

# IN THE ZONE

MAGAZINE

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## FOB Freedom transferred

to the Government of Iraq

## Trial by Fire

at Iraqi Fire Academy

JASG-C Chaplain's Corps provides

# care for the warrior spirit



**STAYING ON TARGET** - Capt. Robert Stevens, deputy command judge advocate, Operational Law/Military Justice, 1st Lt. Anthony Salvani, Headquarters and Headquarters Company executive officer, and other JASG-C Soldiers fire various types of weapons at the FOB Prosperity firing range March 13. Photo by 1st Sgt. Dave Moore

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## ON THE COVER:

Iraqi firefighter cadets attempt to douse an automobile fire during the skills-evaluation portion of their training program at the International Zone Fire Academy. The three-day evaluation ensures the cadets are proficient at fighting several types of fires. For more photos, see page 11.

*Photo by Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris*

# IN THE ZONE

MAGAZINE

*Produced by the Joint Area Support Group-Central Public Affairs Office*

**JASG-C Commander:**  
Col. Steve Ferrari

**JASG-C Public Affairs Staff:**  
Maj. Jon Powers  
1st Sgt. David Moore  
Sgt. 1st Class Robert Stephenson  
Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris  
Sgt. Bill Addison



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## LEADERS' LOG

# Stay focused and finish strong



The JASG-C continues to play a vital role during this historic time in Iraq. We are now 100 days into the implementation of the Security Agreement and the transition of Green Zone security and property returns have been very successful. The turnover of FOB Freedom was a huge success story and all involved should be proud of this accomplishment. Joint security operations with the newly designated 56th Brigade of the 6th Iraqi Army continues to go very well. The Jundi's are now individually trained and the next 90 days of transition will concentrate on collective operations and logistical sustainment. Our role now is to provide assistance and support.

For the majority of the JASG-C we are approaching the 30 day mark for redeployment. As we begin

to plan for redeployment do not lose focus on the mission. Continue to execute the plan to open the Sunken Highway road to the Republican bridge. This will be a significant event for the Government of Iraq and will be another milestone in this year of transition.

Continue to plan for a smooth and seamless transition with the 32nd IBCT. There can be no loss or degradation of services. Let's ensure we set the conditions for the 32nd BCT's success. All the JASG-C Directorates, 1-7 FA Bn and IZ Police continue to play a key role in shaping the future of Iraq. Keep up the great team work! Always look out for each other and be safe. One team, One Mission, Finish Strong!

Thanks for all you do!

**Col. Steve Ferrari**  
**Joint Area Support Group – Central Commanding**

# Be understanding and aware of change

As we begin working the final days of our mission here in the International Zone, now is not the time to waste energy on negative emotions that impact the superb job everyone does each day.

We have passed more than 300 days of active-duty service and completed each mission, often facing difficult challenges. These challenges were overcome by hard work and a unique sense of humor that Soldiers develop in his or her military career.

It is not the time to allow anger or arguments to replace a positive attitude. With the combination of our ongoing mission and preparation for re-deployment, stress levels and tempers may increase. Stay focused and remain flexible. Don't get spun up over silly incidents.

A professional Soldier chooses to show strong determination tempered with consideration, not clouded by anger. Take the time to say the right things instead of speaking in haste or expressing frustration. This does not mean that you can silently allow substandard performance - it simply means think before you speak. Don't try to change situations you don't have control of in this environment. Remember, there are military standards and a chain of command for a reason.

As we pack our bags to go home, take time to talk to your families. You have spent a year without them, and you have changed since you left. Maybe you have had life-changing experiences serving in a war zone. At the very least, your family has spent a year living without

you, and life was different in your absence. Remember, good communication involves more listening than talking. Find out about the new dynamics. Try to understand that some of those changes were made for the better. You may not be very happy about all of them, but they happened out of necessity.

Your family, friends and loved ones care and want you home, so don't shortcut safety and maintain your standards here in the IZ. One area in particular we must focus on is force protection. Though things have been quiet, there is still a deadly threat out there and you can usually hear it every night. Use the buddy system, stay alert, and don't let complacency set in. You all have done an outstanding job and have raised the bar. Don't stop now.

In closing, our replacements from the 32nd BCT will be on the ground soon, but we still have the mission and everyone needs to push forward and look out for each other's welfare. Stay alert.

**Command Sgt. Maj. David Kenna**  
**Joint Area Support Group – Central Command Sergeant Major**



# Iraq receives key to Freedom

Story by Sgt. Bill Addison

Photos by Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris  
JASG-C Public Affairs

The Joint Area Support Group-Central (JASG-C) held a ceremony March 20 commemorating the transfer of Forward Operating Base (FOB) Freedom to the Government of Iraq.

The property, which is located in Baghdad's International Zone (IZ), has been under the control of U.S. Forces since early 2003.

Speaking at the event were Mohammad Salmon, national reconciliation liaison for the Government of Iraq, and Col. Kenneth S. Schechter, JASG-C deputy commander.

Schechter, who is the head of the IZ transition team, said that the transfer ceremony marks another step in implementing the security agreement that went into effect Jan. 1 of this year.

"The transfer of FOB Freedom is another strong indication that the security agreement between the Government of Iraq and the Government of the United States is successful," he said. "Property transfer is a key component of the security agreement between Iraq and the United States and is a significant achievement for both of our nations," he said.

Schechter, a native of Toms River, N.J., also took



**UNLOCKING THE FUTURE** - Capt. Eric Montoya, Forward Operating Base (FOB) Freedom mayor, 1st Sgt. Charley Keuscher, FOB Freedom deputy mayor, Col. Steven Ferrari, Joint Area Support Group-Central (JASG-C) commander, Mohammad Salman, national reconciliation liaison for the Government of Iraq (GOI), Ali Al-Yasri, director general of the prime minister's office operations for the GOI, and Dr. Mawafek Al-Kuramanjy, director general of real estate of the General Secretariat for the GOI, from left, hold the symbolic key to FOB Freedom during a ceremony marking the property's transfer back to the GOI.

the chance to commend his Iraqi counterparts for their efforts in the transfer of properties from U.S. to Iraqi control.

"They should take great pride in knowing the citizens of Baghdad can immediately benefit from these properties," he said.



**LOOKING FORWARD** - Mohammad Salman, national reconciliation liaison for the Government of Iraq, left, and Col. Kenneth S. Schechter, Joint Area Support Group-Central (JASG-C) deputy commander, speak during a ceremony to transfer Forward Operating Base (FOB) Freedom back to the Government of Iraq.

The JASG-C is made up primarily of N.J. Army National Guard Soldiers of the 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Combat team who have been deployed to Iraq since September of last year.

FOB Freedom served as the smallest military base in the IZ, providing housing for approximately 400 permanent residents. The former Republican Guard compound is highlighted by Freedom Rest, an Army R&R facility located in the former Iraqi Military Officers Club. 🇮🇶

# JASG-C honors fallen hero

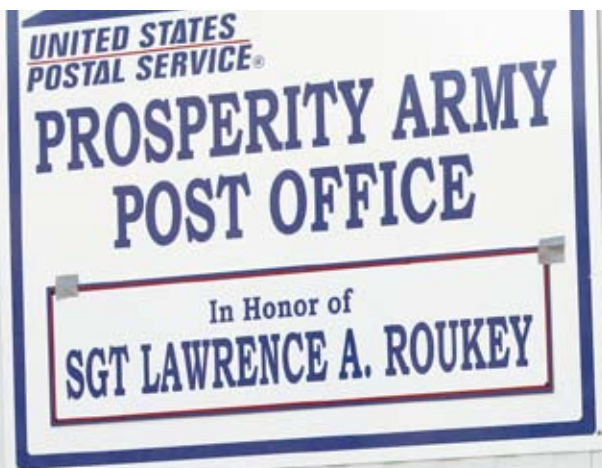
Story and photos by  
1st Sgt. David Moore  
JASG-C Public Affairs

As a civilian, he was a United State Post Office mail handler sorting mail. Without a doubt, he was passing letters and boxes that were traveling between loved ones at home

and those abroad who were supporting the Global War on Terrorism.

As a Soldier and fallen warrior, Lawrence A. Roukey was a sergeant. To his widow, he was a husband and a father of two.

At a Forward Operating Base (FOB) Prosperity ceremony March 20 commemorating the Army's Year of the NCO, a new FOB Prosperity Post Office was dedicated in honor of Roukey. The facility is part of the Army's response to meet the mail



**IN MEMORIAM** - Col. Steven Ferrari, Joint Area Support Group-Central commander, below, applauds the dedication of the new FOB Prosperity Army Post Office to a fallen Soldier, Sgt. Lawrence A. Roukey, left, during a March 20 ceremony.

needs of service members and U.S. civilians in the International Zone.

Col. Steven Ferrari, commander of the 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Combat Team and the Joint Area Support Group-Central (JASG-C), hosted the event with 10<sup>th</sup> Sustainment Brigade leaders who officially handed off the post office from the JASG-C to Army postal handlers of the 3<sup>rd</sup>/566<sup>th</sup> Postal Platoon from Stuttgart, Germany.

While the U.S. Army proclaimed

2009 as the Year of the NCO, "it's not only Army NCOs who are keepers of the standard; it's about all military professionals who wear the uniform bearing the stripes of a time-honored corps of leaders," Ferrari said to about 250 military and civilians who attended the ceremony.

"As the 50<sup>th</sup> IBCT trained and prepared to come to Iraq nearly a year ago, I quickly realized that the transformation of military doctrine would have NCOs where officers once stood...making decisions we used to make," he said. "As a result of this changing environment forged in combat operations, our NCOs have been given more responsibility and they have risen to that challenge."

As he looked at the full-service post office facility, Ferrari said that officers had a vision to provide better postal facilities to personnel as the International Zone footprint

**“ His name underscores the commitment and ultimate sacrifice made by the more than 600 sustainment and support Soldiers who have given their lives in Iraq. ”**

- Col. Steven Ferrari, JASG-C commander

*continued on page 15*

# First tourists since '03 visit IZ



**SEEING THE SIGHTS** - Hinterland Travel brought the first group of tourists since 2003 into Baghdad's International Zone March 20. The two-week tour of Iraq included a stop at the Ishtar Gate in Babylon, pictured above. (Courtesy photo)

*Story by Sgt. Bill Addison  
JASG-C Public Affairs*

The security agreement between the U.S. and Government of Iraq, which went into effect Jan. 1, was just one of many steps toward a safe and prosperous Iraq. March 20 marked another step, one that was both unexpected and unique.

That was the day the first tourists came to the IZ.

Eight tourists to be exact: Five from Great Britain, two from America and one from Canada.

The tourists arrived in Iraq on March 8, and began making their way around the country for a two week excursion that brought them to Samarra, Mosul, Babylon, Nasiriyah, Ur, Uruk and Basrah before making their way to Baghdad.

Geoff Hann of English-based Hinterland Travel remembers when his company offered multiple tours a year to the area, before the beginning of the war in 2003.

"I'd been operating in and out of Iraq for many years, but hadn't been

here since 2003. I came out here in November of last year for a tourism conference, and I thought, 'well okay, things have improved, we can do something here,'" he said.

Hann, who recently co-authored a travel book to the country, "Iraq, Then and Now; A Guide to the Country and its People," said that while travel in the region is currently difficult, he is glad his tour group is able to show that it is possible.

"It's going to take time, but I think if we can work together (the tourist companies and the Iraqi government) it will be alright. Obviously the potential here is very great. The reason is that people now know, for example, where Najaf is or Mosul is or where Basra is. Most people in the world didn't know where that was, but now because of the war, the media, television everything, they know where these places are. It's very rich," he explained.

But Hann said travel, while possible, was not always easy, and the tour was not able to see all of the things they had wanted. However,

he said given the country's current condition, he is understanding.

"After all, this is a political, insecure place, and the governments don't really want us going about," he said.

New York City-native David Chung said that he jumped at the chance to visit the country. He was one of the many people on Hann's waiting list to tour the region.

"I think it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience to come to this country, especially in a time of transition," he said.

Watching the war on the news was one thing, but Chung said he was eager to see for himself what he had been hearing and seeing on CNN and MSNBC.

"Two years ago you had the surge, where a lot of people didn't believe that would work. Now, us coming here as tourists is proof. The proof is in the pudding that it has worked. The fact that we were able to navigate most parts of Iraq- not all parts of Iraq, but most parts of it relatively safely- I think that sort of has proven that the surge has worked," he said.

For Bridget Jones, a 77-year-old retired archeologist, the tour was good, but not all she hoped for.

"I was disappointed we couldn't go to Nippur or Nineveh, but I appreciate that this is the early days of tourism and you have to be flexible," she said.

When asked what she thought about being one of first tourists to the country, she laughed.

"I didn't realize we were the first tourists, and it's been brought up very much in the fact that you can't get postcards," she joked.

"My two weeks here have been terrific; the Iraqi people have been very hospitable and this is something I will remember for a lifetime," said Chung. 🇮🇷

## CHAPLAIN'S WORD

# Think before you speak

Chap. (Maj.) Jan Koczera  
JASG-C Chaplain

I learned something about Middle Eastern culture from my Bible the other day. Noticing all the small rain showers that we have had recently, I thought how good it is to have rain in this dry place and I came across this odd proverb in my Bible. "When a king's face brightens, it means life; his favor is like a rain cloud in spring. Proverbs 16:15"

How odd, I thought, because we Westerners typically associate rain with frowning faces, or sad faces. We don't know how much of a blessing rain is in a hot, dry climate.

That odd switch reminds me of something that I have learned about



anger: Anger is universal, and just because a person is angry, it's not the end of the world. I was brought up to think that if people speak angrily to each other, their relationship is destroyed, and things will only go from bad to worse. The childhood message to me was don't express anger, keep it hidden. That doesn't

work. Especially now, as we wait to go home and see our loved ones, we shouldn't be surprised at the anger we may feel, even anger at the ones we love the most (and they may be angry at us too!) Don't read too much into the anger; it's simply driven by the stressfulness of waiting.

But just as there's a difference between a rain shower and a flood, so there's a difference between a single angry outburst and an uncontrollable flood of anger. There's a old saying in Alcoholics Anonymous, "First the man takes a drink, then the drink takes a man." If anger has taken you over, then get help. Anger can be managed with the right tools; its part of our nature and it doesn't have to be overwhelming.

## Chaplain Services

### Sundays

Protestant Service  
0900 in the DFAC

Catholic Mass  
0915 in the FOB Prosperity Chapel

Latter Day Saints Service East  
1300 in the CSH Compound Chapel

Catholic Mass  
1630 at the Bldg 5 Basketball Court

Contemp. Protestant Worship  
1815 at the Bldg. 5 Basketball Court  
Spanish Catholic Mass  
2000 in Bldg. 1 Conference Room

### Tuesdays and Thursdays

Catholic Mass  
1200 in Bldg. 1 Conference Room

### Wednesdays and Fridays

Catholic Mass  
1200 in the CSH Compound Chapel

### Fridays

Eastern Orthodox Service  
0930 every other Friday in Bldg 1  
Conference Room

Juma'a Prayer Service  
1300 in the Embassy Prayer Room

Latter Day Saints Service West  
1500 in Bldg. 1 Conference Room

Jewish Shabbat Service  
1800 in Bldg. 1 Conference Room

### Saturdays

Catholic Mass  
1100 in the CSH Compound Chapel

### Sundays

Church of Christ services  
0900 in Bldg. 1 Conference Room

Denominational Protestant Service  
(Anglican, Episcopal and Lutheran)  
1800 in Bldg. 1 Conference Room

An Easter event will be held at Freedom Rest March 27 from 1100-1500

Directions to the Building 1 Conference Room: Enter Union III, turn left. The first building to your left is Bldg. 1. Enter and ask for the conference room.

Directions to the Union III DFAC: The DFAC is just beyond Bldg. 1 on the opposite side of the street.

Directions to the Bldg. 5 Basketball Court: Enter Union III, Bldg. 5 is to the right and is the largest building on Union III. A large exterior concrete ramp goes to the second floor. Walk up the ramp and, once inside the building entrance, take the lefthand hall. Follow the hall to the stairwell, continue walking forward into what looks like an abandoned corridor. The basketball court is located on the left at the end of the corridor.



# Care of the Warrior Spirit

*Story and Graphic by  
Maj. Jon Powers  
JASG-C Public Affairs*

The Bible states “Iron sharpens Iron” and in a war zone it rings true. However, that iron can cut and the Chaplain Corps and their assistants are often the ones who heal those wounds.

Caring for the spirit of a warrior is simultaneously both simple and complex. The Joint Area Support Group – Central relies on the care and attention of four dedicated individuals.

Petty Officer 1st Class Tronda L. Douglas, a religious program specialist originally based in Norfolk, Va., believes her job is simply defined. “Helping whenever someone is in need. That’s what we’re here for,” she said. Douglas’ sense of accomplishment is joined to this principle.

“Being able to notice that some days you’re not smiling. If I know you like beef jerky or he likes power-bars, just being able to give you something, seeing the smile on your face is enough,” she added.

She makes her job sound easy but there is a difficult side, too. “Someone can come into the office yelling and screaming and I have been screamed at yelled at, they are upset for other reasons, but you know in your heart it’s not about you – you can’t take it personally,” said Douglas. “There’s some days, trust me. Being able to talk with family helps

me get through those.”

Chap. (Col.) David G. Reeson, deployed from Offut AFB, Neb. He started as a Reservist, but due to a shortage of chaplains has found himself on active duty most of the last 10 years.

Reeson is also able to clearly define his role. “We are supposed to be a visible sign of the Holy. So we head out, spend time with people, just being available,” he said. But there is much involved within his singular purpose. To Reeson, being a chaplain means serving all religious denominations. “I would be there for the Jewish, the Muslim, and the Protestant.”

“We’re paid just to talk to people, paid just to visit,” said Reeson, smiling. “People invite me into their lives.” Part of the reason for this may be that service members can turn to chaplains without fear of judgment. When a person may want to talk but feels inhibited about the subject chaplains offer something a first sergeant can’t.

“We have complete confidentiality,” Reeson said. “People feel they can come talk to us about things. The more you go out, the more people come in for counseling, marriage counseling, spiritual guidance, decisions on their careers.”

Reeson never forgets that he is not only a priest, but a military chaplain. “I support the warrior. Some of the things we do are with the warrior in mind.”

“Last year they were being mor-

tared every Sunday; it causes people to think of their mortality. For good reason people start to prioritize what’s really important, what’s really not important,” Reeson recalled.

Parishes differ as a priest moves through his career and the same is true with deployments. “In the military, I deal a lot more with people in the same age category, 18 to 30 year-olds, where in a parish you have a lot of older people. Different issues come up. Here I don’t ever hear a baby cry at mass, but I hear people snoring sometimes though,” he joked. He maintains his sense of humor even though he is sometimes called upon for the ultimate service to a military member.

“I have had a few occasions when I’ve had to go to the hospital for the Last Rites, the ‘anointing of the sick’ for someone that was hit pretty hard. When you are with their buddies who question ‘Why did he die and I am going to survive, I just got a few scratches.’ Life and death issues, questions of their own mortality. I do a lot more listening than talking quite often.”

Reeson’s care extends from the tragic to a more routine maintenance of the soul.

Deployments can be extremely hard on marriages and for this Reeson emphasizes the benefits of faith. With half of all marriages ending in divorce Reeson attempts to extend this any benefit available



**SEASON OF WORSHIP** - From left to right- Soldiers pray during Sunday mass here at FOB Union III, Chap. (Col.) David G. Reeson offers ashes on Ash Wednesday, JASG-C Soldiers observe the Stations of the Cross during Lent, Staff Sgt. Daryl Caulfield sets up for Mass, candle light at the Easter Vigil, Chap. (Maj.) Jan Koczera plays the harp after the sunrise service, Petty Officer 1st Class Tronda Douglas sets out donations, Soldiers offer thanks for Easter, Koczera gives his sermon on Easter, Lt. Col. Edward Chrystal receives his confirmation at the Easter Vigil. *Photos by Maj. Jon Powers*

here in Theater to all walks of life.

“Whether you’re Jewish, Muslim, or Protestant or Catholic, it doesn’t make any difference,” Reeson noted. “[With faith] you’re able to cope better and so with these deployments that are more frequent and longer it seems that if I can get people involved, not just coming to church on Sunday but in their spiritual life, in reading and their relationship with their god, whatever name they might give their God, they would be happier. We offer a number of different programs, they do want to build a better relationship even though they are far away.”

Chap. (Maj.) Jan Koczera, 50th Infantry Brigade Combat Team chaplain calls Hamilton Square, N.J. home. As a member of the Joint Area Support Group – Central here in Baghdad, he has also seen his share of active duty. This tour is his third.

“Faith is an essential in any person’s lifestyle, there’s your mental, your physical and then there’s your soul,” said Koczera. “You have to have some sort of faith. Even the atheist has faith; he has faith that there is no God. There’s a mystery to life, in this great mystery, I don’t care how great a scientist you are, you cannot define everything.” Koczera comfortably deals in esoteric principles with practical advice.

“Those great questions in life, like why do things happen the way they do, what is my purpose, how do I have the strength to go on, those are things that just resist definition. So if you are going to be a warrior, you are setting yourself on a course that will be extremely demanding physically, it’s going to require mental concentration, and if your spirit isn’t in line with that there will be a terrible sense of aloneness and

or seriously injured, how do I deal with the pile of crap at home and I can’t go back and help it?” He used this experience to sharpen his own ideas on how best to help.

“So you have to present a practical faith,” he said. Often, a great truth can aid everyone and Koczera uses his own discoveries to his best advantage. “Now, I have found this a wonderful thing, because it keeps me real and then when I go back to my church at home I make sure I am still in the real and that attracts people, versus the temptation in any religious group to get into your own language, to get some ideals and things going that have no practical identification.”

But it is being a Soldier’s preacher is what Koczera loves most.

“As a chaplain, I step out to them, I am with them and I share life with them.”

Koczera believes in doing

what Soldiers do, including participating in the individual movements techniques training in the Texas sun. “That’s a tremendous burden but also a great gift and honor,” he noted. “I have always believed that I don’t have the right to minister to someone if I don’t share their lives.” Whether you regularly attend church makes no difference to him.

“Jesus spent most of his time with the people on the fringes and

**“It’s the idea of helping Soldiers. To me that’s most important, being able to serve God, and to serve not just my Soldiers but my country as well. There’s a lot of satisfaction in being of service.”**

**-Staff Sgt. Daryl Caulfield**

emptiness and there will be a point that you just run out of the strength to do it,” he added.

Through his combat-zone service Koczera’s experience offers help to any service member. “In a war zone there’s immediacy about everything and people don’t want theories, they don’t want to know general ideas, they want to know practical solutions. ‘How do I make it through today, how do I deal with the fact that my buddy has just been killed

*continued on page 16*

# Iraqis celebrate Easter

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris  
JASG-C Public Affairs

The Easter Bunny visited Iraq early this year, leaving colored eggs scattered about the International Zone March 27 for dozens of Baghdad children to discover.

The event, hosted by the Joint Area Support Group-Central (JASG-C) and 1st Cavalry Division, offered these children a chance to not only have fun with their families and coalition members, but also to safely celebrate the spring holiday at Freedom Rest, an Army recreational facility located within the confines of Forward Operating Base (FOB) Freedom.

"This normally doesn't happen for them," explained Sgt. 1st Class Sandra McIntosh, Freedom Rest mayor attached to the 1st Cavalry Division. "We came together and decided to have this day for them so they could have something in their lives besides the war out there."

The "we" to whom McIntosh refers includes Capt. Eric Montoya, FOB Freedom mayor, 1st Sgt. Charley Keuscher, FOB Freedom deputy mayor, and Sgt. Maj. Israel Garcia, JASG-C Support Operations sergeant major.

"We wanted to do something for the kids again, similar to our Christmas event," explained Garcia. "We wanted to hold it at FOB Freedom, but since FOB Freedom is being turned over to the Government of Iraq, there's really nothing there."

"We approached the Freedom Rest mayor, we pitched the idea, and she bought off on it," he added.

The children and their families made the most of Freedom Rest's amenities, playing soccer and Frisbee on open fields, swimming and diving in several pools, and hunting for the ever-elusive dyed eggs.

Having the chance to play with these children seemed to give service members all the reward they needed for

the many hours they volunteered to set up and run the event.

"We're away from home, we don't get to interact with our kids, and so this is a really great thing; we get to play with them, have a little fun," said McIntosh.

"It's really great, because we work all day during the week and we don't get to interact with children like we do at home," added Sgt. Sara Vasquez, JASG-C Badging Section.

"I need a fix of children every once and a while, having seven at home," explained Lt. Col. Brian Scully, JASG-C chief of staff. "Just having the noise of children and children being around, it's therapeutic for me. The fact that we can interact with the children and actually be a part of their happiness is a very fulfilling experience."


Those involved also said they hoped events such as this would have a positive influence on these children as they grow to adulthood.

"I'm sure that when I leave here, these kids will always remember the Christmas event that we had for them, and they'll definitely remember this," said Garcia.

"They can always hear stories about Americans, but the stories can't replace their personal experiences," he continued. "No matter what people will tell them, if it's bad they can say, 'No, no, no – Americans are good;

they're always willing to help.'"

"When you're dealing with children, you reach something that's common to all of us," said Scully. "It goes beyond our job description, it goes beyond the pay, and it strikes at something fundamentally important to each adult who is here."

"To take care of Iraqi children, it makes our separation from our own families worth it in a way," he continued, "because we're making a very positive difference in the future of this country by touching the lives of the children." 



**"We came together and decided to have this day for them so they could have something in their lives besides the war out there."**

**- Sgt. 1st Class Sandra McIntosh, 1st Cavalry Div.**

# FIRED UP!



*photos by Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris and Sgt. Bill Addison*

Iraqi firefighter cadets attempt to douse an automobile fire, above during the first phase of the skills-evaluation program at the International Zone Fire Academy. The three-day evaluation ensures the cadets are proficient at fighting several types of fires.



# From Soldier to Citizen:

*The  
Ins  
and  
Outs  
of*

# USERRA

*Col. Daniel G. Giaquinto  
Command Judge Advocate*

As our deployment winds down, it is natural to think ahead of reuniting with family and friends, as well as resuming our civilian careers. When doing so, hopefully not at the expense of remaining focused on our current mission, you may be reassured to know that federal law protects the reinstatement of your civilian employment.

The Uniform Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), which is found in Title 38, United States Code, sections 4301-4333, is a federal law that prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of past or present military service and obligations; protects reemployment rights for persons absent from employment because of military service; and preserves some employment related benefits for persons absent from employment because of military service. This article will examine these protections in the context of the 50th IBCT deployment (duration of one year).

The anti-discrimination provision of USERRA prohibits the denial, by an employer, of employment, reemployment, retention in employment, promotion or any benefit of employment of any employee who “is a member of, applies to be a member of, performs, has performed, applies to perform, or has an obligation to perform service in a

uniformed service...” Basically this means that your past, present or future connection with your National Guard service cannot be a motivating factor of your employer in any adverse action taken against you, including the denial of an employment related benefit. Also, “benefit” is defined broadly and includes matters such as pension plan, health plan, and working hours.

**The Uniform Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act is a federal law that prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of past or present military service and obligations.**

Regarding reinstatement of employment, an employee who meets the criteria for reemployment shall be promptly reemployed “upon completion of a period of service in the uniformed services.” There are five criteria for reinstatement:

- 1) The absence from employment must have been for military service,
- 2) The employee must have given notice to the employer before taking military leave,
- 3) The absence due to military service cannot exceed 5 years,

4) Separation from service must be under honorable conditions, and

5) The employee must report back to work in a timely manner.

Now let’s examine those criteria. First, the job to which reinstatement is sought must have been one in which you were an employee working for someone else. That is, the reemployment protection does not apply to the self-employed, independent contractors, students or to employment of a brief, non reoccurring nature.

Second, your absence due to this deployment (active duty) is considered military service under USERRA (for future reference reserve duty also is covered, but state active duty is not, although separate state laws may provide protection for SAD).

Third, you should have given your employer advance notice before leaving for military service, and notice can be verbal or written.

Fourth, the length of our deployment obviously does not exceed five years. It is important to note that there are many exceptions to the five year cumulative rule, and therefore the rule should not present a problem for USERRA coverage even if you have had several deployments. Nonetheless, if you feel your total deployment time is approaching five years, and you are concerned about your protection, consult with counsel regarding applicable exceptions to the five year cumulative rule (e.g. mobilizations during different jobs,

type of call up to active duty, etc.).

Fifth, there is no USERRA right to reemployment if you received a dishonorable, bad conduct, or under other than honorable conditions discharge, or were dismissed in the case of an officer. Finally, with absences due to military service of more than 180 days, "timely reporting" means submitting a request/ application for reemployment within 90 days of termination of your orders.

On returning to work, you should apply for reemployment in writing, even though a written request is not required. A sample request for reemployment letter may be found on our JASG-C share point under CJA. It is best to give your employer as much advance notice as possible regarding your return to work; remember that professional courtesy, communication, and clear intentions are important in maintaining good relations with your employer.

You are entitled to be "promptly" reinstated to your former position. The Department of Labor has interpreted "promptly" to mean as soon as practicable under the circumstances. Because you have been deployed for more than 90 days, reemployment will be in the position in which you would have been employed if your continuous employment with the employer had not been interrupted by your military service.

If your employer claims you are no longer qualified, the employer must make reasonable efforts to qualify you for the position. If these efforts are not successful, then the employer must give you a position of like seniority, status, and pay, the duties of which you are qualified to perform. If you received an injury or aggravated an injury during your military service that disqualifies you



from your former position, the employer must provide you an equivalent position, or the closest job to an equivalent position.

When you return to work you have a right to your vacation and other benefits accrued at the time you left for military service. In addition, while in military service you continue to accrue seniority and any rights and benefits that are determined by seniority. This is known as the "escalator principle." When you resume employment, you begin employment at the level of seniority you would have attained if were riding "the escalator" during your entire period of military service. In other words, you are entitled to seniority rights as if you never left your civilian employment.

There are also special protections covering your return to work and resumption of employment. There is a grace period of one year for military members like you who

have been deployed for more than 180 days. This means that your employer cannot discharge you for one year following your reinstatement, except "for cause." Other protections include: you cannot be forced to take vacation or sick time to cover your absence due to military service; you cannot be forced to find a replacement to cover your absence; and time in military service counts towards your civilian employment "pension time" requirements.

So what resources are out there to assist you if you feel your employer has not complied with USERRA regarding any aspect of your reemployment? Although your Office of the Staff Judge Advocate office is a good start, remember the Judge Advocates cannot represent you against your employer. They can, however, drill down further than this article in explaining the intricacies of USERRA and any state laws that may apply to your situation and may make a referral to an appropriate agency for you. The primary contact for resolving these matters is the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), [www.esgr.org](http://www.esgr.org), 1-800-336-4590.

ESGR is a DOD organization within the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs that seeks to promote cooperation and understanding between reserve component members and their civilian employers and to assist in the resolution of conflicts arising from an employee's military commitment. Information regarding the New Jersey Committee of ESGR may be found at <http://www.njesgr.org>.

If the ESGR cannot resolve or mediate a dispute, you may file a complaint with the Department of

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# Riverside villas demolished



**CLEANING HOUSE** - The Joint Area Support Group-Central's Department of Public Works continues to tear down the riverside villa that once belonged to Uday and Qusay Hussein.

*Story and photos by  
Sgt. Bill Addison  
JASG-C Public Affairs*

When you need something built in the International Zone (IZ), you turn to the Joint Area Support Group- Central's Department of Public Works. Recently, DPW got the chance to do just the opposite when they oversaw the demolition of Uday and Qusay Hussein's river villa earlier this month.

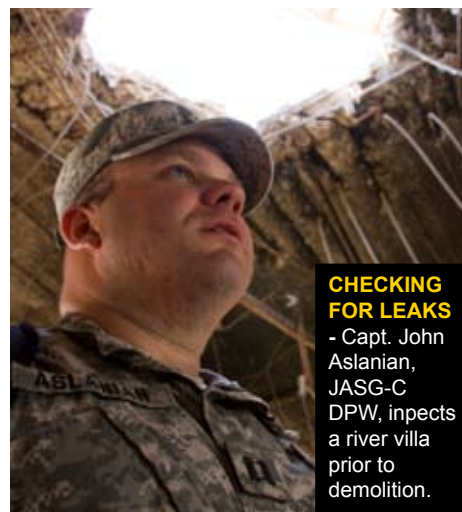
The villa is one of several that were built along the Tigris River around 1985. Two of them were later built together and refinished ornately to resemble a palace for the former Iraqi dictator's two sons.

"Initially we were renovating quite a few of those villas to become embassies for the Iraqi government using Iraqi funds," said Air Force Capt. Michelle Sterling, project manager for the demolition of the riverside villa belonging to Saddam's two sons. "These particular villas were heavily damaged during the bombings in 2003, so much so that we couldn't renovate them."

The project, which was funded by the Government of Iraq, is expected to create more space for ad-

ditional embassies to be built. And with most of the labor force being local Iraqis, the project is helping to pump additional money into the local economy.

"It's a good project... you're getting people back to work, you're putting money back into the economy and that really is what's impor-



**CHECKING FOR LEAKS**  
- Capt. John Aslanian, JASG-C DPW, inspects a river villa prior to demolition.

tant to move forward," she said.

For Sterling, the project was an exciting change of pace to the normal construction and renovation projects DPW usually handles.


"Demolition is fun for an engineer," she said. "It's always interesting to me, from an engineering perspective; to see how different

parts of the world do their construction...you can learn a lot about how somebody put something together by taking it down."

Sterling said the buildings were built uncommonly strong, utilizing a greater amount of rebar and steel reinforcement than typically needed for a building of its size. Most of the damage was confined to the areas that were specifically bombed, making a statement not about the American war technology, but the strength of the building's construction.

"These were incredibly robust buildings; they were very much overdesigned," she said.

But Sterling's interest in the building's construction didn't overshadow the feeling of tearing down the home of Saddam's notoriously brutal sons Uday and Qusay.

"It's always important in this part of the world to remember history. Nothing is easily washed away or gotten rid of. But I do think that with all the pain that the country has gone through both during Saddam's regime and then immediately following, that getting rid of some of these symbols of that pain and the oppression is important to the Iraqis," she said. 

# Fallen hero honored

*continued from page 5*

changes. But without the NCOs from the 50<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, the mission may never have been accomplished, he added.

While the 50<sup>th</sup> personnel hosted the event, the 10<sup>th</sup> Sustainment personnel covered down on each phase of the event. The event included the unveiling of a sign bearing Roukey's name, cutting a ribbon of stamps, as well as serving a cake designed as postage stamps from the U.S. and Middle East.

Lt. Col. David E. Jones, 10<sup>th</sup> Sustainment Brigade Troops Battalion commander deployed from Fort Drum, N.Y., said the post office dedication was important to recognize a fallen comrade.

"It connects service members with loved ones and makes sure there is a good information flow, as well as service members being able to get the items they need," Jones added.

He explained that in addition to postal operations at FOB Prosperity, Soldiers from his command provide postal services at Camp Liberty, FOB Falcon, and FOB Union III.

Roukey, 33, who served on active-duty and later with the Maine Army National Guard, was a Soldier in the Army Reserve's Lewiston, Maine-based 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn., 304<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 98<sup>th</sup> Division. He died on April 26, 2004, from injuries sustained from a bomb blast after his



team raided a warehouse searching for chemical weapons.

He had returned to the military as a result of the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, family members reported.

Maj. James Lincoln of the Coalition Press Information Center, Multi-National Force-Iraq, had served with the 98<sup>th</sup> in 2004. He read Roukey's widow's letter of appreciation for remembering her late husband.

"If it wasn't for the Postal Service, I would not have been able to receive letters, cards, and gifts from all corners of the world," Lincoln read from Ryann Roukey's letter.


"Larry taught and showed me how to be a strong person, and in these five years time, has shown that

I am a strong and confident woman, mother, friend, daughter, and sister. I know for a fact Larry would never have wanted me to give up. I wake up every morning for our children and myself. I know I have made Larry proud," Lincoln continued.

She wrote that when Larry left for Iraq, he made her promise to tell their son, Nicholas, he was working and would be home soon. Shortly after her husband died, the son asked if his father was in heaven.

"I answered yes, daddy is working in heaven now and he will be working hard in heaven to keep us safe," the letter read. She closed by not only thanking the military personnel present for thinking of her husband, but reminded those attending the ceremony to hug their family members and tell them they love them, because life is too short.

Ferrari said each day when hundreds of people walk by the APO, they will see the name of a fallen hero—a sergeant.

"His name underscores the commitment and ultimate sacrifice made by the more than 600 sustainment and support Soldiers who have given their lives in Iraq," he said. 

**“ It connects service members with loved ones and makes sure there is good information flow, as well as service members being able to get the items they need.**

- Lt. Col David E. Jones **”**



**SUNRISE SERVICE** - More than 200 Military and civilian faithful gathered at FOB Phoenix for an Easter morning service at sun up.

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not with the established religion of the day. So I truly feel I am doing more of Christ's ministry as a chaplain than I ever would as a pastor."

"The issues they give me are real-life issues, marriage problems, personal problems, what do I do with my life type of problems, how do I get out of the jam that I am in type of things. So there again that's a great gift of working with Soldiers, that there's so much more I can do and that they are ready to hear," he added.

Koczera understands "calling", he had one and looks for the same in each person he works with. "A person can be called to be a warrior; you don't have to go any further than the Bible to see all kinds of examples. There is the sense that way down deep inside of us, every man and woman needs a cause to stand for, something they believe in, standards they defend. These are the things you believe and commit to so strongly."

This commitment brings sacrifice and hardship too. "For a lot of Soldiers this may be the first time they were ever away from home or the furthest they've been away from home, so there's that sense of being

alone and being disconnected," he noticed. And for many young Soldiers, they are faced with life-and-death issues every day. "It's a whole different level of doing things."

Staff Sgt. Daryl Caulfield, from West Hampton, N.J. sees his role of chaplain's assistant as a mixture of functions. A former Marine aircraft mechanic turned Military Police then chaplains assistant, he is prepared for whatever comes.

"Office manager, body guard for the chaplain, church secretary, music coordinator, supply Sgt. and a good mix of clerical duties," said Caulfield. The job is much more than that also. "It's an opportunity to serve Soldiers and provide comfort and encouragement."

He points out the connection between his religious beliefs and those of the military. "Warrior values and many of the things religion speaks about – they go hand in hand," he said. One of those common tenets is selfless service.

"It's the idea of helping Soldiers. To me that's most important, being able to serve God, and to serve not just my Soldiers but my country as well. There's a lot of satisfaction in being of service," Caulfield said. "I am often approached by Soldiers; it can be an innocent conversation that through questioning reveals something deeper going on. It gives


me an opportunity to help Soldiers that are confronting different issues in their lives."

He also understands the one element of military life that service members deal with beyond the average civilian experience shared by most Americans. "The uncertainty of going

to war, the idea they could possibly die doing what they are doing. They realize how fragile life is; they see it all around them. There is a draw to church to draw close to God. A lot of the values that the Army and other services hold are honorable and shared with faith groups, honor and integrity, stuff that is essential to the Christian principles."

Austere surroundings are part of being a Soldier. Caulfield relates to this. "It is not always going to be comfortable. We take what we have and drive on, we can do what we have to do no matter what the circumstance and no matter what the environment," he said. "I've seen services held on the hood of a hum-vee, even our dirty nasty basketball court; we still have an obligation to provide services for our Soldiers. It is what it is."

Koczera summed up his experiences. "To be separated from your family, your friends, all the things that are normally part of your life – it is amazing how many people there are whose life is on the very edge and it doesn't take much to push them over. On a number of occasions when people have been thinking about suicide, I have been able to intervene and they are alive because I was there. That's no small thing."

No small thing indeed. 

# Everyone Loves Girl Scout Cookies



**Plethora of pastries** - Soldiers of the Joint Area Support Group-Central pose for a group photo with some of the 250 boxes of Girl Scout Cookies donated to the N.J. Soldiers by Girl Scout Troop 1572 of Lakewood and Brick N.J. as well as Summit Supports our Troops of Summit N.J., top. Master Sgt. Nicholas Markert sets up the display in the Union III DFAC a joint effort with KBR and GCC, top right and Maj. Jon Powers unloads and distributes some of the 600 boxes of cookies donated by Adopt-a-Platoon, bottom right. Airman 1st Class Ryan Patrick Meehan grabs his share of the coveted cookies, left. *Photos by Sgt. Bill Addison*



## Understanding USERRA

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Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DOL-VETS or VETS), 1-866-4-USA-DOL, [www.dol.gov/vets/welcome.html](http://www.dol.gov/vets/welcome.html). VETS will conduct an investigation, which may include getting documents from the employer and interviewing relevant witnesses. With the assistance of the Department of Justice (DOJ), VETS has subpoena power in investigating, but it cannot order compliance. If it cannot resolve the case, you may request DOJ to initiate a lawsuit, which it may do if it feels your case has merit.

If you are a federal government employee (but not a National Guard technician), and VETS is unsuccessful in resolving the complaint, you may request that VETS refer the complaint to the Office of Special Counsel (OSC). If the OSC believes there is merit to the complaint, it will initiate an action before the Merit Systems Protection Board and appear on your behalf. You may also hire a private attorney to file suite at your own ex-

pense, regardless of any attempts to resolve the case administratively through ESGR or VETS. In a successful lawsuit, the court can order compliance with USERRA, compensation for any lost wages and benefits, and certain liquidated damages if the court determines that the employer's failure to comply with the law was willful or reckless.

This article has only highlighted certain major protections of USERRA. This area of the law is fraught with complexities and exceptions, employers are not without defenses in certain circumstances. There may also be state laws that supplement, but cannot diminish, the protections of USERRA. If you experience any problems regarding your civilian employment, or perceive any discrimination in the workplace or in seeking employment - that you feel is due to your military service or affiliation - contact your local JAG office, ESGR, VETS and/or private legal counsel immediately. 🇺🇸

**LAPTOP LINEUP** - Staff Sgt. Jarod J. Gatson, Joint Area Support Group-Central, checks computer status and surveys progress during re-imaging of the first 30 of 400 computers that will result in the removal of tactical servers from Forward Operating Base Prosperity.



## New computer system provides link between FOBs Prosperity, Union III

*Story and photos by  
1st Sgt. David Moore  
JASG-C Public Affairs*

While the footprint of U.S. forces inside the International Zone changes, the digital footprint is also experiencing a shift in technology between two forward operating bases.

The change, better known as a switchover, occurred March 24 when Joint Area Support Group-Central (JASG-C) Soldiers from FOB Prosperity turned off the switch to their tactical Web services provided by the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, and connected to the bigger U.S. Army Central Command domain.

“The way you have to think about this in business terms is the change now brings the FOB to a different

command or to a corporate level with the backbone of service reaching all the way back to the United States,” Staff Sgt. Jarod Gatson, NCOIC of the FOB Prosperity Help Desk from Joliet, Ill., said.

About two weeks before the switch was turned off to the tactical Web, the information management Soldiers received the first 40 of 400 computers and laptops to re-image hard drives, and started the migration to the larger command’s backbone of service.

The machines being handled by the information management shop at FOB Prosperity affect nearly all the military tenant organizations at this International Zone location.

Miles of computer and power cords were strewn across the floor of the office in the Al Salam Palace and individual computer systems were placed on two eight-foot-long tables. Around-the-clock operations began and may continue into the future for additional service improvements.


While the seven computer technicians started the process for the changeover, they faced some early challenges along the way to reach the proper level of service for the computer users to communicate with the command network.

“Once we handled some of the issues such as those associated with the common access card readers, we were able to pick up the pace with the process,” 1st Lt. Steven Brill, OIC of the Prosperity Help Desk and Ewing, N.J., resident, said.

Another changeover phase will be the completion of construction for the placement of fiber optic between FOBs Union III and Prosperity. Presently, services are received via a microwave line-of-sight (LOS) shot. Once the fiber optic is in place, it is expected to terminate that system. This equipment is maintained by Company B, 51st Expeditionary Signal Battalion (ESB), out of Fort Lewis, Wash.

Brill said the fiber optic will replace the Joint Network Node, known as JNN, that operates from a satellite trailer and LOS shelter.

“Right now, we are using all the infrastructure of the former service to make this change work. Once the fiber optic is in place, the infrastructure components from the old will also be removed,” Gatson said.

With the system changes at FOB Prosperity, one thing will not change - the JASG-C military personnel will likely continue to man the Prosperity Help Desk around the clock until the mission is complete. 

**Miles of computer and power cords were strewn across the floor of the office in the Al Salam Palace at FOB Prosperity.**

# Getting To Know **FOB UNION III**

## **Mayor's Cell**

MAJ Thomas McGhee  
 FOB Union III mayor  
 DSN 318 239-0232  
 Asia Cell 0770-444-1653

CSM Scott Lewis  
 FOB Union III deputy mayor  
 DSN 318 239-0234  
 Asia Cell 0770-444-1705

## **Dining Facility**

The Union III Dining Facility (DFAC) across from the Bldg. 1 parking lot offers four meals a day. Meal hours are:

Breakfast: 0530 to 0800  
 Lunch: 1130 to 1330  
 Dinner: 1730 to 2000  
 Midnight Meal: 2330 to 0100

## **Post Office**

Free mail, which is limited to 13 ounces, still exists for the letter home and a mailbox is located in front of Bldg. 6. But if you are looking to mail pictures, a small souvenir in an envelope or packages, then you must go to the Post Office located in Bldg. 5.

Your packages will be inspected and limited to three packages or items, such as footlockers, per visit. You are also required to have a military ID card for the transaction. Civilians are required to have two forms of identification to conduct postal transactions.

Items that are forbidden to be shipped include weapons items, drugs, alcohol, and perishable material. For a complete list of items, consult CENTCOM AR 25-200 or HRSC Policy 07-26.

The hours at the Post Office are 0800 to 1730 daily.

## **Finance**

The times and location for Union III finance operations are Bldg. 6, Rooms 1-4A and 1-4B, from 0900 to 1600, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Finance operations include check cashing, Eagle Cash Card transactions, military pay issues, collection and review of travel vouchers and other military pay-related documents, and more.

Eagle Cash Card (ECC) applications are available. The service member must provide a current bank statement or LES to verify bank routing and account numbers. As a reminder, you can load up to \$350 per day to your card. You can get cash back up to \$200 per month. Checks can also be cashed for up to \$200 per month.

For more information, call Sgt. Genea L. Michael at DSN 318 239-8570/8571 or send e-mail [genea.michael@iraq.centcom.mil](mailto:genea.michael@iraq.centcom.mil)

## **Gym/MWR**

The Union III Gym is located in Bldg. 5 and is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The MWR facility, adjacent to the gym, offers a large-screen television, DVDs, books, board games, Xbox and other fun activities. The MWR facility is also open 24/7.

The gym/MWR facility host several weekly events, including Karaoke Night Sundays at 1900, Movie Night Saturdays at 2000, ping-pong and pool tournaments Thursdays at 1930, ab workout classes Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 2000 to 2100, and Texas Hold-Em Tuesdays,

Fridays and Saturdays from 2000 to 2300. Times and events are subject to change.

## **Common Access Cards**

The IZ Common Access Card (CAC) office is open in Bldg. 1, Room 107, Monday through Saturday from 0830 to 1800. For questions, call DSN 318 239-0641 or 703 270-0641 or e-mail [jasgchrn@iraq.centcom.mil](mailto:jasgchrn@iraq.centcom.mil)

## **Laundry Service**

Since dirty laundry is serious business, the FOB has a seven-day-a-week laundry service that at a maximum takes three days to complete. Individuals using the service can only have 20 pieces of laundry in each bag. Blankets and comforters must be separated from clothing or uniform items. The hours of operation are 0700 to 2000 daily.

## **Medical Treatment**

The Union III Troop Medical Clinic, located behind the Mayor's Cell in Bldg. 1, is open for routine health care needs. Sick-call hours for walk-ins are Monday through Friday from 0800 to 1100 and 1300 to 1500, and Saturdays from 0800 to 1100. The clinic is closed on Sundays.

Those eligible for care include active-duty U.S. and Coalition Forces, retired U.S. military and Department of Defense federal government employees.

Routine immunizations and Post Deployment Health Assessments are available for individuals during sick call hours. For groups of 10 or more call 239-0680 to schedule.

# HOUSING BOOM!

Work continues on the South LSA (Life Support Area) at Forward Operating Base Union III as various-sized cranes lift Containerized Housing Units and protective t-walls into place.

*Photos by Maj. Jon Powers and Sgt. Bill Addison of JASG-C Public Affairs*

