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THE Desert Talon



Volume 1, Issue 1

A Publication of the Task Force 49 Public Affairs Office

January 2008

Women take to the skies on Christmas

SGT. DALE SWEETNAM
Task Force 49 PAO

While their families, children and friends back home sat down for Christmas Eve dinner, two all-female UH-60 Black Hawk crews woke up early Christmas morning and began preparing for a unique mission.

Female Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment spent their Christmas Day executing a 100 percent female-run flight mission. From the intelligence briefings in the morning, to the two four-woman flight crews, all the way to the fuel teams, the mission consisted of only women.

Black Hawk pilot Capt. Andrea Ourada, said the mission was not about busting open stereotypes or challenging the status quo, but rather about showing people how much women in the Army do already.

"It's not about proving you can do the job you're already qualified to do, it's about how we have the capability to do it," Ourada said. "Our Army is a lot more diverse than I think we realize."

Ourada flew in the lead aircraft with Pilot Chief Warrant Officer 4 Teresa Burgess and Crew Chiefs Staff Sgt. Michelle Smith, and



Capt. Phoebe Inigo, 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment, conducts her preflight inspections early Christmas morning at Logistics Support Area Anaconda. Inigo was one of the several Soldiers who participated in a 100 percent female-run mission on Christmas Day.

Sgt. Leilani Aho. The trail aircraft was piloted by Chief Warrant Officer 3 Angela Barros and Capt. Phoebe Inigo with Crew Chiefs Sgt. Michelle Aina and Sgt. Crisaron Voeuth.

The crews flew all over Baghdad picking up VIPs including U.S. Rep. Michelle Bachmann of Minnesota. The crews also transported a general and several Soldiers during the general aviation support mission.

The mission went off just as planned, and while the women associated with the

mission respected the unique nature of the flight, they wanted their fellow Soldiers to see the event as no big deal.

"It's just another day at the office,"



Sgt. Michelle Aina, 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment, fastens her gear before take off.

Aina said before the flight.

While an all-female mission might challenge the perception of combat gender roles in today's Army, Burgess said that's not what the flight was all about.

"I don't think this will change any gender stereotypes that are already present, and I'm not here to change any minds," she said. "We are doing it because we can."

Ourada added that the Black Hawk doesn't care who runs the controls and soon

a flight of this nature will be commonplace.

"It can be the norm," she said. "That aircraft operates the same way whether it's a male or female behind the controls."

The crew executed its Christmas Day mission and returned safely with no fanfare or exposure. The mission appeared just like any other.

However, Barros said the mission was a reminder that there is still a great deal of work to be done before it can be

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Talon 6 sends . . . happy holidays!

Soldiers and Families of Task Force 49:

This past month has been one of great change, with Col. Tim Edens and the Headquarters of Task Force XII completing the transfer of authority and movement to Taji to take on the MND-Baghdad mission. While all that took place at the brigade level, the battalions here at Balad continued their incredible support across the Corps without interruption. Those of us that have joined this great formation from Alaska could not be more proud to serve alongside such great warriors. Thank you.

For the Task Force 49 Headquarters our transition has gone extremely smoothly. With minimal time spent in Kuwait, we quickly moved up to LSA Anaconda and began to transition duties with Task Force XII. Everyone is moved into permanent quarters and is well entrenched into the daily battle rhythm needed to support this large aviation formation. I know that our Arctic Warriors will build on all the accomplishments of the Griffin team as the Multi-National Corps-Iraq Aviation Brigade.

Though we are far from home this holiday season, those on the homefront are foremost on our minds. We are taking time during the holiday season to make sure we celebrate the Christmas season and I'm impressed at what a little American ingenuity, even here in Iraq, can do to bring the holidays closer to our Soldiers even here in a distant land.

One advantage of being stationed here in Balad with such



a large Army Aviation and Air Force presence is that many of the USO shows and entertainers go through Balad on their way to see us and other units across Iraq. Three weeks ago we had WWE wrestlers here with us and this past week, a USO show that included Lance Armstrong, Kid Rock, Miss America, and Robin Williams spent the day entertaining us. The USO is even bringing yet another show to us as part of the New Year festivities.

Even with a touch of home here in Iraq, we are all so very thankful for the many care packages, cards, phone calls, etc. that we receive from our loved ones at home. This command has Family Readiness Groups in Alaska, Germany, Minnesota, Washington, Hawaii, Illinois, Georgia, Oklahoma, Oregon, and South Dakota. Wow! Even though Task Force 49's Headquarters is new to the team, my wife

Lauri and I welcome each of you to this new formation. We are so very thankful for the support each FRG is providing as we Soldier in Iraq.

I thank God for the dedication of each and every Soldier in this command and for our great families at home. During the holiday season, that thanks is even more heartfelt.

I hope you all had a very Merry Christmas! Have a wonderful New Year.

One Team! Arctic Talons!
Col. Chandler C. Sherrell
Commander, Task Force 49

Editor's note

Public Affairs Office open for business

Change has been the word of the month here at LSA Anaconda.

The 12th Combat Aviation Brigade has moved forward to Taji, leaving Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force 49 in charge of six of its aviation elements.

The transition was a smooth one, but as with any change, it took some time for Soldiers to figure out who had taken over for whom.

The Task Force 49 Public Affairs Office moved into the former home of the 12th CAB Public Affairs Office and went right to work.

As public affairs specialists, our mission is to tell your story – the Army

story. We will accomplish that through this newsletter, through the stories we send to your home stations, and by engaging national and hometown media outlets to feature our Soldiers.

We need your help to make that happen. We're always looking for story ideas, and are eager to get out there and write about the brigade's Soldiers and the good work they do. We invite you to call us or email us with story ideas, send us photos or just stop by and let us know what your unit is up to. Our office is in Bldg. 4022, right next to Catfish Air. Our phone number is at 483-2079

It's hard at times to tell families about all the good work you're doing here in Iraq. We hope *The Desert Talon* will make that much easier.

The office can also be reached through our individual emails:

Sgt. 1st Class Eric Reinhardt can be reached at eric.reinhardt@iraq.centcom.mil and Sgt. Dale Sweetnam at dale.sweetnam@iraq.centcom.mil

Get in touch with us soon, we've already begun work on next month's *Desert Talon*.

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Talon 7 sends . . . TF49 hits ground running

Well, it's been six or so weeks since the Task Force 49 Headquarters deployed to Balad Iraq; the time has passed extremely fast due to the high operational tempo that the Soldiers of Task Force 49 endure each and every day. The brigade headquarters and its staff hit the ground running and every Soldier from the highest ranking officer to the lowest ranking private assumed the controls of the brigade headquarters soon after our arrival. We held the transfer of authority ceremony on Dec. 3, at which time we assumed responsibility from the headquarters of the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade. I'm extremely proud of each and every member of this team and what they have contributed to the fight and their devotion to duty and our Nation.

Life here on LSA Anaconda isn't as bad as some would think. Our Soldiers have plenty of activities to partake in on their time off. We have a great MWR facility that offers a gym, basketball, volleyball, on-line gaming, movies, pool tables, a computer lab, and they host weekly events such as a Texas Hold 'em poker tournaments that the Brigade XO (Maj. Jones) never misses. The LSA also has two large PXs, an Iraqi bazaar for shopping, an indoor swimming pool and a full-size movie theater. So, if your Soldiers are complaining about being bored, or that there's nothing to do, encourage them to get out and try to relax and enjoy some of the facilities offered to them.

Our award-winning dining facility provided us excellent Thanksgiving and Christmas meals that included all the



trimmings of home. On Christmas Eve the Task Force 49 Headquarters Company conducted a combat patch ceremony so now they too can join the rest of the brigade's combat veterans by proudly displaying the coveted combat patch. We were honored at the ceremony with a special guest; Command Sgt. Maj. Neil Ciotola, the Multi National Corps-Iraq command sergeant major. He participated in the ceremony by issuing combat patches to our Soldiers.

On another good note, the brigade is slightly above glide path when it comes to reenlistment. Several of our Soldiers took advantage of the deployment bonus and earned some well-deserved extra cash. I would like to congratulate and thank each and every one of them, as well as their families, for staying on the team and giving their support and commitment to our Army and our Nation.

I would like to close by thanking all the families and friends of the Arctic Talons for their support and the care that they showed our Soldiers over the holiday season, your packages, cards and letters brought smiles to faces of our warriors. I ask for continued support as we continue the fight.

May God bless you, your families, our Soldiers and our great Nation!

Talon 7 Out!
CSM Richard A. Mitchell
Command Sgt. Major, Task Force 49



photo by Sgt. 1st Class Eric Reinhardt



Sign here . . .

(Above) Spc. Isaac Christensen creates a billboard identifying Task Force 49's home away from home Dec. 12 on LSA Anaconda, Iraq. Christensen had very few art supplies to work with, calling for some American ingenuity and "field expedient" techniques.

(Left) The completed sign stands outside Task Force 49 headquarters.

TF 49 takes charge of MNC-I aviation ops

BY SGT. 1ST CLASS ERIC REINHARDT
Task Force 49 PAO

Task Force 49 became the key aviation asset for Multi-National Corps – Iraq in a ceremony here Dec. 3.

The Alaska-based headquarters element of Task Force 49 is charged with conducting a full spectrum of Army aviation operations throughout the MNC-I area of responsibility.

The unit took over for the headquarters of Task Force XII, which relocated to Taji to support the aviation mission of Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

“We are honored to stand shoulder to shoulder with every member of this great corps,” Task Force 49 Commander Chandler C. Sherrell said.

About 130 members of Headquarters and Headquarters Company Task Force 49 conducted a two-week relief in place with their Task Force XII counterparts – resulting in a largely seamless transition of authority, according to officials.

The relief-in-place process employed the “right-seat ride, left-seat drive” technique, in which the outgoing unit shows its replacements how they’ve been operating, and gradually allows the incoming unit to take the lead.

“With this transfer of authority we’re going to prove that Army Aviation has the same capabilities and flexibility as our ground forces,” said MNCI-I Deputy Commander Maj. Gen. James E. Simmons in remarks.

In the time that Task Force XII led those units, it oversaw 4,500 combat missions,



photo by Sgt. 1st Class Eric Reinhardt

Task Force 49 staff took charge of full-spectrum aviation operations throughout the Multi-National Corps – Iraq area of operations.

31,000 hours of flight time, the movement of 90,000 passengers and 8 million pounds of cargo, according to Simmons.

The transfer came about six months into Task Force XII’s expected 15-month tenure at LSA Anaconda.

The transfer’s intent is to sustain the mission in Iraq without extending troops or altering deployment timelines.

About 3,000 Soldiers now fall under Task Force 49’s command. The subordinate units are:

■ **Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force 49, Fort**

Wainwright, Alaska

■ **2nd Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment (Attack), Illesheim, Germany**

■ **5th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment (General Support) Katterbach, Germany**

■ **2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment (Assault), Minnesota Army National Guard**

■ **412th Aviation Support Battalion (Katterbach, Germany)**

■ **Task Force Hawk (Army Reserve fixed-wing battalion)**

■ **B Company, 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment (Katterbach, Germany)**

The unit has also gained administrative control of Task

Force Dragon, whose mission is to provide general aviation support throughout Iraq’s Al Anbar Province.

Like HHC Task Force 49, the unit hails from Fort Wainwright, Alaska.

With the arrival of Task Force 49, multi-national forces in Iraq are able to keep four aviation brigade headquarters in theater.

Such a transition, especially in a combat zone, is unprecedented for a brigade-sized aviation unit in Iraq.

“We’re only now beginning to write the history of Task Force 49,” Sherrell said.

Task Force XII settles into new offices, mission at Taji

BY SGT. BRANDON LITTLE
Task Force XII PAO

Some Soldiers may view a deployment as an endless case of déjà-vu, but for many Task Force XII Soldiers it’s been the complete opposite.

In December, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force XII trained and transferred the mission of providing direct aviation support to Multi-National Corps – Iraq to Task Force 49; then packed and moved to Camp Taji.

Since their move to Taji, they have become the aviation task force for Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

The Soldiers successfully met every challenge placed before them in the last few months, said Col. Timothy J. Edens, Task Force XII commander.

Their new role, taking over from the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, from Fort Hood, Texas, must be accomplished with significantly fewer personnel.

“This just means that our command has a lot of confidence in us,” said Staff Sgt. Cedric T. Lowe, the human resource

sergeant for 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment. “[We] have a lot of motivated people who are excited about their jobs, so we will definitely be just as successful here as we were in (LSA Anaconda).”

In addition to its headquarters company, Task Force XII comprises 4th Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, from Fort Hood Texas; the 3-158th and a Forward Logistics Element (FLE) from the 412th Aviation Support Battalion.

“Our job [at Camp Taji] is to help provide communication support for Task Force XII,” said 1st Lt. Heidi Connelly, the Joint Node platoon leader for the FLE. “So far, our transition into this role has been pretty smooth and painless.”

Although transitioning to Camp Taji was a challenge, Col. Edens said he knows the Soldiers will exceed all expectations.

“Everything you have accomplished has come at a price,” Edens told his Soldiers at the unit’s transfer of authority ceremony. “A great deal of that price has been, and continues to be, the sacrifices made by your Families. I am extremely proud of the Soldiers and Families of Task Force XII, and I hope all of you will continue to do great things.”

Not just 'Any Soldiers'

Ohio grade-schoolers and Task Force 49 exchange gifts

By SGT. 1ST CLASS
ERIC REINHARDT
Task Force 49 PAO

The Soldiers of Task Force 49 exchanged gifts with an Ohio grade school this holiday season, thanks to a family connection.

In return for more than 100 messages of support, the school's students and faculty received a flag flown – especially for them – over the unit's headquarters on LSA Anaconda, Iraq.

Rebecca Biddle, a fifth-grade teacher in Springdale, Ohio, was on the phone with her sister, Beth Cunningham, an Army spouse in Fairbanks, Alaska this fall and learned her brother-in-law, Sgt. 1st Class Jim Cunningham, was deploying to Iraq – and would be spending Christmas there.

Biddle said students had often told her they wanted to send "Any Soldier" letters, but security concerns have prevented the Army's postal system from accepting them for the past few years. Biddle decided to enlist the help of her brother-in-law in Iraq.



photo by: Sgt. 1st Class Eric Reinhardt
Staff Sgt. Michael Falsken, Sgt. 1st Class Jim Cunningham, Maj. James Jones, and Sgt. 1st Class Chris Davis conduct a retreat ceremony Dec. 17 to prepare a flag for the students and faculty of Springdale Elementary School in Springdale, Ohio. Task Force 49 Soldiers presented the flag to show their appreciation for the more than 100 holiday cards they received from Springdale students.

A few weeks later, more than 100 holiday cards showed up at Task Force 49 headquarters and Cunningham handed them out to Soldiers around the unit.

"A lot of Soldiers wanted to write individual thank-you letters back to the kids," said Cunningham, who is noncommissioned officer in charge of Task Force 49's logistics section. "After

talking about it a while, we thought it would be best to do something collectively for the entire school and the faculty."

In keeping with military tradition, the unit opted to present the school with a flag flown over Task Force 49 headquarters in Iraq.

Soldiers gathered at the Task Force 49 headquarters flag pole the evening of Dec. 17 for a retreat ceremony

and to ready the flag for mailing to the Springdale school.

The package included a letter from the Task Force 49 Chaplain, Lt. Col. David Vanderjagt expressing the unit's appreciation to Springdale Elementary students and faculty.

The decision to make cards for the troops started with the students themselves.

"Our school's student council, which is made up of grades three through five, decided they wanted to make cards this year," Biddle said.

In past years, the school made cards for nursing homes and hospitals, but this year, the students wanted to send their support to troops in Iraq.

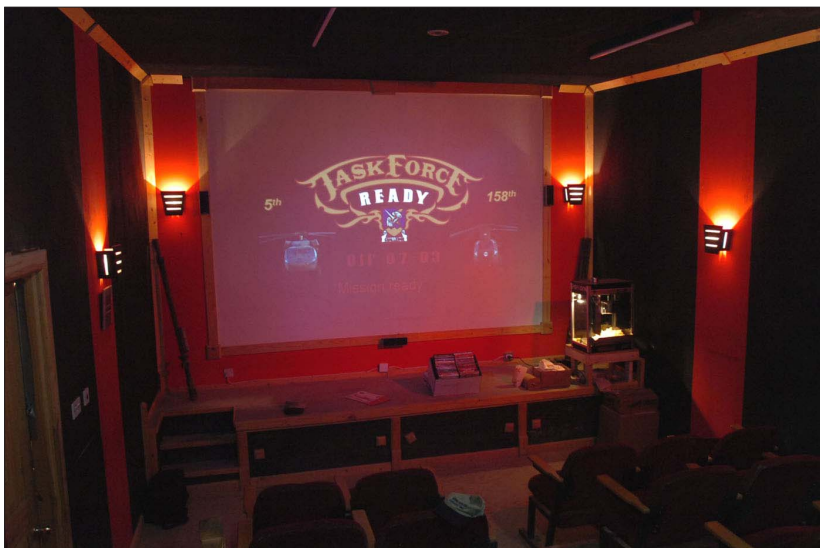
"I knew Jim was going to be sent to Iraq soon, so I knew I would have a contact person to send them to," Biddle said.

The students said they had many reasons for writing the troops.

"I wanted the soldiers to know that they are thought about at Christmas time and we wish you could be at home with your families instead," third-grader Emma Schriever said.

Second-grader Corban Simms said, "We really wanted to do this because we are counting on the soldiers and they can't win without the support of people back home."

Second-grader Marvin Bullock said he simply wanted to send a message to "let peace reign."



Lights, Camera, Action!

Spend a little time in Task Force Ready's newly renovated theater and you might think you're in a multiplex cinema back home. Task Force Ready, also known as 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, inherited the theater from the Alabama Army National Guard, which built it as a briefing space. With a bit of carpentry and some equipment upgrades, 5-158 Soldiers turned it into a full-fledged entertainment facility. Other units in the brigade can reserve the theater on a space-available basis by contacting the 5-158 operations and training section.

Deployment doesn't deter re-ups

■ *Bonuses and a sense of purpose are inspiring today's Soldiers to sign on the dotted line.*

By SGT DALE SWEETNAM
Task Force 49 PAO

People back in the States might wonder how a Soldier in a combat zone could raise his or her right hand and reenlist amidst the mortars and gunfire, but officials here say it happens all the time with today's new breed of Soldier.

"What we're asking Soldiers to do today isn't what we were asking 20 years ago," Task Force 49 Command Sgt. Maj., Richard Mitchell, said. "Most of these young Soldiers came in during a time of war and they have sacrificed and continue to sacrifice, yet they still want to be on the team."

Many incentives available

Many Soldiers make their way to the retention office with hopes of earning a tax-free bonus by reenlisting while deployed, but according to Task Force 49 Senior Career Counselor, Master Sgt. Dudley Moser, bonuses aren't the only incentives available.

If a Soldier is within his or her reenlistment window, the retention office can facilitate a current duty station stabilization arrangement, allowing Soldiers to remain in their current duty station for a year.

The office can also lock in the Soldier's next duty station if they are close to their date of expected return from overseas (DEROS). They can also assist with career progression, including reclassification to a new MOS.

Moser said many Soldiers wait to deploy before reenlisting, in order to take advantage of tax-free bonuses currently averaging between \$7,000 and \$14,000. Bonuses can be as high as \$23,000 depending on the Soldier's MOS.

However, there are also some Soldiers who don't really know where they stand



photo by Sgt. 1st Class Eric Reinhardt

Since arriving in country late November, Task Force 49 has reenlisted 14 Soldiers. (Front row from left) Sgt. James Emfinger, Staff Sgt. Mayra Diaz, Sgt. Melissa French and Sgt. Dale Sweetnam. (Back row from left) Sgt. John Shifflette, Staff Sgt. Daniel Pons, Staff Sgt. Ronald Manners and Staff Sgt. Harvey Dennie.

with their careers before touching down in a combat zone.

"Some Soldiers aren't sure or are anxious about deployments because they haven't been here before," Moser said. "They don't know what to expect, but they find out when they get over here that they like what they're doing because they're doing what they were trained for. They feel good about themselves. Over here, you're actually doing your job and you have more pride in your work."

Higher Goals

Naturally, all units want to retain skilled and experienced Soldiers, so retention goals are often high.

"The morale of Soldiers continues to be very high," Mitchell said of his troops. "They're proud of what the Army stands for, so our goal is always 100 percent retention."

Moser said the retention office has a wealth of information that can help

Soldiers make educated decisions about their careers in the Army.

"We're here for the Soldiers — to provide the information and the tools to help them make an informed decision about their career," Moser said.

Since arriving in Iraq in July, Sgt 1st Class Eboni Britton, and 412th Aviation Support Battalion Senior Career Counselor, said that the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade has reenlisted 470 Soldiers and their families have received more than \$5.5 million in bonuses.

After just over a month in theatre, Moser said that 14 Soldiers from Task Force 49 have reenlisted.

Mitchell said deployments often get Soldiers excited about being in the Army.

"It's like being on a sports team," Mitchell said. "You've sat on the sideline and now you finally get to go play in the game. They're all here now, and they're the first string. I think it helps motivate them."

TF 49 Legal team provides wide range of services

CAPT. KRISTIN HANSEN
Task Force 49 Legal Assistance Officer

Recently, I've been hearing comments such as, "Nobody ever goes to Task Force 49 Legal because they just send you over to the east side."

I want to take a minute to introduce the Task Force 49 Legal Team and to give an overview of the services we provide. Throughout the deployment, I will discuss more specific topics of interest to Soldiers and how we can help you on the west side.

The Task Force 49 Legal Team consists of Capt. Mary Ann Bowery, Brigade Judge Advocate; Capt. Joseph Wilkinson, Brigade Trial Counsel; myself, Capt. Kristin Hansen, Brigade Legal Assistance Attorney and Administrative Law Attorney; Noncommissioned Officer in Charge, Sgt. 1st Class Hector Rivera; and our four paralegals, Staff Sgt. James Thompson, Sgt. Brian Mumford, Spc. Kelly Winship, and Spc. Kathaleen Knowles.



Capt. Kristin Hansen

Depending on your particular question, we're here to support you in any way we can.

We provide advice to commanders on military justice, administrative law, operational law and fiscal law issues. Through our Legal Assistance Office, all Soldiers can get a will, a general or special power of attorney and legal advice on a variety of issues, including the benefits of the Service Members' Civil Relief Act, immigration, credit problems and family law issues. In the new year, we will offer tax preparation and filing services. More information on this program will be coming in next month's column.

If you need a will or a power of attorney, or if you have family law, credit, tax or immigration question, we can help. We are located in the ALOC next to Catfish Air. We're open from 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily or by appointment at 483-4156. Save your east side trips for the pool or the movies, and visit our Legal Office for your legal needs.



photo by Sgt. 1st Class Eric Reinhardt

'Silent Night'

Worshippers pause to reflect on the meaning of the season during an ecumenical Christmas Eve service Dec. 24 at LSA Anaconda's Freedom Chapel.

When the boat of life rocks - hang on!

CHAPLAIN (LT. COL.) DAVID VANDERJAGT
Task Force 49 Chaplain

The last three months have been a whirlwind for Task Force 49. The unexpected deployment order set off a chain reaction. Family, friends, and comrades in arms found their lives caught up in a cross-current of events. New training schedules, more painful shots, canceled leaves, stop loss, and, sure enough, the boat started to rock.

I'm sure many experienced the same things I did. Well, not the exact same things, but similar in nature. For example, my roof had to be replaced. I suggested my wife just put out buckets while I was gone, but that did not go over well. A big "thank you" to the men of the chapel who spent hours helping with that project. And so a new roof was up.

What else could go wrong? Well, sure enough, the unexpected occurred. The boiler decided to quit. Not just slow down; not just break a little; but utter, total failure. It was only 30 years old, but why quit two weeks before a deployment? Yes, the boat of our lives sometimes shakes and we get rocked by the blowing winds.

What do we do? We hang on. But what do we hang on to? I would like to suggest four things we can do and hang on to.

First, when we look around we will find others in the same boat. We are



Chaplain David
Vanderjagt

the most is just a hug from someone we love. Hang on to others when life shows up with bad news.

Second, hang on to your experience.

This is not the first time that something unexpected has happened in our lives. Use the lessons learned from these experiences.

Hang on to those techniques that worked to make our lives easier during those difficult times. Remembering what the past has taught us can prepare us for the future.

Third, hang on to your personal strengths. We grow every day. You and I have survived the unexpected before.

We are gifted with heart, soul, mind and body.

very seldom alone when the boat rocks. Family, friends and neighbors are often in the same boat. Learning to hang on to others gives us mutual support in times of distress.

Sometimes, the thing we need

"Sometimes, the thing we need the most is just a hug from someone we love. Hang on to others when life shows up with bad news."

Chaplain David Vanderjagt

Sometimes we look at others and think they have it all together, not knowing they are looking at us and thinking the same thing.

We all have strengths that support us. We are all a lot tougher than most people think. Use those gifts, talents and strengths to hang in there.

But there are times in our lives in which hanging on to others, or experience, or personal strength seems to fail us – times when we need to hang on but don't know what to cling to.

I believe there is a fourth thing to hang on to. Hang on to God. I believe that there is someone bigger than the world itself. There is someone bigger than my problems, bigger than this deployment, bigger than this war and a lot bigger than me.

When all else seems to fail, He does not. Personally, I seem to hang on to God a lot. In reality I have found out that when I can not hold on any longer, I

find that He is holding on to me.

So when the boat rocks: Hang on! Hang on to others, to lessons learned, to personal strength, and hang on to God.

Blessings to you all.

WWE celebs make a surprise visit

By SGT. DALE SWEETNAM
Task Force 49 PAO

A stroke of bad luck for several WWE superstars and crew members resulted in a welcome surprise for Soldiers of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force 49 Dec. 6.

That evening, six WWE superstars walked into building 4022 unannounced followed by a crew of Soldiers. A few Soldiers looked up from their desks and popped their heads out of their offices to see what the noise was all about. They couldn't help but be little stunned when WWE wrestlers JBL, Ron Simmons, Chris Jericho, Mickie James, Carlito and Dean Malenko were escorted into the building's conference room.

The wrestlers were originally scheduled to take part in a meet and greet a few days earlier at a LSA Anaconda dining facility, but the event had been canceled.

Lt. Col. Michael McCurry, Task Force 49 operations officer, said the Dec. 6 stop at LSA Anaconda was not planned.

The wrestlers left Contingency Operating Base Speicher earlier in the day to visit a remote combat outpost north of Baghdad. They were scheduled to return to Speicher but their aircraft experienced some mechanical difficulties.

An aircraft from the 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment was sent out to recover the wrestlers, crew and the senior officer escort that traveled with the wrestlers. Once they were retrieved, they were brought to LSA Anaconda where they waited for their next flight out of Balad.

Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Davis, HHC, Task Force 49, said the wrestlers were a little tired but still sociable and friendly.

"You could tell they were worn out a little," Davis said. "They were still in good spirits, but you could tell they were tired from traveling all day."

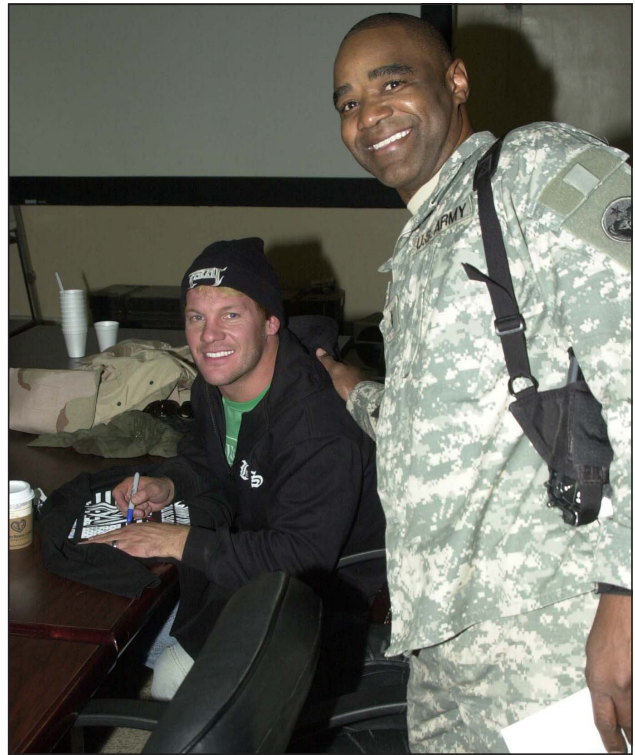
Despite their obvious exhaustion, the wrestlers were kind and generous with their time as Soldiers began filtering into the conference room to meet the celebrities.

The wrestlers smiled, shook hands, posed for photos and signed autographs for a little over an hour. They also handed out WWE coins, signed mini-posters and shirts to the Soldiers.

Longtime wrestling fan, Spc. Becky Haynes, HHC, Task Force 49, said the experience was one to remember.

"Honestly, it was pretty awesome, I don't know how to put it," she said. "They were tired and worn out, but they were still really cool."

Staff Sgt. James Thompson, HHC Task Force 49, said the impromptu visit



WWE wrestler Chris Jericho signs a shirt for Chief Warrant Officer 2 Claudell Harris of HHC, Task Force 49 Dec. 6. Several wrestlers and crew members were briefly stranded in Balad while waiting to return to Contingency Operating Base Speicher.

did a lot for the Soldiers' morale.

"A visit like this can take even the least motivated Soldier and motivate them."

After meeting with the Soldiers in the conference room, the wrestlers went to Dining Facility 1, where they ate and met with more LSA Anaconda Soldiers.

The wrestlers were scheduled to head back out

to Speicher that evening, but bad weather postponed their departure until the morning of Dec. 7.

The WWE wrestlers traveled in multiple groups all over Iraq throughout December for their annual Tribute to the Troops tour. This is the fifth consecutive year the WWE has sent its wrestlers out to meet troops in combat.



photo by SGT Dale Sweetnam

Sharing a laugh

Comedian Brad Williams laughs with the crowd during his appearance in the MWR West building at LSA Anaconda Nov. 29. Williams traveled to Balad, Iraq with fellow comedian Carlos Mencia for the show. The duo filled the MWR West room to capacity. Individuals watching the door for the event were forced to turn people away. The two comedians then moved on to MWR East, for another show later in the evening.

USO brings Christmas to Balad



Stars take on Balad

Robin Williams, Lewis Black, Kid Rock, Lance Armstrong and Miss USA Rachel Smith travelled to LSA Anaconda for a USO Christmas show at Holt Stadium Dec. 20. The stars performed a two-hour show of music and comedy for thousands of Soldiers and Airmen. Above: An armed elf pulls holiday security duty for thousands of Soldiers during the two-hour USO Christmas show. Right: Kid Rock jokes with the crowd of Soldiers and Airmen during his acoustic set. Rock opened up with a cover of "Sweet Home Alabama" and then played a few of his own hits including "Picture" and "Cowboy." Bottom left: Comedian Lewis Black mans the video camera while Lance Armstrong is interviewed. Bottom right: Comedian Robin Williams lets loose during his routine for the troops.



photos by: SGT Dale Sweetman





photos by Sgt. 1st Class Eric Reinhardt

HHC Task Force 49 earns combat patch

LSA ANACONDA, Iraq – Some call it the “Binky Bear patch” or the “Sugar Bear.”

The distinctive U.S. Army Alaska patch, with its snarling polar bear face, is often a conversation starter, as many Headquarters, Headquarters Company Task Force 49 Soldiers have learned since arriving here.

A Christmas Eve ceremony here gave HHC Task Force 49 Soldiers a little more to talk about. They can now wear the emblem on their right sleeves as a combat patch.

Multi-National Corps – Iraq Command Sgt. Maj. Neil Ciotola was the ceremony’s guest of honor. He addressed the unit about the importance of their role in Iraq and helped Task Force 49 Commander, Col. Chandler C. Sherrell, and Command Sgt. Maj. Richard A. Mitchell issue patches to Soldiers.



(Top) Headquarters and Headquarters Company Task Force 49 kicks off its Christmas Eve combat patch ceremony.

(Above) Task Force 49 Command Sgt. Maj. Richard A. Mitchell and Multi-National Corps - Iraq Command Sgt. Maj. Neil Ciotola issue combat patches.

(Right) Task Force 49 Commander, Col. Chandler C. Sherrell issues a combat patch to Maj. Christopher Chapman, brigade logistics officer.

Early Show features 2-147 Soldier's family

Editor's note: Sgt. Jon Vanderwert, a utilities repairist with the Minnesota National Guard's E Co. 2nd Battalion, 147 Aviation Regiment, was renovating a "fixer-upper" home for his large family when his unit deployed to Iraq. With the harsh Minnesota winter closing in, his local community and the nonprofit organization Heroes at Home stepped in to help. The group and several corporate sponsors gave the Vanderwerts and their nine children a \$300,000 home makeover. The story caught the attention of local media and was featured on the CBS Early Show Dec. 12. Below, reprinted with the kind permission of CBS News, is the web version of the Early Show segment. A video clip of the piece can be found on the Minnesota National Guard home page at <http://www.MinnesotaNationalGuard.org>

Miracles Worked By 'Heroes At Home'

(CBS) Dec. 12 – Christmas came early this year for the Vanderwerts, of New Prague, Minn., thanks to a national program that reaches out to help military families.

As CBS News correspondent Cynthia Bowers reports, Jon Vanderwert's National Guard



unit was sent to Iraq in August. It's his second combat tour. But his family was left to cope with a house badly in need of repair.

His departure forced the postponement for a year of his plans to rehab the fixer-upper he and wife Blake bought for their large family.

"I didn't know what to do, where to turn, who to talk to," Blake told Bowers.

There was so little insulation, the kitchen felt almost as cold to their 12-year-old son, Michael, as the weather outside.

"I have this big cup," Michael says, "and I was filling it with water, and I set it down in the sink . . . and about five minutes later, I come in the kitchen and the water was frozen."

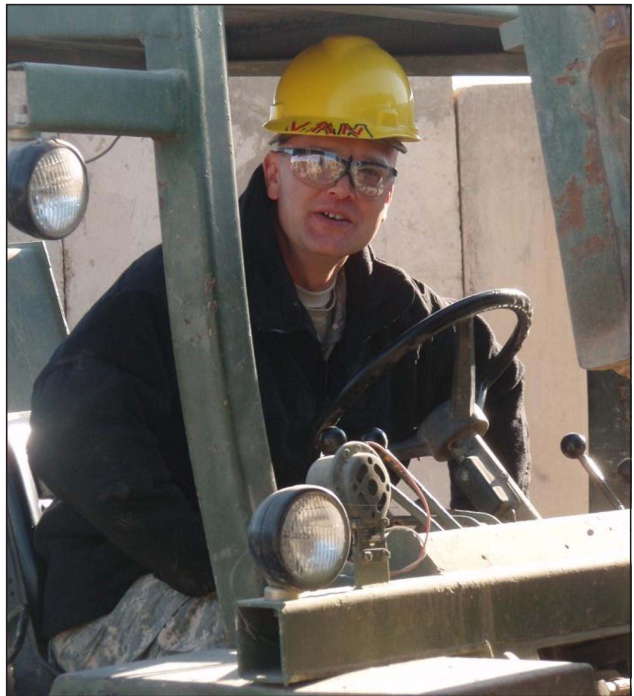
But volunteers beat the Minnesota winter to the punch. Blake reached out to the non-profit "Rebuilding Together," whose Twin Cities executive director, Kathy Greiner, brought together volunteers who are the heart and soul of their community.

"I don't even have words for it," Greiner says. "Every time we turn around, someone is coming up to us, offering donations."

Local companies pitched in with electrical work, lumber, insulation, plumbing, heating, air conditioning, and appliances.

Blake hasn't had to write a check yet.

Rebuilding Together's Web site explains that it works in conjunction with "Heroes at Home."



courtesy photo
Sgt. Jon Vanderwert, 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment, stays busy at the 2-147 motorpool. The Vanderwert's home makeover was featured on the CBS Early Show Dec. 12.

The site says, "Heroes at Home is a program of Sears Holdings in partnership with Rebuilding Together, the nation's largest volunteer-based provider of home repair services. Heroes at Home assists the families of military personnel and veterans by providing critical repairs and renovations for their homes, such as modifications necessary for disabled veterans. Founded in 1988, Rebuilding Together has rehabilitated 105,020 homes and nonprofit facilities, involving 2.5 million volunteers committing to 24 million hours of volunteer time."

Blake told Bowers Heroes at Home "basically saved our family."

New Prague Mayor Bink Bender marvels, "It's an absolutely good example of where I think many hands working together end up creating a miracle – for this family, for sure."

All Blake wanted was a little help with heating, some sheetrock and a bathroom door but, she'll end up pretty much with a completely renovated house.

"All of my wishes, basically, have come true," Blake says.

The Vanderwerts hope to move into their cozy home after New Year's Day.



courtesy photo



photo by Sgt. 1st Class Eric Reinhardt

Christmas across the world

(Left) Members of Task Force 49's family readiness group celebrate the holidays at Fort Wainwright, Alaska. (Above) On Christmas Eve at Task Force 49 headquarters in Iraq, Cpl. Matthew Smith and Pfc. Danielle Paige help hand out gifts sent by the FRG.

Task Force 49 NCO of the Quarter

Staff Sgt. Joker Botin, a native of Iriga, Philippines, supervises an avionics communication equipment repair squad with Company B, 412th Aviation Support Battalion. Botin moved to the United States in 1999 and joined the Army three months later. His goals are to earn a bachelor's in information systems management and retire from the Army as a Command Sergeant Major.



Task Force 49 Soldier of the Quarter

Spc. Joseph Vrechek IV of Denton, Texas, is an avionics communication equipment repairer with Company B, 412th Aviation Support Battalion. He joined the Army in May 2005.

While assigned to 412ASB he has won two company soldier of the month boards and a battalion Soldier of the quarter board. Vrechek is married to Nicole and they have one child, Joseph Vrechek V.



AWARDS

AIR MEDAL

CW2 MULLINS, CHRISTOPHER, 2-159 ARB
SGT WARRAM, JAMES 5-158 AVN
CW3 MILLER, JONATHAN 5-158 AVN
LTC BONE, JACK 5-158 AVN
1LT GERBAS, CHRISTOPHER 2-159 ARB
CW3 GLASENAP, GAVIN 2-159 ARB
MAJ TILY, GREGORY 2-159 ARB
CW2 BRESCHER, RYAN 2-159 ARB
CW2 MALMROSE, CHRISTOPHER 2-159 ARB
CW3 TAMBURELLO, CHRISTOPHER 2-159 ARB
CW2 ALBRECHT, CORYDON 2-159 ARB
CW4 STOLL, JOHN 2-159 ARB
CW2 ENGLEHARD, ELDEN 2-159 ARB
SPC MCGOWAN, GREG 2-158 AVN
CW5 HOLDERBY, JAMES 412 ASB
CW2 CICCARELLI, CHARLES 2-159 ARB
CW2 SMITH, JEFFERY 2-159 ARB
CW2 MERRILL, SEAN 2-159 ARB
CW2 BERNARD, ERIK 2-159 ARB
CW2 LAWRENCE, JOHN 2-159 ARB
CW2 CLARKE, AARON 2-159 ARB
CPT KARRELS, SEAN 2-159 ARB
CW3 COLE, JOHN 2-147 AHB
SPC KREWSON, KRISTEN 2-147 AHB
CW2 KRESSE, DONALD 2-147 AHB
CW4 KALTWANG, MARTIN 2-159 ARB
CW2 MORRIS, ROBERT 2-159 ARB
CW2 CASE, DUSTIN 2-159 ARB
SGT HESLER, LARRY 2-147 AHB
1LT GALLOWAY, BRIANNE 2-147 AHB
WO1 SWENSON, ERIC 2-147 AHB
SGT GOODHUE, DAVID 2-147 AHB
SPC LOHN, NATHAN 2-147 AHB

COMBAT ACTION BADGE

SSG COX, ANTHONY 5-158 AVN
SPC RAUSCHNOT, REGINALD 2-147 AHB

SPC FALKOFSKE, ZACHARY 2-147 AHB
PV2 CHEEK, RYAN 5-158 AHB
1LT COTA, NEILAND 2-147 AHB
CPT FORD, JARAT 2-159 ARB
CW2 KELLY, BENJAMIN 2-147 ARB
CW4 KANAE, CLARENCE 2-147 ARB
PFC MEISEL, RALF 5-158 AVN
SPC PUN, ANTHONY 5-158 AVN
SGT LEONES, JAYPEE 2-147 AHB
PFC POLAND, NICHOLAS 5-158 AVN
SPC MANNON, LEVI 2-159 ARB
SGT SHELTON, MATTHEW 2-159 ARB
CW2 LAWRENCE, JOHN 2-159 ARB
CW3 WALTHOUSE, ROBERT 2-147 AHB
SGT HERNANDEZ, SAMSON 2-147 AHB
CW2 FRIES, GARY 2-147 AHB
SGT HESLER, LARRY 2-147 AHB
CW2 ALBRECHT, CORYDON 2-159 ARB
SPC ASTESANA, JAMES 5-158 AVN
SPC KEEHAN, MICHAEL 2-159 ARB
SPC GALLOWAY, BRANDON 2-159 ARB
SGT ASHLINE, KENNETH 2-159 ARB
1SG ANTHONY, WILLIAM 2-159 ARB
CW2 IGA, ALDENN 2-147 AHB
CPL ALEJANDRO, VICTOR 2-159 ARB
SGT JAMES, KENNETH 2-159 ARB
CW3 KELLY, TIMOTHY 2-147 AHB
SGT MONTIMOR, ARTEMIO 2-147 AHB
WO1 LINCOLN, TROY 2-147 AHB
CW2 BRESCHER, RYAN 2-159 ARB
SPC PODRECCA, TYLER 2-159 ARB
SGT MILES, MATTHEW 2-159 ARB
CW2 PAOPAO, MATTHEW 2-147 AHB
MAJ HARRIS, FREDERICK 5-158 AVN
SGT PANEK, GUY 2-147 AHB
SGT PACHECO, CHRISTOPHER 2-147 AHB
SGT BROOMEILL, GABRIEL 2-147 AHB
CW2 BERTRAND, RACHEL 5-158 AVN

CPT OURADA, ANDREA 2-147 AHB
CPL OTTER, BRANDON 2-159 ARB
SGT OSELES, TODD 2-159 ARB
SGT FISCHER, ADAM 2-147 AHB
SGT FILBIN, TIMOTHY 2-147 AHB
CW2 BERNARD, ERIK 2-159 ARB
SPC GONZALEZ, MICHAEL 2-159 ARB
SPC WHEELINGS, SCHEDRIC 2-159 ARB
CW3 KOZLOWSKI, JOEL 2-147 AHB
SPC COLBY, GRAYSON 5-158 AVN
1LT GERING, BENJAMIN 2-147 AHB
SGT CRUZ, FRANK 2-159 ARB
SPC LEWIS, JACODY 2-147 AHB
SFC CORDLE, MICHAEL 2-159 ARB
SPC FARMER, CLYDE 2-159 ARB
SPC WILLIAMS, ANTHONY 2-159 ARB
SGT KNOX, JONATHAN 2-147 AHB
SPC CHRISTIE, BRENT 2-159 ARB
SPC CHEN, LIANG 2-159 ARB
SGT WELCH, GENE 2-147 AHB
SPC CARROLL, PATRICK 2-159 ARB
SGT CAMERO, RYAN 2-147 AHB
SPC MATHIS, WILLIAM 2-159 ARB
CW4 BURGESS, TERESA 2-147 AHB
SPC BRUNELL, AVERY 2-159 ARB

ARMY COMMENDATION MEDAL

CW2 NAGIES, THOMAS 5-158 AVN
SSG CHANQUIN, NELSON 5-158 AVN
SGT FOX, DONNIE 5-158 AVN
SPC REINHARDT, JOSEPH 2-147 AHB
CPT WINN, PHILIP 2-147 AHB
SPC MOGCK, PETER 2-147 AHB
SGT LEE, CAMERON 2-159 ARB
SSG JOHNSON, CHRISTIAAN 2-159
SFC WORDEN, MARK 2-147 AHB
SSG ROWAN, JEREMIE 412 ASB
SSG VALDEZ, DEMIS 2-159 ARB

REENLISTMENTS

2nd Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment

PFC DESHAZO, WESTON
PFC SHIPP, BRADLEY
SPC CALDWELL, JOHN I.
SPC CRIDER, SENICA C.
SPC JACOBSON, DAVID I.
SPC HERBINGER, ANTHONY M.
SGT PENROD, JOHN M.
SGT ACEVEDOGUZMAN, ALBERTO
SGT NORRIS, CHARLENE M.
SGT CONWELL, SEAN D.
SPC BATES, DIGHTON D.

5th Battalion, 158th Regiment

PFC ALLEN, ASHLEY S.
PFC HALL, JERROD F.
PFC GIRONURBANO, VERONICA
PFC KOEPNICK, ASHLEY M.
PFC MEJIA, JOHATHAN R.
PFC CARPENTER, JENNIFER L.
SPC BATTLE, LONNAY A.
SPC JUVIER, ALEXANDER
SPC FRALEY, BRIAN C.
SPC COX, RUSSELL G.

SPC ELEBY, IASHA M.
SPC ROBINSON, AKEEM R.
SGT GIACOPPO, MICHAEL J.
SGT TANIELU, LEIMOMI N.
SGT DOUGLAS, MANDRELL J.
SGT BRIGGS, KRISTINA M.
SGT CHANQUIN, NELSON E.
SGT CROWLEY, MATTHEW J.
SGT VILORIA, EDMOND R.

412th Aviation Support Battalion

PFC MYERS, DAVID N.
PFC MCLAMB, JOSHUA L.
PFC GWIN, LUCAS A.
PFC BLAIR, BRADLEY M.
PFC WEIR, BRITT L.
PFC WARF, RYAN T.
SPC RICHARDSON, ELIZABETH S.
SPC WEIS, JOHATHAN D.
SPC COX, VERNON E.
SPC POWELLROMERO, KARMA N.
SPC SANEZ, RAYMOND R.
SPC KIM, JOHN S.
SPC BARNES, CASSANDRA N.

SPC WILLIAMS, VERNON J.
SPC KNUTSEN, MICHAEL L.
SPC LEATH, TOMMY J.
SPC RANDALL, CAMERON A.
SPC KING, RENEE S.
SPC PEACOE, DAVID M.
SGT SESAY, BAI
SGT SAVAGE, ALHAJI A.
SGT THOMPSON, THOMAS A.
SGT PLAISIMOND, PIERRE L.
SGT LOCQUIAO, PAUL B.
SGT ALLEN, JUSTIN J.
SGT ORTIZCALIXTO, JOSE L.

HHC Task Force 49

SPC HALL, CHRISTOPHER C.
SPC KOOB, JOSHUA J.
SPC LEDOUX, LAMAR M.
SPC SNYDER, JUSTIN C.
SGT FRENCH, MELISSA A.
SGT SWEETNAM, DALE M.
SSG DENNIE, HARVEY L.
SSG DIAZ, MAYRA E.
SSG MANNERS, RONALD D.

Point of View

Your images of Task Force 49



'Twas the Night Before Christmas . . . A full moon shines over the LSA Anaconda flight line on Christmas Eve.

photo by Chief Warrant Officer 2 Rene Santiago



photo by Chief Warrant Officer 2 Rene Santiago

Lt. Col. Sam Hamontree, 412th Aviation Support Battalion commander, plays Christmas carols with a Celtic twist at Dining Facility 4 on Christmas Eve.



photo by Chief Warrant Officer 2 Rene Santiago

The holiday spread at LSA Anaconda's Dining Facility 4 included this confectionary tribute to the U.S. Army Alaska "Binky Bear" patch. The subdued cloth version of the ursine emblem became a combat patch for Task Force 49 Soldiers in a Christmas Eve ceremony at the unit's headquarters.

Point of View will be a regular feature of the *Desert Talon*, highlighting reader-submitted photos. It's your chance to help us tell the Task Force 49 story. E-mail your digital images of unit events, activities and off-duty projects, or just everyday life on deployment. Candid photos are preferred over posed shots. Send to: eric.reinhardt@iraq.centcom.mil

Flight

Continued from Page 1

considered just another mission.

"Women in the military have overcome some huge barriers," she said. "I believe this mission will be an eye opener, but unfortunately, I'm afraid the stereotypes will always be there. It's how our society was brought up. Even at the end of 2007, [we're considering this] an historic event."

The National Guard unit houses Soldiers from Washington, Minnesota and Hawaii.

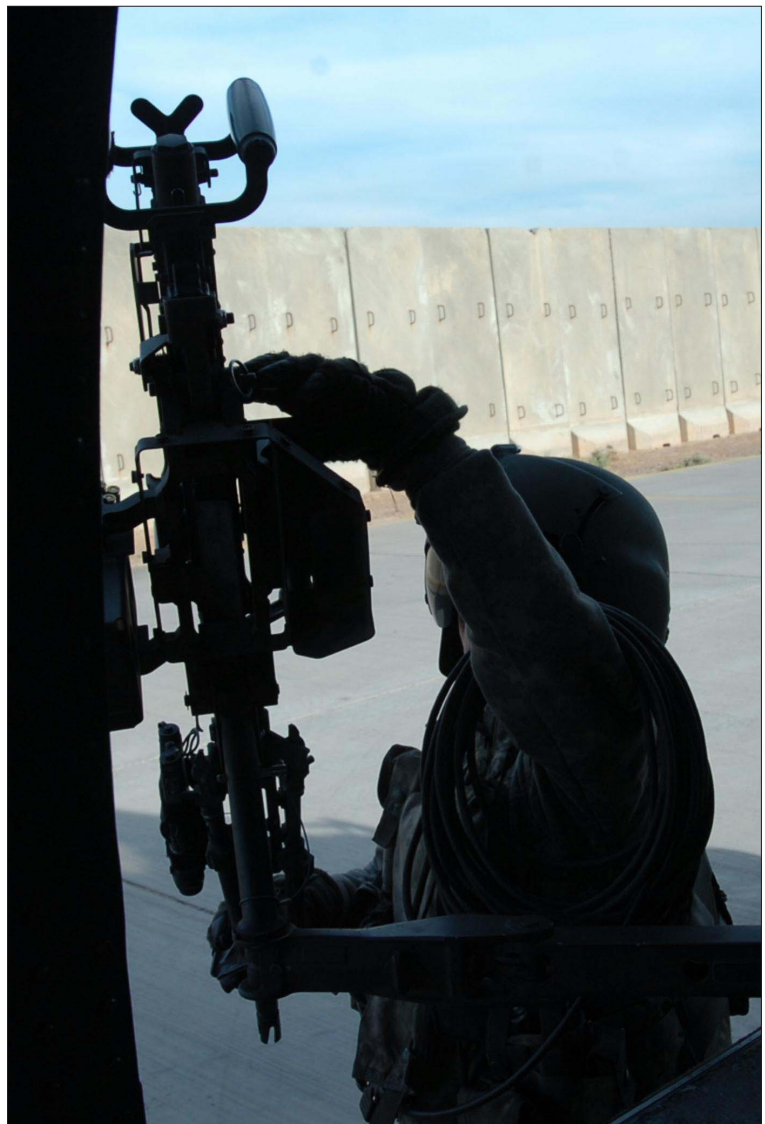
Not only was the mission all female, but all three states were represented by the women executing it.

Lt. Col. Gregory Thingvold, 2-147 Commander, commented on how important the flight was, for not only the National Guard, but for young women back home.

"This demands attention," he said. "Young ladies need good role models in their life. Our culture twists around to a fault what women should strive for in life. Here is an opportunity to showcase women in combat executing a combat mission. I want young women around this country to see these amazing women in action."

Burgess said that no matter what this mission does to the Army's gender stereotypes, it is still very important to the youth of the United States to see what women in the Army do on a daily basis.

"The one thing I hope this mission does is show little girls that they can do this," she said. "A lot of them don't seem to know this."



photos by: Sgt. Dale Sweetnam



(Top Left) The lead aircraft makes its way to Baghdad early Christmas morning.

(Above) Crew Chief Sgt. Leilani Aho, 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment, clears her weapon after returning from a long day in the sky on Christmas day.

(Left) The two female Black Hawk crews stand with their individual state flags after returning from their Christmas Day mission. Hawaii, Washington and Minnesota are all represented in the 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment, and Soldiers from all three states participated in the all-female mission.