

Marne Focus

Volume 1, Issue 30 May 22, 2008

Serving Task Force Marne and MND-Center



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Photo by 1st Lt. Marshall Tucker

Joint patrol with Iraqi Army builds capacity

Corporal Travis Wisley, 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, pulls security while a civil affairs team inspects a school renovations project. Coalition forces have been conducting joint patrols with the Iraqi Army throughout the fish farm areas of North Babil, approximately 50 kilometers south of Baghdad.

Marne Dauntless to improve quality of life

MND-C PAO

BAGHDAD – Multi-National Division – Center launched its latest major operation primarily devoted to capacity building May 15, seeking to improve the quality of life for Iraqi citizens of the Mada'in Qada, in southeast Baghdad Province.

Coming on the heels of Operation Marne Piledriver – which kicked off in April across the Mahmudiyah Qada, south of Baghdad – Marne Dauntless aims to facilitate sustainable stability and security in a new part of MND-C's battle space.

The operation is taking place in the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division's area of responsibility, as it assumes authority from the 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd

Infantry Division. The security gains achieved by the 3rd HBCT over the last fifteen months have set the stage for this effort.

"When we first got into the Mada'in Qada we were experiencing probably four or five attacks a day. Now ... we're down to maybe an attack every other day," said Col. Wayne W. Grigsby Jr., commander of the 3rd HBCT.

"All this violence that has gone down has created this window now, that we can think capacity, not just security."

In addition to economic and governance development, Marne Dauntless aims to eliminate lingering extremist and criminal elements in the area. The Iraqi Security Forces will take the lead in targeting extremists through intelligence-driven raids, with support

from Coalition forces, and ensure extremists are unable to conduct attacks or smuggle munitions into Baghdad.

"The ISF in Mada'in Qada have grown to a level of operational readiness that allows them to take the lead," said Maj. Dave Waldron, ISF chief, G3 section, 3rd Infantry Division.

"The National Police and Iraqi Army have proven they have a good working relationship with the townspeople and local leaders. This has recently gained significant intelligence to assist in conducting operations to disrupt (al-Qaeda in Iraq) and Shia extremist networks in Mada'in."

Policemen of the 3rd Battalion, 1st National Police Brigade will establish a presence in the northern Jisr Diyala area and Narhwan. An Iraqi Police

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Marne 6 Sends

Marne Soldiers, mission complete

Hard work and dedication produce successful tour

In a week, Task Force Marne will transition to Task Force Mountain, but the transfer of authority of the Division Headquarters will be seamless for you.

When I look back at this time, and for the rest of my life, my fondest memories will be the ones serving on this battlefield alongside of you – every single one of you made a difference.

None of you watched this war on television, but were active participants and contributors to the ideals of freedom. The most important piece of furniture in your house, your trailer, your tent, or wherever you live, is your mirror because when you look in the mirror you see someone who is making a difference.

When the 3rd Infantry Division Headquarters arrived in Iraq 15 months ago, attack levels averaged 25 per day. Now they average less than two per day. Some days, across a battlefield the size of West Virginia, we have no attacks. This is attributed to your hard work and to your dedication.

The Surge gave us the combat power to take the fight to the enemy. Second Brigade, 1st Armor Division now occupies the Mada'in qada east of Baghdad. Prior to March 2007, one company patrolled the entire qada a few days a week from New Baghdad. Now Soldiers do not commute to work, but live forward in one of the 60 patrol bases or combat outposts across Mahmudiyah, Mada'in, and northern Babil.

By living among the Iraqis, they trust you because their needs are your needs. Over time, you transformed the battlefield. Security is transitioning into stability. Not only are attack levels down, but the capability of the Iraqi Security Forces increase every day. You live with them, partner with them, and serve on MiTTs with them. The Task Force Marne NCO Academy works with their non-commissioned officer corps to make it the strong backbone our fine non-commissioned officers are for us.

You all worked governance from the local level through grassroots movements to form small councils. You worked to connect those Iraqis to their next higher governing level, all while meeting their needs.

You helped to jumpstart economies by revitalizing the poultry industry, assisting with rebuilding the fish farm industry, providing microgrants, and letting the Iraqi people return to a way of life pre-Saddam Hussein.

Most importantly, you helped open the channels for Iraqis to communicate by developing radio stations, local newspapers, distributing flyers, opening tip lines, building bridges, and providing ferries to reunite families as well as communities.

Some can debate the progress in Iraq, but when you look around the battlefield, you can see the progress with your eyes. When I think about how far we have come, I think about Patrol Base Kemple and our magnificent Rakkasan Soldiers operating in Owesat, a previous no-man's land. I think about Arab Jabour and areas such as Hawr Rajab, Adwaniyah, Abu Aytha, and Sayafiyah, where Al-Qaeda used to have sanctuary and now the Spartan Soldiers call home.

I think about Combat Outpost Carver and the Durayah Brigade, which allows the Iraqis to move back and forth across the Tigris River, where previously the presence of a boat signaled hostile intent. And, as we work to meet the needs of the Iraqi people and create jobs, I think of the Iskandariyah Industrial Complex and VoTech as well as areas like Haswa and Musayaib



Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch
Task Force Marne Commander

where Vanguard Soldiers work tirelessly to provide essential services for the people of Iraq.

I also think about the work of the 1st Georgian Brigade and their ability to change mission by getting off their checkpoints and running snap TCPs in Wasit. I think of the strides the 7th Sustainment Brigade is making in enhancing ISF logistics. I think of the great "helicopter diplomacy" our pilots are providing across the entire

battlefield. And lately, I've been realizing that the transformation meant we traded bullets for projects, bombs for initiatives, and your resolve to kill the enemy with your passion for helping the Iraqi people.

When I close my eyes and think how far Multi-National Division – Center has come, I am absolutely amazed. It was your work that made this possible.

I've told you many times that you have a choice in life – you can read history or you can make history, and you have all chosen to make history. Years from now you can put your grandkids on your lap and show them a map of the world. When you point to Iraq, it will be a country free from fear, an ally on the war on terror, and a beacon of hope for the entire Middle East. You will be able to look your grandkids in the eye and say, "I did that."

I could not be more proud, but you still have a tough fight ahead so stay safe. Make safety and security your first priority without being risk averse.

ROCK OF THE MARNE!

Marne Focus

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187th Infantry helps families move home



Courtesy Photo

First Lieutenant Austin Commons, 1st Platoon leader, Co. C, 1-187th Inf. Regt. shakes hands with an Sol leader in Chalabi Village. Commons and his Soldiers, along with the Sol, helped displaced families move back to their homes after they were terrorized by extremists.

BY CAPT. RAYMOND NUTTER
2nd BCT, 3rd Inf. Div., PAO

FOB KALSU, Iraq – Two years ago, al-Qaeda destroyed the Chalabi village in the Sayafiya region. A Shia tribe in a predominantly Sunni area, the Chalabis fled to Mahmudiyah, Baghdad, and other surrounding areas.

About four months ago, Coalition forces entered the area and set up Sons of Iraq security and Iraqi Army checkpoints. Soon after, Soldiers from Company C, 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), discovered residents had returned to the area.

“These families had heard from word of mouth that the area was now secure so now they are back,” said Capt. Joe Johnson, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-187th Inf. Regt.

Now, Coalition forces are bringing aid to about 150 men and boys that came to rebuild and continue securing the area. Soldiers provided shovels, wood, bricks, mortar, cement and basic living essentials

such as food and water May 5.

“This is just to get them a jump start and to keep the men building and productive until the Government of Iraq comes and takes over,” said Staff Sgt. Christopher Sloan, 1-187th Inf. Regt. psychological operations noncommissioned officer. “The government is already working the (electrical) power issue in the area and we just wanted to jump start the building process and make it a smoother transition.”

Sheikh Jassim Mohammed Alawan al-Kalabi praised the supply delivery.

“The Iraqi government, the Americans and our families are all working together to make this place great again,” he said.

Soldiers from Company C, 1-187th Inf. Regt., promised to return soon and check what progress has been made in the area.

“We will re-evaluate the situation and make sure progress doesn’t get halted by al-Qaeda or any other terrorist unit,” said 1st Lt. Justin Commons from Macomb, Ill.

Salvadoran forces celebrate 184th birthday

SGT. 1ST CLASS STACY NILES
214th FB, PAO

FOB DELTA– The Salvadoran Cuscatlán Battalion, X rotation, celebrated the “Day of the Salvadoran Soldier,” here May 7.

The day recognized the contributions of the Salvadoran soldiers for preserving the freedom of their country and the democratization of others. It also served to commemorate the 184th year of the Salvadoran armed forces.

“We must remember our history,” said Col. Walter Arévalo, commander of the Cuscatlán Battalion, referring to the civil war El Salvador endured more than 15 years ago. “It’s important that we remember the contribution of those who have come before us. The work we do here is important in helping those who are suffering because of the insurgency in Iraq.”

The celebration featured a five-kilometer run, a unit prayer service, a wreath-laying ceremony, a bayonet charge and machete fighting demonstration. The battalion also competed against other Coalition partners in sporting events.

“These types of activities increase morale,” Arévalo said. “The ceremony offered an opportunity for our soldiers to hone their skills and for us to demonstrate the type of soldiers we have.” The soldiers are proud to show their skills and of their service.

“Like everyone else, I am happy to be celebrating the anniversary of the armed forces of El Salvador. It is a very important day for every Salvadoran,” said 1st Lt. Walber Alfredo

Rivas Rivas, a member of the Cuscatlán commander’s close security detachment.

“I am really proud to belong to the armed forces of El Salvador because it is an institution that the Salvadoran people truly rely on and trust,” Rivas said. “It’s really great to be here in Iraq. It is a place I have the opportunity to do my best and bring honor to the armed forces of El Salvador.”

“The ceremony gave us a chance to show the different skills we have gotten from all the training we go through,” he said. “Since we don’t have a lot of high tech resources we have to make double the effort to be very good in traditional military skills.”



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Stacy Niles

Soldiers from the Cuscatlán Battalion, X rotation, give a 21-gun salute in honor of their fallen soldiers during the “Day of the Salvadoran Soldier” ceremony May 7 at FOB Delta.



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Stacy Niles

Soldiers from the Cuscatlán Battalion, X rotation, compete in a tug-of-war competition as others cheer them on as part of the “Day of the Salvadoran Soldier” ceremony May 7 at FOB Delta.

In addition to the ceremony, Arévalo used the day as an opportunity to show his appreciation to his soldiers for the work they are doing.

“You have to do things to improve the morale of the soldiers,” Arévalo said. “I gave them some small gifts, but it is a way to say thank you for what they do and the sacrifices they make.”

To date, five soldiers from El Salvador have died during the battalion’s peacekeeping support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and 32 have been wounded, Arévalo said. The Salvadoran army participated in the only known instance of hand-to-hand combat in Iraq while stationed in Najaf in 2004. El Salvador lost one soldier in that engagement, Pvt. Natividad Mendez, the first the battalion lost.

The Salvadoran armed forces were created May 7, 1824, though their origin began in the colonial Spanish era when Salvadorans acted on patriotism and nationalism to protect their country.

Rakkasans prepare to patrol waterways

Boats assist in expanding Rakkasans capabilities throughout operations along the Euphrates River



A team of Soldiers from Co. A, 3-187th Inf. Regt., launches a boat operation on the Euphrates River during a demonstration at PB Kemple May 5.

By 1st Lt. Jodi Krippel

By **Sgt. 1st Class Kerensa Hardy**,
3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT), PAO

CAMP STRIKER – Most Soldiers who join the Army can honestly say they would have never imagined patrolling the Euphrates River in a boat. Some Rakkasans will soon be able to say they’ve done just that.

Company A, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), is training to operate boats the unit received May 2.

“I’m pretty excited,” said Cpl. Tomas Montoya, Co. A, 3-187th Inf. Regt. “I never thought I’d have the opportunity to work on boats over here in Iraq.”

The boats will create new opportunities and capabilities in their operations along the Euphrates River, said Lt. Col. Andrew Rohling, commander of 3-187th Inf. Regt. “They bring a sense of security, strength and versatility the local populace has not always seen from the water.”

The boats add invaluable dimensions to the unit’s ability to conduct full-spectrum operations, said Maj. Curtis Crum, 3rd BCT operations officer. “The boats give the brigade a unique capability that is not typically resident in this type of unit’s arsenal.”

The unit’s predecessors, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry), ordered the boats in November 2007 to conduct riverine operations along the Euphrates to deter insurgent activity. The boats were delivered to 3-187th Inf. Regt., in

January.

Since river operations are usually outside the scope of Soldiers’ duties, the battalion sent eight Soldiers to Kuwait in January to train on operating the vessels.

“It was excellent, they did great training,” said Pfc. Travis Baldrige of the Army divers and Coast Guardsmen who taught the course.

Baldrige said the three-week course in Kuwait taught boat docking, engine repair, man-overboard drills, driving the boat under varying conditions, docking the boat and repairing major malfunctions. Now, almost four months later, Baldrige is in the instructor’s seat passing on the knowledge he gained in Kuwait.

Baldrige is one of five in Co. A, 3-187th Inf. Regt., training other Soldiers in the unit on boat operations.

“It feels really good to be involved in this,” he said. “I’m new to the Army, I’ve been in for two years and it’s nice that they expect me to go above and beyond the standards and to train up other people.”

A training plan was established based on the battalion and company commanders’ guidance and input from the eight Soldiers who certified in Kuwait.

“The first thing in our mind is the safety of personnel in the boat,” said Staff Sgt. Clifton Sanders, lead instructor for a five-day course designed to ensure all Soldiers who man the boats are physically and technically qualified for the task.

The first day, each Soldier has to complete a 50-

meter confidence swim while wearing their Army Combat Uniform and boots. They also have to tread water for three minutes wearing ACUs, the improved outer tactical vest, advanced combat helmet and a personal flotation device.

“No weak swimmers or non-swimmers will be allowed on boat operations,” Sanders said firmly. Those who don’t meet the standards the first day have an opportunity to retest at the end of the course.

The remaining four days of training cover boat preparation, operation of the boat, battle drills and practical exercises that help prepare Soldiers for situations they may encounter during riverine operations.

“Our first mission will be ... river reconnaissance,” Sanders said, an avid swimmer and certified lifeguard who voiced commitment to retraining all weak and non-swimmers.

Before executing any actual missions, Soldiers will identify potential hazards, determine loading and departure points and seek out areas frequented by criminal factions.

“The boats allow the Rakkasans to deter illegal activity and deter insurgents from potentially using the river to transit weapons and personnel,” Crum said. “As a BCT, we have added to an already incredible capability, and this ensures, as we continue to assist the Government of Iraq and Iraqi Security Forces in stabilizing acceptable security levels, it will also foster systems that set conditions for long-term Iraqi self-reliance.”

MPs build relationship with Iraqi children

Top: Pfc. John Nolan, of the 511th Military Police Company, from Fort Drum, N.Y., bounces a soccer ball to a crowd of Iraqi children in al-Kut, Iraq, May 10. Bottom left: Pfc. Raymond Criswell, of the 511th MP Co., from Fort Drum, N.Y., spars with an Iraqi child in al-Kut, Iraq, May 10. Bottom Right: Pfc. John Nolan, of the 511th Military Police Company, from Fort Drum, N.Y., walks with an Iraqi child in al-Kut, Iraq.



Photos by Sgt. Daniel West



Combat Aviation Brigade flight hours exceed 100,000

SGT. 1ST CLASS THOMAS MILLS
3rd CAB, 3rd Inf. Div., PAO

CAMP STRIKER — The 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division surpassed a remarkable milestone May 13 while deployed in Baghdad, having flown more than 100,000 flight hours in less than 12 months of combat.

The 3rd CAB reached this milestone while in support of Multi-National Division – Center and, most recently, providing attack helicopter support to Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

With unmanned aerial systems assigned to the 3rd CAB as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets for MND-C, the total flight hours for airframes surpassed 120,000 flight hours.

During the brigade's previous deployment in support of MND-B in 2005 they flew more than 80,000 flight hours in 12 months. The 3rd CAB is set to redeploy to Hunter Army Airfield, Ga., by August after completing a 15-month deployment.

Several factors have contributed to the 3rd CAB's ability to maintain this level of operational tempo,

said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Arthur Gribensk, brigade aviation maintenance officer. Gribensk said the overall strategy was to ensure operations and maintenance were synched at every level.

"We looked at the OPTEMPO daily and projected out as far as we could to see what the impact would be to adjust fire now, rather than wait until it impacted maintenance," Gribensk said.

Forward looking, thinking and planning, coupled with integrating the civilian contractor work force with the Soldier maintainer work force was crucial, he added.

"That is imperative," he said. "Proactive, predictive maintenance planning working with operations as much as possible to minimize reactive maintenance."

Gribensk said keeping operations informed daily on the impact OPTEMPO has on maintenance capabilities is important so operations do not overfly the capabilities.

The 3rd CAB maximized the Soldier work force as its first priority, he said, then used civilian contractors to compensate for the deficit of manhours the high OPTEMPO required.

Besides maintenance and operations working together, supply planning played a big role as well. As

part of last summer's surge forces, the 3rd CAB didn't relieve a unit in place in the traditional sense. The parts and supplies system had to be created from scratch. The 3rd CAB used demand analysis established in Iraq and mirrored it as best it could, Gribensk said, in order to give an idea of what parts it needed on hand.

That effort allowed the 3rd CAB to meet and exceed the OPTEMPOs of other CABs in the shortest period of time, he said.

"It's a mutual effort," Gribensk said. "But it is ultimately our magnificent maintainers in this brigade."

The 3rd CAB executive officer, Lt. Col. Greg Kanicki, agreed, saying it was a total team effort, from the maintainers all the way to the operators.

"We've all played a part in facilitating the brigade's ability to operate at this high level," Kanicki said. "Additionally, we've leveraged the experience of our Soldiers with multiple deployments. We should be getting better if we are truly a 'learning organization.'"

Gribensk emphasized it was truly a "one team, one fight" effort.

"Ultimately, no matter the plan, it was our Soldiers and civilians that executed this program superbly," he said.

DAUNTLESS: From page 1

base is planned, along with expanding a nearby combat outpost to accommodate joint operations. Building police and joint security stations will allow the ISF to position their forces deeper among the population, Waldron said, adding that as a governmental entity, the NP will provide a link between the Government of Iraq and the nahias they operate in.

As people's need for security is met, they seek improvements in other basic needs areas, such as jobs, health care and clean water, said Col. David Brost, effects coordinator for the 3rd Infantry Division.

"Without improvements in these basic needs areas, the hard-fought gains in security are potentially at risk," Brost said. "Marne Dauntless is providing for the basic needs and services of the local population, as well as revitalizing the local economy in order to further drive a wedge between the local population and the insurgents."

Commander's Emergency Response Program funds will be used for short-term, immediate impact projects ranging from community councils to schools and governance projects. However, Coalition forces are working with the Government of Iraq to inject funding into projects for long-term maintenance and viability.

Grigsby said about \$7 million would be spent on those short-term projects, including micro-grants to small business owners. As part of the operation, he said, a Jisr Diyala development conference will be held in upcoming weeks, where the nahia will lay out its vision to the Baghdad government of what it wants to look like in five years.

"Last year the Baghdad government spent \$1 million in Mada'in Qada," Grigsby said. "So far this year they've spent \$86.1 million of Baghdad money in the Mada'in Qada. That's huge momentum."

In the mainly agricultural Mada'in Qada, where

almost three quarters of the population are either farmers or in farm-related businesses, water systems will be improved, to include refurbishment of water and irrigation pump stations. A revitalization of the poultry farming industry is also planned, with eight chicken farms slated for improvement.

Extending over the upcoming months, Marne Dauntless will cover a full spectrum of initiatives, from market refurbishments to employment centers, power line repairs, billboard emplacement and an increase in transmission power for the radio station currently operating in Wahida.

"By using money as a weapon system, funding schools, health care clinics, employment centers, etc., Marne Dauntless focuses on creating more stakeholders in a peaceful and productive Iraq," Brost said.

Expect your memories in a package

MAKING HISTORY

3rd Infantry Division
&
Multi-National Division - Center



Operation Iraqi Freedom 2007-2008



Upon returning home, MND-C Soldiers who served during 2007 will receive a Yearbook featuring the most captivating photos that were taken throughout the deployment. Enjoy the 136-page photo album, and share your great successes with others. The books will be distributed to Soldiers after redeployment.

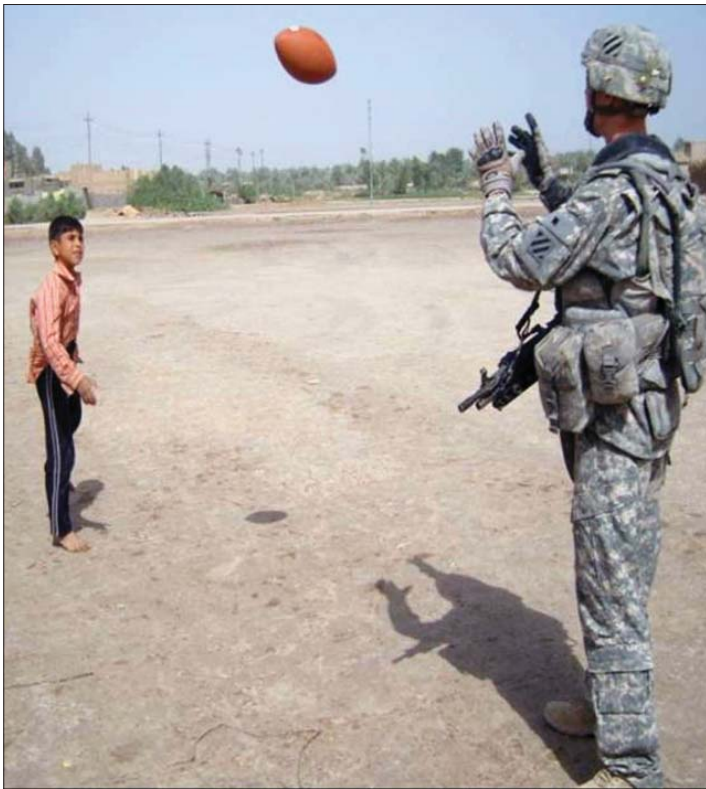


Photo by 1st Lt. Chris Blom

Specialist Steve Stillman, from Philadelphia, plays catch with an Iraqi child May 10 in the Hay al-Askeri neighborhood of Jurf as Sahkr.

Iraqis suprised with stateside gifts

1ST LT. CHRIS BLOM
4th BCT, 3rd Inf. Div., PAO

FOB ISKAN— Coalition forces had some special gifts to hand out during their patrol May 10 in the Hay al-Askeri neighborhood of Jurf As Sahkr, approximately 55 kilometers south of Baghdad.

Soldiers of 1st Platoon, Company A, 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, collected several soccer balls, basketballs and footballs donated from Mission Sergeant Soper and distributed them out to Iraqi children.

Mission Sergeant Soper is an organization based out of Jackson, Mich., created by Family members and friends of Staff Sgt. Jason Barr, of Company A.

Their mission is to collect donated school supplies, toys and clothes, ship them to Soldiers who can distribute them to Iraqi children.

Barr has been working with Mission Sergeant Soper since he was back in the States to send much needed support to kids in Jurf, said Capt. Eric Tisland, Company A commander.

During this patrol, local children

received a firsthand lesson in American football from the 1st Platoon Soldiers, who visited a local soccer field, where more than 50 children were playing with an old, half-deflated soccer ball.

After setting up local security, Soldiers gathered the children and began inflating and handing out the new sports balls. None of the children knew how to use or throw a football.

"Staff Sergeant Barr and his Soldiers turned the distro into a pretty successful event by teaching them how to throw a real football, and then got the kids spun up to play a game for them," Tisland said.

Sergeant Timothy Louvier, from Calinville, Ill., and Spc. Steve Stillman, from Philadelphia, took time to explain the sport and give children hands-on instruction on how to catch and throw the football. After learning, the children played catch.

Later, Sgt. Cedric Alexander, from Atlanta, asked the children if they would play a soccer game for them. Soldiers cheered them on as they played.

"The parents even came out to join in with watching the game and even started cheering them on," Tisland said.

Soldier, NCO of the Year announced

STAFF SGT. AMBER EMERY
MND-C PAO

CAMP VICTORY—The U.S. Army is a time-honored organization rich in tradition and history. Long considered members of the best military in the world, Soldiers of the 3rd Infantry Division carry out these traditions and play a part in writing its history.

Two Soldiers from earned their page in the 3rd Infantry Division history book after winning the titles of 2008 Noncommissioned Officer of the Year and Soldier of the Year.

Specialist Michael Holbrook, 3rd Inf. Div. Soldier of the Year 2008 winner, said ever since he won the Soldier of the Month award, it has been his mission to progress as far as possible. He is from 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, attached to 2nd Brigade Combat Team.

Soldier and NCO of the Year titles go to those who perform above and beyond their call to duty. Each Soldier competing in the event is required to turn in a packet which includes a nomination worksheet signed by a brigade command sergeant major, and must compete in an oral board.

"I ended up learning a lot from being with 3rd ID," said Staff Sgt. Joshua Ridge, 3rd Inf. Div. NCO of the Year 2008, from 1st Battalion, 76th Field Artillery, 4th BCT. "I am definitely proud of the fact that I won the title of NCO of the Year."

The competition starts at company level then advances to battalion, brigade and division competitions. Division-level winners compete in the Forces Command NCO and Soldier of the Year competition, which takes place July 27 through August 1. The top Soldier and NCO in that event will then compete for at the whole Army level.

"They are considered to be the top Soldiers in the division and will represent the division on different levels," said Staff Sgt. Ashanti Carter, executive assistant to division command sergeant major.

This competition improves the Soldiers' morale while deployed and gives them a goal to achieve, Carter said.

"I worked for it, and I did everything I could to get to this position. The next step is the FORSCOM board, and I can't wait to go there and perform my best," Holbrook said.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Amber Emery

Staff Sergeant Joshua Ridge, 1-76th FA, performs pre-combat checks before a convoy on Spc. Michael Holbrook, 3-7th Cav. Regt. May 8.

Not all of our enemies are outside the FOB...

OPERATIONAL SECURITY

...some have disguised themselves as one of us. Report suspicious activities immediately.

...IT'S EVERYONE'S JOB.

Iron Brigade takes command at FOB Hammer

Spc. JUSTIN SNYDER
2nd BCT, 1st Armd. Div., PAO

FOB HAMMER— Authority in the Mada'in Qada area of Iraq transferred from the 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, here May 15.

"Like the Hammer Brigade, the Iron Brigade will be at your side to continue to support and assist you," said 2nd BCT commander, Col. Pat White, to Iraqis in attendance. "We are honored to be a part of your history."

The ceremony began with the playing of both the United States and Iraqi national anthems. Following the anthems, Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, commanding general of Multi-National Division – Center, addressed the crowd, which included 2nd BCT Soldiers, 3rd HBCT Soldiers and many local Iraqi leaders and citizens.

Lynch, a native of Hamilton, Ohio, began by thanking everyone for coming into and supporting the Hammer and Iron Brigades. He told the crowd that his Soldiers could not have been successful alone and that the partnerships they developed with the Iraqi Army and National Police were a large part of their success.

"Everyone did this together, including the courageous people of the Mada'in Qada," Lynch said. "We are excited about what the future holds for you as Col. Pat White and the [Iron] Brigade Combat Team takes command. They will take things to the next level in the Mada'in Qada."

He then introduced Col. Wayne W. Grigsby Jr., 3rd HBCT commander, and congratulated him on a job well done.

"Wayne, you did an outstanding job and your Soldiers were lucky to have



Photo by Spc. Justin Snyder
Colonel Pat White, commander of 2nd BCT, 1st Armd. Div., and Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Eyer, of 2nd BCT, uncased their unit's colors during a transfer of authority ceremony at FOB Hammer May 15.

served with you," Lynch said. "Nothing was too great for you to accomplish and you accomplished it all. The people of the Mada'in Qada will miss you greatly."

Grigsby, a native of Prince George's County, Md., took the microphone and thanked the Iraqis for accepting him and his Soldiers as their neighbors.

When the Hammer Soldiers arrived in the Mada'in Qada 15 months ago, the region was strangled by Shia and Sunni extremist influences. The markets were vacant, women and children could not walk safely in the streets and irrigation canals were dry, leaving the area sparse of drinking water.

The Hammer Soldiers went to work alongside the IA, NP and Sons of Iraq,

providing security, which led to the detaining of more than 500 suspected criminals, 47 of them being high-value targets. This allowed them to help revitalize markets, build schools and improve water distribution facilities, once again returning glory to the people of the Mada'in Qada.

On this celebratory day, Grigsby said he was proud to be a part of the rebuilding, and it was because of the bold citizens of Iraq that they were able to come so far.

"All things have changed in the Mada'in Qada and we have transformed," Grigsby said. "In our time here, the bold citizens have stepped forward. Because of you, the Mada'in Qada is a better place for future genera-

tions."

Grigsby promised more improvements would come as the Iron Brigade took over command in the qada.

"The Sledgehammer Brigade is leaving, but the mission will continue on," Grigsby said. "Col. White and the great Iron Brigade will take on this task and continue to make the Mada'in Qada even better than it stands today."

Grigsby left the podium and cased the colors of the 3rd HBCT, signifying the brigade's mission completed, turning over command to the 2nd BCT.

White, from Apple Valley, Ca., followed by uncasing the Iron Brigade's colors, signifying the transfer of authority as official. The Iron Brigade stands strong and ready to perform full spectrum operations in the Mada'in Qada.

White thanked the 3rd HBCT for a great transition and said that there is nothing more important than what the Army is doing in Iraq. He said the Iron Brigade would continue to support and assist the people of Iraq, but it would involve their help.

"As the transition moves forward, there remains one constant, to free citizens in this Mada'in Qada," White said. "It is up to you to provide the leadership, security and economic growth required to improve this Mada'in one day at a time."

Lynch believes this transition holds much larger meaning than just a change of command, one that will stay with the Iraqi people forever.

"We are doing this for our children and your children," Lynch said. "We are truly building a new Iraq together."

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

Spartans hold prayer breakfast celebrating year in Iraq

Sgt. KEVIN STABINSKY
2nd BCT, 3rd Inf. Div., PAO

FOB KALSU – To celebrate the passing of the one year mark in Iraq, the Spartan Brigade held a prayer breakfast May 13 to pray for protection and safety during the closing months of their deployment.

"We thank the Lord for being with us through this year and ask for His blessing through the rest of the journey," prayed Chaplain (Maj.) Jay Hearn, during the opening invocation, chaplain for 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division.

While Soldiers ate breakfast, they took in words of wisdom from Col. (Chaplain) Pat Hash, Multi-National Corps – Iraq chaplain.

Hash, a native of Corbin, Ky., based his speech on the biblical passage of Luke 12:16-21, read earlier in the event by Chaplain (Capt.) Javon Seaborn, of 26th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd BCT.

Hash said the scripture, although nearly 2,000 years old, was still applicable to the audience today.

The passage described a rich farmer who loses focus on God while preparing for his future. He learns, however, he will die the very night he prepares to build larger barns for his harvest. Like the rich farmer, Hash warned Soldiers not to lose focus in the face of their own overwhelming bounty: their upcoming redeploy-

ment.

"The man lost his focus; don't lose your focus. Keep your mind on what it is you are doing," he said, adding that when people lose their focus, they are more apt to do foolish things.

Besides the importance of keeping one's focus, Hash said the short scripture provided two other important lessons: making the most of one's time and the inability of physical objects to satisfy the soul's yearning.

In the passage, Hash said the man did not use his time well, nor did his vast wealth provide him happiness.

"Every single day is a gift from God," Hash said. "Take the gifts God gave you and use them to the best of your ability. Utilize the gift of time to be a better human being."

It was a lesson Hearn, of Sherman, Texas, said he learned all too well during a fateful day in Waco, Texas, when he was 25 years old.

Having just completed a tour in the Navy, he thought he was invincible, far from harm, when he got in an accident with a train that left him in a coma and almost killed him.

With deployment on the downslide, many Soldiers may feel similar feelings of complacency, Hearn said. He added he hopes Hash's words remind Soldiers not to take things for granted and stay vigilant, even as the end nears.



Photo by Sgt. Kevin Stabinsky

Soldiers bow their heads in prayer during the opening invocation at a prayer breakfast held by 2nd BCT May 13 at FOB Kalsu. Soldiers shared food, prayer and words from guest speaker, Chaplain (Col.) Pat Hash, Multi-National Corps – Iraq chaplain.

Chicks hatch, kick start poultry industry

Chicken farms in Mahmudiyah receive 33,000 baby chicks

SGT. 1ST CLASS KERENSA HARDY
3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT), PAO

FOB MAHMUDIYAH— The Karadi Hatchery was abuzz with activity as nearly 33,000 day-old chicks were prepared for delivery to chicken farms in Mahmudiyah, about 26 kilometers south of Baghdad, May 13.

At the end of a 21-day incubation period, 32,750 chicks were distributed among seven local farmers. The chicks represented approximately 94 percent of the 35,000 eggs, well exceeding the expected 90 percent survival rate.

"After eight to nine months of planning, this is the first step where all the chicken farmers see live chickens getting put into the entire chicken industry," said Capt. Benjamin Neusse, civil military operations officer for 3rd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault).

The day-old chicks were purchased from the hatchery and given to local farmers to kick start their businesses. Hatchery employees worked for hours separating the peeping chicks into trays of 100 to hand off to the farmers.

"In about 45 days they'll grow to a couple pounds each and they'll go off to the market," Neusse said. "This should hopefully create a nice market for fresh, Iraqi-grown chickens."

Two more batches totaling 60,000 eggs are scheduled to hatch within the next three weeks. Thirteen additional farmers have been identified to receive and grow them into broilers for market.

"It's a good example of the ground forces and the (embedded provincial reconstruction team) working together toward the same objective," said Lt. Col. Linda E. Capobianco, ePRT deputy team leader. "It's great when Soldiers get involved with a great project like this one. They're helping the farmers... they're helping the economy."

The poultry association is using this as a means to reopen some of the dormant chicken farms in the Qada'a. One farmer who received a batch of the day-old chicks said he hasn't had chickens on his farm in more than a year.

"This is a region that once thrived on the poultry industry," said Col. Dominic Caraccilo, commander



Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Kerensa Hardy

of the 3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT). "This infusion of chicks provides us with an opportunity to restart a process very familiar to the people of the Mahmudiyah Qada'a."

To date, Commander's Emergency Relief Program funds have paid for this initiative. The Government of Iraq is working on a plan to take over the effort.

"This is a one-time thing, we're buying the eggs one time and the feed one time," said Lt. Col. Robert Bobinski, Baghdad-4 ePRT deputy team leader, attached to 3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT). He said that in order for the process to continue and yield a profit, all entities will need to work together.

Bobinski said what is important is having the hatchery, chicken farm, feed mill and processing plant on the same sheet of music.

"Everyone gives a percentage of their profits back to the poultry association, then the poultry association reinvests," he said.

Since poultry is the top protein staple in the Middle East, Bobinski said there is a huge potential for them to be sold as a fresh, halal, Iraqi-grown product.

"There are no fresh-grown chicken here in Iraq, it's all frozen — other than some guy on the corner — there's nobody doing it on a large scale," Bobinski said. "There's a market for that here."

Shakir al-Karadi owns the Karadi Hatchery and said if it weren't for Coalition forces' intervention and assistance the poultry business would still be in trouble.

Left: Some of the 32,750 day-old chicks peek out of their containers as they wait to be picked up from the Karadi Hatchery in Mahmudiyah May 13. Below: Workers at the Karadi Hatchery in Mahmudiyah separate chicks from their shells and put them into trays of 100 for delivery to the area's chicken farmers May 13.



His hatchery has not operated at full capacity since 2003.

"I would work one month and stop for three months," al-Karadi said.

When Coalition forces purchased the live chicks from him, al-Karadi said it helped his business tremendously.

Before this project began, the hatchery owner estimated about 5 percent of poultry farms were operating. He said about 10 percent will be operating once remaining batches of chicks are delivered.

"I hope this is a new beginning," Al Karadi said. "There is a big future for this industry now and this is a very big push."

**THERE'S STRONG AND
THEN THERE'S ARMY STRONG**

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Clearing agents on prowl for prohibited items

PFC. MONICA K. SMITH
3 CAB, 3rd Inf. Div., PAO

CAMP STRIKER—As Task Force Marne units re-deploy to Georgia, clearing agents ensure Soldiers know which items they can and cannot bring back to the United States.

Sergeant Donte Jones, who works in supply and logistics for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, says customs serves have to restrict items that may harm the agriculture and economy of the United States.

"Why would you want to take something back that would harm us?" Jones said. "Diseases may occur and ... spread over the United States."

As Soldiers pack up their belongings, they want to avoid packing things that can't be taken with them.

"One of the most common problems is powdered substances," said Master Sgt. Terence Conners, member of HHC, 3rd CAB, and senior customs brigade clearing agent. "No powdered substance if the seal is broken."

Typical powders include foot powders and powdered protein drinks. Other rules include only one type of pill per container and it must include the

person's name and a valid expiration date. Also, no more than one piece of faux merchandise, such as watches, movies or purses, can be packed.

"If you have five Rolexes and (they're) all the same type and color, you can't take it," Conners said. "You can't take sand with you because of what it might carry in it."

Conners said the hardest part of customs checks is waiting on a unit not prepared for an inspection.

"Just make sure all your stuff is laid out and ready to go," he said. "It will make the process faster. If there's a question, don't wait until the (the day of the inspection) to ask. Each unit has a (customs border clearing agent)."

Soldiers seeking specific details on customs can ask their supply and logistics office for their customs border clearing agent.

Soldiers who decide to mail personal items home should know the post office has different rules regarding what can and cannot be shipped.

Common questions include shipping of military equipment. Packages can weigh up to 70 pounds; however, bullets, magazines, lighters, gas masks and knives longer than 6-inches (with the exception of ceremonial and decorative swords) are prohibited.



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Steve Opet

First Lieutenant Jacob Soileau, HHC, 3rd CAB, goes through his belongings during a customs inspection at Camp Striker.

Iraqis earn technical skills to gain employment



Photo by Sgt. Daniel T. West

A sewing school graduate from the al-Kut Vo-Tech center accepts a sewing machine from Lt. Col. Rob Jones, deputy commander of the Wasit PRT, during her graduation ceremony May 12.

SGT. DANIEL T. WEST
214th FB, PAO

FOB DELTA—Sixty students at the al-Kut vocational technical center graduated May 12 after a two-month course of instruction.

The graduating classes included 40 students from a sewing class and 20 students from a computer-repair class.

The Wasit Provincial Reconstruction Team provided starter kits for the students at the graduation ceremony to assist them with their transition into the work force.

"The kits are meant to minimize the requirements to start working," said Capt. Caroline Pogge, of Danbury, Conn., Company B, 411th Civil Affairs Battalion. "We provide

the tools to start their job immediately."

The center has seen a boost in enrollment since the PRT began providing the kits.

"Based on the starter kits, we've seen an influx of new students," Pogge said. "The new sewing class has 52 students."

The center is government-funded, and anyone who comes to register is enrolled, said Ammar, a school representative.

Courses run from two to four months and cover subjects in masonry and construction, auto repair, sewing, carpentry, computer repair, metalwork and milling, Ammar said.

The center helps ensure unemployed citizens in Wasit have an avenue to develop their technical

skills, Pogge said.

"It enables folks to have other employment options, so they are not forced to turn to other means," she said. "It helps productive members of society, so they don't need to rely on state assistance."

Pogge said students who attend the Vo-Tech do face some challenges.

"People are not afraid to go," she said. "The issue isn't security, but paying for transportation and daily life needs for the months that the students are gone to school."

However, the classes will help students provide for their families in the future as their technical skills turn into new employments and jobs in the area.

Check with your retention counselor for information on the Enhanced Program Bonus and the Deployed Program Bonus



Bridge linking Busayefi to Hawr Rajab opens

SGT. KEVIN STABINSKY
2nd BCT, 3rd Inf. Div., PAO

FOB KALSU— Brightly painted flowers, hearts and polka-dots color the new bridge with cheery symbols. Most importantly, the bridge's construction between the communities of Busayefi and Hawr Rajab paints a symbol of unity.

Once under the control of insurgents, the communities became isolated; they were also separated from each other by the Mercedes Canal.

Thanks to the efforts of Coalition forces, Iraqi Army and citizens tired of violence, the insurgents were driven away. However, the canal still isolated them from one another.

Their desire to establish a relationship materialized May 13 when the bridge linking the communities officially opened.

The event was coordinated by Wasmei Yas Khudhayer, owner of the Adwa al-Ashar Construction Company and supervisor of the project. Besides having an Iraqi company perform the construction, the project was funded by the Government of Iraq.

In the past, most projects were funded using money available to Coalition commanders via the Commander's Emergency Relief Program. Now, with security being established, the GoI is taking an active role in its country's reconstruction.

"It's an important sign that the GoI is footing the bill to reunite their communities," said Maj. John Brock, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infan-



Citizens of Hawr Rajab and Busayefi gather May 13 on the bridge linking their communities. The bridge, constructed by an Iraqi company and funded by the GoI, spans the Mercedes Canal.

try Division.

Sheikhs from multiple areas attended the event, including Sheikh Salah, who cut the ribbon over the bridge and Jalil from Busayefi. Sheikhs Ahmed and Salah from Khamasiyah, Sheikhs Yassin and Hamid from Adwaniyah and Adel from Hawr Rajab were also present.

Brock, a native of New Orleans, La., said the bridge will help re-establish community relations between two cities once fragmented by criminal activity.

Once the event was over, the crowd moved to the Busayefi Sons of Iraq headquarters for lunch, where they discussed the importance of working together to prevent the criminal activity that once caused division in the area.

"The key thing is we are linking communities together," said Maj. Dan Canales, 2nd BCT civil affairs officer and native of Point Pleasant, N.J., who said that before the bridge was constructed, citizens had to take more difficult, longer roads to travel between the cities.

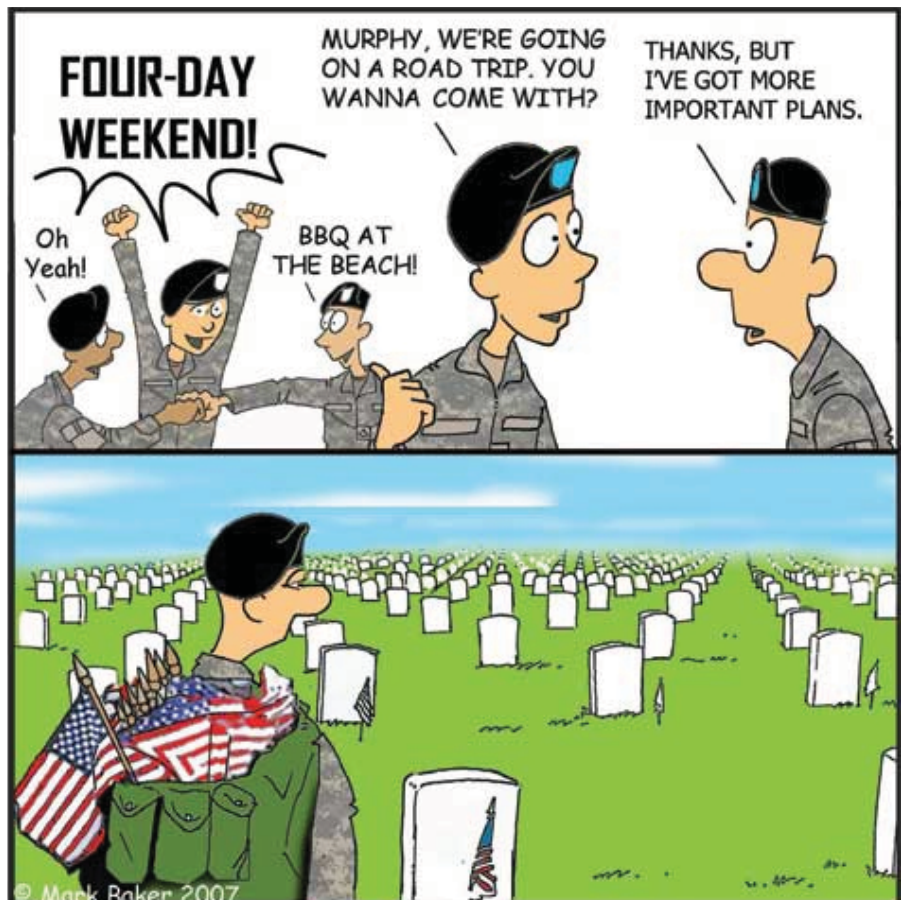
PVT MURPHY'S LAW

MARNE JUSTICE COURTS MARTIAL RESULTS

The following Courts-Martials concluded recently:

In *United States v. Triplett*, SGT Triplett, 4/3, was convicted of one specification of distribution of marijuana, one specification of use of marijuana, and a false official statement. SGT Triplett was sentenced to be confined for three months, reduced to Private (E-2), and to forfeit \$1000 pay per month for three months.

In a separate court-martial of *United States v. Murrah*, SGT Murrah, 2/3, was convicted of use of cocaine and possession of ecstasy. SGT Murrah was sentenced to 90 days hard labor without confinement, reduction to Private (E-2), and forfeiture of \$1,510.00 pay per month for two months.



Soldier Leaves Softball to come to Iraq



Courtesy photo

Corporal Roxanne Finks, from San Diego, a Soldier in the communications section for 2nd BCT, 1st Armd. Div. fields a ball while playing infield for the All-Army Team at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., 2008.

PFC. EVAN LOYD
2nd BCT, 1st Armd. Div., PAO

FOB HAMMER— Corporal Roxanne Finks walks into the dusty office, sits down and begins working on her computer. Her fingers move like lightning on the black keyboard.

It's early in her deployment with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, and she has a lot of work to do, smoothing out the wrinkles on the unit's computer networks. She hasn't always been an information system operations analyst, though. Before being assigned to the communications section of the 2nd BCT, 1st Armd. Div., she played softball for the All-Army team.

"I was just in the right place at the right time," she said. "I don't even think I'm that great." Finks started playing baseball when she was young and switched to softball during her high school years. After graduating high school, she turned down an athletic scholarship at a nearby college to join the Army.

"Everyone always asks me why I didn't go to the college team," said Finks, a native of San Diego, Calif. "At the time, I just didn't think I

had the skill to play college softball. Also, the Army helped me gain independence and will help me later with school."

Still, Finks loved softball and didn't want to give it up. While she was stationed in Yansung, Korea, she decided to play ball in post-sized tournaments. She played so well at the Pacific Wide Tournament in Yansung, that a recruiter for the All-Army team invited her to attend tryouts at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa.

"There was a lot of pressure once you were at the tryouts," Finks said.

"Over half of the people trying to make the team were players from previous years. Being previous players it was almost like they had spots reserved for them."

As a result of the tryout, Finks managed to get a spot on the second string. After a year, she earned her place as the middle infielder.

"That first year, my position was the bench cheerer," she said. "But, I paid my dues and got into my spot the second year."

After Finks' second season, she was offered the choice between

staying with the team or deploying with a unit to Iraq. She decided she would deploy to serve her country.

"I think everyone should put their

time in," Finks said. "This is what I feel I should do right now. You got to do what you got to do."

Finks' day goes a little different from when she once trained all day to play softball. With the communication section, she's currently working on the transitions of tactical and automation computers. She helps establish network connections and provide a system to track friendly forces on the battlefield and radio communication for war fighters on the ground. With all those duties, Finks has almost no free time for softball.

"I usually finish my day and head straight to my bed," she said. "I still keep my glove and a ball with me though. I'd sleep with it if I had to. It's my outlet for fun in life."

Finks is scheduled for redeployment from Iraq just in time to tryout for the All-Army team again. She has another three years with the Army and plans to play on the team again for the 2009 season. After the Army, she hopes to use her GI Bill to attend UCLA and major in information systems.

The 2nd BCT, 1st Armd. Div., from Baumholder, Germany, deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in April.

US troops work together with Georgian soldiers

SPC. JUSTIN SNYDER
2nd BCT, 1st Armd. Div., PAO

FOB HAMMER — Soldiers stationed at Combat Outpost Cleary have been working closely with soldiers from Georgia as part of Task Force Petro.

Task Force Petro is a combined effort involving the Georgian forces along with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, and the 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, to bring peace to Iraq and improve living conditions both on and off of COP Cleary.

The 13th Georgian Light Infantry Battalion's progress as a unit has been phenomenal, said Capt. Christopher Rehnberg, from Norfolk, Conn., a member of the liaison team, 2nd BCT, 1st Armd. Div. He credits this to the 3rd HBCT, 3rd Inf. Div., for their hard work with the Georgians.

"The 3rd HBCT has set a high standard for [the 2nd BCT] coming in here," Rehnberg said. "We plan to build upon that and gain trust with the Georgians."

Rehnberg said both forces are working together to make the Mada'in Qada a more safe and secure place. Upcoming projects include building water pumps for agricultural needs, and building housing for Iraqi contractors while they work on COP Cleary.

Rehnberg also points out that up to this point, the Georgians have built everything on COP Cleary.

"These soldiers are hard working and passionate about their work," Rehnberg said. "They did an outstanding job building the COP. We are their guests here."

Rehnberg can speak for their work ethic since he spent time with the Georgians prior to arriving in Iraq. He was a participant in the Georgian

Sustainment and Stability Operation Program, a project aimed to help the Georgians become members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

He said there is a small cultural barrier between the two units, but the distance is closing on a daily basis.

"We are learning each other's language, plus we are both learning Arabic. Every day communication gets better," Rehnberg said.

The Georgians pride and joy on COP Cleary is a church they built from the ground up. The church includes a picket fence and a small bell tower.

Zaza Arsoshvili, a medic in the 13th Georgian Light Infantry Battalion, said Georgia has been a Christian region for over 16 centuries. He said having the church on the COP helps soldiers feel more comfortable while away from home.

"Faith is very important in our country," Arsoshvili said. "The church is like a small piece of home for the soldiers."

Arsoshvili said that the Sledgehammer Soldiers of the 3rd HBCT set very high standards for Georgians and made them stronger as a battalion. While the Iron Brigade Soldiers have just begun working with the Georgians, he believes their relationship will prosper over the coming months.

"First impressions are very important and theirs was very good," Arsoshvili said. "They are



Courtesy photo

Soldiers from the 13th Georgian Light Infantry Battalion and 3rd HBCT, 3rd Inf. Div., speak with an Iraqi Policeman while on a patrol in Iraq.

new blood and have new ideas. They can only make us better."

Rehnberg agrees with that assessment and believes that together, Georgian and American Soldiers can improve Iraq. Over the next 15 months, the 2nd BCT and Georgian forces will assist Iraqis in repairing infrastructure and help set conditions for long-term stability in Iraq.

"These guys are our comrades," Rehnberg said. "We need them to help complete our mission."

The 2nd BCT, 1st Armd. Div., from Baumholder, Germany, is replacing the 3rd HBCT, 3rd Inf. Div., in the Mada'in Qada in Eastern Iraq.