very worn out but had received a lot of experience out of the training. When asked if he was ready to do it again, he said, "Maybe next year."

Soldiers from the battalion not only competed in the competition but they had constructed the lanes for the brigade.

Rodriguez said that at little to no cost to the battalion or brigade, his Soldiers took available resources and their imagination and creativity to make these lanes very realistic.

Ultimately, this competition offered a true infantry experience and training to all MOS's, male and female Soldiers alike, throughout the battalion. It also allowed for the battalion to accomplish its redeployment reset and prepare its Soldiers for further endeavors within the Cav.



Ironhorse Receives New Commanders

Story by Pfc. Bailey Jester

After two successful years of commanding the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, Col. Tobin Green relinquished his command to Col. Scott Efflandt during a ceremony on Cooper Field, here, April 23.

Efflandt, a Rock Island, Ill. native, previously served in the “Ironhorse” Brigade as the commander of the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment through the Operation Iraqi Freedom 06-08 deployment.

“When I was asked to return and command the “Ironhorse” Brigade, I was excited,” Efflandt stated. “It feels like I’m coming home.”

Efflandt anticipates leading the brigade to accomplish the high goals he has set.

“I look forward to upholding the traditions of excellence the 1st Brigade has held in the division,” Ef-

flandt said about his future goals for the brigade. “I also look forward to serving with an incredibly powerful team and answering any call to anywhere we are called upon.”

The “Ironhorse” Brigade recently returned from a year-long deployment from Baghdad under

the command of Green.

Green commented that the battalion commanders he deployed and worked closely with were a great team who accomplished much in Baghdad, but now it is time to start a

new chapter for the brigade.

Not only is the “Ironhorse” Brigade receiving a new brigade commander, but five of the six battalions changed commanders.

“I feel confident taking on this team,” Efflandt said about his new men. “These are great Soldiers and I am anxious to work with them.”



Col. Scott Efflandt (right), commander of the “Ironhorse” Brigade, and Maj. Gen. Daniel Allyn (left), commander of the 1st Cav. Div., mount their horses for the inspection of troops.

Machine Gun Range Gets Garryowen Mission Ready

Story by Pfc. Bailey Jester

Soldiers from the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, participated in a machine gun range, at the Trapnal Range, May 18.

“This was the first range we have attended since our return from Iraq,” said Raeford, N.C. native, Capt. Michael Liscano, the commander of Troop C, 1st Sqdn., 7th Cav. Regt. “We may be back home, but it is still important to ensure our weapons are mission ready.”

The squadron implemented the range training to refresh “seasoned” Soldiers, or those who have been deployed, and to allow new Soldiers experience on firing the M240B. The M240B is a machine gun that fires a 7.62 mm bullet and can be mounted on vehicles or hand carried.

“While we were in Iraq it was important to make sure that not only our weapons, but we as Soldiers were able to protect our battle buddies,” said Jacksonville, Fla., native, Spc. Aaron Falk, a scout assigned to Troop A, 1st Sqdn., 7th Cav. Regt. “Now that we are home, we have to be able to keep these skills for our next deployment.”

The day began with test firing; test firing is a process where the machine gun is fired towards paper targets to guarantee that it will fire. After the test fire, Soldiers formed up to conduct familiarization and qualification of their ability to fire the weapon.

“All the weapons were in working order,” Liscano said about the day’s success, “and every Soldier left qualified on the M240B.”



Bucaramanga, Columbia native, Spc. James Davis, a scout assigned to the 1-7 CAV, prepares to fire his M240B at the Trapnal machine gun range, May 18.



Jacksonville, Fla. native, Spc. Aaron Falk, a scout assigned to the 1-7 CAV counts rounds to prepare for firing his M240B, May 18. “Garryowen” troops attended the range to ensure weapons were mission capable and maintain mission readiness. (Photo by Pfc. Bailey Jester)

Lancers Conduct Land Navigation Training



Clackamas, Ore. native, Sgt. Wilfredo Santos, a tanker assigned to Company D, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, records his point found during a land navigation training course, here, May 26. The Soldiers are refreshing their land navigation skills to prepare for the Iron Warrior Stakes competition in June.

Story By Pfc. Bailey Jester

Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division conducted land navigation training, May 26, to prepare themselves for the upcoming Iron Warrior Stakes competition to be held in June.

“You won’t always have high tech equipment, sometimes you only have a compass and a map, and if you don’t know how to properly use them, then it does you no good,” said Dallas native, 1st Lt. Ashton Daily, a platoon

leader assigned to Company A.

This training was designed to help Soldiers reacquaint themselves with how to conduct basic land navigation. The training began in the morning with a simple block of instruction reminding Soldiers about the fundamental techniques to conduct land navigation. In the afternoon, Soldiers completed the land navigation course; looking for several points during daylight, then after sunset, they searched for points in darkness.

“Doing this event today really helped refresh my mind,” explained New York City native, Spc. Carrington Oliver, a tanker assigned to Co. D, after successfully completing the course. “It’s been awhile since I have done any form of land navigation training so this was really helpful.”

To pass the course Soldiers were required to successfully find three out of four points that were spread out across five square kilometers of dry, dead field of grass and shrubs.

Soldiers quickly traversed the land navigation course on Fort Hood, using a lensatic compasses, protractors and a military maps.

The training consisted of reading and plotting points on a map, determining an azimuth, or angle from the starting spot to the desired locations and using a pace count to track your travelled distance over various terrain.

“Land navigation is an important skill,” Daily said. “Land navigation is a simple, yet sometimes forgotten, skill.”



Ironhorse Works on Strengthening Marriages

Story By Pfc. Bailey Jester

SAN ANTONIO, Texas – Making a relationship work takes time, communication, commitment and effort. The 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division held a series of Strong Bonds Marriage Retreats in San Antonio, Texas to help spouses build stronger marriages and improve the quality of their relationships.

The retreats were organized by unit and rank structure. The largest retreat from April 5 to 7 was held for the junior enlisted soldiers of the brigade.

“The purpose of this retreat is to build strong family and marital relationships. Also good communication skills and conflict resolutions between spouses,” explains Somerset, Ky., native Capt. Claude Hoffman, the chaplain for 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. “We want to help the couples to stay on the course.”

Many couples lack relationship skills such as trust, honesty and a foundation of friendship, Hoffman explained. “It isn’t anybody’s fault, just culture has taught us to rush into relationships without the right skills.”

There were about 116 married couples attending the event. “We expected about this many couples,” Hoffman said about the outcome. “This was one of my better groups, they were dedicated and serious about what we had to say. You could tell they wanted to be there.”

Many topics were discussed during the scheduled sessions on the retreat. Such as how to better communicate and resolve issues.

“We hoped to come up to the retreat and learn how to better our relationship and ways to improve ourselves,” said Littleton, Colo., native Kayla Claunts, the wife of an “Ironhorse” Soldier.

To create a romantic atmosphere for the Soldiers and their spouses, the retreat was held at the Holiday Inn on the scenic Riverwalk of San Antonio.

“The Riverwalk helps create a more intimate atmosphere,” Hoffman explained. “One that is difficult to feel in the Fort Hood or Killeen area.”

Little Lambs, a credited daycare team, were contracted not only to help create a more relaxed retreat but were also there to relieve the stress on parents to find daycare for their children while on this three-day retreat.

“The provided daycare assisted us in attending the Strong Bonds retreat,” according to Littleton, Colo., native Pfc. Michael Claunts, an artilleryman assigned to the 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. “We didn’t have to worry about our daughter interrupting the sessions or even worrying about finding someone at home to look after her.”

“Between the daycare and active involvement, the retreat was a success,” Hoffman said. “We will have more, and hope to have the same outcome.”



Welcome to the 1st Brigade Family Readiness Group



Not sure who to contact?
Family Readiness Support Assistants
for the 1st Brigade

1st Brigade - Ironhorse

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2-8 CAV – Stallions

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1-82 FA – Dragons

Julie Grant
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115th BSB – Muleskinners

Timika Ford
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1BSTB – Centurions

Trish Cooper
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Definition: *Family Readiness Group - “An officially command-sponsored organization of Family members, volunteers and soldiers belonging to a unit, that together provide an avenue of mutual support and assistance, and a network of communications among Family members, the chain of command and community resources.”*

Mission: *The Family Readiness Groups of the 1st BCT 1st Cavalry Division provide activities and support that will enhance the flow of information, morale, esprit de corps, and readiness within the unit. Our focus is to provide an avenue of mutual assistance and a network of communication between the Family members and the chain of command, especially during times of deployment.*

Army Community Services Fort Hood: <http://hoodmwr.com/acs>

Army One Source site: www.myarmyonesource.com/default.aspx

Child, Youth and School Services: www.arfp.org/cyss

Army Family Team Building: www.aftb.org

Military One Source: 800-464-8107 or www.militaryonesource.com

American Red Cross: www.redcross.org or 877-272-7337 or local 254-287-0400

MWR (Morale, Welfare, and Recreation): www.armymwr.com 254-287-4126

Child and Youth Services (CYSS): 254-287-8029

TRICARE: www.Tricareonline.com

Darnall Appointment 288-8888 or 800-305-6421 / 24 Nurse Advice line: 254-553-3695



FRSA CORNER

The Brigade needs the Families within our organization to be prepared. The easiest and most useful way to help your Family and the Brigade is to be involved in the Family Readiness Group. Whether your Family is new to the Army, new to Fort Hood or a long-term veteran Army Family, the FRG will help keep you up to date on what is happening in the Army. The FRG also gives you a voice to raise concerns and share quality information that can benefit the entire Army Family.

The Department of Defense and the Department of the Army have wonderful programs that are designed to support Army Families. Many of these programs are under-utilized. Strive to stay informed, share information and support these programs. Your support not only includes using these programs but providing feedback to the Army Leadership on what program improvements need to occur. Get involved and support your Family Readiness Group.

April Volunteers of the Month Ceremony



On May 5, 2010, the volunteers of the month for February and March were recognized on Cooper Field by Maj. Gen. Allyn and Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Malloy.

(left to right) Terry Robison (HHT), Amy Steigers (2-8 CAV), Jennifer Simmons (2-8 CAV), Terri Lichlyter (2-5 CAV), Karissa Dolan (1-7 CAV), Brandy Williams (1-82 FA), Tiffany Grant (1-82 FA), Connie McNeil (1BSTB), Katie Brewster (1BSTB).



“Ironhorse” Schools NCO travels to Pentagon to receive award

Sgt. 1st Class Natalie Lewis received the 2009 Department of Defense Honorary Value Engineering Achievement Award at the Pentagon, in Washington D.C., May 12.

Lewis, a Lagrange, Ga., native, discovered on April 28, 2010 that she was to receive this award from her previous duty assignment at Fort Sill, Okla.

“I can honestly say I was surprised,” Lewis, the noncommissioned officer in

charge of managing schools, assigned to the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, commented about receiving her award.

The VE Awards Program is an acknowledgment of excellent achievements and encourages additional projects to improve in-house and contractor productivity.

Around November of 2008 Lewis served with the Department of Defense at the Training and Doctrine Command at Fort Sill, Okla.

While serving with the DoD team Lewis worked as a combat developer for a weather balloon system. A combat developer is responsible for researching, developing, and testing

of new resources, and the effect of the new materiel into the Army to serve the greatest combat effectiveness.

At Fort Sill Lewis assisted in developing a new weather balloon system for the field artillery unit’s meteorological systems.

“The balloon removal has been quite a hit,” Gordon Wehri, Lewis’s former supervisor, said about her performance. “We proved that we are still providing good accurate [Mission Essential Tasks] and at the same time we are saving the Army millions of dollars.”

Armament Inspections Assure Accuracy

Story by: 1st Lt. Akia Robinson
Company B, 115 BSB

Bravo Company of 115th BSB has been supervising the small arms repair for the entire 1BCT. The process began on 22APR10 and has been going well. The Armament Repair section from Bravo Company has been working with Camber Corporation and Anniston Army Depot to get the job done. WO1 Harmon, SSG Whitaker, SGT February, SGT Lee, and PV2 Betts have been working hard to make this a smooth and successful mission.

In Iraq Soldiers carried M4s, M16s, and M9s around on a daily basis. Luckily, most of the weapons firing took place at the range. The Soldiers from 1BCT did a good job keeping their weapons clean and serviceable, which has made the whole small arms repair process much easier.

The small arms repair process is pretty simple. First, the units bring all of their weapons to the motor pool and lay them out. After the weapons are then accounted for, by serial number, the inspectors take control of the weapons and they are ready to begin repair.

Next, the weapons are inspected for safety issues such as unauthorized parts; missing parts, fit, form, and function, and code outs (weapons that cannot be repaired on site). Any deficiencies that are found are documented on either a 2404 or a 5988E.

The weapon then moves on to the next station which is the re-

pair station. The employee takes the paperwork and verifies the deficiency on the weapon and fixes it. Once that is done the weapon moves to the trigger pull station. At this station the

counted for by the civilians and the unit. After this is done, the process is complete.

Bravo Company's armament section ensures all of the paperwork is correct by double check-



SSG Whitaker (left) and SGT Lee (right) of Bravo Company 115th BSB confirm weapons serial numbers during the small arms repair in the 1BSTB motor pool.

weapon is checked to make sure the amount of pressure it takes to pull the trigger is within tolerance. After that, the weapon goes to a Quality Assurance/Quality Control Station. This is where the 2404/5988E is verified again and the weapon double checked to make sure it has been repaired correctly and nothing was missed.

Once the weapon has been cleared, it is sent to the unit identification station where the serial number on the weapon and unit on the 2404/5988E is verified. A label is then put on the weapon. The weapons are once again ac-

ing the serial numbers and separating all of the 2404/5988E by weapon. The armament section also lets each unit in the brigade know when their next appointment is. Anything that cannot be fixed on site is placed on a job ordered and will be fixed by the armament section when the parts come in.

This operation and the cooperation between Bravo company's armament repairers and the civilian inspectors from Anniston Army Depot ensures that the Ironhorse Brigade remains lethal and ready to fight.

A Soldier's Return Home

Story by Capt. Tyler Cortner,
Commander, Company B, 115 BSB

Soaring in the luminous sky above the white clouds I woke from a deep sleep. The nightmare was over walking around like a zombie distant from certainty. Living in a world like no other where the grit from the sand was everywhere in everything owned. Everyone appeared identical in the same uniform, sharing the same feelings of homesickness. The loud distinct voice of the pilot announced, "Welcome home 115th Soldiers" tickled my ear. Joy conquered my spirit as the Soldiers and I cheered, clapped and prayed; thrilled with anticipation returning to the world we once knew as home. Excited about our arrival I felt peace within as we listened to the instructions from the proud pilot to prepare for a safe landing. Returning home from Iraq was exhilarating and awakened my soul.

The large exit door of the super turbo Boeing 747 vertically opened after flying in the air for over thirty-six hours. The aches in my bones slowly disappeared; with every stretch I began to feel my legs again. I glanced out the window where four white charter buses awaited to transport three hundred anxious Soldiers. I rushed to the exit with my bags. My nose engulfed the refreshing scent of the spring grass as I stared in disbelief for a moment until the very polite flight attendant spoke "Watch your step as you exit through the door, thank you for your service." We were back in the United States of America, the land of the free, the home of the brave. Like silk, the clean and cold night air lightly blew against my dry skin. Taking my time walking down each metal step, I embraced my escape from the Middle East.

I rushed to the door of the charter bus, leaving one harsh chapter of war to begin the next vivid untitled chapter of my life. I quickly took my seat on the warm charter bus. The wheels on the bus moved forward and rolled back the memories of the sand box restricted surroundings.

Our first destination was 1st Cavalry Division Headquarters parade field. Two towering American flags draped the side of the brick buildings. Two prestigious me dressed in gold and navy blue staged riding on horses with black and gold Stetsons on their heads and shiny silver spurs on their black boots. I looked out the horizontal window during the ride amazed at hundreds of red, white and blue flags shining in the night leading us to our celebration of victory.



Exiting the bus, my heart was beating and became one with the drum leading the Army Band as I stood in formation. The adrenaline rushed through my veins and my knees quivered.

We stood beside each other for strength in formation under the night sky filled with twinkling stars and the moon gleaming in the darkness. An overflow of suppressed emotions awakened my body and mind forcing me to march forward toward hundreds of family and friends. Chills raced up and down my spine and tears swelled in my wide-open eyes like small crystals in spite of it all, I maintained my composure and stood tall with honor. I was about to explode on the inside and my hand trembled as I raised it to salute the battalion colors and American flag. Large signs of gratitude, welcome home banners and yellow ribbons adorned Cooper Field and held up high from the crowd, in the gray bleachers directly in front of the massive formation. Something inside of me ruptured in delight from the rejoicing and celebrating people. I watched my comrades intensely connect with loved ones like magnets hugging them very tightly.

My eyes scanned the crowd searching for those who came for me, while the mist from the night dew whisked upon my cheek. I found my mother in the crowd, a touch I longed for, as her loving arms wrapped around me. Her tears of joy washed away the fear of death, I felt like a newborn again. I was alive, my soul awakened. My sister sobbing, laughing, smiling, and shouting with happiness "I love you, welcome home!" I danced and I sang with my cousins who also came to welcome me home on Cooper field. The man of my dreams, my fiancé, Chris, joined me. He embraced me with so much passion in his eyes, his arms comforted me. Our lips joined so soft and gentle. I drowned in the moment of a passionate kiss and everything stood still for that priceless moment in time. He stood self-assured with yellow roses and a brown teddy bear with a red ribbon tied so neatly around its neck. He joined my family entangled in a group hug. I glanced over their shoulders in my view, a grand yellow and black 1st Cavalry patch surrounded by eight large black marble stones engraved with the names of Soldiers, whose souls are forever resting. The departure of the night was clear, we were finally home.

Photos: Commanders and Soldiers

Sioux Falls, S.D., native Col. Tobin Green, commander of the 1st BCT 1st Cav. Div., congratulates Soldiers from HHB, 1-82 FA Battalion, in completing the brigade run, here, April 20. This was Green's final week with the "Ironhorse" Brigade and asked for everyone to participate in one last event as a brigade. (Photo by Pfc. Bailey Jester)



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Former commander of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, retired Army Lt. Gen. Paul E. Funk II, native to San Diego, discusses many of the various challenges that Soldiers and families deal with in today's Army, especially while deployed, with leadership from the "Ironhorse" Brigade on Fort Hood, Texas April 21. Funk visited Fort Hood to conduct research as part of an advisory panel for the Army Chief of Staff. (Photo by Maj. Brian Carlin)

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IRONHORSEMAN