



The Mountain View

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Serving Task Force Mountain

June 3, 2008

Groundbreaking ceremony held in Iskandariyah

SGT. 1ST CLASS TAMI HILLIS
4TH BCT, 3RD INF. DIV.



FOB KALSU, Iraq – Iraqi leaders, including the chief justice of the Higher Judicial Council, unearthed heaping mounds of dirt May 28, in a ceremonial ground breaking where a new courthouse will stand in Iskandariyah, approximately 50 kilometers south of Baghdad.

The project was initiated within the nahia council and is one effort by local and national government to increase the capacity of local court systems.

“I hope the new courthouse will promote law and order as well as democracy,” said Chief Justice Medhat al-Mahmoud, the chief justice of the HJC – a body similar to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Iskandariyah courthouse has needed repairs for some time. Renovation was impractical because the building was not owned by the Iraq HJC.

Damage caused by an electrical fire in January made the construction of a new courthouse a priority, even though the court continued to function.

Through the combined efforts of the HJC and Coalition forces, land for the new facility was secured in February.



Sgt. 1st Class Tami Hillis

Local leaders and national officials participate in the groundbreaking ceremony for a new Iskandariyah Courthouse May 28.

The Iskandariyah court processes numerous criminal cases in the Multi-National Division – Center area of operation and lies at the center of the historically volatile fault line of North Babil Province.

Coalition forces also attended the

ceremony to show their support for the project and celebrate the historic day.

“This is an important day for the city of Iskandariyah,” said Lt. Col. Michael Getchell, commander of 2nd Battalion,

See CHIEF, page 3

Soldier volunteers for deployment to serve with commander

PFC. MICHAEL SCHUCH
2ND BCT, 1 AMRD. DIV.



FOB HAMMER – Soldiers throughout the U.S. Army answer the call to duty in their own ways. For Sgt. 1st Class Marcus Butler, that answer came by volunteering to deploy with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division.

Butler has been a Soldier in the Army for more than 18 years, and is now on his third deployment.

For the last three years, he was assigned to the Joint

Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany.

“Being an observer-controller was the best job I have ever had,” said Butler, a native of Baltimore, Md.

“It gave me a chance to work with Soldiers without distractions, when they are focused and ready to train,” he added.

Butler’s job was to train Soldiers in fire support operations. He would observe Soldiers conducting training, and

See DEPLOY, page 3

703rd Soldiers support their supporters

CAPT. CONSTANCE QUINLAN
4TH BCT, 3RD INF. DIV.



FOB KALSU – This past February, the Maintainers of the 703rd Brigade Support Battalion, initiated Operation Maintain the Home Front, a letter-writing campaign from Soldiers to their hometown newspapers.

“I wanted to provide an opportunity for 703rd BSB Soldiers to thank the American people for all the love and support they give to us,” said Lt. Col. John Chadbourne, 703rd BSB, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, commander.

Throughout the past few months, Soldiers from the battalion’s four main companies have written more than 400 letters to their hometown newspapers. Ranging from a few sentences to full pages, these letters have been sent to more than 200 newspapers throughout the country, from small-town weekly newsletters to several national publications.

“We’ve had an awesome response to the program,” Chadbourne said. “(More than) 90 percent of our Soldiers have volunteered to write letters to their hometowns.”

Soldiers began receiving feedback almost immediately from loved ones back home who had spotted the letters. Overhearing a Soldier call out, “My letter was published!” has become a common occurrence in the battalion.

One such Soldier was the battalion chaplain himself, Capt. Shannon



Pfc. Monica K. Smith
Chief Warrant Officer 3 Rod Delostrinos of Bravo Company, 703rd Brigade Support Battalion, reads a letter sent to his hometown newspaper during a break from duties June 2.

Philio. A native of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Philio wrote home to the “Sun Herald” where a fellow service member took notice and was moved to send care packages to battalion Soldiers.

Other newspapers have taken interest by requesting further contact with their hometown heroes, and in several cases, sending complimentary editions

of the published letters to local family members.

“The Coloradoan” of Fort Collins, Colo., was one such publication. Its editor sent five copies of the newspaper to the family of 1st Lt. Allis Gilbert, Company C Treatment Platoon leader and head of the FOB Kalsu aid station.

“My family was very excited to read my letter,” Gilbert said.

“It sparked conversations among their friends about what it means to support the troops. There are many people who support myself and my unit who have never met us and only want to show their support,” she said.

I feel (like) telling those who are generous, caring and supportive thank you is the least I can do. Many people go out of their way to support those they do not know, and my family has experienced the generosity of the average American,” she added.

The movement was inspired by Task Force Marne’s Operation Thank You, aimed to thank the American people

for its support of Soldiers during the holiday season while keeping them engaged in the accomplishments of deployed men and women.

Each of the battalion’s four main companies recently received an Operation Maintain the Home Front streamer to acknowledge their overwhelming contributions to the program.

THE Mountain View

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DEPLOY

From page 1

facilitate discussions in finding ways to improve or sustain their performances.

It was at the Iron Brigade's mission readiness exercise at the JMRC in October and November of last year that Butler observed the 2nd BCT fire support Soldiers.

"During the leadership training program and mission readiness exercises, I recognized a lot of talent in the fire support and brigade staff," he said.

Butler had already served with the 1st Armd. Div. and formed ties back then with Col. Pat White, now commander of 2nd BCT, 1st Armd. Div.

"I was in the 1st Armd. Div. for three and a half years," Butler said.

"At the time, White was the battalion commander of 2nd Battalion, 37th Armor Regiment, 1st BCT, 1st Armd. Div." he added.

While with the 2-37th Armor Regt., known as Task Force Iron Dukes he fought in one of the major battles of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2004, the Battle of Najaf.

Task Force Iron Dukes fought against Muqtada al-Sadr's militia from April to June 2004. During this time, White conducted operations as the TF Iron Dukes commander,



Pfc. Michael Schuch
Sergeant First Class Marcus Butler briefs Soldiers of his fire support team at FOB Hammer, Iraq, May 29.

while Butler was the fire support non-commissioned officer in charge.

"I provided fires in support of maneuver operations, as well as provided counter-fire missions," Butler said.

Following his time with TF Iron Dukes, Butler went on to his next duty assignment, Operations Group Mustang at Hohenfels. It would be another three years before Butler and White's paths crossed again.

"I wanted to work with White again because his leadership style makes people want to do better," Butler said. "I believe he has a genuine concern for his Soldiers."

Having deployed twice during his career, Butler knew he might be called on to deploy again.

"I knew that if I volunteered to be assigned to the 2nd BCT, I would be able to deploy with people I knew," Butler said. "Between the familiar faces and the pool of talent on the brigade staff, I was in a win-win situation."

Butler contacted his branch manager and requested to be reassigned to the 2nd BCT. On Feb. 10, Butler's request was accepted and he was on his way to Baumholder, Germany.

Butler now provides operational fire support for the 2nd BCT and is currently serving at FOB Hammer in support of OIF.

CHIEF: IA leaders, Chief Justice al-Mahmoud open courthouse

From page 1

502nd Infantry Regiment, attached to 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Inf. Div. "This is another step forward in the area as security continues to improve and projects are able to develop."

"This important project demonstrates the Government of Iraq's and the HJC's commitment to supporting our local courts and creating conditions necessary for the rule of law to flourish," Medhat said.

Coalition forces approved \$30,000 in Commander's Emergency Response Program funds for furnishings and supplies intended for the new Iskandariyah court.

"It is encouraging to see the benefits of the security in the area paying off," Getchell said.

"It's been a lot of hard work by the mayor, the police and the citizens who have brought security to the area that has allowed bringing in essential services that are needed," he added.

Sgt. 1st Class Tami Hillis

Chief Justice Medhat al-Mahmoud, chief justice of the Higher Judicial Council, talks about the importance of building a new courthouse in Iskandariyah.



KARAOKE CONTEST

Takes place at Victory Stage next to the Oasis DFAC. All rounds will start at 1900.

Starts June 7th (Round 1)

Round 3 – June 21st

All rounds start at 1900



Prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd places.

Round 2 – June 14th

Final round – June 28th

2nd BCT plants seeds of success

SGT. DAVID TURNER
2ND BCT, 3RD INF. DIV.



FOB KALSU – After nearly a year in Iraq as the last of the “surge brigades,” the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, has seen the south Baghdad area transformed from insurgent stronghold to model of peace and security. The gains made in security may not hold, however, unless citizens of this area are able to successfully continue their way of life. In the 2nd BCT’s area of operations, that mostly means agriculture.

Mike Stevens, a U.S. Department of Agriculture representative and agriculture adviser for the U.S. Dept. of State’s Baghdad-7 embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team, put it simply: “If you feed the people, they can concentrate on their other needs, and thus it becomes a more peaceful area.”

In the wake of combat operations that drove al-Qaeda out of the area, 2nd BCT Soldiers began looking to the needs of citizens. Programs were started to repair infrastructure and revitalize local governments and businesses. One of the first such programs was aimed at farmers. Armed with vegetable seeds and plastic, Soldiers distributed the materials to farmers eager to plant new crops.

Stevens recalled that when he began his work with the ePRT in October, many parts of the area were still dangerous.

“At that time, we had only five percent of our area we could travel in and the rest was too kinetic to move into,” Stevens recalled. “As we focused on seed distributions, it got farmers farming, rather than putting [improvised explosive devices] on the road. It was a kind of domino effect. Wherever we did these distributions we saw a decrease in IED activity and an increase in farming,” he said.

Stevens credited 2nd BCT Soldiers with doing the hard work to get farms back on their feet. He relied on Soldiers patrolling the area to identify who the key figures in the area were and what they needed.

“They had everything to do with revitalization in the agricultural sector,” Stevens said. “I can attend the farmer’s union meetings, but I am not the guy out talking to the farmers ... They are

the ones who identify all the crops being grown in the area. They are the ones who see that the seeds are getting distributed properly. They are the ones who are implementing the programs.”

One reason for focusing on vegetable farming was that years of war had ravaged the once-vibrant farming sector, with decreased supply driving market prices up. Already a net importer of food products, Iraq relied on imports of produce to meet people’s needs.

“It was horrible when I first got here,” Stevens said. “Traveling through Amman, [Jordan] telling people what I do, they pleaded with me to do something about the food situation in Iraq, because prices had been through the roof,” he said.

Reliance on produce imports had another negative aspect, Stevens said.

“We know arms get smuggled in with vegetables,” he said. “The first concentrated effort was on vegetable production so we could slow down imports from other countries.”

The Soldiers flooded the area with tomato, green pepper, eggplant and cucumber seeds. They also gave out plastic, used to make shelters which trap moisture in the warm, arid climate. The effort is already producing results.

“Just last week, I got a report from our agriculture office in Baghdad that tomatoes, eggplants, cucumbers and green peppers have all seen a 25 percent decrease in price,” Stevens said.

Like other programs, Stevens described the seed distribution as a “kick start” to reinvigorate a once-thriving sector.

“[The farmers] were directed to save those input costs so they could continue to buy good seeds,” Stevens said. “You’ve got good-minded farmers in



Sgt. Kevin Stabinsky
Mike Stevens, Baghdad 7 embedded PRT agricultural adviser, shakes hands with Sayifiyah landowners as he distributes seeds Feb. 28 at PB Whitehouse. Increased production in vegetable farming has led to lower food costs for Iraqis.

business now who know how to make a profit, and I see it continuing on.”

Seed distribution was only the beginning of the effort. Similar kick-start programs were begun with poultry and fish farming, both traditionally profitable forms of farming in the area. Using a combination of funds from the State Dept. and 2nd BCT’s Commander’s Emergency Response Program, fish farms and chicken coops were restocked. So far, \$75,000 of CERP funds have been spent on fish and poultry farms and more than \$73,000 of State Dept. Quick Reaction Funds have been spent on poultry farms alone.

Other programs have been aimed at assisting farmers in other areas of farming: \$20,000 in QRF for flooding orchards; \$8,500 in QRF for purchasing beekeeping supplies; \$50,000 to re-

Sheikh support council meeting discusses issues, progress

SPC. JUSTIN SNYDER
2ND BCT, 1 ARMD. DIV.



FOB HAMMER – A sheikh support council meeting brought sheiks and leaders of the Mada'in Qada together with their Coalition counterparts here May 28.

As the meeting commenced, Mada'in Qada Mayor Mushen Nasser asked for a moment of silence in honor of all the fallen Soldiers and civilians who have died in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Nasser next spoke on the importance of the Sons of Iraq, a group credited with reducing violence and improving security in the qada. The contract for the SoI is ending soon and Nasser expressed his hope it would be extended.

"They (the SoI) are here to support you and you need to work with them to accomplish your goals," Nasser said. "Together, you can make the Mada'in Qada the best mada'in in all of Iraq."

Colonel Pat White, commander of 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, thanked those pres-

ent for coming and said such meetings were a very important part of the Iron Brigade's mission.

"These meetings are a forum where you can air your grievances," said White, a native of Apple Valley, Calif. "It gives you the chance to tell us what your government is doing for you and tells us how we can help make your connections to the central government better."

One concern brought up involved the Iron Brigade's route clearance team. During their search for improvised explosive devices, the clearance team tends to bog down traffic – a situation White would like to improve, while adding the team serves a vital role.

Nasser agreed that because of these teams, the villages of Iraq are safer than they were a year ago and he asked for the tribal leaders' assistance in ensuring the team has room to work.

Nasser also discussed a newly established court in Salman Pak he believes needs to be used more.

"We need to enforce the Iraqi laws,"



Spc. Justin Snyder
Colonel Pat White, commander 2nd BCT, 1st Armd. Div., speaks with local tribal leaders before the Sheikh Support Council meeting at the FOB Hammer dining facility May 28.

Nasser said. "We put forth a lot of effort to make the court happen. Have your people go and solve their problems in court, not by violence, but with Iraqi law."

The 2nd BCT, 1st Armd. Div., from Baumholder, Germany, has been deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom since April in the Mada'in Qada in southeastern Baghdad Province.

SEEDS

From previous page

pair irrigation canals and pumps. More recently, \$180,000 in CERP funds have been allocated to provide veterinary services for livestock.

Stevens stressed that the joint mission of the 2nd BCT and Baghdad-7 ePRT is more than just providing short-term assistance to farmers. For agriculture to thrive again, farmers are being encouraged to take agribusiness training and work with their local farmer's unions.

There are currently seven farmers unions in the 2nd BCT's area. The goal is to establish these farmers unions as non-governmental organizations which can generate profits, said Capt. Jeffrey Brizek, deputy agricultural adviser to the Baghdad-7 ePRT.

"We are working toward improving the farmer's unions so they can develop business opportunities within their specific areas," said Brizek, a Reading, Pa. native. "Then they can be a profit-generating organization and sustain themselves."

One such business opportunity is the recent purchase of new tractors by farmer's unions in South Rasheed and

Arab Jabour. The nine tractors are being bought with loans from the Iraqi government's Ministry of Agriculture and will be rented out to farmers in order to generate revenue for the unions.

"The MoA has made great strides

"We are working toward improving the farmer's unions so they can develop business opportunities within their specific areas."

– Capt. Jeffrey Brizek
deputy agricultural adviser

since I've been here, especially with the development of their loan programs," Brizek said. "It is proof that the government of Iraq is becoming more of a direct force with the local populace."

The other key to sustaining the gains made in agriculture is educating farmer's unions in agribusiness. Representatives from all of the unions are attending seminars and some will take advanced agribusiness classes.

"It's getting them thinking about

the big picture, rather than just initial handouts like they've been used to for so many years," Stevens said. "One farmer who has been to the training told us, 'You've brought us out of the dark'. That light is starting to come on. Those trains of thought are going to make good businessmen out of these farmers."

Stevens said the future of the ePRT's mission is to step back and take an advisory role, letting local farmers work directly with their government.

"Now I'm providing a link between the farmers and the MoA to make sure the programs are working," Stevens said. "We're only going to be here for so long."

Brizek said there are several ways to measure the 2nd BCT and ePRT's success in the past year with local farmers, from increased production to greater independence and involvement in their government.

"The first thing is putting food on the table," Brizek said. "We've seen at least a 25 percent increase in crop production. You're seeing farmers re-developing their industries. They've gotten a lot of support through their farmer's unions and they've got a voice in their government now. They're working to make their voices heard."

Headline Highlights

Calls from Brown; drugs in Jesus; sumo spoon attack

Hello, it's Gordon here ... random calls from Gordon Brown

LONDON (Reuters) – Gordon Brown has taken to “cold calling” members of the general public, newspapers reported on Friday, in the latest charm offensive aimed at restoring his battered popularity.

Brown, reeling from a string of poor election results, has been randomly phoning critics who have written him letters of complaint to make the point that he really does listen.

While Downing St officials insisted it was not a new initiative, media reports on Friday said the idea had come from his newly appointed strategy chief Stephen Carter.

Carter, a former public relations chief, wanted to “humanise” his new boss, PR Week reported.

“Carter thought it was a good idea to have Brown call people personally,” an insider told the industry magazine.

“Carter will choose a letter or email at random, have one of his team at Number 10 prepare a response, then get Brown to call.”

The tactic, revealed on the same day as Labour recorded its worst opinion poll showing since surveys began in 1943, has been used by dozens of politicians since Jimmy Carter’s 1976 presidential campaign.

It is not known how many calls Brown makes a week, but newspapers reported on Friday it was as many as two dozen.

The magazine said the tactic backfired

once, when Brown, an early riser, rang a member of the public at 6 a.m. -- a claim Downing Street has denied.

No Downing Street spokesman was immediately available on Friday morning.

The YouGov poll, published by the Daily Telegraph, showed Labour on 23 percent against 47 percent for the Conservatives, underlining voter concerns about a slowing economy, rising fuel and food prices and the botched 10p tax abolition.

Mexico drug smugglers make Jesus statue of cocaine

NUEVO LAREDO, Mexico (Reuters) – U.S. customs officials have seized a statue of Jesus Christ made from plaster mixed with cocaine -- the latest sophisticated attempt to smuggle drugs from Mexico.

Sniffer dogs at the border crossing in Laredo, Texas, alerted officials to the smell of narcotics in the 6.6 pound (3 kilo) statue, which was in the trunk of a car being driven by a Mexican woman into the United States last week.

“The statue tested positive for cocaine,” Nancy Herrera, an official at the U.S. Attorney’s Office Southern District of Texas said on Friday.

U.S. border police arrested a 61-year-old Mexican man accused of offering the woman \$80 to carry the statue to the bus station in downtown Laredo.

The woman escaped back to Mexico, Herrera said.

Tighter U.S. security and Mexico’s de-

ployment of thousands of soldiers along the border are pushing smugglers to try increasingly sophisticated techniques like hiding drugs in sealed beer cans, U.S. officials say.

The average price of a gram of pure cocaine in the United States is around \$130, according to U.S. government data.

Veteran sumo wrestler takes salary cut after spoon attack

TOKYO (Reuters) - A veteran sumo wrestler who attacked a junior grappler with a cooking instrument has been ordered to take a salary cut for his violent outburst.

Toyozakura, whose ladle-wielding assault left the victim bleeding and needing eight stitches, will take a 30 percent pay cut for three months, Japanese sumo officials said on Thursday.

The same punishment was meted out to gym chief Magaki for beating a junior wrestler with a bamboo sword in the latest in a series of incidents of bullying to tarnish sumo’s image.

Sumo dates back some 2,000 years and retains many Shinto religious overtones but the roly-poly sport has been plagued by scandal in recent months.

The closeted sumo world is still reeling from the arrest earlier this year of a former gym chief on suspicion of assault following the death of a teenage wrestler.

Such was the impact of the incident, Japan’s government weighed in on the issue, ordering sumo officials to clean up their act.

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7						9

from Sudoku Easy Presented by Will Shortz

Solution to yesterday’s puzzle:

9	1	5	6	2	3	4	8	7
2	7	6	4	5	8	3	9	1
3	8	4	9	7	1	6	5	2
6	4	3	2	1	9	8	7	5
7	5	2	8	3	6	9	1	4
1	9	8	5	4	7	2	3	6
8	2	9	1	6	5	7	4	3
4	3	1	7	8	2	5	6	9
5	6	7	3	9	4	1	2	8

ARABIC PHRASE OF THE DAY

Hands up.

er-fah ee-dee-yek.