

# Army linguist, Lebanon native connects cultures

By 1ST LT. TINA PENICK  
3-346th Regiment Public Affairs

The first nine years of Sgt. Salim's life was spent in shelters and underground bunkers trying to evade the fighting between the Palestinians, Phalangists, Syrians and Israelis in Lebanon.

Born in the midst of the Lebanese Civil War, he knows the consequences of war between clashing ideals all too well.

The Lebanese Civil War was ignited in Beirut on April 13, 1975, when gunmen killed four Phalangists during an assassination attempt on Pierre Jumayyil, the founder of the Phalange Party.

It was presumed that his assassination was carried out by the Palestinians, and the Phalangists retaliated, killing 26 occupants of a bus passing through a Christian neighborhood.

Fighting ensued and finally, in October 1976 a formal end to the Lebanese Civil War occurred following the Riyadh Conference. Despite the end of full-scale war-

fare, underlying tensions continued to plague the region.

Due to those tensions, Salim left Lebanon for a new life in the United States in December 1998.

"The situation in Lebanon was hectic," he said. "There were no jobs, no money and chaos ruled all industries."

The political corruption infested every aspect of civilian life, he said.

Salim, who recently demobilized from the 3rd Battalion 346th Regiment, 177th Armored Brigade, knew a better life existed for him.

"I could not accept being controlled and ruled by unjust and barbaric rulers," Salim said.

Acquiring a Visa would require traveling to Syria, so he packed his bags and started his journey. Two weeks later he arrived in New Jersey and remembers standing in the airport in awe as if he were in a movie.

"Initially, I lived in a car garage for about six months," he recounted.

He worked at a restaurant to save up money in hopes of moving to

Massachusetts to be closer to his sister.

His hopes came true after Salim moved to Taunton, Mass., where he'd be near his sister and his new life would begin.

His journey was not without challenges and he arrived in the U.S. without the ability to speak English.

But Salim pressed on, determined to leave behind the oppression he left in Lebanon. He improved his English by attending Coyle and Cassidy High School in Taunton, and in six months, graduated with the senior class, holding honors in calculus and psychology.

He learned to speak English fluently and, surprisingly, eliminated all traces of his accent.

"To be a part of what I considered a perfect American society, losing my Lebanese accent was part of my complete immersion in the American culture that I admired

all my life," Salim stated proudly.

Following high school, Salim joined the Army as a linguist and cultural advisor and was deployed to Iraq within two weeks.

While deployed, he was responsible for facilitating the communication process and translating for the prisoners of Saddam's former regime.

From there, he worked with a support group in the villages interpreting for interrogators and worked with a detainee transport team flying on a daily basis to Baghdad.

"It was a long dream of mine to join the Army - to be part of something bigger than myself," he said. "I want to make a difference in the world and in my kids' lives."

Salim was mobilized at Camp Shelby following his deployment and taught mobilized Soldiers Arabic and Pashto.

When he joined the Army Reserve, he said it was the best

option at the time. Being a Reservist was a balance between civilian and military lifestyles.

Now, when asked about his career, his answer is completely different.

"My job helps train Soldiers to bridge the gap between two cultures," he said. "I am in the business of helping Soldiers understand the language, culture, social habits and psychology of the enemy and friendly troops in the area of operations."

He is proud to help, bringing two clashing cultures together to find common ground to live peacefully.

Salim continues to support his fellow service members when not mobilized. He volunteers as an ambassador for Freedom Team Salute.

"It was great to honor veterans and Family members of troops that served overseas," he said about the experience.

Ever the peacemaker, Salim hopes to run for public office to close the gap of misunderstanding between societies.



## THREADS

Continued from Page 1

Soldiers with the latest, most versatile protective gear it has to offer.

From head-to-toe, the brigade combat fielded 27 different items such as the Advanced Combat Helmet to the new mountain combat boots.

One item that is vital to the Soldier is the Soldier Plate Carrier System (SPCS), which provides greater protection to the Soldier.

The SPCS is a lightweight vest that provides ballistic protection equal to or greater than that of the Improved Outer Tactical Vest that is currently used in Iraq, while reducing the Soldier's load, enhancing comfort, and optimizing mobility.

It has a unique feature that incorporates a quick-release system for removing the armor plates to tend to Soldiers wounds or other rapid response situations.

"It's impressive," said Spc. Andrew McElmeel, a resident of Iowa City, Iowa. "It's just awesome how all this can just fall apart for a quick escape. It's incredible to see all the engineering that goes into this."

"We're giving the Soldiers everything they need," said Master Sgt. Cedrick Harris, who works for the PEO Soldier Protection and Individual Equipment section of PEO

Soldier. "They can tailor their outfit to the mission they're going out on."

Among the new, more rugged items in the Soldiers fielding exercise are the mountain combat boots.

With numerous requests from Afghanistan for tougher boots, the Army provided Soldiers with Danner mountain hiking boots. These boots provide better ankle support and have a tougher sole than the standard combat boot.

"We think the mountain boot is going to pass everyone's expectations," said Maj. John Bryan, assistant product manager of Cold Weather Clothing Systems. "The new boot design which sports a higher heel than the current combat boots being worn, allows Soldiers to maintain better footing while taking on Afghanistan's terrain."

Tougher pants were on inventory for the Soldiers.

After seven years of combat, the Army has developed pants that don't rip out the bottoms when Soldiers might have to slide down a hill.

"Among the small changes they have added buttons to the cargo pocket," said Harris. He said that the change came from complaints from Soldiers that the Velcro on the Army Combat Uniform tends to wear out on the cargo pocket.

Mountain gear such as the medium rucksack was offered to the Soldiers.



**SOLDIER FEEDBACK...** Sergeant Major of the Army Kenneth Preston, right, and Command Sgt. Maj. Steve Waymon, of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division of the Iowa Army National Guard, receive input on the new Operation Enduring Freedom Camouflage Pattern uniform from Staff Sgt. William Haley, left, of the 2/34th, at a round table discussion of the uniform at Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center.

An Army pack of about 3400 cubic inches with a load capacity of about 60 pounds can now be used during missions. Soldiers complained that the small rucksack was too small and the larger rucksack was too large for a 24 to 72 hour mission.

"When you stop making changes, that's when you run the risk of being outdated," said Preston. "I think it's phenomenal

what we're doing in a short period of time."

In November, the Army plans to field units that are already serving in Afghanistan with the new equipment.

However, only units with 120 days or more remaining in Afghanistan will receive it. This system will allow the Army to equip the highest number of Soldiers in the shortest amount of

time to have all Soldiers outfitted in the gear.

The 2nd BCT 34th Infantry Division will spend nearly a month and a half at Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center for their mobilization training before deploying to Afghanistan in support of the Overseas Contingency Operation.

They are expected to deploy for approximately one year.



**NEW THREADS...** Soldiers of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division of the Iowa Army National Guard inspect the new Operation Enduring Freedom Camouflage Pattern uniform during Rapid Fielding Initiative issue at Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center Aug. 10. The unit is the first of its size in the Army, and the first unit in the National Guard, to receive the new equipment designed exclusively for use in Afghanistan.

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