

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE 1ST BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM

BASTOGNE

MAGAZINE

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SMALL
STEPS
IN
BAYJI





A Soldier from Scout Platoon, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), watches for suspicious activity, while taking a defensive position in Mezra, Iraq March 21. Soldiers met with local citizens there to discuss recent terrorist attacks in the area. “Tiger Force” Soldiers have helped to establish a group of Sons of Iraq in Mezra, who are taking the fight to enemy extremists.

(Photo by Spc. John Bentley, Bastogne PAO)

YOU CALL WE HULL

TASKMASTER PLATOON PROVIDES LIFELINE FOR BASTOGNE SOLDIERS

Story by Pfc. Heather Skipper
426th Brigade Support Battalion

COB SPEICHER, Iraq- By definition the word lifeline is described as, “One that is or is regarded as a source of salvation in a crisis.”

On the dangerous roads in Iraq, Coalition-force convoy vehicles that have either broken down in the desert weather conditions or disabled by enemy attacks, can call their own “lifeline”, in the Taskmaster Soldiers of the service and recovery platoon, Bravo Company, 426th Brigade Support Battalion.

“These Soldiers respond in a moments notice,” said 2nd Lt. Keith Fetter, Bravo Company executive officer. “Whenever Soldiers need their assistance, they react.” According to Fetter, the S&R section has established a legacy within the company not easily pushed aside. “Their persistence and tenacity within their work performance is the heart and sole behind their success.” The S&R consists of two sections; the Wrecker Team and the Welders.

The Wreckers, who spend most of their time “outside the wire”, have successfully completed over 200 missions and traveled more than 4,700 miles providing recovery support to convoys traveling the roads in the Salah ad Din Province.

The “Wrecker” Soldiers keep their vehicles ready in the event they receive a call from a convoy element in distress.

The Soldiers of the wrecker section must act decisively once they reach an inoperative vehicle. They have to assess the situation and act accordingly as quickly as possible.

“We dismount the wrecker, assess the disabled vehicle to determine the depth of ‘battlefield damage,’ and make a decisive recommendation to the combat logistics patrol commander on what exactly needs to be done to rectify the situation,” said Spc. Brian Kramer, wrecker team. They acknowledge that, in order to provide their recovery assets, they are subject to the same dangers as anyone else traveling on the precarious roads.

“Some of these Soldiers have scathed death by very

small margins,” said Fetter. “Even the lowest ranking Soldiers in the team have contributed to saving lives by spotting possible Improvised Explosive Devices [IEDs]. They are always very attentive to their surroundings.”

The other sub-section of the S&R section may not be in harm’s way as frequently as their wrecker brethren, but not lost to them, is what they provide to the Soldier “out on the road.”

“It is an inspiration to us in the shop to help out our brothers-in-arms by keeping them safer,” said Spc. Adam Allen, welder section. “Knowing we’ve done our job is very satisfying.”

One of the main focuses for the welder section is to produce fabrications, which makes vehicles safer. According to Sgt. Zachary Lewis of the welder section, these fabrications aid in providing a 360-degree armor protection. “The underbelly fabrication is very important in saving Soldier’s lives,” Lewis said.

These welders have also used their technical skill to assist with the transportation of wounded Soldiers. “We have turned a Mine Resistant Armor Protecting vehicle into a casualty evacuation asset, which gives the personnel inside the MRAP the capabilities to administer medical attention to wounded Coalition forces during a combat logistic patrol,” Lewis said.

As with most Soldiers in a combat environment, the members of the S&R platoon are never without a task to execute and work tirelessly to provide their superior level of support to Coalition convoys traveling in the Bastogne battle space. “Our time is very sporadic,” said Staff Sgt. Marcellus Pierre, welding section. “Time and personnel management is our pillar. Due to the uncertainty of our schedule as a result of CLPs, underbelly construction, other modifications and fabrications, the non-commissioned officers of the section are known throughout the battalion to be the epitome of personnel and time management. We work at least 18 of the 24 hours in a day.”

However, as Fetter states, “In the end, when you get down to the bare bones of the overall mission for any support Soldier, it is to provide support for their fellow Soldiers on the battlefield.”



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1BCT COMMANDER:
COL. MICHAEL MCBRIDE

1BCT COMMAND SGT. MAJOR:
CSM ROBERT WRIGHT

1BCT PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER:
MAJ. JOHNPAUL ARNOLD

1BCT PAO NCOIC:
SFC KEVIN DOHENY

EDITOR:
SPC. RICK RZEPKA

RICHARD.RZEPKA@IRAQ.CENTCOM.MIL

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Freedom of movement key for Iraqi growth

Story and photos by
Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Doheny
Bastogne PAO

SAMARRA, Iraq- After completion of a recent operation reconnecting old economic partners, the people of the northern-Iraqi city of Samarra can breathe again.

The “Bastogne” Soldiers of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, recently finished conducting multiple operations that cleared al Qaeda fighters and other enemy extremist from the desert areas west and south of Samarra, including the southern portion of the city.

Over the past year Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) has had a chokehold on the “Fallujah Road”, the main road between al Anbar Province’s population centers and Samarra.

They have operated freely on and around the Salah ad Din Province portion of the route, restricting travel between the two areas.

Al Qaeda had forced civilian traffic to alternate routes, choking this critical economic line of communication. The enemy did this by hijacking and kidnapping drivers; preying upon helpless travelers and truck drivers in the secluded areas of the desert away from security forces.

According to Maj. Jim DeOre, 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment operations officer, “this had many Iraqis traveling considerable distances out of the way, forcing them to use a great deal of fuel and energy in the process.

“The restriction of travel on this route strangled the economic growth of the city and its surrounding towns and villages,” said DeOre. “Opening this road displays to the Iraqis that Iraqi Security (ISF) and Coalition forces (CF) are making positive gains in their efforts to remove AQI’s criminal influence over the people.”

These enemy extremist had smothered this passageway by kidnapping, murdering, and extorting money from any civilians traveling on the route. The emplacement of improvised explosive devices (IED) ultimately made civilian travel on this thoroughfare almost non-existent, according to DeOre, whose battalion controls the area where most of the route runs.

The opening of the route offers more convenient travel for people looking to drive between Salah ad Din and Anbar. This freedom of movement for Iraqis and is attributed to the construction of checkpoints along the route and the establishment of the Sons of Iraq (SoI) groups manning them. By having a 24-hour, 7-day a week over watch on the route, Iraqi and Coalition forces can ensure AQI doesn’t return to the area and terrorize the local populace.

“These security positions deny use of the road to the criminal activity of AQI fighters, thereby making the area safer for people traveling on the road and those who live in the area,” DeOre said.

Captain Nathan Hicks, commander of Delta Company, 2-327, said SoI members in his unit’s area are pointing out hiding places AQI use to conceal their bombs and dangerous weapons. Hick’s unit, responsible for most of the route running into Samarra, routinely speaks with SoI groups in its area seeking out information leading to weapons caches and enemy hideouts.

“The greatest effect the SoI have on the people here is making their homes and towns safer,” said Hicks. “Brave men are standing up SoI groups to deny AQI sanctuary there.”

If Coalition forces are correct in their assessment that this route will stimulate the economy of Samarra, thousands of people will see and feel the positive impact. The transport of goods and services will allow the economy growth of the city of Samarra, and the surrounding areas along the route. It will also improve the quality of life for thousands of Iraqi citizens.

One day during the first week of the route opening, a Coalition force patrol had counted over 240 fuel trucks traveling on the road.

“Agricultural and fuel trucks travel this route by the hundreds everyday,” said DeOre. “We believe there is no doubt that this movement of goods between the provinces will stimulate the economy of large and small towns along the entire length of the road as well as the cities that are now linked by its opening.”



Bastogne Cavalry Troops, Iraqi Army unearth weapons cache

Story and photos by
Spc. Alfredo Jimenez Jr.
Task Force Iron Public Affairs



BALAD, Iraq - Two Soldiers, one Iraqi and one American, stood beside each other as they pulled out a corroded rocket from the ground. Sweat poured down the American Soldier’s cheek as the Iraqi Soldier lit a cigarette.

“Well this thing was buried well,” the American said. “Let’s go find some more!”

That was the scene that played out near the Jabouri Peninsula and the city of Al-Sayer, where troops from the 1st Squadron, 32nd Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), and Soldiers from the 3rd Battalion 14th Iraqi Army Brigade, conducted joint operations to find and destroy weapons caches March 28-29.

“We came out to look for weapons so we can take them off the street,” said 1st Sgt. Brian Haydt, Bravo Troop, first sergeant. “We conduct these types of operations to protect the safety of the civilian population and U.S. troops.”

“Searching for weapons is important because it allows our teams to be safe out on missions,” said Sgt. 1st Class David Dempsey, 3rd platoon sergeant, Able Troop. “It is a dangerous job but we are always ready to come out and find these weapons and destroy them.”

Soldiers from 3rd platoon, Able Troop, and Iraqi troops convoyed from Forward Operating Base Paliwoda early in the morning and rolled into Al-Sayer March 28. They were greeted by Iraqi children, teenagers and adults, who were excited to see American troops in the area.

After meeting the crowd, they pressed on to locations where weapons were believed to be buried.

“The civilians usually greet us very well because they know we are there to protect them and keep them safe,” said 1st Sgt. Santo Watson, A Troop first sergeant. “Their attitude is good because everything helps when we are out looking for weapons.”

After turning up empty in their mission to find weapons, Able Troop was able to locate a Russian-made sniper rifle and a Dushka tripod.

“Citizens enjoy it when we come out because they know our platoon help keep them safe,” Dempsey said.

Soldiers from Bravo Troop and the Iraqi Army,

convoyed from Forward Operating Base Paliwoda early in the morning and rolled in northern Jabouri March 29. They encountered empty streets but were soon greeted by the local population as they marched to their objective.

“We conducted Operation Bandit Roundup which was designated to degrade enemy capabilities by taking their weapons away,” said Capt. Anthony Keller, Bravo Troop commander.

They searched a large area and found a corroded rocket.

“We come out two to three times a week to help keep our troops safe,” Haydt said. “We are glad to perform these types of missions and I know the local populace is happy we are able to do it.”

By the end of the day, Bravo troop were able to amass a huge weapons cache, which was later destroyed by an ordnance team, and signal another successful mission.

“The local citizens are tired of the bloodshed and seek us out to help us find these weapons,” Keller said. “They give us their husbands’ weapons and tell us to keep them away from their children.”



SMALL STEPS



Story and photos by Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Doheny
1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) PAO

Before the start of each school year in America, millions of parents flock to stores and clear out the school supplies isle.

Parents load up with pens, pencils, notebooks and other items associated with learning enhancement, giving their children a better opportunity to further their education.

In Iraq, there is no Wal-Mart, Target or even a supermarket available for every child to get the supplies needed to enhance their learning.

On an ordinary Tuesday morning for students at two schools in the northern Iraqi city of Siniyah, students were treated to an educational surprise.

On this day, they were greeted by local policemen, city councilmen and Soldiers from Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, who visited the school to hand out much needed school supplies and other miscellaneous items.

Although small in terms of what they actually need to sustain a long-term enhancement in learning, each student was given supplies to show what the commander of the battalion, Lt. Col. Peter Wilhelm, says is, “a small offering to improve ties between local officials and the population.”

Wilhelm’s battalion is doing much more than focusing on the youth of Iraq. They are involved with issues from security to basic needs of the populace.

There are also many projects in place to enhance the quality of life for the citizens of Bayji, Siniyah, Mezra and the other surrounding towns and villages.

According to Maj. Brad Mock, executive officer for the Bulldog Battalion, “nothing can improve though without the security situation under control.”

Mock admits that the security situation in his battalion’s area of operations is not completely handcuffed, but it is to a point where local leaders are voicing opinions on other issues besides the security of the local populace.

“We are now hearing issues on basic needs and economic growth, which something we almost never used to hear,” said Mock. “We have seen over the last six months a change from security being the primary concern of the people, to basic needs.”

Mock points out that, the primary factor in the improvement of the security situation has been the establishment of local Sons of Iraq groups. He said his battalion hasn’t changed the way they operated from day one. Mock added that they haven’t increased operational tempo or maneuvered manpower to another location to counteract enemy activity in the area.

“The data speaks for itself,” said Mock. “Every tracking mechanism that we have has shown a sharp decline in almost every category. This is due to the local Sons of Iraq groups in the population centers here.”

With the improvement in security, the local leaders can focus more on improving the needs of the people. Recent successes for the local city council and its leaders, are the beginning of water projects in Bayji, the opening of Market Street and its shops, and the placement of a floating bridge allowing more convenient travel from Kirkuk to the Bayji area.



A Soldier from 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment pulls security as Iraqi Policemen hand out school supplies at a school in Siniyah, Iraq March 25.

The bridge is just a temporary fix as engineers are in place now, building a more permanent structure that can handle much more traffic than the smaller floating bridge they emplaced.

“This bridge is significant because instead of traveling many miles out of the way both north and south to reach the Bayji area, people can now cross at this central location. This should greatly improve trade, hopefully improving the economy in both cities,” said Wilhelm.

The bridge near the Bayji Power Plant, is situated on the main road from Bayji to Kirkuk. This road connects directly into a main road running to the population centers near Bayji, and according to Wilhelm, “greatly increases the convenience of people traveling between the two oil-connected cities.”

Even with the security situation improving in Bayji and the surrounding area, security is still the number one priority for the battalion.

They still conduct operations to eliminate enemy extremists who hamper the progress of the battalion’s efforts. According to the battalion, these “lethal” operations allow them to focus on assisting the Iraqi people.

“Yes, we still go after bad guys,” said Mock, “but our focus has changed to almost 70 percent non-lethal targeting and 30 percent lethal targets. This 30 percent will probably never change, around here; there is always an enemy to apprehend.”

Even with the improvements in the Bayji area, the local leaders continue to make efforts to improve the day-to-day life of the people.

Wilhelm admits that sometimes, we as Americans overlook the power of making small steps.

“In American society everyone wants change right away,” he said. “In Iraq it is small step after small step.”

According to Wilhelm, the local leaders’ “small steps” are making a huge difference.

“The pyramids weren’t built in one day,” he added. “Our stone and mortar are float bridges and school supplies.”

During a hazy morning, a Soldier from Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, pulls security while civilian vehicles cross a temporary float bridge near the Al Fatah Bridge northeast of Bayji, Iraq Mar. 26. The temporary bridge was placed so traffic can cross the Tigris River, allowing easier access to the population centers near Bayji.

TOP NCO IN IRAQ VISITS NO SLACK

By Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Doheny
1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st
Airborne Division PAO

SAMARRA, Iraq - Some people say it is always good to see old friends from time to time. For the top non-commissioned officer in Iraq, Command Sgt. Maj. Marvin Hill, Multi-National Forces - Iraq, he was close to home again with his Bastogne family as he visited the home of the “No Slack” Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment.

Hill, who served twice in the “No Slack” battalion, inducted the newest non-commissioned officers into the corps during

an NCO induction ceremony, March 8, at Forward Operating Base Brassfield-Mora near Samarra.

Serving in more than one prominent position within the Screaming Eagle Division, Hill is most notably known for his time as the top enlisted Soldier in the 101st during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. During the ceremony he offered words of wisdom only gained through many years of leading Soldiers in some of the most demanding of units.

Speaking to the newly promoted NCOs sitting in front of him, articulated to them about the influence they were now empowered with as NCOs.

“You see those stripes on your uniform,” Hill said. “With those stripes comes power. It is up to you how you use that power.”

Engaging the NCOs with his every word, he uttered six different powers that NCOs gain when pinning on the stripes.

“Use your power,” he said. “If you don’t use it the Soldier will find someone else who will. If this happens, you will then become powerless.”

According to Hill, if an NCO is having a difficult time reaching his Soldiers, he must ensure that he always “dazzles them with their expertise.”

“We are telling you to lead troops in combat. Leading troops is a 24-hour, seven-days a week job,” Hill said.



Command Sgt. Major Marvin Hill, Iraq’s top enlisted Soldier, offers advice to No Slack NCOs March 8.

After speaking with the NCOs, Hill and CSM Chris Fields, 2nd Bn., 327th Inf. Regt., walked over to the red line painted on the floor. Crossing this red line, which was the first rank worn by a sergeant in 1775, is the defining moment of the ceremony as it is symbolic with the crossing the “time-honored” line between Soldier and NCO.

The newly inducted NCOs received their charges and shook the hands of the official party members.

They were now equipped with all the tools to lead Soldiers in combat and hopefully, according to Hill, are to become “thermostats” instead of “thermometers”.

“A thermometer can only tell if it is hot or cold,” Hill said. “As new members of this time-honored corps, I need you to be thermostats. Thermostats do much more than just say it’s hot or cold. It can control, it can change, and it acts. Don’t just sit back watch things happen, do something about it and make them happen.”



During the ceremony, No Slack Soldiers pause for a moment of silence for two fallen No Slack NCOs.

SCORING CONFIDENCE

IN A SEARCH FOR AL QAEDA AND WEAPONS
CACHES NEAR THE HAMRIN MOUNTAINS, ONE
IRAQI ARMY BATTALION FINDS MUCH MORE
THAN TANGIBLE ITEMS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SPC. JOHN BENTLEY
BASTOGNE PAO

In an attempt to build rapport, 1st Lt. Tom Collins, the adjutant from the Military Transition Team, 1st Special Troops Battalion, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), accepts chai from villagers outside of Bayji, Iraq near the Hamrin Mountains March 5.

BAYJI, Iraq—During his Hall of Fame football coaching career, former Green Bay Packers head coach Vince Lombardi said “Confidence is contagious.”

Lombardi uttered these words to describe the confidence that spread throughout his players in order to bring them together to achieve the team’s goals.

Over 50 years later this is

a parallel message for a group of Iraqi soldiers that recently conducted a mission in Salah ad Din Province.

During Operation Makua II, March 5, the Iraqi army didn’t find the insurgents or weapons caches they were looking for, but perhaps more importantly they established a sense of confidence for accomplishing a task they have not completed before.

Iraqi soldiers from the 1st

Battalion, 14th Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division combed more than 350-square kms of desert at the base of the Hamrin Mountains, east of Bayji. The Tikrit-based IA Soldiers searched endlessly for weapons caches, enemy extremists and caves with possible tunnel networks.

Even though the Iraqi soldiers didn’t discover precisely what they were looking for, “they found out that they were capable of planning

and executing missions for more than one day at a time,” said Maj. Joe Pavone, 1st Special Troops Battalion, Military Transition Team chief.

Pavone said the 36-hour operation was the first overnight mission planned and conducted by this battalion.

“I think a positive outlook is that there is an increased ISF (Iraqi Security Forces) presence in the Hamrin Mountains.

Insurgents now know that they can no longer use that area as a stronghold. At any given time the IA are able to go out there,” said Capt. Timothy Lawson, 1st STB MiTT operations officer.

Although the Iraqi battalion commands and controls all their missions, the Tikrit-based military transition team Soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, provide assistance for any problems they may encounter.

“We don’t give them all the answers,” said Pavone. “We do coach them along the way, but we allow them to find their own solutions to setbacks.”

Pavone said once the missions are

complete they evaluate situations which could have been performed more efficiently, similar to a U.S. military after action review.

During his days as head coach of the Packers, Lombardi often used his mentorship to develop the confidence of his players so as to prepare them for the battles that they would face on the gridiron.

If Lombardi were coaching this battalion of IA he may have shared one of his famous quotes, “life’s battles don’t always go to the stronger or faster man. But sooner or later the man who wins, is the man who thinks he can.”

Confidence is just the outward expression of a Soldier who thinks he can.

During the Iraqi-led Operation Makua II, a Soldier from 1st Battalion, 14th Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division mans his humvee turret during a cordon and search in the Hamrin Mountains east of Bayji, Iraq March 6.

eye of the eagle

the world as Bastogne Soldiers see it

Photos by Bastogne PAO



Colonel Michael McBride presents Sgt. Cliff Lee, HHC, 1BCT, with the Purple Heart Medal.



2-320th Soldiers drink from the grog bowl.



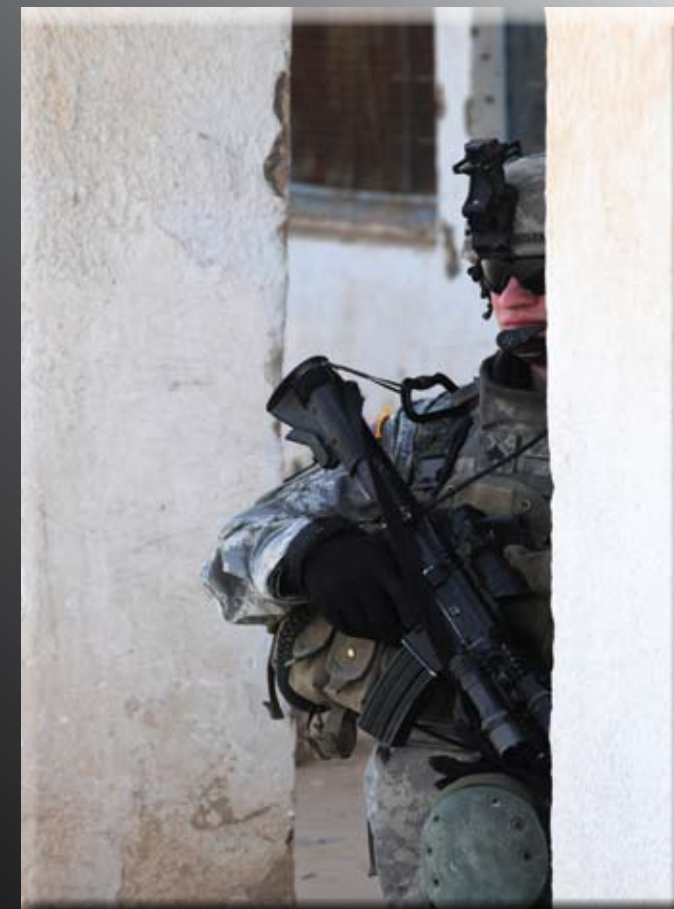
A 1st Special Troops Battalion Soldier scans the sparse terrain for any Al Qaeda attempting to “squirt” from the area during a recent operation west of Tikrit. The operation netted multiple AQI for TF Spartan.



Soldiers from 426th BSB prepare for an early-morning convoy in support of operations in the Salah ad Din Province.



(TOP): A Soldier from 2nd Battalion watches as a member from the Samarra Rescue Counsel fires his weapon at a range at Forward Operating Base Seven near the restive city. The SRC have improved the security situation in the city of Samarra. (Right): Sergeant Cole McClean, Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, pulls security while other members of his company, along with Siniyah leaders, hand out school supplies at two different schools in the city.



A “Tiger Force” Soldier pulls overwatch security during a recent mission in Mezra, Iraq.

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MARCH 2008

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SPC Joseph Dawson II- HHC BDE

SPC Marice Campbell- 426 BSB

SPC Betina Cook- 426 BSB

SGT Dionicio Garcia- 426 BSB

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SGT Christina Dees- 426 BSB

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PFC Marshall Bell- 2-327

SGT Samuel Britt- 2-327

SPC Michael Venus- 2-327

SPC Clinton Roberts- 2-327

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SPC Mark Boolen- 2-327

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SPC Elsin Peter- 2-327

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SPC Donnell Haynes- 2-327

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SSG Carl Pulver- 2-320

SPC John Gibson- 2-320

SPC Clarence Ariola- 2-320

SSG Daniel Murillo- 2-320

SGT Jose Fernandez-Negron-2-320 nathan.p.cook@us.army.mil

SGT Edwin Lassiter- 2-320

SGT Rickey Cupp- 2-320

SGT Nigel Davis- 2-320

SSG Henry Knosp- 2-320

PFC Joseph Bennefield- 1STB

SGT Vassilis Kitsos- 1STB

CONTACT YOUR CAREER COUNSELOR:

1BCT Senior Counselor

SFC Julius Kelley III

julius.kelley@us.army.mil

VOIP: 242-1116

DSN: 318-849-2502

1-327th INF

SSG Robert Stull

robert.stull@us.army.mil

VOIP: 672-5228

2-327th INF

SSG Edmundo Prado

edmundo.jose.prado@us.army.mil

VOIP: 672-5318

2-320th FAR

SSG Dennis Dumont

dennis.j.dumont@us.army.mil

VOIP: 242-9269

1-32 CAV/426 BSB

SFC Michael Bonfardine

michael.bonfardine@us.army.mil

1STB/HHC BDE

SFC Nathan Cook

nathan.p.cook@us.army.mil

VOIP: 242-1116

DSN: 318-849-2502

SPC Stephan Johnson- 1STB

SPC William Emery- 1STB

SGT Joshua Cheever- 1STB

SGT Matthew Carpenter- 1STB

SGT Daniel Hall- 1STB

SPC Loren Benth- 1STB

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SGT Leon England- 1-32 CAV

SPC Gurnie Ware- 1-32 CAV

SSG Easton Purkiss- 1-32 CAV

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