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# THE Desert Talon



Volume 1, Issue 3

A Publication of the Task Force 49 Public Affairs Office

March 2008

## Boxer dukes it out with Army's best

By SGT. DALE SWEETNAM  
Task Force 49 PAO

Pound for pound, Spc. Adrian Orrostieta is now one of the best boxers in the Army.

Orrostieta, who just a few months ago was bandaging wounds and stabilizing sprains in Iraq as a combat medic in 412<sup>th</sup> Aviation Support Battalion, is now considered the best boxer in the Army. He won the 141-pound weight class in the 2008 All-Army Boxing Championships at Fort Huachuca in January.

"Winning all Army was a great experience and an eye-opener for the skill level that I have," Orrostieta said.

Orrostieta fought his way through the Army championships and then continued on to the Armed Forces Boxing Championships at Camp Lejeune, N.C. from Feb. 4 to 7. Orrostieta lost his bout to a Marine in the tournament, but he wasn't fazed. He's already looking forward to the rematch.

"I am going to get my rematch from the loss I took in the Armed Forces Championship," he said. "He is ranked 10<sup>th</sup>



Spc. Adrian Orrostieta after a bout in January. Orrostieta won the 141-pound weight class during the All-Army Championships in January and earned a spot on in the Army's World Class Athlete Program.

Courtesy photo

in the nation, but I'm going to get my win against him in the national tournament in March."

Orrostieta may have lost his match, but the Army continued its dominance in armed forces boxing by winning its 17<sup>th</sup> consecutive team title at the Armed Forces Boxing Championship. The team performance illustrated the kind of tradition Orrostieta is now a part of.

Orrostieta made his impression in Army boxing quickly, but his competitive boxing future didn't materialize until the last minute, when a fellow Soldier walked in to his office and told him he should sign up. Army boxing had always been an

aspiration of Orrostieta's, according to his platoon sergeant, Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Danielle Whitaker. But Orrostieta was deployed, and that made things a little more complicated at first.

See Boxer, page 12

## Soldiers' good-luck charms take many forms

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

It's a safe bet that good-luck charms have accompanied warriors into the fray ever since humans started throwing rocks at each other.

In the first century, the Roman historian Tacitus noted that tribal warriors carried symbolic objects for protection on the battlefield. On a tour of just about any World War II museum you're likely to see good-luck trinkets Soldiers took overseas with them.

As an inherently risky business, aviation also has a storied tradition of lucky charms and mascots.

It's no surprise, then, that the practice is alive and well here among the Soldiers of Multi-National Corps - Iraq's aviation brigade, Task Force 49. While some of their talismans are purely based on personal superstition, others reflect devotion to their families and friends, their country, fallen comrades and faith.



First Sgt. Michael Mendoza of Task Force Hawk, 244<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment, got his as a surprise from his 5-year-old daughter, Ariana.

"I went to pre-deployment training at Fort Sheridan, Ill. I was emptying out my duffel bags and there was my daughter's favorite little black pony," said Mendoza. "I couldn't believe it. She never goes anywhere without it. I called home right away and told her

See Good Luck, page 13

# Talon 6 sends . . . Another busy month

## Soldiers and Families of Task Force 49:

We've ticked another month off the calendar and the Soldiers of the task force continue to do a magnificent job supporting the corps and all the divisions in Iraq. Time goes rather quickly here with the myriad of taskings and support requirements we perform every day.

The month has been a busy one, with III Corps leaving and the 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps taking their place. With the change, we said farewell to Lt. Gen. Odierno and Maj. Gen. Simmons and welcomed Lt. Gen. Austin and Maj. Gen. Flynn as the new corps commanding general and deputy commanding general. Even though our leadership has changed, the mission and the Soldiers have remained steadfast in supporting the warfighter on the ground in making this country a safer place for all Iraqis. Our soldiers have done this every day and will continue to accomplish this mission until we leave. I can not sing the praises of our Soldiers enough for the spectacular job that they do every day.

Earlier this month we also had the opportunity to host members of the 34<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Brigade command team for their pre-deployment site survey (PDSS) visit here to Iraq. Col. Brock and his team were a welcome sight for all units here and put a light at the end of the tunnel to focus on. His group of professionals are focused on the mission they are about to



assume and committed to preparing their Soldiers for the task at hand. Additionally, we also had the good fortune to visit with leadership from 6-17 Cavalry from Fort Wainwright, here for their PDSS preparing for their deployment this summer. I know they were thrilled to be out of the snow. For those of us from Alaska, their visit brought home just a little bit closer.

I would be remiss if I did not thank all of the family readiness groups, friends and supporters of the task force for the numerous Valentines gifts and letters we received during that holiday period. The Soldiers and I are humbled at the support that we receive daily from all of you. Thank you to the FRG

spouses who made the Valentine rose sale come to fruition. The Soldiers here appreciate the efforts that went into planning and executing the sales and delivery. They are even more thankful that it kept some of them out of hot water with their spouses.

I also want to thank the FRGs for their selfless work at home in caring for our families who have dealt with personal tragedies over the past few months. I know those grieving appreciate your assistance and so do we, who can only watch from afar as the rear detachments and readiness groups care for our Army family.

We continue to take the fight to the enemy here in theater with our attack platforms and we're moving Soldiers and equipment around the battlefield where they are needed most. By my count, more than 14,000 hours have been flown, 130,000 Soldiers moved, and more than 130 million pounds of cargo have been moved around the theater. We are accomplishing this all safely and professionally and supporting those on the ground - coalition and Iraqi - in the best possible manner.

Continue the great work. I am proud of the way each of you are representing your units and your Army.

### One Team! Arctic Talons!

Col. Chandler C. Sherrell  
Commander, Task Force 49

## Editor's note

# DoD service takes Task Force 49 stories nationwide

Thank you for your recent story idea submissions. We've received some excellent news tips from Soldiers throughout the brigade.

We're always looking for more stories to tell and now those stories have the potential to reach more readers than ever.

Recently, the Task Force 49 Public Affairs Office subscribed to the Digital Video and Imagery Distribution

System, which acts as a link between Army public affairs assets and civilian media outlets nationwide.

That means your stories can now reach millions of readers through newspapers, websites and television broadcasts nationwide.

Several stories produced by this newsletter have already received national coverage in major media markets like Ohio and Minnesota.

Relatively few people back in the states have personal connections to the Army and the war in Iraq, so it's important that we provide that link. Through your stories, we can reach audiences of all walks of life and show them who you are and tell them about the great work you do.

**The Desert Talon staff**

**Task Force 49 Commander**  
Col. Chandler C. Sherrell

**Task Force 49 Command Sergeant Major**  
Command Sgt. Maj. Richard A. Mitchell

**Task Force 49 Public Affairs Officer**  
Sgt. 1st Class Eric Reinhardt

**The Desert Talon Editor**  
Sgt. Dale Sweetnam



## Task Force 49 PAO Contact Information

Bldg. 4022  
LSA Anaconda  
DSN: 318 483-2079  
[eric.reinhardt@iraq.centcom.mil](mailto:eric.reinhardt@iraq.centcom.mil)  
[dale.sweetnam@iraq.centcom.mil](mailto:dale.sweetnam@iraq.centcom.mil)

*This issue of The Desert Talon and back issues can be found on the Task Force 49 website at:*  
[http://www.wainwright.army.mil/49TF/BDE\\_WEB/](http://www.wainwright.army.mil/49TF/BDE_WEB/)

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# Talon 7 sends . . . 100 days down

**W**ell, Task Force 49 has reached the 100-day mark here in Balad, Iraq. Our Soldiers have accomplished an amazing amount in the past few months, keeping our aircraft flying 24-7, moving thousands of troops and tons of equipment and providing crucial support to ground units throughout our area of operations. I'm tremendously proud of each and every one of you and the outstanding work you do, day in and day out.

Change is a constant in the Army and we've seen plenty of it here recently. The 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps took over from III Corps Feb. 14. The outgoing deputy commander, Maj. Gen. Simmons, visited us before his departure and presented awards to several of the brigade's outstanding Soldiers. Another significant change is also on the horizon. This month we hosted a pre-deployment site survey (PDSS) visit by the 34<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Brigade command and staff. They're getting ready to replace some of our units later this year, so their presence was a very welcome sign of things to come.

With bonuses back in place, Task Force 49 is now well above the glide path for re-enlistments. If you're considering re-enlistment, now's the time to act – bonuses won't be around forever. I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to all the Task Force 49 Soldiers, and their families, who have made the commitment to stay in the Army. Your experience, dedication and selfless service are proof



positive that you are the Army's most important asset.

We're just a couple months away from Iraq's grueling hot season; it's time to start thinking now about preventing heat-related injuries. Even with the mild weather we've had recently, it's crucial to stay hydrated, get adequate rest and stay active and engaged during your free time. A lot of you are putting in extra time in the gym and that's highly commendable; however make sure you're doing it safely. Some Soldiers use energy and muscle-building supplements to boost the effects of their training, without realizing the serious potential dangers of those products. I urge you to approach any such supplement with extreme caution and remember that, in the long run, there's no

substitute for hard training and proper diet. You can find a wealth of information about supplements online at the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine at: <http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/dhwp/Wellness/dietary.aspx>

Keep safety uppermost in your mind, no matter what you're doing. Soldiers are our most precious asset and each and every one of you is a vital part of the Task Force 49 team.

On Feb. 7 Col. Sherrell and I had the opportunity to recognize the outstanding Soldiers who keep our Dining Facility 4 and The Convoy Cafe running to the highest standards. We sometimes take our award-winning DFACs for granted and many may not realize that Soldiers from our brigade work there around the clock. Because of their tireless efforts, we enjoy some of the best chow in the Army right here at LSA Anaconda; and once again, they put on a first-class holiday spread – this time for Valentines Day.

Now that we've been here a few months, the dedication and support of our families and friends back home is even more important and more appreciated than ever. Thank you for the care and concern you show us each and every day – we couldn't accomplish our mission without it. God Bless.

**Talon 7 Out!**  
**CSM Richard A. Mitchell**  
**Command Sergeant Major**  
**Task Force 49**



## Gunslingers

(Top) Staff Sgt. Jermaine Holley (middle), 2nd Battalion, 159 Aviation Regiment, encourages a Soldier who successfully zeroed his weapon Feb. 12 at Smith Range. (Inset) Soldiers of 2-159 take aim during the E. Company's Feb. 12 trip to Smith Range.

Photos by Spc. Royce Shepard



# Soldiers volunteer to fight in the sky

By: SGT. DALE SWEETNAM  
Task Force 49 PAO

Preparing food and repairing generators wasn't close enough to the action for Spc. Cameron Randall and Sgt. Jason Hutchinson; they wanted to fly.

Randall and Hutchinson knew their jobs here in Iraq were important, but they both felt drawn to the door gunner position inside a CH-47 Chinook. With the help of their parent units, both Soldiers volunteered to train and serve as door gunners for B. Co. 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 158<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment (Big Windy).

"My father, being a Vietnam veteran and a retired sergeant first class, asked me to give him one enlistment as a non-combat Soldier," Randall said. "So I conceded and chose being a wrench over the Ranger contract I had wanted. I saw being a door gunner as a way to get off the FOB and actually feel like I'm doing something and earning my combat pay, patch and stripes."

Randall and Hutchinson both trained for the position while here in Iraq, which is unusual - most gunners train at home before taking to hostile skies.

Big Windy commander, Capt. Howard Titzel said Chinook crews can do this because the gunners are not trained as crew chiefs like Black Hawk gunners are.

Chinook crews consist of five Soldiers which include two pilots, a flight engineer and a crew chief. This arrangement leaves room for one more door gunner, and that's where Hutchinson and Randall come in to play.

Titzel said training gunners in theatre is based on manpower requirements.

"We only have a certain amount of paid flight positions, otherwise we'd train as many as we could," Titzel said.

**"It's not just the job I'm attached to or the excitement. It's the fact that I'm actually good at what I do here and I enjoy it."**

Spc. Cameron Randall

While the Soldiers were well trained before heading up on their own, all the training in the world can't stop first-flight jitters.



Photo by Sgt. Dale Sweetnam  
Spc. Cameron Randall, 412th Aviation Support Battalion, secures an M240H machine gun to the back of a CH-47 Chinook prior to a general support mission on Feb. 12. Randall and Sgt. Jason Hutchinson both volunteered to be Chinook door gunners and then trained for the position while in theatre.

"My first few missions, I was so far off into the realm of the unknown I didn't know what to feel or think," Randall said. "I was trying too hard to not screw up or to be nervous."

"After that, I stopped worrying about messing up and focused on doing my job. It's been smooth sailing ever since."

Hutchinson, who was out on a three-week support mission in Kuwait at the time of publication was unavailable for comment, but Titzel said he has been impressed with his performance.

"I am very encouraged by his motivation, intellectual curiosity and energy as a door gunner," he said.

Randall and Hutchinson will be attached to Big Windy for the foreseeable future. Both Soldiers enjoy what they do, so it seems safe to assume that going back to their old jobs will be a little bit of culture shock.

"It's not just the job I'm attached to or the excitement," Randall said. "It's the fact that I'm actually good at what I do here and I enjoy it."



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Eric Reinhardt

## Culinary kudos

Task Force 49 Commander Col. Chandler C. Sherrell speaks to a group of dining facility Soldiers during a Feb. 7 award ceremony at DFAC 4. More than 30 Soldiers were awarded the Army Commendation Medal for their exceptional management of the dining facility. The Soldiers are responsible for not only maintaining the facility, they also go to great lengths to bring Soldiers a little closer to home during holidays. Throughout the year the dining facility Soldiers decorate the building and regularly create extensive food-based scenes to foster holiday spirit.



# Hooked on Chinooks

## Task Force 49 intelligence analyst re-ups for aviation

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

The first time Spc. David Morris ever flew on a Chinook was the day he re-enlisted to become a Chinook mechanic.

Morris inked a five-year contract Feb. 7 to reclassify into the military occupational specialty 35U, CH-47 helicopter repairer. To close the deal, he was sworn in that day while aloft over LSA Anaconda.

"My NCOIC [Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Davis] asked me if I wanted to re-enlist in a Chinook," Morris said. "I said 'sure,' so he made it happen."

The 28-year-old intelligence analyst from China Spring, Texas, said he made the switch because he was looking for a job that could get him out from behind a desk and into the air.

"I've always wanted to fly," said Morris. "I like to get out of the office, instead of sitting behind a desk all day, and I like using my hands and doing something."

He's slated to begin training in his new MOS in August 2009 at Fort Eustis, Va.

He plans to use that training after the Army to launch a career in the civilian aviation sector. In the meantime, Morris said his goal is get as much training as he can as a mechanic and get a broader education out of the experience.

"Spc. Morris's decision was made in the best interests of himself and his



Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Eric Reinhardt

Capt. David Musick reenlists Spc. David Morris, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force 49, on a CH-47 Chinook on Feb. 7. Morris, currently an intelligence analyst, signed a contract to reclassify to a CH-47 helicopter repairer.

family," said Morris's supervisor Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Davis. "The aviation branch is an excellent branch that's full of opportunity. He will succeed at this new endeavor just the same as he succeeded in the intelligence branch. I know I'll miss him as a leader. He's an outstanding example of the kind of proficient Soldier the Army must retain in order to be successful in the Global War on Terror."

After earning a bachelor's degree in environmental geography and history from Texas State University in 2004, Morris was aiming for a job with the FBI. He joined the Army in 2005 as an intelligence analyst to gain some real-world experience for that position.

His first assignment, and his introduction to Army aviation, was with Task Force 49 at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, and now here in Iraq.

"I think it's good for the Army and for the individual when a Soldier with Spc. Morris's work ethic and professionalism chooses to redirect his life to a new field while staying in the Army," said Task Force 49 intelligence officer Capt.

David Musick, who officiated Spc. Morris's re-enlistment.

Achievement appears to be a family trait in the Morris household. His wife, Ava, is completing her doctorate in psychology at Lamar University in Belmont, Texas.

The couple has an 8-month-old daughter, Emma. They're staying in Texas while Ava finishes her studies and Spc. Morris finishes his deployment.

His whole section and several Soldiers from his company filled the helicopter for the flight, which included a "cyclic climb" followed by a

bank – a gut-wrenching aerial maneuver that felt a little like a rough carnival ride.

Davis said he asked the pilot from B Company, 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment to do

the maneuver as a kind of initiation rite for Spc. Morris.

"I wanted a little something special to introduce Spc. Morris into the field of aviation," said Davis.

While the feat turned some faces in the aircraft to varying shades of grey, Morris was unfazed.

"It was different," Morris said of the aerial ceremony. "At Wainwright, I got to see [Chinooks] and walk around in them, but I never got to fly. So when I actually got to fly on one it was pretty fun."

**"I've always wanted to fly. I like to get out of the office instead of sitting behind a desk all day and I like using my hands and doing something."**

Spc. David Morris



Spc. David Morris on his first Chinook flight, shortly before his re-enlistment.

# Leaders crucial during times of crisis

By CHAPLAIN (CAPT.) PHILIP A. WINN JR.  
2-147 AHB Chaplain

Gen. George S. Patton said, "It is nearly impossible to remain both aloof and effective." Patton was right, and he walked his talk. In nine months and eight days his Third Army went farther and faster than any other Army in history. Army leaders can learn from his example of staying visible, accessible and engaged during crisis.

Unfortunately, crisis often drives leaders behind closed doors instead of out to the trenches. They withdraw to their desks, get dazed by data, numbed by numbers and lose connection with their people, abandoning these key tenets of crisis leadership:

## **Stay engaged and lead from the front**

In times of crisis, no news is not good news. Communicate constantly with your Soldiers. Tell the truth. Lead from the trenches and not from the rear, or worse, from your rear, polishing a chair with your behind while you wait for the storm to pass. The more time you spend at the front predicting problems, the fewer problems you'll have to solve. Shift your focus from charting results to charting the course.

In the days after Sept. 11, New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani exhaustively pounded the streets modeling visibility and accessibility while he consoled, encouraged, communicated, planned and executed strategy for rescue and cleanup. He attended more than 100 funerals, held daily briefings and consulted incessantly with others. He did not hide in his office, reading reports, pondering budgets and digesting second-hand information.

Winston Churchill modeled engagement at the front during the blitzkrieg against London in 1940 by refusing to leave the city for Ireland or Canada, as was recommended. He lived in an underground bunker and resurfaced after raids to walk the streets, encourage, console and preach his message of inevitable victory.

Another example of engagement during crisis occurred July 2, 1864 as the Confederate army approached Washington, D.C. A high-ranking Union officer climbed the fort's

parapet to personally survey the situation and came under fire from rebel snipers. This officer was the commander-in-chief, President Abraham Lincoln, who had left the safety of the White House, opting to join his troops at the front, observe, encourage and chart the course. Lincoln had a track record of staying engaged and leading from the front. In prior years he visited several generals on battlefields: McClellan at Antietam, Hooker at Charlottesville and Burnside at Fredericksburg. The Confederate's advance toward Washington ended that day at Fort Stevens.



Chaplain  
Philip A. Winn Jr.

**"In times of crisis, no news is not good news. Communicate constantly with your Soldiers. Tell the truth."**

Chaplain (Capt.) Philip A. Winn Jr.

Too many leaders dig deeper in their foxholes after crisis hits. They develop a bunker mentality and start playing "not-to-lose" instead of playing to win. This strategy ensures loss.

## **Point to the big picture and communicate the vision**

In times of crisis, leaders face the brutal facts of reality but never lose unwavering faith that they and their people will prevail. Giuliani never minimized the damage after Sept. 11, but at the same time maintained and conveyed uncompromising faith that New York and New Yorkers would triumph and emerge stronger than ever.

Churchill did the same by repeating the vision of victory so clearly an entire nation became believers even while the Nazi army battered them with daily blitzkrieg. Lincoln's vision was crystal clear: preservation of the Union. And anyone doubting that should look at the 600,000 casualties on both sides as testament to his determination.

Vision-driven organizations always have an advantage over their visionless counterparts. When crisis hits, vision creates a clear advantage.

Vision provides a big picture people can borrow inspiration from to get through the present trials and setbacks. The book of Proverbs tells us that, "where [there is] no vision, the people perish."

Patton said, "A man must know his destiny." To succeed in life, you need to set targets. Patton added "your plan to achieve success need not be perfect or complete." He notes, "A good plan (solution), executed now, is better than a perfect plan next week."

Working in a visionless environment is like trying to assemble a 500-piece jigsaw puzzle without being able to refer to the front of the box. With no bigger picture — no vision — to keep you focused, inspired and persistent, your chore would quickly lose its meaning and you'd lose all motivation to continue.

Without a larger sense of perspective, sense of meaning and sense of direction out of the abyss, people are immobilized and succumb to inertia.

## **Seek wise counsel and use your team**

John Maxwell's Law of the Inner Circle says those closest to the leader determine his success. In a crisis, leaders need a team that can offer wise counsel and tell the truth; challenge one another, engage in debate without coercion, conduct autopsies without blame and unite behind decisions once they are made.

We can learn from Colin Powell who said: "When we are debating an issue, being loyal to me means giving me your opinion whether you think I'll like it or not. At this point, disagreement stimulates me. But after the decision has been made, the debate ends. At this point being loyal means getting behind and executing the decision as if it were your own."

In crisis, a team of leaders with a balance of complementary skills and talents can move more quickly and

effectively.

This is where having developed capable, lateral leaders at all levels in your organization pays big dividends and often means the difference between survival and extinction.

In fact, a hierarchy is the worst possible model in crisis and the organizations burdened by one will fail. The key is to be proactive and build your dream team before disaster hits. Why? Because tough times won't create leaders. They show you what kind of leaders you already have.



# Iraq's no-frills airline

## Catfish Air keeps troops in the sky and off the road

By SGT. DALE SWEETNAM  
Task Force 49 PAO

Its story has appeared in the Washington Post, Stars and Stripes and dozens of other publications.

Since its inception at the outset of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, Catfish Air has become part of deployment lore. The Soldiers who man the radios and strive to fill every seat continue to add to the growing tradition of what the service's troops call "Iraq's airline".

"I love the mission here [at Catfish]," said Spc. Glen Churchill, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force 49. "It's awesome. It gives me a chance to interact with Soldiers from all over Iraq."

**Catfish Air** is responsible for the timely movement of mission passengers to forward operating bases all around Baghdad via UH-60 Black Hawks, CH-47 Chinooks and other helicopters departing Balad.

The main purpose of Catfish is to transport passengers to areas that are unable to receive fixed wing aircraft. Catfish Air not only moves passengers around the battlefield quickly, it keeps people off the roads and far away from the IEDs that have claimed the lives of so many.

The Soldiers and civilians of Catfish also work hard to place space-available passengers on helicopters in order to fulfill their motto, "no seat goes unfilled."

"Toward the end of last year, we were moving upwards of 13,000 passengers a month," said Capt. Russ Vander Lugt, Catfish Air officer in charge. "That's a battalion's worth of troops a day. On some nights, it's literally standing room only."

The Catfish crew consists of 14 Soldiers and 18 KBR employees and its operations run 24 hours a day. HHC Task Force 49 is responsible for running Catfish Air, but the operation is augmented by Soldiers from subordinate units 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 147<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment; 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 158<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment; and 412<sup>th</sup> Aviation Support Battalion.

"I volunteered to work here, and I am proud to help make our mission safe and successful," said Spc. Keith Christopher, 412<sup>th</sup> ASB.

With so many Soldiers moving through Catfish Air daily, it is common



Photo by Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Eric Reinhardt

Soldiers hang around the Catfish Air terminal Feb. 26 while awaiting flights. Catfish transports thousands of Soldiers and civilians all over the battlefield, keeping people off the roads and far from IEDs.

to run into some strange situations. Business picks up after dinner, according to Vander Lugt; there are times when the rainy season and different scenarios can really wreak havoc on flights and scheduling.

"We sometimes call it Hotel Catfish," Vander Lugt said. "We'll have a whole company of people [in here] just racked out."

KBR employee Jackie Craddieth said it can get pretty crazy during the night.

"It gives me something to look forward to every day," she said. "Sometimes it's comical. You never know what to expect working at Catfish."

During its run, Catfish Air has catered to Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, Department of Defense civilians and contractors, foreign nationals, coalition forces, detainees and even military working dogs.

It has received multiple awards, including a plaque recently awarded by the Australian Coalition Forces as a token of appreciation. Australian forces depend heavily on Catfish Air to conduct personnel movements in theater.

The name Catfish Air was created when the 185<sup>th</sup> Aviation Brigade of the Mississippi National Guard opened up shop in Iraq.

Catfish Air has since been passed down through several units, but the name and symbol have remained the same.

When Task Force 49 arrived from Alaska, the impulse to change the name arose, but Vander Lugt decided against it.

"People have asked me to change it," Vander Lugt said. "I've had pressure to change it to Halibut Air. But when I got over here, I realized it was like a unit mascot. You don't change it when the command changes, it stays the same. That's what Catfish has become; it's a kind of symbol or emblem."

**The Catfish Air name** has become such an icon, that its logo has been copyrighted by the Mississippi Guard Soldier who created it.

So outside the Catfish terminal hangs the copyrighted image depicting an angry helicopter/catfish hybrid toting an M-16 and clearly ready for anything the Iraqi skies can throw at it, just like the Soldiers and civilians busy at work inside the building.

Catfish Air is here for as long as Operation Iraqi Freedom requires it, providing vital support to the units in Iraq while at the same time grabbing a few headlines and cementing its place in military history along the way.



Photo by Sgt. Dale Sweetnam

This copyrighted sign hangs outside the Catfish Air terminal. The sign was designed by a Soldier from the 185<sup>th</sup> Aviation Brigade out of Mississippi, the original operators of Catfish Air.



Photo by Sgt. Dale Sweetnam

## Bench press tourney

Sgt. Natanael Ubri, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force 49, knocks out one of 15 repetitions at 225 pounds during the MWR bench press competition on Feb. 9 at the MWR West building. Ubri was one of more than a dozen male and female Soldiers who participated in the competition. MWR hosts multiple lifting competitions throughout the year, including bench press, bicep curl and power lift showdowns. Ubri said the competition was exceptional during the contest. "I could've pushed out more than 15 reps, but I kept thinking about what the other competitors were pushing," he said. "I was out of focus. Oh well, there's always the next one."

# XO examines carrots, weather and shrimp

BY MAJ. JAMES JONES  
Task Force 49 Executive Officer

### To all my fans out there:

Thanks for the tons of letters and emails I have received. It has been a very busy month and I've had my hands full doing a lot of C.R.A.P. (Critical Requests And Paperwork). Please continue to "help me help you." I take this calling very seriously, and will uphold a standard of professionalism and service equivalent to high school kid working as a fast food restaurant French-fry maker on a Friday night ten minutes before end of shift with his buddies waiting in the car with the beer they stole from their dad. I'm that dedicated!

### Dear XO,

My mom sez that I should eat all my carits at diner cuz it will make me see good. I really don't like carits and was wondering if this is true.

- Little Billy

Dear Billy: I don't like carrots either. But I ate them when I was a kid too, and you know what it did for me? Nothing. I'm now working on my third pair of prescription glasses. If carrots are so good for your eyesight then why do you see all those dead rabbits on the side of the road? And another thing: why do we have to eat spinach to get big and strong? Popeye only has big forearms - the rest of him looks like a toothpick. A lot of good that will do him, unless he lands a job opening mayonnaise jars. I heard his name is even being mentioned in the Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens steroid case. Another thing: if milk does a body good, why are cows so easy to tip over? I say forget all that stuff; it's all just an attempt to keep the "little man" down.

### Dear XO,

I am here in Iraq in the Lift Company from Hawaii; people from your staff have told me that it gets a little cold in Alaska. Is that true?

- Bob Monaloamacadameakilawayadoletikiluausmith

Dear Bob: Saying it gets a "little" cold in Alaska is like saying Master Sgt. Wayfield uses a "little" hair gel in the morning, that Oprah has a "little" money, that the brigade command sergeant major has only a "little" craving for a cigarette after over a month of cold turkey, or that Lt. Col

McCurry should be put on a "little" dose of Ritalin. It also only hurts a "little" when your youngster punches you in the junk when you aren't expecting it, or when you pluck those nose hairs out with tweezers (oh please! Like I am the only one ...). So, yes, it gets a "little" cold in Alaska.

### Dear XO,

I heard you have been out flying in Iraq. How's that going?

- Gary

Dear Gary: I am glad you asked that question. No kidding, there I was [Editor: Confirmation of XO's whereabouts are sketchy, think he was in the chow hall] inverted [Editor: UH-60 is prohibited from this maneuver, investigation pending] air medals dangling in my face [Editor: XO does not have an air medal, although one did disappear from S1 shop - investigation pending], flying over the barren countryside of Iraq [Editor: XO did not even leave the traffic pattern]. Sowing the seeds of goodwill [Editor: XO launched flares and almost burned down a village outside the gate] and safety to all [Editor: Only safety was brought to the rest of crew when the XO finally landed]. All in all a pretty good day [Editor: Almost caused an international incident, investigation pending].

### Dear XO,

I heard you get to have shrimp for almost every meal over there. Is that true?

- Green with Envy

Dear Green: That's pretty much the truth. It seems that 10,000 pounds of shrimp from Col. and Mrs. Sherrell's change of command reception found their way to Iraq and have been sustaining the troops here for some time. Supply of shrimp doesn't seem to be an issue and should carry us and the rest of Iraq through the year 2020. There have been some inquiries into the expiration date of the shrimp and a small outbreak of botulism; however these accusations are probably unfounded.

### Please send your questions to:

Maj. James Jones

"Ask the XO"

HHC TF 49

APO AE 09391

Or email them to: hawktwosix@yahoo.com.



Ask the XO



# Big Windy navigates night skies

By SGT. DALE SWEETNAM  
Task Force 49 PAO

Soon after kissing the lucky lady painted on the side of their aircraft, two CH-47 Chinook crews loaded up and took to the sky under the cover of night Feb. 12 to complete a general-support mission over Baghdad.

The two five-Soldier crews belong to B Company 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 158<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment, more commonly known as Big Windy. It's a small unit with a large mission to support and massive aircraft to fly.

Since arriving in country last summer, Big Windy has flown 460 missions clocking 3,700 flight hours and the aircraft have transported 37,500 passengers and 5,710,500 pounds of cargo.

**Big Windy's** 14 Chinooks fly nightly to conduct corps air-movement operations. The Chinook crews move people and equipment across the battle space and regularly support air assault missions.

"We pretty much take the fight to the enemy," said B. Co., 5-158 Commander Capt. Howard Titzel.

Door Gunner Spc. Cameron Randall, an augmentee from 412<sup>th</sup> Aviation Support Battalion, said he's seen some interesting loads while flying with the Big Windy crews - everything from Hellfire missiles to Gatorade.

The Chinooks owned the night Feb. 12 as they picked up and dropped off pallets and Soldiers at forward operating bases around Baghdad. The crew was efficient and the mission was accomplished. Just another night for Big Windy.

Chinook Pilot Chief Warrant Officer 2 Colt Galusha said the missions are intense, but he enjoys flying one of the most valued aviation assets in the Army.

"It's pretty unique," Galusha said. "We get a lot of different missions. We go out and do a variety of things. It's a lot of responsibility, but with our training and everything we've done, we're covered."

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Aaron Foster said Big Windy is responsible for some dangerous missions as well as its basic general support mission.

"People probably don't realize that a lot of the recent captures and successful raids have been done with the support of Chinook helicopters."

**The five-man crews** consist of a pilot in charge, pilot, flight engineer, crew chief and door gunner. Titzel said since the unit is small, the Soldiers and crews are very close and that results in excellent execution.

"We're a real tight, close-knit group of people," Titzel said.

The tight nature of the unit also allows the Soldiers to build a great deal of trust in one another.

Randall, who is relatively new to the unit, said he is perfectly comfortable putting his life in the hands of his crew.



Photos by Sgt. Dale Sweetnam



B. Company, 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment (Big Windy) takes to the skies on a nightly basis to conduct corps-movement operations. The CH-47 Chinook crews move people, weapons and supplies all over the battlefield. They also support air assault missions. The company consists of about 75 Soldiers and 14 Chinooks.

(Top) The view from a CH-47 Chinook cockpit through night vision goggles during a general support mission on Feb. 12.

(Left) Big Windy Soldiers load a pallet of equipment during a Feb. 12 general support mission. The Chinook crew will transport anything from Hellfire missiles to Gatorade and water.

"I'm terrified of heights, but I have no problem being 1,000 feet up in an aircraft taken care of by Soldiers as professional and as competent as the crews and pilots of B. Co. 5-158," Randall said.

**Big Windy used to** be a company-sized element with about 300 Soldiers and two flight platoons at its home station in Katterbach, Germany, according to Titzel.

Now it falls under two Black Hawk battalions while in Iraq. For general-support missions, Big Windy works with 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 158<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment

and with 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 147<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment for air assault missions.

Capt. Daniel Erskine, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force 49 flies with Big Windy on occasion and said the way the Big Windy approaches each mission is a testament to their abilities.

"One thing I noticed when flying with those guys is that the way they plan it, the way they brief it, the way they execute it is what you hear about in the school house," he said. "Everything goes perfect and it's just the norm here; that's how proficient they are."



## ■ Task Force Dragon helps Marines shoulder the load in western Iraq

By CPL. ANDREW KALWITZ  
2nd Marine Logistics Group

**AL TAQADDUM, Iraq** — Though they are a flock of merely eight, the Army's CH-47 Chinooks move thousands of pounds of gear and scores of personnel daily.

The company is an operational asset of Task Force 49 back at its home station of Fort Wainwright, Alaska. Here in Iraq, the Task Force has administrative control of the unit, but the Marine Corps holds the operational reins.

Despite their small number of aircraft, the 1st Battalion, 52nd Aviation Regiment has handled a large workload since beginning operations in August. With greater capacity, the Army's Chinooks have spared the Marine Corps' aircraft approximately 28,000 passengers and almost 2 million pounds of cargo.

"They just needed something to fill the gaps until they could get another stateside unit into the rotation," said Capt. Nelson Gray, a Milan, Ohio, native.

Gray said the battalion's Chinooks have already flown more than 300 missions. The overachieving aircraft can already carry 2,000 pounds more than the Marine Corps' Sea Knight.

"It's the best aircraft in any military inventory that I've seen yet," said Capt.

Zachariah Morford, Task Force Dragon deputy commander "Our aircraft flies faster, higher, farther than anything in the Army inventory and now that we're stacking up against Marine aircraft, we're more than holding our own."

The Soldiers are on a constant flight rotation, taking to the skies both day and night for the entirety of their deployment.

A lot of maintenance comes with that kind of tempo, especially if the battalion plans to sustain it for the remainder of their 15-month deployment.

"Without us, we couldn't move troops or supplies, so it's satisfying to see

these things take off and go," said Staff Sgt. Samuel Ayres, a Chinook mechanic with the battalion.

Morford said he especially enjoys working in a Marine environment as many of the few and the proud are unfamiliar with the Chinook's capabilities.

"People wear a couple different uniforms, but all haircuts look the same and the food tastes the same," said the Gainesville, Fla., native. "There are fewer differences than I would've at first imagined. They have a very mission focused perspective and we've been able to fit right into that."



Photos by Cpl. Andrew Kalwitz

(Top) Spc. Robert Brazell, 1st Battalion, 52nd Aviation Regiment, looks on while his Chinook is refueled. (Above) Soldiers of 1-52 prepare their aircraft for a Dec. 31 general support mission at Al Taqaddum.



# Point of View

Your images of Task Force 49

(Right) Task Force 49 Signal Officer Capt. Jason Mullins captured this image of Al Faw palace at sunset during a recent visit to Multi-National Corps - Iraq.

(Below) Capt. Ross Mathieu's lens caught this specimen of local Balad wildlife.



Photo by Capt. Jason Mullins



(Left) Sgt. Natanael Ubri took this shot of a sandstorm at Taji during his first tour in Iraq in 2005.

Photo by Sgt. Natanael Ubri

**Point of View** is a regular feature of *The Desert Talon*, highlighting reader-submitted photos. Send them to: [eric.reinhardt@iraq.centcom.mil](mailto:eric.reinhardt@iraq.centcom.mil)

## What's on your iPod?

**Spc. Brett Marko**  
HHC, 2-147th AHB  
Demon Hunter –  
"Soldier's Song"

Because it was written for us! It speaks about the sacrifice we make, and what we go through.

**Jimmy Eat World – "Hear you Me"** Written for the two girls who started the Weezer fan club and died in a car accident. They were very generous and opened their home up to many bands looking for a place to stay. It speaks to anyone who has lost someone close.

**Haste the Day – "Chorus of Angels"** It combines various elements, like choir in the background, and soft elements with very heavy guitars and an aggressive drum beat. It speaks of the Angels rising to test the strengths of Man. Very prophetic and deep message.

**Remix by VNV Nation, originally by Suicide Commando – "Hellraiser"** It's a heavy, aggressive industrial techno song. Great for relaxing after a long day.

**The Goo Goo Dolls – "Name"** It's a song about the artist's childhood, which was troubled. It's a beautiful song that anyone can relate to, even if your childhood was great.



**Chief Warrant Officer 4 Travis Wallace**

HHC Task Force 49  
Bleu Edmondson – "50 Dollars and a Flask of Crown" Quintessential Texas Friday night song. Grabbing my Stetson, pulling it down. Mamas lock up your daughters.

**Mike McClure – "Into the Mystic"** Mike McClure Covers the great Van Morrison song.

**Pat Green – "3 Days"** It is about trying to make some things right in a relationship on a long weekend.

**Jack Ingram – "Rules for life"** Drive that Ford like it's a stallion. Passing knowledge and life experience from senior to junior.

**Randy Rogers Band – "Tonight's Not the Night"** It isn't the night for saying goodbye.



**Chaplain (Capt.) Philip A. Winn Jr.**  
HHC, 2-147th AHB

**David Crowder Band – "Come Thou Fount"** A very modern, Celtic spin on a revered hymn written 250 years ago.

**Earth Wind & Fire – "Can't Hide Love"**

Verdine White is one of the funkiest bass players ever, and I can't get enough old school R&B love songs.

**The Rev. Al Green – "I'm Still in Love with You"** Has a great hook and solid brass section. My anthem for Mrs. Winn.

**Journey – "Faithfully"** Rock ballad summum bonum from the '80s, the decade in which I grew up. It's relative to being gone, and reminds me of home and what's waiting for me when I'm done here.

**Bill Conti – "Gonna Fly Now"** - The original "Rocky" theme song. It helps me go the distance at the gym.



## Boxer

Continued from Page 1

"It was his goal, but being that mission is first, the focus was not on sending him to All-Army boxing, but the command supported it and he was able to go."

Orrostieta said he's grateful that his chain of command has helped him every step of the way.

"My chain of command and fellow Soldiers have all been very supportive about me trying out for the team," he said.

After rushing his application, Orrostieta was in, and now it looks like boxing will be his life for the next few years. With his win in the All-Army Boxing Championships, Orrostieta has secured a spot on the Army's World Class Athlete Program. Whitaker said Orrostieta is ready for the rigorous training program he will be exposed to at Fort Carson.

"He worked out twice a day [while in Iraq]," Whitaker said. "He would work out until he was about to pass out."

Following the national tournament in March, Orrostieta will return to his home station in Germany where his chain of command will sign his paperwork and send him to Fort Carson to train full time.

Whitaker said the transition to Army boxing will be an easy one for Orrostieta, who regularly scored higher than 350 on his Army physical fitness tests.

"He's a driven young man," he said. "He's focused and he's going to do well in Army boxing."

Boxing may be a dying sport in the civilian world, but in the Army, it's an institution and Orrostieta's passion for boxing will be a valuable asset to the team.

"I box for the excitement," Orrostieta said. "You see all the hard work you put into this sport paying off in the ring."



Courtesy photo

Spc. Adrian Orrostieta matches up with his opponent during his All-Army bout in January at Fort Huachuca, Ariz. Orristieta won his match in the All-Army Championships, but dropped his bout to a Marine in the Armed Forces Boxing Championships in early February.

## Deserters stand to lose more than position in Army

BY CAPT. MARY ANN BOWERY  
Task Force 49 Brigade Judge Advocate

In the midst of the high R&R season, all Soldiers should be aware that they are obligated to come back from leave on time and that a failure to do so exposes them to the possibility of prosecution for the crime of desertion.

Since the beginning of the Task Force XII/Task Force 49 deployment, two Soldiers in the Brigade have been prosecuted for this crime.

This article will discuss some common misconceptions about desertion and the penalties that may result if a Soldier commits this offense:

### **"I can't be charged with desertion unless I have been gone 30 days"**

Most Soldiers believe that in order to be charged with desertion they must be gone for 30 days or more. This is not the case. A Soldier can be charged with desertion regardless of the amount of time that he or she is away if there is evidence that the Soldier intended to remain away permanently. This is most often established by length of time away because the longer you are away the more likely it is that you did not intend to come back, but is not a requirement.

### **"I can't be charged with desertion unless I intend to remain away permanently"**

You can be considered a deserter if you are only gone a few days or even a few hours under the right circumstances, regardless of whether you intend to come back. This happens if you are absent, no matter how long, with the intent to shirk important service. Combat zone service is considered "important service" along with getting ready for combat zone service, or even just supporting it. We are currently serving in a combat zone, so if you decide not to return from R&R or emergency leave on time and

you do not have authorization to extend your leave, you can be charged with desertion.

### **"If I don't come back because my mom is sick - and not because I don't want to serve in Iraq - I can't be charged with desertion"**

In the case of desertion, intent doesn't apply to the reason why you stayed away, but to the actual decision to stay away. If a Soldier, who knows he or she is serving in a combat zone, voluntarily decides to miss his or her return flight because of a family problem or any other reason, he meets the appropriate requirement of intent for desertion.

I mentioned at the beginning of this article that Task Force XII/Task Force 49 has had occasion to prosecute two Soldiers for this crime.

The first Soldier failed to return after block leave and missed her unit's deployment. She was absent for a total of 30 days. She was convicted at a summary court-martial and was sentenced to 30 days in confinement, reduction to E-1 and forfeiture of pay. The second case involved a Soldier who failed to return from R&R leave. She gave as one excuse for her conduct that her mother was sick and she needed to take care of her. She was absent for more than 40 days. She was convicted at a special court-martial and sentenced to six months in confinement, reduction to E-1, forfeiture of two-thirds pay and allowances for six months and a bad conduct discharge.

Desertion is a serious offense and is treated as such by commanders. Soldiers who are on R&R or emergency leave who believe that their problems at home are too serious for them to return to the unit should remember this and are encouraged to contact their chain of command to make them aware of their situation. If they are ordered to return, they should do so, or risk making their problems worse.



Capt. Mary Ann Bowery



## Good luck

Continued from Page 1



Photo by Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Eric Reinhardt

Master Sgt. Bill Nickoloff displays the Bible which three generations of his family have taken to war.

'guess who I have here?' She was thrilled. She had sneaked it into my duffle bag just a few minutes before I left home."

The pony goes on every mission with him; poses for photos in exotic locations throughout Iraq and news of its whereabouts are a regular feature of the Task Force Hawk newsletter.

Task Force 49 medic Sgt. Darlynnne Freiday-Howe has literally brought a piece of her Fort Wainwright, Alaska home to Iraq, in the form of Jake the Pet Rock, a gift from her 9-year-old son, Ryan.

"He painted Jake white, and painted on a yellow beak and stuck on googly eyes," Freiday-Howe said. "I found him on my bedside table one night, right before we left, with a note that had the rock's name on it."

**Some of the Soldiers' keepsakes** have been handed down through generations of service members. Master Sgt. Bill Nickoloff, Task Force 49 Safety NCOIC, has one such heirloom with him in Iraq – a metal-bound pocket Bible. It has been through four wars and three generations of his family, most recently in Desert Storm with his brother, Bob.

Nickoloff's great-grandmother gave it to his grandfather as he went off to serve in Europe during World War II.

The Bible saw action again in the Korean War, where it may have saved his uncle's life during a relentless Chinese Army wave attack by deflecting a piece of shrapnel from a nearby mortar hit. A dent on the Bible's thin steel cover attests to that incident.

One generation later the Bible went to Vietnam with Nickoloff's cousin Mike Myers.

"He was a 'tunnel rat', which was a pretty dangerous job, going down into the Viet Cong tunnels that were often booby-trapped," Nickoloff said.

His cousin Mike came home safely and eight months later it went on another tour of Vietnam with his cousin Bob Osenbaugh, who sent the Bible to Nickoloff in Iraq, with the proviso that "you return this book to me upon completion of its sixth tour of duty – personally."

Capt. Jason Mullins, Task Force 49 Signal Officer, is the third service member in his family to carry the survival knife his grandfather first carried as a Marine in Vietnam.

"He handed it down to my father, who served in the Army on the German border during the Cold War, who handed it down to me, as I prepared to deploy to Iraq," Mullins said "The knife has all three of our names engraved on the blade: USMC Bill Mullins/US ARMY Bobby Mullins/US ARMY Jason Mullins."

Though he keeps it locked away for safekeeping most of the time, he said he takes it with him on flights.

"I'm a self-proclaimed fobbit, but every time I leave the FOB I take it with me, I suppose for luck," Mullins said. "My grandfather was a gunner on a Cobra helicopter during Vietnam and survived being shot down. I guess I'm just hoping some of his luck will rub off on me."

**Miniature flags** are about the most common keepsakes Soldiers here carry with them. Many of them come here in care packages from organizations and supporters in the States, but some have more direct and personal origins.

"I carry a mini flag that my good friend's mom gave me when I was back home in Evansville, Ind.," said Private 2 Matthew Rister, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force 49. "She said that her son was a Soldier and carried it and would have wanted me to have it."

Staff Sgt. Michael Kass, assistant operations NCOIC for Task Force Hawk, got the four-leaf clover he carries from his Vietnam-veteran neighbor in Sparta, Wis.

"He had it from back in Vietnam," said Kass, "I guess it worked for him, because he's obviously alive and well, living next door to me. He gave it to me before I left for OIF 1 in 2003. I've carried it with me ever since."

Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Gregory Crow, A Co. 2nd Battalion, 147 Aviation Regiment carries a laminated card of 91st Psalm, given to him by a friend who carried it with him when he was a Huey door gunner in Vietnam.

"He claims it will protect me," Crow said. "I am one of the few in my unit without a [Combat Action Badge], so maybe it works."

St. Christopher medals are a perennial favorite among Soldiers and others whose duties involve travel and risk.

Task Force 49 Operations Officer Lt. Col. Michael McCurry has a St. Christopher medal given to him by a friend, a retired Marine lieutenant colonel, who wore it on two tours of Vietnam. It bears the Marine Corps insignia on its flipside.

The medallion has spent plenty of time in the Middle East since McCurry first received it before serving in Operation Desert Storm. He has since worn it on three OIF rotations.

**A broken piece** of a helicopter may hardly seem auspicious, but Chief Warrant Officer 2 Eric Hildebrandt, of A Co. 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 158<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment, swears by the tail-wheel lock pin he snapped in flight school and wears it on his dog tags.

"I haven't had anything break on me since that time," Hildebrandt said.

Staff Sgt. Michelle Smith's good-luck charm was combat proven during a hostile-fire incident in January which resulted in an Air Medal for the A Co., 2-147 Black Hawk crew chief.

"My oldest sister gave me a piece of red yarn to wear around my neck" Smith said. "She put it around my neck the day we left from block leave and told me it is supposed to be a reminder of all the love my family has for me. I wear it on all of my missions."



Photo by Sgt. Dale Sweetnam

Spc. Christopher Hall's good-luck charm is a coin he received from President George W. Bush in 2001. Hall was a high school student at the time. He and his father, Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Blaine Hall, were recognized for their volunteer assistance to post-9/11 recovery efforts at the Pentagon.