

SCIMITAR

Printed in the interest of Multi-National Forces - Iraq



Troops make roads safer, Page 8

Vol. 3, No. 7

Baghdad, Iraq

February 18, 2005



Photo by Sgt. David Foley

The color guard stands at attention during the Multi-National Corps - Iraq Transition of Authority ceremony in the Al-Faw Palace, Camp Victory, Iraq, Feb. 10.

XVIII Airborne takes lead role in Iraq

By Sgt. David Foley
MNC-I Public Affairs/Army News Service

CAMP VICTORY, BAGHDAD, Iraq — Lt. Gen. John R. Vines of XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg, N.C., took command of Multi-National Corps - Iraq Feb. 10 in a transfer of authority ceremony at Camp Victory's Al-Faw Palace here.

Outgoing MNC-I Commander Lt. Gen. Thomas Metz and his III Corps troops will return to Fort Hood, Texas.

In another Transfer of Authority ceremony a day earlier at Camp Victory, III Corps Artillery of Fort Sill, Okla., and 3rd Expeditionary Air Support Operations Group from Fort Hood handed over their role in the Joint Fires and Effect Team to the XVIII Airborne Corps Artillery of Fort Bragg and 18th Air

Support Operations Group from Pope Air Force Base, N.C. Vines and the XVIII Airborne Corps have been working with Metz and III Corps for the past few weeks preparing for the transition, and both teams agree it has gone smoothly.

Gen. George Casey, Multi-National Force - Iraq commander, also attended the ceremony and said, "There is never a good time to make a change of this magnitude, but right on the tail of a watershed historical event, is not a bad time either."

"This transfer of authority is the first in a year of critical transitions for Iraq," he said.

Other transfers will include the transfer from the interim Iraqi government to the Iraqi transitional government, the drafting and adopting of an Iraqi Constitution and the elec-

tions of an Iraqi government, which will take place at the end of 2005.

The year will also see the transfer of the counter-insurgency campaign to Iraqi security forces, who have been preparing to become more independent in fighting the anti-Iraqi forces.

"Now let there be no mistake about it, each of these transitions and the coalition's role in them is singularly focused on helping Iraq secure the liberty it gained on the 28th of June and that it cemented on the 30th of January," Casey said.

"All of these transitions will be in some way dependent upon the great XVIII Airborne Corps team that General Vines has built," he said. "We welcome the Corps and its associated

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Visit gives Rumsfeld firsthand look at Iraqi Forces

By John D. Banusiewicz
American Forces Press Service

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld told several hundred U.S. Soldiers Feb. 11 in Mosul he was “every bit as proud” to be there as he was during his pride-filled moments attending Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai’s inauguration in December.

On that day in Kabul, he said, his thoughts turned to “so many American men and women in uniform who made that day possible,” especially the fallen and the wounded. He thought he could never feel as proud as he had at that moment — until today, that is.

The secretary reminded the Soldiers of the oppression under which the Iraqi people had lived before they were liberated. “They had to learn helplessness, carefulness. ... If they stuck their head up and expressed an opinion that wasn’t consistent with the regime’s, they knew they’d end up in one of those mass graves.” He thanked the Soldiers for helping the Iraqis to take another step in their Jan. 30 elections to shrug off oppression and embrace democracy.

Rumsfeld’s Mosul visit was his first stop in an unannounced trip to Iraq. This was reportedly the secretary’s eighth visit to the country since coalition forces liberated it from Saddam Hussein’s regime in 2003.

Rumsfeld hit the ground running, landing at Mosul airfield to start a jam-packed day that included a firsthand look at Iraqi security forces.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Brett B. McMillan

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and Gen. George W. Casey Jr. talk to the media outside the U.S. Embassy during Rumsfeld’s visit to Baghdad.

Before he addressed the U.S. troops, he went to the combat surgical hospital at the airfield. There, he chatted with Army Sgt. Sean Ferguson of the 25th Infantry Division, who was recuperating from being shot in the right hand by a sniper — the second time he had been wounded during his four months in Iraq. Earlier in his tour, Ferguson was injured by shrapnel from a car bombing.

“I sure want to wish you well,” Rumsfeld told the Visalia, Calif., native. “I appreciate your service to your country.”

Next, the secretary presented Army Commendation Medals to 10 U.S. and 10 Iraqi soldiers at the airfield’s theater for their

roles in providing a safe environment for citizens in Ninevah province to vote in the Jan. 30 provincial-council and national-assembly elections.

After the troop talk in Mosul, the secretary and his party boarded UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters to go to the Joint Coordination Center at Forward Operating Base Freedom, the headquarters for operations in northwest Iraq.

The governor and police chief of Iraq’s Ninevah province, other local officials, and three senior Iraqi Intervention Force officers met with Rumsfeld during his JCC visit.

The police department in Mosul, which is in Ninevah, had evaporated in November when Iraq security forces had wilted, under intense insurgency attacks. The department had to be rebuilt in time to provide election security.

“It was just weeks before the election when people said Mosul wouldn’t work,” Rumsfeld said. “And then we got reports that Iraqi security forces of all types were moving up, and it looked like it would work.” The local officials, through an interpreter, told the secretary they were able to keep all 95 polling places open all day, with Iraqi National Guard and Special Forces providing three lines of defense.

Clearly enjoying the success story, the secretary peppered the Iraqi officials with questions, his own excitement and the Iraqis’ pride gaining with every piece of the story.

When Rumsfeld asked if the successful election had given the Iraqi people confidence

in facing down those who threatened them with death if they participated, one official responded through an interpreter, predicting an even better election when Iraqis vote on a new constitution in December.

“Now the people have no fear,” the official said. “The next election will be even more successful.”

The secretary and his party then returned to Mosul airfield to board an Air Force C-17 Globemaster III transport jet bound for Baghdad. At Camp Dublin here, Iraqi forces showed him demonstrations of their Emergency Response Unit and Counter Terrorist Force capabilities.

At the next stop, a 20-minute helicopter flight to Tadj, the secretary visited the Combined Military Advisory Training Team for overviews on the build-up of Iraq’s 1st Mechanized Brigade, 1st Transportation Regiment and the Iraqi Intervention Force.

The secretary’s whirlwind morning ended back in Baghdad for a working lunch with Army Gen. John Abizaid, commander of U.S. Central Command, and Army Gen. George W. Casey Jr., commander of Multi-National Force - Iraq.

Rumsfeld’s afternoon schedule included meetings with interim Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and other key government officials, and Army Lt. Gen. John Vines, commander of the XVIII Airborne Corps.

Rumsfeld’s trip to Iraq followed two days in informal meetings with NATO defense ministers in Nice, France.

Transfer

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units, and we wish them all the best in the year ahead. The future of Iraq and America’s significant national interests here rest squarely with J.R. Vines and his team. And I am confident they are up to the task.”

Casey said part of what gives him so much confidence in the XVIII Airborne Corps is what he has seen III Corps accomplish in the last year.

“Members of the Phantom Corps, you have made an incredible difference here in Iraq over the past year, and it culminated in the elections on the 30th of January.”

While passing the torch to Vines, Metz said he is proud of the job his Soldiers did in Iraq, and he has confidence the XVIII Airborne Corps will continue the mission successfully.

Metz said he is departing with more confidence than ever that a “free prosperous Iraq that lives by the rule of law and does not harbor terrorists” is in the very near future.

“There are few people wearing the uniform who have personally done more for the Global War on Terrorism than



Photo by Sgt. Mark St.Clair

Lt. Gen. John R. Vines, commander, Multi-National Corps - Iraq and XVIII Abn. Corps and Fort Bragg, N.C., uncases the corps colors during the Transfer of Authority ceremony between XVIII Abn. and III Corps, Fort Hood, Texas at Camp Victory, Iraq, Feb. 10.

you,” Metz said to Vines, “and there is no other commander to whom I would rather have given the colors to.”

“Thank you for the truly superbly prepared troops,” he said to Vines. “They are truly focused and ready. And thanks

ahead of time for the successes you will have in Operation Iraqi Freedom.”

Vines said he has been watching with professional admiration as III Corps and coalition forces battled their way toward a free Iraq and said the mission was a “masterpiece of tactical excellence.”

“I watched General Tom Metz, who was an absolute textbook example of leadership under pressure,” he said. “He never lost sight of his objective, which was to give the citizens of Iraq the opportunity to choose their own destiny, and it was absolutely brilliant.”

“As General Metz, the Phantom Corps and other members of the great coalition — represented by many nations and all our services who passed those colors tonight — head back to your home countries for a well-deserved rest, go with the knowledge that you have done something great and noble,” Vines said. “Go with the knowledge that the citizens of Iraq admire and appreciate what you have done for them. And on behalf of the coalition and the citizens of their nations, I say ‘Thank you. Well done.’”

(Editor’s note: Sgt. David Foley serves with MNC-I Public Affairs. Spc. Jeremy D. Crisp of MNC-I PAO also contributed to this article.)

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PERSPECTIVES

The Importance of Black History

By Pfc. Ferdinand Thomas
Scimitar Staff

I treasured Black History Month growing up as an African-American in the Bay Area of Calif., because many African-Americans influenced me to be a better person. I remember when I was 6 years old, and my mother made me memorize and recite the "I have a dream" speech in front of my church congregation. I was as nervous as a mouse staring into the eyes of a hungry cat when I spoke the words of this great man. The people of the church were impressed with my performance. They were also impressed by King's words. Like many people, they had mostly heard of his accomplishments and very little of his work.

I was impressed by the way King made his voice known, the words he spoke and the number of people he influenced to follow him. I learned so much about King and other African-Americans who have made an immense difference in the past. Reciting King's speech was a drop in a bucket compared to the accomplishments of people like King, Harriet Tubman and Malcolm X.

When one thinks of black history, usually the first person who comes to mind is King. He was a great man, but black history dates back hundreds of years. There are many African-Americans to be remembered during this month. From sports to the military, many played a part in the desegregation and success of freedom.

While researching black history on www.search.eb.com, I found the world of sports was one of the areas where the segregation was broken down. Athletes like Jesse Owens and Jackie Robinson's never-quit attitude helped tear down the walls and pave the way for others like Michael Jordan and Evander Holyfield.

Owens, an amazing track and field athlete, set numerous world records in events like the 100-yard dash, and won four gold medals in the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. Eleven years after Owens impressed the world, Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers, becoming the first black professional baseball player in modern American baseball. He played for 10 years before retiring and was also elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962.

Barriers were also broken down in other parts of society,

such as the world of literature. In the 1900s, black literature, art, music, dance, and social commentary began to flourish during the Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes, one of the first nationally-known black poets/writers in the 1920s and 1930s, won numerous awards for work he published during his high school years and thereafter. He is known as one of the greatest writers the world has ever seen. His work is still taught in schools around the United States.

We can't forget the importance of blacks in the U.S. military. Many blacks made a difference in our great armed forces. The Buffalo Soldiers, who served in the western part of the United States from 1867 to 1896, were a cavalry regiment in the U.S. Army. These Soldiers were known as some of the most courageous and disciplined troops in the military.

During the 1940s, the Tuskegee Airmen unit was formed. They were an all-black group of pilots who flew 1,578 missions in support of the U.S. military and received more than 850 medals. At first, they were the joke of the U.S. Army Air Corps, but later became the most-requested squadron in the U.S. military.

Around the same time, an all black Marine Corps unit called the Montford Point Marines was formed. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order No. 8802 in 1941 to desegregate the military, these Marines were still kept apart from other Marines at Camp Lejeune, N.C. Regardless of the strife they endured for almost 10 years, the Montford Point still served their country with honor.

Imagine living in a world where whites and blacks are separate, and women and men are unequal. That's what the United States was like less than a century ago. We should pay tribute to not only the blacks who dedicated and sacrificed their lives to making a difference, but to anyone who strove to desegregate our country. Many others helped achieve desegregation, like our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln. If it weren't for his bravery and determination to end slavery, our country may not have progressed to the point it has today, and we may not have great blacks to pay tribute to.

Black History Month is a privilege. We should treat it that way and embrace it, not forget it or take it for granted.

Army rights wrong to first African-American chaplain

By Eric Cramer
Army News Service

WASHINGTON — More than 100 years after the court-martial of Chaplain Capt. Henry Vinton Plummer, the Army redressed a wrong and issued an honorable discharge to the first African-American to be commissioned a chaplain in the Army.

Maj. Gen. David H. Hicks, U.S. Army chief of chaplains, said it was time the Army corrected its error. "I am personally gratified that the Army Board for the Correction of Military Records, after 114 years, has restored Chaplain Capt. Henry Plummer to his rightful and deserved place in the history of the United States Army Chaplaincy," Hicks said. "This action makes me proud of the Army in its willingness to right former injustice by granting his honorable discharge in recognition of his many years of selfless service, both before and after 1894."

Hicks said Plummer was a historic



Courtesy photo

Capt. Henry Vinton Plummer recently received an honorable discharge after being dismissed from service in 1894.

figure in the Army, "I am especially proud of Chaplain Plummer's service to our Soldiers on America's frontier as our first commissioned black chaplain, and whose heritage I share. I extend

my congratulations and gratitude to Chaplain Plummer's descendants who brought this case to the Army's attention."

Plummer's military career actually began 30 years before the events that led to his dismissal from service. Born a slave in Prince George's County, Maryland, in 1844, he joined the U.S. Navy in 1864, during the Civil War, serving as a Sailor aboard the USS Coeur de Lion.

Upon leaving the Navy at the end of the war, Plummer taught himself to read and write, and attended the Wayland Seminary, where he became a Baptist minister. He served as pastor of several churches in the District of Columbia before accepting a commission as an Army chaplain in 1884.

He served with the 9th Cavalry Regiment, the famous Buffalo Soldiers, as a chaplain for 10 years before he was dismissed from service.

"Plummer was an American pio-

Scimitar Pulse

Which African-American influenced you the most? Why?

"I'd say Huey P. Newton from the Black Panthers. I don't believe in the militant, radical lifestyle, but I believe you have to stand your ground. He showed me that."

Army Pvt. Lamar E. Dancil
22nd Mobile Public Affairs
Detachment



"My grandmother because she showed me how her father grew up during slavery times."

Air Force Master Sgt. Dennis A. Whitley
Multi-National Forces - Iraq

"I'd have to say my mother because she believed you can do anything if you put your mind to it."

Vonzett George
Project and Contracting Office



"Condaleeza Rice, because she shows everyone that she is a strong black woman. I respect who she is."

Army Sgt. Donna D. Kirkwood
Combined Joint Staff

"Bill Cosby. He transcends across all the racial barriers. He stands up for what is right."

Army Command Sgt. Maj. Neil C. Heupel
Civil Military Operations



"Martin Luther King, Jr., because he lived and died for what he believed in."

Army Lt. Col. Hershel L. Holiday
Multi-National Forces - Iraq

"Paul Robeson, because he came before his time. He was an actor/singer. He graduated from Yale and Rutgers University and he was an All-American football player."

Cedric Hill
Kellogg Brown and Root



Elections boost Iraqi Security Forces' confidence

By Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — The Iraqi elections at the end of January have given the security forces a needed boost of confidence, said Air Force Lt. Gen. Lance Smith, deputy commander of U.S. Central Command Feb. 9.

Smith spoke to reporters at the Pentagon about the Iraqi elections, the continued U.S. effort in Afghanistan and other hot spots in the Central Command region.

On Jan. 30, there were between 200 and 300 terrorist attacks. Smith said the violence in Iraq had returned to pre-election levels, with terrorists shifting their targets back to the Iraqi security forces and civilians.

He said the elections caused an "attitude change" in the Iraqi people. "The Iraqi security forces acquitted themselves very well during the election. I think they feel good about it," he said. "So there is a level of self-confidence out there that maybe they didn't have before. And then ... we see some pride on the part of the Iraqi people for the performance of the Iraqi security forces."

He said there is a growing level of trust between the Iraqi people and their security forces. "That's critical to our ability to get in and make sure that there's a viable Iraqi security force so that we can at some point in time draw down our forces and come home," he said.

But it is not just because of the elections that the security climate in Iraq is improving. "We have very aggressively gone after the insurgents, and we've been very effective in taking out leadership and in rolling up some of the bad actors that are out there," he said.

The general said the coalition and Iraqi forces have been effective against senior leadership, particularly Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's terrorist network. "We have taken out some former regime element leadership," he noted. "Now we're hoping that

the attitude of the people is such that the recruiting base for the insurgents is diminishing. And if we can continue with that momentum, ... we think [the terrorists] are going to have some problems continuing the operations tempo that they had and that they'd like to continue."

Smith said he expects the number of American troops in Iraq to drop to 135,000 in the springtime. He said the brigades extended for the election will come home on schedule. There are more than 150,000 U.S. troops in Iraq today.

The coalition is getting a significant amount of help from Iraqi citizens, Smith said. The information Central Command has is anecdotal, but commanders feel they are receiving more help, more information and more actionable intelligence from the Iraqis.

"In Fallujah, for instance, there are Fallujans who are clearly Sunni, who are pointing out caches ... of weapons," he said. "There are people in Fallujah and Samarra and other places that have pointed out bad actors of some sort, whether they're extremists or former regime elements. And then there are others that are pointing out IEDs and taking us to IEDs."

Afghanistan continues to capitalize on the gains of the October elections, he said. The country is preparing for parliamentary elections in the spring, and coalition forces continue offensive operations against foreign terrorists and Taliban sympathizers. He said the effort is hindered by very bad weather.

He praised Pakistani efforts in north Waziristan. Al Qaeda and Taliban sympathizers are trying to use the remote tribal areas of Pakistan as sanctuaries.

"We're looking for good things from [the Pakistanis] through the winter and into the spring when activity starts to increase," he said.

Other areas concern CENTCOM leaders. In Africa, he said the peace treaty signed in Sudan encouraged leaders, but they remain very concerned about the genocide in the Darfur region of the country.

He said there has been some movement on the transitional government into Somalia. Outside Mogadishu, Somalia is virtually ungoverned. Command officials said it is important for a government to extend control into the area so it doesn't become a safe haven for terrorists.

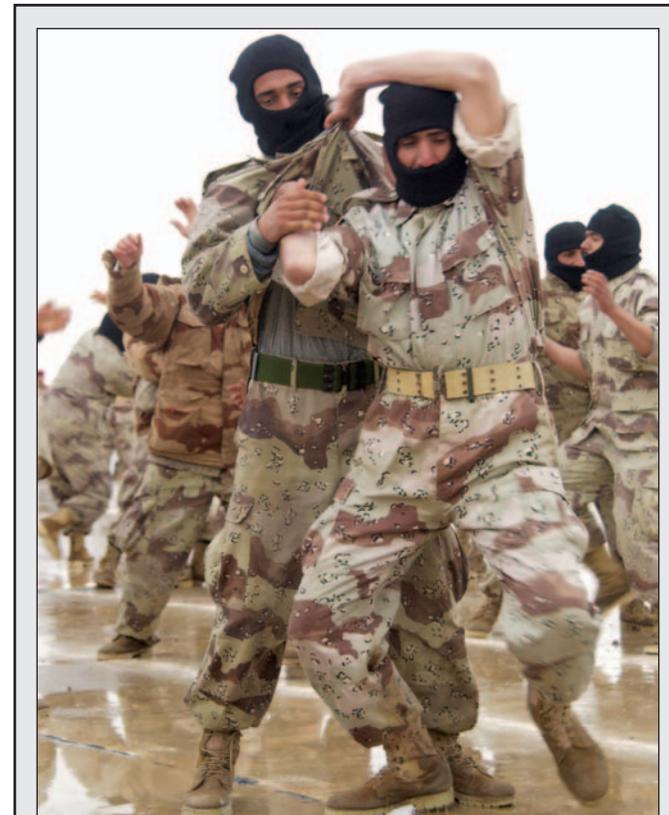


Photo by Sgt. April L. Johnson

Iraqi Army soldiers demonstrate some of their specialized training during the 31st Iraqi Army Brigade Activation Ceremony Feb. 6.

U.S. military advisers to 'embed' in Iraqi units

By John Valceanu

American Forces Press Service

ARABIAN GULF REGION — U.S. forces will use an "advisory, assistance and embedding" strategy to help prepare Iraqi forces to provide security and ensure stability within their own borders, according to a senior military officer in the region.

Small teams, each composed of about 10 U.S. service members, will be attached to Iraqi units at the battalion level and above, the officer said Feb. 10, speaking on background.

A top priority for coalition forces in Iraq over the next year is to do "all we can to

make sure the Iraqis understand that ultimately they have to be responsible for their own security," the officer said. "We can help the Iraqis to develop their own indigenous security forces that are capable of doing the job by refocusing and reshaping their current forces."

The U.S. troops will be embedded in the Iraqi units, and they will advise and assist Iraqi leaders. They will train and fight alongside the Iraqis and help facilitate operations with other U.S. and coalition units operating in Iraq, the officer said.

Such tactics are nothing new. Special operations forces have used similar approaches for decades. What makes the situation in Iraq dif-

ferent, according to the officer, is that conventional troops, such as infantry or artillery Soldiers, will serve as advisers.

"This is a fundamental shift in the way we approach the issue of training Iraqi forces," the officer said. "We are going to take people who are trained and experienced in military operations and ask them to be trainers. It's not going to be a totally smooth transition, but we can make it work."

The teams of advisers will be made up of senior leaders. They will work at the battalion, brigade and division levels, providing "like-leadership" support. For example, an Iraqi lieutenant colonel battalion commander will be paired up with a U.S. lieu-

tenant colonel adviser, according to the officer.

At the national level, members of an advisory group will advise and assist the newly elected Iraqi government as it establishes a national command authority and a clear-cut chain of command over its military units, the officer said.

Accomplishing this large and complex task is going to require an open mind and flexibility on the part of the trainers.

"We have to keep in mind that this is not a static model. It's got to be dynamic, and we have to be flexible," the officer said. "The end state we envision is to not have a need for U.S. advisers at all."

Chaplain

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neer," said U.S. Army spokesman Dov Schwartz. "His actions were selfless." Plummer was responsible for the pastoral care of the regiment's troopers and for the education of the troopers and their families, as many had not had prior schooling.

Plummer was dismissed from service in 1894 after facing a court-martial on the grounds of conduct unbecoming an officer. A dismissal for an officer is the equivalent of a dishonorable discharge for an enlisted Soldier. The facts of his case are largely undisputed, said Schwartz. In 1894, Plummer, who was serving as the chaplain for the 9th Cavalry Regiment, joined the regiment's sergeant major and two other noncommissioned officers to celebrate a sergeant's promotion. There was general agreement that Plummer and

the non-commissioned officers toasted the promotion with alcohol and that Plummer had an altercation with a non-commissioned officer.

In the resulting court-martial, all witnesses agreed that Plummer had consumed alcohol with enlisted troopers and had provided enlisted troopers with alcohol, both activities considered offenses as conduct unbecoming an officer under the Articles of War in use at the time. President Grover Cleveland approved Plummer's dismissal in November 1894.

Plummer requested that his commission be reinstated several times, volunteering for service in combat during the Spanish-American War in 1898, and to serve in the Philippines following that war. His requests were denied.

Schwartz said Plummer faced discrimination because he was the only African-American officer in the regiment. In the military tradition of the period, officers of European ancestry commanded African-Americans.

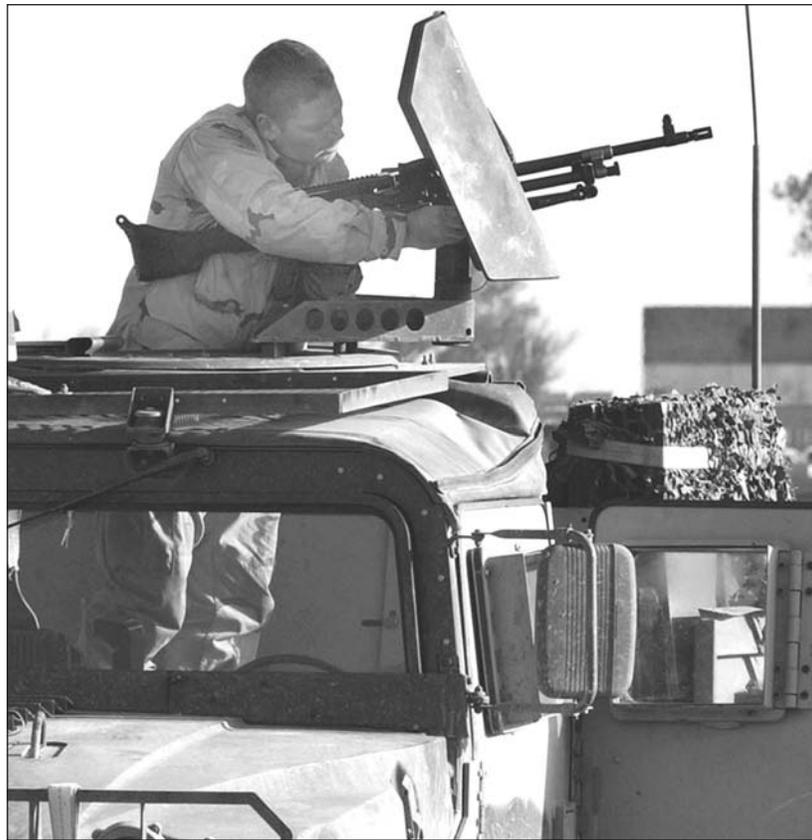
In 2004, Plummer's great-grand nephew requested that the Army review his ancestor's case, asking that the records of the Army be corrected to show the court-martial was overturned and expunged and that Plummer be issued an honorable discharge.

The Army Board for the Correction of Military Records reviewed the case. While it did not overturn the court martial, it concluded that racism extant at the time contributed to Plummer's treatment and the characterization of his service that led to the dismissal. The board determined Plummer deserved an honorable discharge to restore equity.

"He had honorable service to his country during the Civil War, and for 10 years in the 9th Cavalry," Schwartz said. "He was a conscientious and well-respected officer, and his post-service conduct as well as his patriotism and love of country was taken into account."

Plummer's descendants were to receive his honorable discharge certificate last week.

Maintenance company installs armor kits



A Soldier from the 278th Regimental Combat Team, Tennessee National Guard, prepares his vehicle for a combat patrol after having an up-armor kit installed.

Story and photo by Sgt. Blake Kent
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, TIKRIT, Iraq — Soldiers arriving here are now able to have their Humvees up-armored, raising the level of protection for convoy travel throughout the country.

Soldiers from the 557th Maintenance Company from Fort Irwin, Calif., deployed to FOB Speicher, and civilian contractors working with them, run a 24-hour operation installing armor kits.

“They can’t give us enough customers; we are really only limited by the number of kits that are available,” said 1st Lt. Gregory Larson of Scottsdale, Ariz.

The 557th can up-armor roughly 10 vehicles a day, but the vehicles must be prepped for the installation. The vehicles must be cleared of all trash, ammunition and radio mounts, the doors must be taken off, and gun boxes must be removed prior to armor installation.

Larson said though more kits are coming into country, there are limited numbers available at this time.

“With declining inventories, you have to be a bit more selective of who can receive a kit,” Larson said.

Soldiers who are outside the FOBs more often are going to receive the top priority, he said.

The kits are given out on an “as needed” basis, which is determined at the division level.

Once the vehicle is up-armored, it must stay in country, which could cause some difficulty for units needing their Humvees for day-to-day garrison operations upon re-deployment.

“You can work out where you’ll get new Humvees in a safe zone,” Larson said, “but the ones that get up-armored are going to be committed to Operation Iraqi Freedom till the mission is completed.”

The typical kit includes four doors, molding around the cab, a back plate, an air conditioning unit and a 200-amp alternator.

“The hard part was doing the convoy down here to pick it up,” said Sgt. Michael Blackwell of Greensboro, N.C., 278th Regimental Combat Team, Tennessee National Guard. “It was a little scary coming through Tikrit, but we are definitely glad to have the armor.”

The up-armor has helped save many Soldiers from injury and death over the past year. “It will sustain a serious blast and keep these guys safe out there,” Larson said.

“A couple of years ago, there was no such thing as an up-armor kit for a Humvee, and now there are thousands of them here,” said Col. Bill Rochelle of Brick, N.J., commander, 42nd Infantry Division Support Command.

“The Army has turned many of these concept systems around in months, which is amazing. I think the American government has really done an incredible job of taking care of us.”

Pay hike, expanded military benefits on budget proposals

By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — A 3.1 percent military basic pay hike, higher housing allowances and more health-care and educational benefits for the National Guard and Reserve are all part of the president’s proposed fiscal 2006 defense budget unveiled here Feb. 7.

The package of expanded benefits is part of what a defense official called a top priority in the president’s \$419.3 billion budget request: “taking care of our forces.”

“People are our most important asset. We can’t do anything without our folks,” the official told Pentagon reporters. “Our forces are the best-trained and best-organized on the globe, and we maintain our commitment to them.”

The proposed military pay raise reflects a continued trend in better compensation for service members. Incorporating the 3.1 percent military increase, basic pay will be up 25 percent since fiscal 2001.

In terms of actual money in troops’ pockets, the official told reporters the 3.1 percent increase would raise basic pay for members in the lowest enlisted grade from \$12,000 in fiscal 2001 to \$15,000 next year, and that of a second lieutenant or ensign from \$23,000 to \$28,000. Similarly, an E-5 who was earning \$30,000 in base pay in fiscal 2001 will be making \$39,000 under the new budget, she said.

Federal civilian workers would receive a 2.3 percent pay hike.

The proposed budget provides a 4 percent increase in the basic housing allowance to reduce and, ideally, eliminate out-of-pocket costs for service members living in private housing. “In the past, there was as much as an 18 percent out-of-pocket cost for our military,” the defense official said. “And this budget

sustains our no-out-of-pocket cost commitment.”

The budget also keeps DoD on track in its effort to eliminate all inadequate military family housing units in the United States by fiscal 2007, and worldwide by fiscal 2009. “We are on track” with that effort, the defense official told reporters.

The proposed budget continues to extend privatization to improve military housing. By the end of fiscal 2006, the official said, this effort is expected to have produced nearly 172,000 new high-quality family housing units during the past 10 years.

In terms of health care, the proposed budget increases funding for the Defense Health Program, with \$20 billion in direct funding and \$7 billion for military personnel supporting the program. Officials said this funding level will ensure continuing good health care for service members and their families.

Guard and Reserve members will receive additional benefits as well, including expanded Tricare eligibility that provides health coverage up to 90 days before activation and 180 days after mobilization for most members. “This is a significant new benefit,” the defense official said.

The budget also includes the GI Bill for Reservists, passed by Congress last year, to provide educational benefits for Guard and Reserve members who have been mobilized. These troops would qualify for up to 36 months of payments, from \$400 to \$800 a month, depending on the length of active service in support of a contingency operation.

Provisions for quality facilities also are included in the budget package. The proposed budget funds 92 percent of maintenance requirements.

“So I think what we have here is a healthy benefit package,” the official summarized. “We want to maintain our commitment to the forces of the United States.”

Iraqi pilgrims expected to clog streets for Ashura

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The Shiite holy day of Ashura falls on Feb. 19 this year. Pilgrims travel to Karbala, south of Baghdad, to celebrate the martyrdom of the grandson of the Muslim prophet Mohammed. The grandson died defending their faith.

Millions of black robe-clad Shiites are expected to travel to Karbala for the annual pilgrimage. MNF-I personnel should expect to encounter many travelers on the roads, both on foot and in vehicles, in connection with these mournings.

The interim Iraqi Government closed the country’s borders Feb. 17 to 22 to prevent terrorists disguised as pilgrims from entering the country. Last year over 100 were killed in terrorist bombings in Karbala and Baghdad.

Army announces birth of Close Combat Badge

WASHINGTON — In response to requests from field commanders and after careful analysis, the U.S. Army announced Friday a new badge for selected combat arms Soldiers in combat arms brigades who engage in active ground combat.

The Close Combat Badge will provide special recognition to ground combat arms Soldiers who are trained and employed in direct combat missions similar to Infantry and Special Forces.

Infantry and Special Forces will continue to be recognized for their ground-combat role with the Combat Infantryman Badge.

The Army will award the CCB to Armor, Cavalry, Combat Engineer, and Field Artillery Soldiers in Military Occupational Specialties or corresponding officer branch/specialties recognized as having a high probability to routinely engage in direct combat.

Soldiers must be assigned or attached to an Army unit of brigade or below that is purposefully organized to routinely conduct close combat operations and engage in direct combat in accordance with existing rules and policy.

The CCB will be presented only to eligible Soldiers who are personally present and under fire while engaged in active ground combat, to close with and destroy the enemy with direct fires.

NEWS BRIEFS

Iraqi Security Forces continue offensive

MOSUL, Iraq — Iraqi Security Forces detained nine individuals, and confiscated weapons and ammunition in northern Iraq Feb. 8.

Iraqi Regular Army soldiers from the 102nd Infantry Regiment detained five individuals suspected of terrorist activity while conducting a cordon and search in Huriyah. The 102nd also confiscated weapons and ammunition from the individuals.

Iraqi Regular Army Soldiers from the 101st Infantry Regiment detained four individuals suspected of placing roadside bombs while conducting a cordon and search in eastern Mosul. All suspects were taken into custody with no IRA injuries reported.

Iraqi Security Forces have stepped up their involvement in security operations and are conducting numerous independent operations. In preparation for the recent elections in Iraq, great emphasis was placed on security and the security posture was bolstered by increased numbers of ISF and their increased capability to provide security for their country.

Iraqi Security Forces operations stalling insurgents

MOSUL, Iraq — Iraqi Security Forces detained ten suspected insurgents in northern Iraq Feb. 7.

Iraqi Regular Army Soldiers from the 101st Infantry Regiment detained ten individuals in two separate operations in Mosul. During a raid in northeast Mosul 101st troops detained eight individuals suspected of terrorist activity. 101st troops conducted another raid in the northern part of Mosul detaining two individuals suspected of conducting mortar attacks on Multi-National Force bases. Suspects are in custody with no ISF injuries reported.

Iraqi Security Forces win battle with insurgents

MOSUL, Iraq — Iraqi Security Forces killed four insurgent minority members, wounded two, detained one, and confiscated various weapons in northern Iraq Feb. 6.

An Iraqi Border Patrol troop outpost was attacked by insurgents north of Ar Rummanah. The IBP were able to fight off the attack killing four and wounding two insurgents. One insurgent was also detained following the insurgents' defeat. The IBP seized three trucks and various weapons from the insurgents. The two wounded were taken to hospital and will be detained following treatment.

Iraqi Security Forces continue the offensive against the insurgent minority as they step up their operations in the Ninewa Province and the Mosul area. Since the beginning of the year Iraqi Security Forces have detained numerous individuals and confiscated numerous weapons and munitions.

Iraqi Security Forces continue to work together with Multi-National Forces from Task Force Freedom, leaders and citizens of Iraq to help build and maintain a prosperous and democratic nation.

Anyone with information on anti-Iraqi insurgent minority activities should call the Joint Coordination Center's at 513462 or 07701623300.

Insurgents kill local national child during search

MOSUL, Iraq — A local national child was shot and killed by insurgents Feb. 10 when 1-24 Infantry Battalion took small arms fire from an apartment while patrolling in Al-Mosul Al-Jadidah neighborhood.

Following the incident, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces searched the apartment. They discovered 2 grenades, shell casings, signs calling for Jihad, and other religious extremist paraphernalia.

Three individuals were detained and one admitted that they were involved in anti-coalition activity and provided information on fellow terrorists.



Photo by Lt. Col. Mark Harvey

As a reaction to the successful completion of the Iraqi election, An Numaniyah had over 5,000 potential recruits arrive at its gate within 48 hours of voting. The vetting process started immediately to identify prior-service personnel and to conduct preliminary physical condition examinations and literacy capability. Some were taken immediately, and other potential soldiers were asked to return Feb. 14 to join the next Direct Recruiting Course.

Soldiers find cache from tip

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Task Force Baghdad troops seized a weapons cache in an eastern Baghdad school at approximately 1:30 p.m. Feb. 10, following a tip from a concerned local Iraqi.

The local Iraqi was an election worker who had been receiving threats and intimidation from the terrorists. The uncovered cache consisted of various types of rockets, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, RPG rounds, anti-tank mines, various mortar tubes and rounds, small arms ammunition, and weapon repair kits.

"Terrorists and criminals continue to use schools and other municipal buildings to store their weapons. Their actions needlessly endanger innocent Iraqis," said Col. Robert "Abe" Abrams, commander of the 1st Cavalry Division's 1st Brigade Combat Team operating in Sadr City.

"It sends a strong message when the people come forward to turn in the criminals and terrorist," Abrams added. "Just as in the elections, the peaceful people of Iraq are demonstrating that they want to take their country back from criminals and terrorists."

Task Force Baghdad troops rescue two kidnap victims

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Soldiers from 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, stopped a vehicle they thought was suspicious at approximately 4:20 p.m. Feb. 7.

When they searched the vehicle, inside the trunk, the Soldiers found two blindfolded and bound men. The men were two of four Egyptian kidnap victims, taken captive on Feb. 6.

When the vehicle first stopped, the three occupants fled on foot. The Soldiers followed in pursuit, catching two.

U.S. Soldiers foil terrorist's attempt to force child into taking hand grenade

CAMP BLUE DIAMOND, Iraq — U.S. Soldiers from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, foiled an attempt by a terrorist to coerce a child into accepting a hand grenade at approximately 1 p.m. in Ramadi Feb. 10.

The Soldiers, currently assigned to the 1st Marine Division of the I Marine Expeditionary Force, were conducting a patrol in the northeastern sector of the city when

they observed a blue 4-door sedan with three military-aged males pull up near their position.

The driver exited the vehicle and approached a child, estimated to be 10. The two exchanged words and the adult gave the child a hand grenade. The child and adult exchanged possession of the hand grenade several times.

The grenade was dropped after U.S. Soldiers fired a warning shot in the direction of the terrorist. The child ran away as the adult returned fire with a handgun.

The adult then jumped into his vehicle and attempted to flee the scene. The patrol fired disabling shots into the vehicle to prevent the terrorists from escaping. A brief firefight ensued, which resulted in one terrorist being killed and two terrorists being wounded.

The patrol evacuated the wounded to the medical facility at their forward operating base. The unit recovered the grenade from the scene, but was unable to locate the child.

There were no U.S. casualties.

"The incident demonstrates the ruthless disregard that the insurgency has for the citizens of Iraq," said Marine Maj. Phill Bragg, information operations officer, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force.

Firing from Mosques continues in Iraq

MOSUL, Iraq — Insurgents continue to violate the law of war by firing from Mosques in northern Iraq Feb. 9.

Soldiers from 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Regiment received small arms fire from Sa'id Al Morsalin Mosque in eastern Mosul. 1-5 Soldiers were waiting for EOD to diffuse an explosive device, after the explosive was reduced the 1-5 received fire.

During the small arms fire one civilian was killed, two civilians were wounded, and two Iraqi Security Force Soldiers were wounded. This pattern of injuring and killing innocent civilians and local national Soldiers continues without regard for the sanctity of life, said one official.

There have been many instances where the insurgent minority has used mosques as a place from which they have launched attacks. ISF and Multi-National Force Soldiers have expressed their desire to respect the sanctity of these buildings, and have generally shown reverence to the mosque. However, when insurgents launch attacks from these locations they jeopardize the protected status of these holy sites.

NEWS BRIEFS

Iraqi citizens taking back their city

MOSUL, Iraq — Iraqi citizens informed Multi-National Forces from 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division (Stryker Brigade Combat Team) in three separate instances of potential attacks in northern Iraq.

A citizen approached Soldiers from 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment who were on patrol in southeastern Mosul Feb. 5, and informed them of a location of a roadside bomb. The Explosive Ordnance Disposal team was called in and the bomb was defused. No Iraqi citizen or MNF injuries were reported during the operation.

An Iraqi child informed Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, who were on patrol south of Mosul Feb. 6, of a mine and other explosives placed along a roadway. EOD was called in and defused the explosives.

Another Iraqi citizen's information led to the capture of an insurgent following a mortar attack on Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment Feb. 6. The information given by the citizen helped 1-24th Soldiers find the origin of the attack, which led to the detention of two individuals. Suspects are in custody with no citizen or MNF injuries reported.

These courageous acts demonstrate the commitment of Iraqi citizens to ensuring a safe and peaceful Iraq. Iraqi Security Forces and Multi-National Forces encourage citizens of Iraq to continue to cooperate with security forces and turn in military weapons and equipment.

Iraqi pilots get first-time C-130 training

BAGHDAD, Iraq — A five-man crew from Squadron 23 of the Iraqi Air Force recently trained for the first time on flying and operating an American C-130 cargo plane outside of Iraq's air space.

A crew of U.S. Air Force pilots used a five-hour round-trip flight to Amman, Jordan as a training exercise for the Iraqi pilots and crew members. Five other crews from Squadron 23, of Ali Base in Talil, Iraq, were passengers on the flight, heading to training in Jordan.

One crew will continue traveling to the U.S. for Hercules simulator training in Little Rock, Ark., said Wing Cmdr. Robert Greene, of the Multi-National Security Transition Command – Iraq.

All of the squadron members are experienced crews who are strengthening and expanding their skills after a 12-year lapse under Saddam Hussein's rule, Greene said. This was their first time in the seats of a C-130, he added.

The next phase of training will focus on dealing with emergencies, approaches and landings, and general flying skills.

Iraqi Police graduate 14 SWAT officers

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Iraqi Police graduated 14 officers from the Provincial SWAT (special weapons and tactics) training course Feb. 10. The officers completed a specialized four-week training curriculum that places a heavy emphasis on weapons training and includes training in dynamic entries, mechanical breaching, diversionary devices, sniper training and offensive driving skills.

The provincial SWAT teams are provincial-level, high end, rapid response, tactical units responsible for high-risk

arrest and hostage rescue. They provide a special weapons and tactics capability to the provincial or city police commander.

Proper license plates on vehicles required

MOSUL, Iraq — Ninewah Province Governor Duraid Kashmoula announced all vehicles are to be registered by Feb. 28. The date was extended from Feb. 15.

All citizens of Ninewah Province will be required to have a proper license plate on their vehicle by the end of the month. Citizens will be able to register their vehicle for a fee at the Traffic Police Station.

The Traffic Police Station has sufficient licensing materials and will perform this task. All cars that are not properly licensed after this date will be impounded.

Speicher makes redeployment easier

FORWARD OPERATING BASE DANGER, TIKRIT, Iraq — Redeployment is being made easier for 1st Infantry Division Soldiers thanks to the reconstruction of two runways at Forward Operating Base Speicher's airfield.

Instead of convoying to Kuwait, Soldiers need only take a short ride to Speicher before flying.

"It is a much easier and much safer way to get Soldiers back to their families," said Brig. Gen. Stephen D. Mundt, 1st ID, assistant division commander-support. "It is part of a major initiative to ease the pressure on Kuwait."

Speicher was chosen because of its location and can accommodate C-130 Hercules, C-17 Globemasters, C-23s, UC-35s as well as commercial planes, he said.

The runways were bombed in the first Persian Gulf War, and getting them back in shape took months, and included electrical repairs, trash removal, and surface repairs.

While 1st ID Soldiers are currently enjoying the runway's

benefits, Iraqis will be the long-term winners, Mundt said.

"It was built in a way that will allow it to become an industrial park for the Iraqi people," Mundt said. "Speicher sits in a key location for Iraq. It's near a major city for commerce." It's all part of the plan to eventually have Iraqi Security Forces take over for the United States, he added.

DOD announces OIF rotational units

The Department of Defense announced today that the Headquarters, V Corps, Heidelberg, Germany, and major subordinate units of the Corps will deploy to Iraq in support of the Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Headquarters, V Corps is scheduled to replace XVIII Airborne Corps as the headquarters for the Multi-National Corps - Iraq early 2006.

Major subordinate units of V Corps scheduled to deploy include the 3rd Corps Support Command, V Corps Artillery, 205th Military Intelligence Brigade, 130th Engineer Brigade, 22nd Signal Brigade and 30th Medical Brigade, and all are based in Germany.

DoD will continue to announce large units as they are identified and alerted.

New Polish commander heads Central South Division in Iraq

WASHINGTON — Polish Maj. Gen. Waldemar Skrzypczak took command of the Multinational Division Central South at Camp Echo in Diwaniya Feb. 7.

Skrzypczak, who once served as Poland's chief of land operations for land forces, succeeded Maj. Gen. Andrzej Ekiert, who commanded the the multinational division since July.

The division is responsible for the security and stabilization of southern portion of Iraq between Baghdad and Basra, including the provinces of Babil, Wasit, Karbala, Qadisiyah and Najaf.



Photo by Pfc. Ferdinand Thomas

Farid Ayar, left, spokesman for the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq, and Adel al-Lami, the commission's chief of electoral office, announce election results in Baghdad Sunday.

Worship and Prayer Schedule for the International Zone**Sunday**

9:30 a.m. — Choir Rehearsal
10 a.m. — Catholic Mass (3rd BTC)
10:30 a.m. — General Christian
Noon — Episcopal/Lutheran/Anglican
2 p.m. — Latter Day Saints
4 p.m. — Catholic Confession
4:30 p.m. — Catholic Mass
6 p.m. — Contemporary Protestant

Monday-Friday

Noon — Catholic Mass (Mon-Thurs)
Noon — Catholic Communion Service (Tues)
5:30 p.m. — Catholic Mass (Fri at Camp Steel Dragon)
6 p.m. — Jewish Shabbat Services (Fri)
7:30 p.m. — Prayer Service (Tue)
8 p.m. — Bible Study (Thurs at Senior Advisors Conf Rm)
8:30 p.m. — Bible Study (Wed at Ambassadors Conf Rm)

Saturday

11:30 a.m. — Catholic Mass (Camp Headhunter)
12:30 p.m. — Buddhist Worship
4 p.m. — Catholic Confession
4:30 p.m. — Catholic Mass

Daily Islamic Prayer



Army Reserve combat engineers with the 467th Engineer Battalion use the "Buffalo" to search trash piles suspected to contain improvised explosive devices. The vehicle's hydraulic arm is used to probe the suspected sites. If an IED is found, the explosive ordnance disposal unit is called, and the road is closed until the device is neutralized.

Operation Trailblazer makes Iraqi roads safer

Story and photos

by Sgt. Matthew Acosta

22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE WARHORSE, BAQUBAH, Iraq — To make Iraqi roads safer for fellow Soldiers, a U.S. Army Reserve company of combat engineers patrol selected roads near Baqubah, searching for "trouble" in a mission called Operation Trailblazer.

Soldiers from Company A, 467th Engineer Battalion, Memphis, Tenn., recently took over operations from the 141st Engineer Battalion, North Dakota National Guard, at Forward Operating Base Warhorse.

Their mission is to search pre-determined supply routes in the Baqubah area for improvised explosive devices planted by terrorists.

"Our job is to go out and look for trouble in the form of Improvised Explosive Devices planted near the sides of roads," said Sgt. 1st Class Dallas Bryan, combat engineer.

With teams of 18 Soldiers or more, the Trailblazers set out on convoys of several supporting vehicles and one "Buffalo," scouring the roadside for signs of terrorist activity.

The Buffalo, a ground mine-detection system, uses a hydraulic arm to sift through trash piles or probe areas where the convoy suspects IEDs might be hidden.

"Between a few rotating teams, we search the roads several times a day looking for conspicuous things that might be used to conceal explosives, such as piles of trash, containers or anything that looks like it's out of the ordinary, like freshly-patched potholes in the road or new road signs close to the road's edge," Bryan said.

If an IED is confirmed, the unit marks the site and calls for an explosive ordnance disposal unit to neutralize the device.

Bryan said since the 467th has taken over, it has been credited with finding three explosive devices in its first few days of patrols.

Although the unit travels at a relatively slow rate of speed, the fear of being attacked doesn't faze the crew much, Bryan said.

"We really can't drive too fast because by the time we see a device, it'll be too late to stop before it goes off on us or the next vehicle," he said. "We need to keep a slow steady pace, and if we suspect something, we call in the Buffalo. Of course it makes us a good target, but that's not something we normally think about."

Normally, the Trailblazers cruise the routes looking for explosives, but sometimes they will encounter a vehicle they think needs to be searched because of a tip from an Iraqi traffic checkpoint.

Since the operation started, countless ordnance and IEDs have been removed from the streets of Iraq, saving potential casualties, Bryan said.

"As long as we have an eventful day

finding an IED or two, that's one less possible casualty," he said. "And if we don't have an eventful day, then it's another quiet day for us, and that's not a bad thing either."



Army Reserve Soldiers Spc. James Acker, left, and Sgt. Michael Cochran, top, combat engineers with the 467th Engineer Battalion, scan traffic stopped 100 meters ahead for suspicious vehicles. The roads are searched several times daily.

Predators in the skies protect troops

Story and photos by Spc. Leah R. Burton
28th Public Affairs Detachment

LOGISTICS SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, BALAD, Iraq — The loud roars of Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcons here are familiar reminders of close-air support, but unmanned Predators silently swarm the skies protecting troops by different means.

The MQ-1 Predator, a lightweight, low-horsepower, unmanned aerial vehicle capable of taking daylight and infrared video imagery traverses the atmosphere above virtually undetectable.

The 46th Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron here aids Army personnel by keeping eyes on the combat situation via the Predators.

Although the Predator's main mission is to collect intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance information, it can also be used to introduce some lethal firepower to an intense combat situation.

"Obviously if we catch the bad guys that are shooting mortars at our base, the mortars stop," said Air Force Maj. Michael Bruzzini, squadron commander. "We saw mortars launched and took out the perpetrators with Hellfire missiles."

All of this is done from a terminal on the ground, where a pilot and a sensor operator control the movements and actions of the UAV.

The Predator was used during a recent raid where Army personnel detained several high-value targets, increasing the unit's combat effectiveness by 50 percent, Bruzzini said.

"As the raid was going down, a 'God's-eye' view was being passed down to the Soldiers. The Predator had eyes on the whole time and was able to inform the Soldiers of what was going on around them," Bruzzini said.

This type of mission is what the Predator was meant for. "Our biggest mission is to support [the Army]. We want to be your God's-eye view," Bruzzini said.

While the Predator's two onboard Hellfire missiles and surveillance capabilities supports the mission, Bruzzini still understands his sister service's bottom line. "You win wars by securing ground, and troops on the ground are the only



The MQ-1 Predator, an unmanned aerial vehicle capable of flying more than 20 hours of intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance, helps protect ground troops and Logistics Support Area Anaconda.

way you secure ground," the former F-16 pilot said.

He noted that there are challenges unique to the Predator. "You feel like you're in it. You do lose some situational awareness, because you can't look around your aircraft," Bruzzini said. "You take for granted a lot of things that are very easy in other aircraft, like taxiing."

Other than challenges borne of the fact that the pilot isn't actually in the aircraft, piloting the Predator is very similar to operating other aircraft.

The sensor operators control the movement of the cameras on the Predator and undergo nine months of training for that responsibility. Six months of that training takes place at Goodfellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, Texas, and the other three months take place at a formal training unit.

"In the first couple of weeks of the FTU, you want to

quit [because of difficulties controlling the equipment]," said Airman 1st Class Tyler Farley, a squadron sensor operator.

Farley has since mastered the operation of the equipment and now acts on instinct. "You just trust what the pilots do and play your 'video game' for five hours or so," he said.

Although it can be scary controlling a \$4.2 million aircraft by remote control, Bruzzini said they are more apt to take risks in this aircraft because they're not risking loss of life.

"What's going through my head [when I'm piloting the Predator] is we have troops getting shot at who are Americans, and I want to help save American lives. It's very rewarding to know that what you do saves lives. There are combat missions with people on the ground, and I'm saving their lives on a daily basis," Bruzzini said.



Air Force Maj. Michael Bruzzini, 46th Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron commander, visually inspects an MQ-1 Predator at LSA Anaconda.



Airman 1st Class Tyler Farley, an MQ-1 Predator sensor operator, controls the virtually undetectable unmanned aerial vehicle's cameras from his seat.

Postal workers help keep spirits up

Story and photos by
Pfc. Ferdinand Thomas
Scimitar Staff

INTERNATIONAL ZONE, BAGHDAD, Iraq — Even with telephones and the internet, there is really nothing quite like getting a letter or care package from home.

Nearly all Multi-National Forces – Iraq personnel here use the military postal service offered at the Presidential Palace on a regular basis, said Air Force Staff Sgt. Valon Barnett, a custodian of postal effects. The spirits of IZ personnel seem to deflate when mail cannot be distributed, such as a few days before the election.

“It’s all about morale,” Barnett said. “A lot of MNF-I personnel don’t have regular access to phones and internet, so they depend on the good old-fashioned letter to say their piece.”

Letters are not the only items postal workers process every day. Countless care packages in various sizes up to 70 pounds or 108 cubic inches are also processed through the postal system daily.

Commercial mail carriers are also available in the palace, said Air Force Staff Sgt. Nicole Little, a cashier for the post office. Service members and civilians who have access to these services seem to use the military postal service more because it is convenient and affordable.

Some mail can be sent free of charge, Barnett said. “The free mail only pertains to first class letters. If it’s less than 13 ounces, it’s free.”

Mail can take a long time to reach an individual if it gets stopped en route, Barnett said. That is one of the reasons why letters under 13 ounces are free.

“A priority item usually takes up to 14 days,” Barnett said. “Regular mail can take up to a month or longer.”

One of the reasons for the delay is the security aspect, said Air Force Master Sgt. Cedric L. Palmore. “We make sure people are sending the right things out of here.

Lately we haven’t been having any problems as far as security goes.”

Certain items are not allowed to be sent through the post office. Some of these items include guns, bootleg DVDs and any military-issued gear.

“We stress that everyone takes the batteries out of their equipment when they package it up,” Little said.

The postal troops move the mail in and out of the office as fast as possible since it takes so long to send and receive mail here, Little said.

The post office has four airmen keeping it in operation. Two were assigned to the office without having been school trained for the job.

Airman 1st Class William Joseph is one of the augmented mail clerks. Joseph is a telephone systems journeyman at Andrews Air Force Base, Md. Little, also augmented, is an information systems craftsman from Scott Air Force Base, Ill.

“They are doing a great job here considering the training a couple of them have had,” Barnett said.

Because the augmentees haven’t been through the military’s postal school, they face the challenge of learning as they go, Palmore said. “Once they arrive, we train them on the spot how to be postal clerks.”

“Working with limited training made my first few days real frustrating,” Little said. “The rush of customers was the hardest thing to handle. It is still a rough part of the job to handle, but now I am more prepared.”

Regardless of the training each of the personnel has received, they believe the customer comes first.

“It’s all about customer service here,” Palmore said. “This is a great cause we are supporting.”

Even though the two augmentees are not working in their military occupational specialty here, they still do their best and stay positive, he said.

“I love helping out the service members,” Little said. “When a troop brings something in, I help him or her out the best I can. My favorite part of the day is 5 p.m. We lift so many heavy boxes all day. By the end of the day, I am worn-out.”



Airman 1st Class William Joseph bags up some of the mail during the duty day. Bagging is a continuous process throughout the day for the postal personnel.



Staff Sgt. Valon Barnett prepares boxes for shipping by conducting security checks and taping them up.

The palace isn’t the only place where service members are working hard in postal. Forward Operating Base Steel Dragon also offers postal services for MNF-I personnel.

The MNF-I personnel have noticed the hard work of postal, said Col. Brett L. Hanke, program manager for water and public works, Project Contracting Office. “They are doing a great job here. Customer service is great. The free mail is great.”

Helping others seems to be the best part of the job, Barnett said. “We feel like we are doing a noble service for everyone.”



Staff Sgt. Nicole Little fills a bag of outgoing mail as part of her daily duties at the post office.

Army pediatricians mentor Iraqi doctors

Story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Brett B. McMillan
Scimitar Editor

INTERNATIONAL ZONE, BAGHDAD, Iraq — Hoping to improve the medical care for Iraqi children, Army physicians shared their expertise with about 25 Iraqi physicians, teaching a Pediatric Advanced Life Support course at a Baghdad convention center Saturday through Monday.

Eight physicians from 1st Cavalry Division's Forward Support Medical Company, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, Fort Hood, Texas, with support from the 86th Combat Support Hospital, Fort Campbell, Ky., held the course to help Iraqi pediatricians better care for sick and injured children.

A pediatric intensivist (a critical care pediatrician), Maj. Philip Spinella said teaching the course came about after he was approached by the director general of Medical City — a medical complex in Baghdad — about how the Army pediatricians could help Iraqi pediatricians.

"There is a large number Army pediatricians in country right now, six or eight right here in Baghdad," said Spinella, who is deployed from Brooke Army Medical Center, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, and assigned to the FSMC as the battalion surgeon for the 215th Forward Support Battalion. "We thought this would be a good way to share our knowledge and be able to help the children of Iraq as well.

"We've treated close to 200 children at Ibn Sina Hospital (86th CSH) with traumatic injuries in the past year and we want to help continue to contribute to the care of children of Iraq by teaching them what we know and how we do things. This class teaches them advanced life support skills and techniques to resuscitate children who are sick or injured."

Other military medical teams have conducted training with Iraqi doctors in the past, but "this is the first course specifically addressing the care of children," said Col. Ken Azarow, 86th CSH.

A specialized pediatric surgeon deployed

from Madigan Army Hospital, Fort Lewis, Wash., Azarow said the response from the Iraqi physicians taking the course was outstanding. "I think they all appreciate the effort and training."

He said the Iraqi doctors are well-trained, many having been schooled in Great Britain, but they lack the supplies and equipment they need. "That's what they are desperate for. Their dedication is admirable; even to be here they had to wait in line for an hour and a half to get to the course."

While many outside the medical field might think treating an injured child is just like treating an injured adult, but on a smaller scale, Spinella said that is not true. "Treating children is much different than treating adults. The equipment that we use and the medications that we use are different. Children are much different than adults. Children are not just little adults. Sometimes adults are big children, but that's a different story."

Spinella said the Iraqi doctors were "definitely" learning from the course. "There are medications they've never heard of that we use routinely, and equipment that we use that they've never seen," he said. "They have been working with substandard equipment it seems like for decades, and this was a way for us to introduce what is available to them now that they have a chance to go out and get their own stuff and to be able to improve their practice to the way we are demonstrating."

Spinella said it will be up to these physicians to improve their practice, but he said they were "excited, happy, extremely appreciative" of the course. "I think they've enjoyed learning a lot from it as well."

The PALS course included lectures and hands-on small-group instruction discussing, demonstrating and practicing techniques to treat children — often noting the differences between treating adults and treating children.

"A course like this gives the medical personnel involved more of a sense of expanding the medical care to children. Although that's not our primary mission here — it's to take care of Soldiers — this is what we do back home. We feel we have something to



Lt. Col. Kurt Grathwohl, 86th CSH, teaches Iraqi pediatricians the Pediatric Advanced Life Support course at the convention center in the International Zone Sunday.



Iraqi physicians practice a method of inserting an IV tube into a small child during the PALS course.

offer — something near and dear to our hearts," Azarow said. "Our hope, eventually, is that training like this will become the primary mission, once security and violence are not at the forefront here."

"Hopefully this is the start of many more education programs where physicians can teach physicians," Spinella added. "We can show them our techniques and improve their medical care. They're smart enough and they're willing; they just need to get the

funding to be able to improve their medical care."

Iraqi doctors attending the course said the training was very valuable and trained them on procedures they had never seen, said Mohamed Falhy, a pediatrician at one of Baghdad's several hospitals.

"It was very short. To read and to learn and to practice, a 10-day course would be better," Falhy said. However, he said he was pleased to be able to take the course and hopes more courses will be available in the future. He said there is a especially a need to train teams to work in emergency centers.

The course was a success, Spinella said. "It was great for us to interact with them. They are very appreciative for our providing the time, and hopefully they'll go out and they'll continue to educate. Our whole mission is to help get the country back on its feet and let them take care of themselves.

"It's been an experience," he said of his time in Iraq. "I would like to have helped contribute more to the health care of the Iraqis, but hopefully as the security gets better, others will be able to continue to help the Iraqi medical system."

TF 1-77 Armor helps city council get projects going

Story by Pfc. Adam N. Phelps
22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE PALIWODA, Iraq — Task Force Danger Soldiers have helped the city council members of Balad build a solid infrastructure over the past year.

Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 77th Armor, helped the council members get projects off the ground, helped them strengthen their governments and kept council members from distracting arguments and irrelevant subject matters by making a presence at the meetings.

"Our goal is to make it more like the city councils in the states," said 1st Lt. Martin Rafter, unit development officer. "Each city has one city council and they'll fall under a

district council."

During the meeting, representatives from each district of Balad meet to discuss projects that would help the whole community or even local areas. During council meetings they are reminded they are there to represent their people, Rafter said.

After council members agree on what they would like to do, they bring their idea to the civil affairs officers who help with financing.

"We don't go out and look for projects," said Capt. Jason Goodfriend, civil affairs officer. "They vote on what they need and they look to us for funding."

The city council has chosen subcommittees for areas such as schools, healthcare, electricity and roads.

Prior civil affairs units established the city councils, and the current unit helped develop

them more to make them more efficient, Rafter said.

"We determine how they will have certain people do certain jobs — such as who will be the chairman and so on," he added.

Helping the Iraqis streamline their government system through tough laws is another way the Coalition Soldiers assisted them.

"Two of our four local councils now have local civil charters," Goodfriend said. "They have taken the transitional administrative law and pretty much brought it down to their level. They have written, ratified and emplaced it so they now have systems that are actual law, which is a great thing to see."

Being mentors to the council members was another way the Soldiers helped. "Everything we do is a partnership," he added. "It begins with civil process, with a civil government

finding out what they need in their communities, and being able to help the people they represent."

"When we first got here, the city council consisted mostly of sheiks, so the people were not very well represented. We started to meet with them, and they changed, and we got to move closer to the back of the room in each meeting," Rafter said. "The 'back of the room' is a phrase we use because when we first got here we had to be in the meeting, and now after every meeting, we move further back and have less to do with it."

"I don't go in front of a room of Iraqis and tell them this is what democracy is and this is what you have to do," Goodfriend said. "We mentor them and point them in the right direction and allow Iraqi democracy to grow."

MOVIE REVIEW

'Elektra' is anything but electrifying

By Sgt. Derek F. Meyer
214th Mobile Public Affairs
Detachment

In Marvel's newest superhero-on-the-big-screen release, not even a beautiful, scantily-clad woman kicking butt can save the day. Jennifer Garner stars in "Elektra," a movie fraught with plot gaps and conflicting themes.

Who is this Elektra? Frank Miller created Elektra Natchios in the 1980s as the love interest of Daredevil. Fans caught their first glimpse of her in "Daredevil" (2003) but the connection between that and "Elektra" is lost, leaving viewers to wonder if it's even the same character at all. At the start of the movie, we pick up at an unknown time in the midst of



unknown circumstances.

Elektra, now an assassin, must fulfill her latest contract by killing Mark (Goran Visnjic) and his sassy daugh-

ter, Abby (Kirsten Prout). For reasons the audience is expected to deduce through telepathy, Elektra decides to protect them instead. What results is a weak pursuit in which the Order of the Hand, a band of failed-the-cut-for-X-Men mutants, led by Kirigi (Will Yun Lee), chase after Elektra. Why they want to kill Mark and Abby in the first place or what they will gain in killing Elektra is left to the viewers' imaginations. Elektra moves her refugees to a new location every few minutes. The bad guys show up. They fight. Begin again.

The fight scenes are pathetic with martial arts not even fit for "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles." The acting is even worse. If you are having trouble deciding between this or catching up on your correspondence, break out the stationery.

Shhhh!



Operational Security...
OPSEC
Keep cell phone and email comms free of sensitive information.
You don't know who's listening.



Art by Maj. James D. Crabtree

Scimitar Slapstick

CHOWHALL CRUNCH



Art by Staff Sgt. Tim Lawn

2nd Brigade Combat Team bids farewell to Kirkuk Provincial Council members

Story and photo by
Sgt. Sean Kimmons
25th ID (Light) Public Affairs Office

KIRKUK, Iraq — Second Brigade Combat Team leaders bid farewell to members of Kirkuk's first provincial council inside the Kirkuk government building Feb. 3, concluding a successful Election Day in the province.

"The reason we are gathered here today really is to honor all of you as the first provincial council in Kirkuk," Col. Lloyd Miles, commander of 2nd BCT, said to the Kirkuk Provincial Council members at the farewell luncheon.

For being the first Iraqis to bring democracy into this Iraqi region, Miles thought the KPC members reminded him of America's "founding fathers."

"In my own country, even little school kids can refer back to what we call our "founding fathers" — the members of our very first constitutional convention.

"I think in the same way when the history of this great nation is written, all of you will be looked upon and remembered because you

were the very first," Miles said.

Besides establishing democracy, KPC members facilitated millions of dollars in reconstruction projects throughout the province. They have also accomplished peace in a region that was feared to play host to a civil war because of its ethnicities, which include Arabs, Kurds, Turkman and Assyrians.

"From the time we arrived there was always talk about a civil war breaking out in Iraq and starting here in Kirkuk," Miles said. "But over the last year, the cynics have always been wrong."

Miles believed it was the KPC members who proved them wrong.

"Whenever there was an issue within the province, all of you managed over the year to



Col. Lloyd Miles speaks to Kirkuk Provincial Council members during the Feb. 3 luncheon.

negotiate and resolve these issues," he said.

It wasn't an easy or safe task for the KPC members to establish peace and democracy in a region once ruled by a dictator. Some KPC members were martyred by insurgents who wanted to derail Iraq's developments.

"All of you have showed the courage, determination and the vision for a better Kirkuk and a better Iraq. And I know many did so at great personal risk for you and your families," Miles said.

As 2nd BCT Soldiers redeploy back to Hawaii, the KPC luncheon was a way for those who have worked closely with the KPC to say a final goodbye to their Iraqi counterparts.

Throughout the past year, Maj. Sam

Schubert, team government officer-in-charge for 2nd BCT, worked with the KPC on a routine basis.

"It's been a great experience," Schubert said. "I came here for a year in combat, and I was able to help in that mission but also with the mission of creating the new country of Iraq."

Schubert also said he'll miss the interaction with the different ethnic groups in the KPC.

"I'll miss working with all the ethnicities [and] trying to balance the different interests of all the people in Kirkuk," Schubert said.

Miles said he was grateful for the friendships that KPC members extended toward him and his Soldiers.

"For the past year, Kirkuk's many ethnicities have been our family.

"We have a word in Hawaiian that is 'Ohana,' which means family. And for the last year this has been our 'Ohana,'" Miles said.

When the ballots from last week's Iraqi election are officially counted, the KPC will be turned over to new members who will go forth in promoting democratic ideals and rebuilding the region.

31st Marine Expeditionary Unit ends operations in Iraq

CAMP RIPPER, Iraq — The 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit relinquished responsibility of providing security and stability in Iraq's western Al Anbar province to Regimental Combat Team 7 of the 1st Marine Division Feb. 7.

The Okinawa-based unit has been in place since mid-October 2004 and was tasked with planning and executing various missions throughout a 33,000 square-mile area of operations, about the size of South Carolina.

"I don't believe anyone else could have done as good of a job," said Maj. Gen. Richard A. Natonski, commander, 1st Marine Division, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force.

Natonski and Sgt. Maj. Wayne R. Bell, division sergeant major, visited the Marines and sailors as they transferred responsibility of the area of operations to the regimental combat team.

"This generation of Marines is as good, if not better, than previous generations of Marines," said Bell. "I am proud to have served with [the MEU]."

The 2,200-member MEU was responsible for missions that included assistance and security for Iraq's first free elections, cordon-and-knock operations against the insurgency, civil affairs missions, Iraqi border security, training of Iraqi security forces, security of the Hadithah Dam, as well as other operations to further stabilize the area in support of the interim Iraqi government.

Battalion Landing Team, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, the MEU's ground combat element, fought in the battle for Fallujah in November 2004 alongside Marines and sailors of RCT-7 and MEU Service Support Group 31. MSSG-31, the MEU's combat service support element, provided necessary logistical support

during the Fallujah operation.

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 265 (Reinforced), the MEU's air combat element, accumulated more than 4,300 flight hours, which included more than 2,000 hours flown during night operations. The squadron transported more than 10,000 personnel and lifted more than 835,000 pounds of cargo throughout Anbar province and its AV-8B Harriers supported the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing's aviation missions during the Fallujah battle.

The MEU conducted numerous limited-scale raids and cordon-and-knock operations, capturing more than 150 insurgents and seizing more than 60 weapons caches.

The detachment from the 4th Civil Affairs Group assigned to the MEU conducted numerous civil affairs missions. It conducted more than 250 missions to evaluate and assess infrastructure, engage with the local populace, manage construction projects and identify the medical needs of the Iraqi people. The detachment initiated and managed more than 200 projects focusing on education, health care, water and sanitation, and roads and bridge construction. The civil affairs Marines and sailors subsequently arranged and coordinated the distribution of more than \$2 million worth of donated medical supplies from the Humanitarian Operations Center, Kuwait, to the people of Iraq.

The detachment and other elements of the 31st MEU further assisted the interim Iraqi government and the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq by distributing voter education materials to the Iraqi people of Anbar province and assisted the Iraqi security forces in providing security for nine polling stations.



Maj. Gen. Peter Chiarelli awards Sgt. Matthew Zedwick, of Corvallis, Ore., the Silver Star Medal Feb. 8 for his heroic actions under enemy attack.

Battalion's heroism honored

Story and photo by
Staff Sgt. Rebekah-mae Bruns
39th Brigade Combat Team
Public Affairs

CAMP TAJI, Iraq — The 1st Cavalry Division's 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, together with a company of Oregon National Guard Soldiers, rounded out their service in Iraq with the presentation of heroic medals here Feb. 8.

Division commander Maj. Gen. Peter Chiarelli bestowed 13 Purple Heart Medals, 10 Bronze Star

Medals with "V" Device for valor and two Silver Star Medals for heroic actions and distinctive gallantry in the face of the enemy while serving in Iraq.

"To pin Silver Stars to great Soldiers is an unbelievable honor," Chiarelli said. "We have heroes amongst us today."

Chiarelli said no battalion in his division had been asked to do more in Iraq than the battle-hardened 2-7 Cavalry. The celebrated battalion spearheaded some of the division's most difficult battles in Iraq.

AFN Iraq: Always there, always on the air

Story and photos by Sgt. Misha King
Scimitar Assistant Editor

INTERNATIONAL ZONE, BAGHDAD, Iraq — Deployed service members do not always have the means to stay up-to-date with current events, the latest music trends, or even the latest rules and regulations at their areas of operations. Thanks to American Forces Network, most troops in Iraq have had access to this type of information since Dec. 12, 2003, when AFN Iraq was established.

“AFN Iraq’s mission is to get out command information messages to the troops through entertainment — music, broadcast news shows, and things of that nature,” said Capt. Daryle A. Sewell, broadcast officer-in-charge of AFN Iraq. He is also the commander of the 209th Broadcast Operations Detachment, an Army Reserve unit based in Rome, Ga., which augments AFN Iraq.

Although AFN’s primary mission is to deliver important command messages to the troops, it also serves as a morale booster for troops through entertainment.

“We have a radio station called Freedom Radio that runs seven days a week, 16 hours a day of live radio. The other eight hours are satellite feeds from Germany,” said Sewell.

The radio programming is limited to in-theatre, so the 150,000 plus troops serving in Iraq can pick it up if they’re close to a transmitter, added Sewell. Although the range is limited to in-theatre, the music variety is anything but limited.

“Monday through Saturday, we have four-hour blocks each of hot adult contemporary, a country show, an urban show and a rock show,” Sewell added. “Then on Sunday, we have an oldies show, a 70s, an 80s and a 90s show.”

When people tune into Freedom Radio, they hear great music and cool DJs. What they don’t hear is what goes on behind the scene — all the hard work and preparation that goes into producing a radio show.

“A lot of people don’t know that in addition to being on-air, we also have to produce all the spots (public service announcements), news and entertainment reports,” said Spc. Renee L. Mahan, the urban show DJ and currently the only female Freedom Radio on-air personality.

The pre-show preparation doesn’t stop there, said Mahan. “We try to keep [our listeners] up-to-date with the newest music, and that involves a lot of research, like checking out the Billboard charts and seeing what’s playing on radio stations back home. We try to be as close to a radio station as they would hear back home.”

Despite the long hours that go into preparing and airing a Freedom Radio show, the end result is worth all the hard work.

“The best part of my job is I feel like I’m making a difference every day I come to work,” said Mahan, smiling. “When they tune in and listen to good music, it gives them a break from whatever is going on in their lives. They say music soothes the soul, so if that’s true, then I feel like that’s what we’re doing here at Freedom Radio.”

AFN Iraq not only has a great radio station to inform and entertain its audience, it also has several television programs produced locally and aired worldwide.

“We have 10 broadcasters who put together ‘Freedom Journal Iraq,’ an 11-minute news program that airs five days a week,” Sewell explained. We also produce a show called ‘OIF Today,’ which is a one-minute news teaser, and a segment called ‘Why I Serve,’ which highlights troops serving in-theatre.”

“Freedom Journal Iraq” is picked up by the Pentagon Channel, which is available through cable channels and government installations worldwide, Sewell added. “They also just signed a contract with Dish Network, which means the Pentagon Channel will now reach over 11 million homes.”

Like with Freedom Radio programming, many hours of research, preparation and production go into creating a final “Freedom Journal Iraq” product. The first step is coming up with story ideas, which can pop up in the most unexpected places.

“I’ll get leads at the chow hall by just sitting next to someone and finding out what they do,” said Staff Sgt. Sherri R. Nabors, AFN Iraq’s assignment editor. “A lot of times I’ll be like, ‘Wow, that’s interesting,’ and I’ll set up an appointment to see if we can cover some of the projects they have going.”

Being in the right place at the right time is only a small piece of seeing a story idea through, said Nabors. “I seek out leads and basically chase them down. If they are something we can go out and shoot, I’ll call the point of contact and make all the necessary arrangements, like billeting, meals and sometimes travel. It can be a long, complicated process.”

Even though Nabors is the primary lead seeker for “Freedom Journal Iraq,” she said the broadcasters come up with a good amount of story ideas themselves just by being out there and doing their jobs.

“Freedom Journal Iraq” is structured like most newscasts seen on major media networks, yet it is very different in content, said Nabors.



Spc. Renee L. Mahan, Freedom Radio’s only female DJ, cues up a song while giving a live weather report during the urban show.

“Our stories are different because we have mission-oriented stories, whereas [the national news media] are mostly interested in what’s happening right now,” Nabors explained. “Let’s say a car bomb goes off. They’re going to have someone right there, right now. Our stories, however, are generated around the search team that goes in and investigates, or the [service members] that search the vehicle for IEDs. It’s what you call ‘soft’ news, not ‘hard’ news like the national media.”

Soft news and hard news differ in content, yet they don’t differ in some of the basics, said Sgt. First Class Melissa Y. Rolan, AFN Iraq’s news anchor and the 209th’s detachment sergeant. “My job is to ensure the information I put out is not only accurate, but it shows the good parts of what we do here. It answers the question, ‘Why are we here?’ for the troops.”

Just as the programming is diverse in music genre and story variety, so is the staff that makes up AFN Iraq. There are active duty Air Force and Marine broadcasters and staff directly assigned to it, Sewell said. In addition to broadcasters, both TV and radio, the 209th has technicians who handle radio and TV transmissions, as well as keep equipment up and running. They also have an administrative staff that handles paperwork, mail and supply needs.

“Everyone in the military knows that without technicians and administrative staff, progress is slow,” said Air Force Lt. Col Doug Smith, commander of AFN Iraq. “In our case, we’d have complete mission failure without them.”

Additionally, the 214th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, a Reserve unit based in Richmond, Va., contributes talent for various projects and broadcasts.

Despite the diverse service backgrounds at AFN Iraq, everyone’s mission is the same: bringing information to the troops deployed in-theatre, worldwide, as well as to our loved ones back home, Nabors said.

“We’re always there and always on the air. That’s our slogan,” Sewell proudly said.



Broadcast journalist Spc. Adams Toomer III operates a video camera for a “Freedom Journal Iraq” taping session, while Spc. Johnny Chavez, technician, controls the teleprompter for the anchor. Both are with the 209th Broadcast Operations Detachment.



Frequencies

Al Asad
Ar Ramadi
Baghdad

Balad
Camp Taji

93.3 FM
107.3 FM
92.3 FM
and 107.7 FM
107.3 FM
102.5 FM

Fallujah
Kirkuk
Mosul
Q-West
Ridgeway
Sinjar
Talil AB
Tikrit
Taji

105.1 FM
107.3 FM
105.1 FM
93.3 FM
107.1 FM
107.9 FM
107.3 FM
93.3 FM
107.7 FM



Throw me something, Mister!

Guardsmen kick off Mardi Gras in Baghdad

By Spc. Erin Robicheaux
256th Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

CAMP LIBERTY, BAGHDAD, Iraq — Soldiers of the 256th Brigade Combat Team generally hear the phrase, “Throw me something, Mister!” from Iraqi kids in the streets of Baghdad, but on Feb. 7, they heard it in the true Mardi Gras sense that it was intended. Although the Louisiana Brigade is thousands of miles from the Mardi Gras celebration, an ocean could not separate the enthusiasm that the Soldiers have for the holiday.

“Mardi Gras” literally means “Fat Tuesday,” and the holiday is obviously celebrated on that day of the week. But since the majority of the Soldiers are off on Sundays, the leadership decided it would be best to celebrate it then.

The history of Mardi Gras, surprisingly enough, is a Catholic tradition. It begins 12 days after Christmas on Jan. 6. That day is called “12th Night,” or “King’s Day” and it celebrates the visit of the three wise men bearing gifts to the Baby Jesus. In a related Mardi Gras custom, a dessert called a “king’s cake” is made into a circular pattern to signify the roundabout route that the three kings took to get to the Christ Child. This was to confuse King Herod, who wanted to kill the baby. In ancient tradition, a small coin or bean was placed in the center of the cake and whoever found it was said to have good fortune throughout the next year. In Louisiana, however, bakers insert a plastic baby instead, to symbolize the Baby Jesus. The recipient is obligated to host the next cake party.

The meaning of the name “Fat Tuesday” refers to the day before the Lenten Season



Photo by 1st Lt. Taysha Deaton

Soldiers of the 1st Battalion 141st Field Artillery line their float up for the parade. The Soldiers dressed in crazy hats and matching shirts for the Mardi Gras celebration.

begins, or the day before Ash Wednesday. Lent is the 40 days and nights prior to Easter when Catholics fast to cleanse their bodies and souls to prepare for the day that Jesus will rise into Heaven after the crucifixion. Traditionally on Fat Tuesday, or Mardi Gras, a fatted calf was slaughtered and Catholics feasted on meat, wine, and good times. The colors of the celebration also fall in line with tradition: purple is for justice, green is for faith, and gold is for power.

The date for Mardi Gras can fall between February 3rd to March 9th, depending on the Lunar calendar. Catholics use this calendar to determine the date of Easter, and Fat Tuesday is always 47 days prior.

The Tiger Brigade brought the tradition and craziness to the streets of their camp in Baghdad, and the stunned spectators from other units took to it like true first-timers.

Throughout Camp Liberty, Soldiers

emerged from their offices and rooms to see what the chaos was all about. What they saw were military vehicles of every shape and size transformed into Mardi Gras floats.

Thanks to many krewes from Louisiana and the Family Readiness Groups, who donated beads, masks, and festive decorations, the parade was a huge success.

Spc. Chris Golden, from Abbeville, La. of Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment, said Mardi Gras in Baghdad was a nice touch, even though supplies and spectators were limited.

“With the amount of shortcomings that we had as far as equipment and planning, we were still able to pull off a nice presentation.” He also said that it felt good to bring a taste of



Photo by Sgt. Thomas Benoit

Spc. Kris Baker, from Opelousas, La., of the 256th Brigade Combat Team Mail Room, displays a traditional Mardi Gras mask.

the Louisiana tradition to the rest of the camp.

“Everyone enjoys a good party,” he said, “and I think that we gave everyone around us a feeling of togetherness and were able to include many people into the event.” He said that it showed the open personality of Louisiana.

Along the parade route, riders threw beads, candy, and cups to anyone within range. Civilian employees passing by in cars, fellow Soldiers from other units returning from missions, and those peeking out of their front doors were greeted with a rain shower of Mardi Gras trinkets. Everyone got into the celebration as the spectators lined the streets and

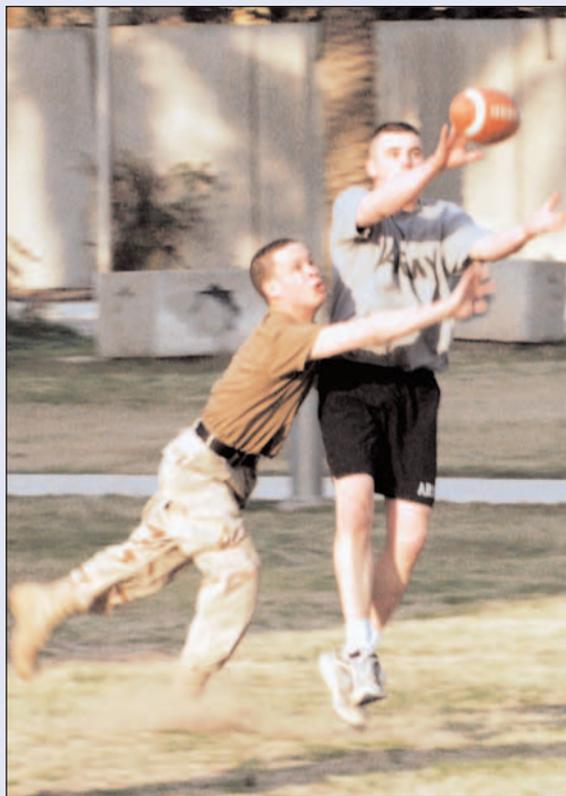
rooftops to catch the traditional items.

Command Sgt. Maj. Homer Stelly from Delcambre, La. of 2nd Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment, set up his sound system on his battalion’s float and blared zydeco music for the parade.

“The music makes everything,” he said, “Cajun music and zydeco music are part of Louisiana culture, and we just couldn’t have a Mardi Gras parade without it.”

A favorite Louisiana phrase is “Laissez les bon temps roulez!” which means “Let the good times roll!” On Feb. 7, thousands of miles from home in the streets of Baghdad, Louisiana Soldiers did just that.

Takin’ a fast break



Photos by Pfc. Ferdinand Thomas

INTERNATIONAL ZONE, BAGHDAD, Iraq — Washington National Guard Soldiers of Company B, 161st Infantry, 81st Brigade from Kent, Wash., take time out from guarding checkpoints at the Al-Rasheed Hotel to enjoy a game of football on the grounds of the convention center here. Left, 1st Lt. Philip G. Hensel, 3rd platoon leader from Alpharetta, Ga., catches a bullet pass while Sgt. Charles Bentley tries to stop him. Right, Spc. John E. Cutter, a squad automatic weapon gunner from Aberdeen, Wash., attempts to catch a pop-fly pass. Below, Spc. Ezra A. Ifie, a Saw gunner from Seattle, Wash., tries to run the ball past a group of Soldiers in his unit. The Soldiers arrived in Baghdad April 4 last year and will be heading home next week.

