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THE Desert Talon

TF 49

Volume 1, Issue 7

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Photo by Master Sgt. Eric Reinhardt

Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force 49 stand above the recently painted Task Force 49 emblem on June 12. Spc. Isaac Christensen led the painting project. Christensen and his crew fought sand storms and a surprisingly rough surface in order to leave a lasting image of Task Force 49's presence at Joint Base Balad.

Task Force 49 leaves its mark

By SGT. DALE SWEETNAM
Task Force 49 PAO

In a few weeks, Task Force 49 will depart Joint Base Balad having left their mark, both figuratively and literally.

On June 11, Spc. Isaac Christensen, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force 49, and a small crew of Soldiers put the finishing touches on a 50-foot by 60-foot painting of Task Force 49's emblem on the side of a hardened aircraft shelter (HAS) on the airfield.

"I'm proud of the product," Christensen said. "It's very big and very distinct. It's an eye grabber."

Christensen organized the project and used a crew of five Soldiers to complete the massive painting in only eight days. Christensen and his crew

worked eight hours each night to take advantage of the cooler temperatures.

Before starting the project, Christensen spent five days talking to personnel from other units who had completed similar projects around the airfield. After collecting information, Christensen and Task Force 49 Command Sgt. Major Richard Mitchell selected a HAS to paint. Mitchell said he wanted to find a HAS that was both visible from the road and the airfield.

Christensen said that other units completed their HAS paintings by using a grid system. Task Force 49 took a different approach. Christensen climbed a forklift equipped with a laptop and a Proxima projector and shot the image on to the HAS. He then outlined the image in chalk. Once the image was outlined and approved, they got to painting.

After the painting was completed, Christensen admitted the project was much more complicated than he had originally anticipated. His crew had to search for paint, fight nightly sand storms, work around equipment limitations and battle a very rough painting surface.

Christensen said the surface was especially unforgiving.

"All the HASs are extraordinarily rough," he said. "We took a lot of rollers expecting to do the large surfaces and we couldn't. It just wouldn't work with the rough surfaces and it was also destroying our paint brushes."

Despite of the problems, they got the job done.

See HAS painting, Page 9

Talon 6 sends . . . A month of transitions

Friends and family members of Task Force 49:

July is shaping up to be a very busy month for the Task Force. This month's theme can be summed up in one word: movement. By the time most of you read this newsletter, Task Force 49 will have sent our advance party to Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) in preparation for the transfer of authority with the 3rd Infantry Division's Combat Aviation Brigade to Task Force 49. At the same time, the remaining members of the team are preparing to welcome Task Force XII Headquarters back to Joint Base Balad. Our close working relationship with Task Force XII has been integral to the success of Army Aviation throughout the country of Iraq and it is only fitting that I will transfer command and control authority back to them.

To all of the organizations in Task Force 49: 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment (Dust Devils), 2nd Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment (Gunslingers), 5th Battalion 158th General Support Aviation Regiment (Task Force Ready), 244th Aviation Regiment (Task Force Hawk) and 412th Aviation Support Battalion (Professionals), I want to give special thanks for your hard work and unwavering support over the last eight months. Your efforts and those of the Soldiers have racked up some very impressive statistics over the last several months. Collectively, as the



Corps Combat Aviation Brigade, Task Force 49 has flown over 10,000 missions which equates to over 65,000 hours flown, 202,472 personnel moved and more than 20 million pounds of mission-essential cargo. These are truly remarkable numbers that each and every one of your Soldiers had some part in. Their role in launching, recovering and launching aircraft around the clock was exceptional and they did this while maintaining strict adherence to all standards and safety procedures. The professionalism and discipline your Soldiers demonstrated on a daily basis was astounding. I am truly honored to have worked with

such exceptional battalions during the past eight months.

To the new members of our team who will be joining us at BIAP – Welcome. We are looking forward to working through all of our future missions and challenges that lie ahead. I know the brigade staff has been burning the midnight oil to ensure the transition is as smooth as possible for all. To the family members, I want to ensure you that your Soldier's mission focus and daily activities will remain much the same for the most part. Thank you to the families, friends and supporters back home who have been so generous in supporting our troops with the cards, letters and care packages. Please keep them coming to our new address forwarded through the FRG chain.

As we prepare to hand the MNC-I combat aviation brigade back to Task Force XII, I want to again thank everyone for their dedication and hard work. Your professionalism was paramount to our successful legacy. As we enter a new phase of our deployment, I am confident that we will meet the challenges ahead with the same professionalism and dedication.

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

Editor's note

Thanks and farewell from Task Force 49 Public Affairs

This is the last edition of *The Desert Talon* we'll produce here at Joint Base Balad.

It has been an honor to tell the story of Task Force 49 and the Soldiers of the Multi-National Corps – Iraq Combat Aviation Brigade.

It has also been an education for us – about the unique and specialized world of Army Aviation, something neither of us had much familiarity with before we deployed with Task Force 49 last fall.

Thank you very much for your support of the Task Force 49 Public Affairs Office and its mission, I hope you will all continue to give the same support to the Task Force XII Public Affairs team of Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Seaton and Sgt. Brandon Little as they resume their duties here and bring *The Griffin* back to Balad.

Many of your stories have extended well beyond the scope of the 3,000-reader circulation of this newspaper,

reaching audiences Armywide and nationwide via such outlets as Army.mil, AFN Europe, *Stars & Stripes*, The CBS Early Show, *Parade Magazine* and local TV stations, radio stations and newspapers, large and small, across the United States.

After the transfer of authority this month you can reach the 12th CAB PAO via e-mail at:
christopher.seaton@iraq.centcom.mil;
and brandon.little@iraq.centcom.mil.

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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/

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Talon 7 sends . . . Thanks for a job well done

As Task Force 49's time at Joint Base Balad draws to a close, I'd like to thank each and every one of you for the outstanding work you have done here. It has truly been a privilege to serve as your Brigade Command Sergeant Major for the past seven months. This is a great unit, doing great things and I know it will continue to do so back in the capable hands of the Task Force XII command and staff. Even though Task Force 49 is moving on, it's a small Army and I'm sure I'll see many of you again down the line.

Task Force 49 is moving on to a new and challenging mission as the Multi-National Division - Center Combat Aviation Brigade. As always, I know our Arctic Warriors will rise to the occasion and continue to uphold the high standards and professionalism they have achieved here in Balad.

As Task Force 49 prepares to hand the reins to our counterparts in the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, we are committed to providing as smooth a transition as the one you gave us when we arrived last November. Thanks in large part to the skill and professionalism of the brigade's Soldiers, we were able to maintain the outstanding reputation and track record the 12th CAB established here at Joint Base Balad last summer. Since Task Force 49 arrived in November, the Multi-National Corps - Iraq Combat Aviation Brigade flew more than 65,000 hours, nearly 10,000 missions and moved 202,472 passengers and more than 20 million pounds of vital supplies to the fight.

Each and every Soldier's role in this brigade is vital to the overall war effort in this country. Know that commanders and troops on the ground are grateful for the outstanding



support you provide them around the clock and that you are all making a difference in Iraq.

This month we held the 3rd Quarter Brigade Soldier and Noncommissioned Officer of the Quarter Board. As always, I was very impressed by the quality and professionalism of our young Soldiers and NCOs. The competition was very close in both categories. The Brigade Noncommissioned Officer of the Quarter is Sgt. Elliot Gordon of B Company, 412th Aviation Support Battalion. The Brigade Soldier of the Quarter is Spc. John Jenkins of C Company, 2-159 Attack Reconnaissance Battalion. Both the NCO and Soldier received Army Commendation Medals, certificates of achievement and a \$50 gift certificates from the brigade FRG.

Only six months into the fiscal year, all Task Force 49 battalions achieved

100 percent of their retention goals - 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, 412th Aviation Support Battalion, 2nd Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment (Attack) and Headquarters and Headquarters Company have all met the Army retention standards early. As a brigade, Task Force 49 has already achieved well above 100 percent in all three reenlistment categories: initial-term reenlistments, mid-career reenlistments and career reenlistments. That's an outstanding achievement and it reflects well on our units and the dedication of our Soldiers. I would like to congratulate all the Task Force 49 Soldiers, and their families, who have made the commitment to stay Army Strong. Your experience, dedication and selfless service are proof positive that you are the Army's most important asset.

As Task Force 49 leaves, we have literally left our mark on Joint Base Balad: a 50-foot by 60-foot painting of Task Force 49's emblem on the side of a hardened aircraft shelter to be exact. Kudos to Spc. Isaac Christensen, of HHC Task Force 49, and the Soldiers who helped him paint it - it looks great.

I would like to close by thanking all the families and friends of our Arctic Warriors for the support and the care they continue to show our Soldiers. Your packages, cards and letters bring smiles to the faces of our Soldiers. I ask for your continued support as we start a new chapter in our deployment. May God bless you, your families, our Soldiers and our great Nation!

Talon 7 Out!

CSM Richard A. Mitchell
Command Sergeant Major
Task Force 49

Task Force 49 NCO and Soldier of the Quarter

Sgt. Elliot Gordon NCO of the Quarter



Sgt. Elliot Gordon of B Company, 412th Aviation Support Battalion, is Task Force 49's NCO of the Third Quarter.

This is Gordon's second tour in Iraq. He first deployed to Balad in 2003 as an Apache maintainer for the Fort Bragg, N.C.-based 4th Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment. He currently serves as an Apache Section sergeant for Task Force 49's Aviation Maintenance Company (B Co. 412th ASB).

Gordon is a native of Georgetown, Guyana, and grew up in New York City. He joined the Army in 1999.

His short-term goal is to be promoted to staff sergeant. His long-term goals are to get an Airframe and Powerplant license (which gives enlisted mechanics in the military the same credentials as their civilian counterparts), earn a bachelor's degree in aircraft general maintenance and become a command sergeant major.

Spc. John Jenkins Soldier of the Quarter



Spc. John Jenkins of C Company, 2-159 Attack Reconnaissance Battalion is Task Force 49's Soldier of the Third Quarter.

The Boaz, Ala., native was only nine months into his first assignment at Fort Carson, Colo., when he received assignment orders for the 2-159th. After five-months in Illesheim, Germany, he joined up with C Company, in combat, at its forward-

deployed location in Basra.

He earned the Combat Action Badge and Army Achievement Medal during his three-month rotation there, and moved with the company to its next forward location in Talil, before returning to Balad.

Jenkins joined the Army in June 2005, following in the footsteps of his father, a retired Marine.

TF49 exceeds retention goals early

By SGT. DALE SWEETNAM
Task Force 49 PAO

Retaining Soldiers can be a challenge for some units, but not for Task Force 49 elements which continue to reenlist Soldiers at a staggering rate.

Only six months into the fiscal year, all Task Force 49 battalions have already achieved 100 percent of their retention goals. 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, 412th Aviation Support Battalion, 2nd Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment (Attack) and Headquarters and Headquarters Company have all met the Army retention standards and are now padding already gaudy percentages.

Task Force 49 Senior Career Counselor, Master Sgt. Dudley Moser, said the achievement is all the more impressive because these units managed to meet their goals after two fiscal years in Iraq.

"Last fiscal year they were over here and had already reenlisted a vast majority of their Soldiers," Moser said. "A lot of units that do that have a hard time making it the next year."

Moser said many units struggle to meet retention goals in deployed areas over the course of two fiscal years, but Task Force 49 elements haven't had any problems.

"A lot of units come over here, reenlist a whole mass of Soldiers and then they don't do a whole lot for the next six, seven months," he said.

"These guys are still reenlisting them like crazy, which reflects on the chain of command and the morale of the Soldiers."

As a brigade, Task Force 49 has already achieved well above 100 percent in all three reenlistment categories: initial-term reenlistments, mid-career reenlistments and career reenlistments.

Many factors contribute to strong retention numbers when a unit is deployed, according to Moser. When deployed, there is no window for reenlistment like there is back in the

rear. Also, bonuses tend to be much higher and are tax free in theatre.

While many factors can influence a Soldier's decision to reenlist, Moser claims that there is more to retention than just money.

"Overall, a bonus isn't going to be the overriding factor in a Soldier's

decision to stay in the military," he said. "They still have to be satisfied with their job and trust the organization they're staying with."

With retention goals already met, it seems natural that these units would

be inclined to rest on their laurels and enjoy their success, but Moser said these units don't have any intention of letting up and the mission is not over.

"They'll continue to overproduce and take care of the Soldiers who haven't made up their minds yet, or the Soldiers who have changed their minds," he said.

"These guys are still reenlisting them like crazy, which reflects on the chain of command and the morale of the Soldiers."

Master Sgt. Dudley Moser

'Fat Cow' provides aircraft fuel on the go

By MASTER SGT. ERIC REINHARDT
Task Force 49 PAO

In the past seven months, Task Force 49 refuelers have provided coalition aircraft with more than 6 million gallons of fuel from the brigade's Forward Area Refueling Points (FARPs) throughout Iraq.

Thanks to some recent training on a Chinook-based, portable refueling system – affectionately called the "Fat Cow" – the brigade's refueling reach can now extend anywhere in theater – even where FARPs don't exist.

The system consists of a CH-47 outfitted with hardened, crash-resistant fuel tanks and all the gear needed to conduct hot-fueling operations (fueling while the aircraft is still running).

The system makes it possible to set up a fuel point anywhere a CH-47 Chinook can land.

"If there's not another secure refueling point around, it allows commanders to place one where it's necessary," said 1st Lt. Rian Ingram, E Company, 5-158.

Soldiers from E Company, 5-158th General Support Aviation Battalion and E Company, 2-159 Attack Reconnaissance Battalion trained on the Fat Cow system last month on Joint Base Balad.

Once thoroughly trained, the Soldiers were able to set up the system in less than four minutes, according to Ingram.

From their training location on Joint Base Balad, the Soldiers provided real-world fueling for several UH-60 Black Hawks and AH-64 Apaches during the exercise.



Courtesy photos



(Top and left) Soldiers from E Company, 5-158th General Support Aviation Battalion and E Company, 2-159 Attack Reconnaissance Battalion train on the "Fat Cow" refueling system, which enables the Soldiers to set up fuel points anywhere in Iraq a CH-47 Chinook can land.

Parents watch graduation from down range

By SGT. DALE SWEETNAM
Task Force 49 PAO

As "Pomp and Circumstance" played through the loudspeakers and the Ansbach high school graduates walked with their heads held high, parents watched with pride and smiled, not just in the school's auditorium in Germany, but also thousands of miles away in Iraq.

The Department of Defense Dependents Schools, U.S. Army Europe and U.S. Army 5th Signal Command combined assets June 6 to bring high school graduations from all over Germany to the deployed Soldiers in Iraq.

The live graduations were patched through to two Task Force 49 conference rooms and came through in excellent picture and sound.

Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Irvin, 2nd Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment (Attack) made it to the conference room almost an hour early to make sure he didn't miss his daughter Trista walking across the stage.

"I'm glad I could see it," he said. "Of course I want to be there, but it's nice I get to see it."

Irvin said he talked to his daughter just a few hours earlier, so she knew he'd be watching.



Photo by Sgt. Dale Sweetnam
Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Irvin, 2nd Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment (Attack) watches Ansbach High School's graduation from a small conference room in Iraq on June 6. Irvin's daughter, Trista was one of the 38 graduates.

"I talked to her this afternoon and they we're getting ready to go up," he said. "I'm very proud of her."

Irvin beamed while he talked about his daughter's accomplishments and the support he's received from his wife Muriel while he's been gone. Irvin said his daughter is headed to Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville next year where she'll pursue a degree in elementary education.

As part of the webcast, graduates had the opportunity to record individual messages to their deployed parents that the Soldiers could pull up prior

to the ceremony. The parents who missed the live ceremony can also view the recorded version at any time on the website.

This is the fifth year that Germany high school graduations have been viewed live in Iraq. Planning for the event began in January. At that time, students who had deployed parents or anticipated their parents being deployed were identified through the high schools and the message recordings were then coordinated.

"I think it's very positive," Lt. Col. Richard Crogan, Task Force 49 deputy commander, said. "It's a

great morale boost being able to see your child go across the stage. It's the next best thing to being there."

Tears flowed in both Germany and Iraq as the 38 graduates received their degrees. The guest speakers highlighted the accomplishments of the students and praised the support of their parents.

When deployed Soldiers were mentioned during the ceremony, many in the audience became choked with emotion.

Irvin sat quietly and enjoyed the ceremony. Beforehand Irvin said this would be the last time he has to watch such an event from afar. He plans to retire by the time his other two children, Dylan and Maisie, graduate.

"When it comes time for their graduation, I'll be there."

At the conclusion of the ceremony Irvin was clearly filled with emotion and wanted to express his gratitude for his wife in a brief message.

"Muriel my love, all your hard work has paid off," he said. "Thank you for always being there and keeping Trista on the right path."

During that ceremony in a darkened conference room in Iraq, home didn't seem that far away.



Award winner

This photo, by 1st Lt. Jeff Gaines of A Company, 2-159th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, took 3rd place in the Army Aviation Association of America 2007 Photography Contest. The shot was taken Sept. 14, 2007 over the shore of Lake Habbaniyah, south of Ramadi, during a combat patrol.

During conflict, choose the right attitude

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

In the world of aviation, the angle, or "attitude" of the wing or rotor blade of an aircraft relative to the ground determines altitude. A "positive" attitude will result in increased elevation. A "negative" attitude will cause the aircraft to descend, and even crash if the attitude is not corrected.

The mindset we have when approaching problems, challenges, or confrontation is also known as our attitude. Attitude is a way of thinking or a complex mental state involving beliefs, feelings, values and dispositions to act in certain ways. One of the realities of deployment is that your true character will be revealed to those around you in trying times. You can try to fake it, but no one can keep a perfect attitude for 15 months. The choices you make about your current situation or your life in general will come out in your attitude.

Another reality is that your life's condition is the sum total of the choices you've made. Few of us asked to deploy and be away from family and comforts, but quite frankly, we all

raised our hands and joined the Army of our own merit.

Dr. Charles Swindoll says that the longer he lives, the more he realizes the impact of attitude in his life. Attitude, to him, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say and do.

It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company...a church...a family. The remarkable thing is that we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past. We cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the

inevitable. He goes on to say that, "The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude...I am convinced that life is 10 percent of what happens to me and 90 percent of how I react to it. And so it is with you. We are in charge of our attitudes."



**Chaplain
Philip A. Winn Jr.**

Victor Frankl, the holocaust survivor who went on to a successful career as a writer and psychiatrist, said of his ordeal in a Nazi prison camp, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: To choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's way." Victor Frankl understood the power his attitude played in his own ability to survive.

The truth is that you do what you spend the most time thinking about. This is why the Bible encourages us to dwell on God's Word day and night. Will a positive attitude make conflict or adversity disappear? Of course not. However, the right mental and emotional approach can redefine what you call conflict or adversity. While you will still experience fear, confusion and disappointment, the right approach to any situation can often make the difference between success and failure.

It doesn't matter if it's a missed promotion, conflict with a supervisor, or discord in your marriage. As you move from where you are to where you're going in the uncertainty of Army life, your attitude is the one thing you can control. Control it well, keep it positive and oriented upward, and you will reach new heights of success, happiness, and contentment you never thought possible - it's your choice!

A little medical advice from the legal section

CAPT. KRISTIN HANSEN
Task Force 49 Legal Assistance Officer

Ok, so here it is. Coffee drinkers - beware! It's hot out there. It's seriously hot. Yes, I know that's obvious, but don't quit reading yet thinking you know it all, because I'm going to give you a little illustration that may entertain and enlighten you almost as much as the Ex-XO column does.

One morning this week, I woke up at 7 a.m. and made a cup of hot tea. The tea was making my insides really warm, but I normally can sit by the air conditioner for awhile and cool down before getting dressed for work. But this particular morning, right as I was finishing the tea, the power went out. The room got hot fast and was getting hotter and hotter. I noticed I was uncomfortably warm, but that didn't seem unusual when it's 100 degrees at 8 a.m. Of course, I still had to go to work, and to do that, I had to put on my ACU (All-Covering Uniform). Then I had to walk the hot walk to the office. When I got there the power was out at the office too, so no air condition was available.

At first, I didn't think anything of it. I thought if I just sat still and drank some cool tea, water and Gatorade, I'd be fine even without the air conditioner. But by 11 a.m., I was starting to feel dizzy. I noticed that even though I was really hot, I wasn't sweating at all. I went to the DFAC thinking a little food and the cool air would help. But after lunch I felt even worse. My roommate walked me back to my room, and I took off most of the All-Covering Uniform and layed down on

the floor. It was nice and cool in the room by this time and I was still thinking I would be fine in a minute with water and Gatorade.

That was when I started singing little made-up songs with no tunes and shouting to my roommate that she would need a crane to get me off the floor but she wouldn't be able to get a crane because that would need a legal review and the legal reviewer was half-dressed on the floor. While this behavior might not sound that crazy for me, the fact is, I was getting a little delirious.

Once I realized that, I got up and got an ice pack out of the freezer and put it on my back and stomach and feet, and my roommate got me a cold washcloth for my neck and head. I had to lie there about 30 minutes before I started to cool off. When I got up, I still needed to sit still for awhile so I wouldn't heat right back up.

This was all just because I drank hot tea and sat in a hot room. Think about how bad it could be if you actually have to be outside for extended periods of time.

That was a long story, but I really wanted to give you all a reminder about watching out for each other. Please be on the lookout for heat injuries, they sneak up on you. I'd never had anything like that happen before and I wasn't expecting it. Take care of your battle buddies and be smart.

For all you Task Force 49'ers, see you at BIAP! For Task Force XII, it's been my pleasure serving you the past seven months. Best wishes for safe returns to Germany.



Capt. Kristin Hansen fights off the effects of a heat injury after too much heat and tea and not enough air condition.

Task Force XII spouses get a taste of combat

U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach PAO

Griffin Spouses Combat Day, or Operation Better Half, began with a bang May 5 when Chief Warrant Officer 4 Ted Tomczyk, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, delivered a spirited in-brief.

With a "Hooah" of about 110 highly motivated spouses, the events of the day kicked-off.

By signing up for Operation Better Half, spouses volunteered to be a Soldier for a day.

The event took place at Urtas training area and was designed to give participants a better idea of what their Soldiers experience during training.

The events of the day included combat and self defense training, a paintball grenade toss, litter carry as part of medical training, a 50 question hands-on test, a crate climb competition, tug of war, an obstacle course, a rucksack relay and paintball.

Each participating spouse received a safety brief and a set of orders. Every spouse was then assigned to a team and had to report to their respective drill sergeants.

After a class on various commands, each drill sergeant and cadence calling team of spouses made its way to the first task.

"The brigade is sponsoring this event on behalf of the spouses which allows them to come together as a team, and in some small part, have fun and understand some of the things that their husbands do in the



Courtesy Photo

From left Sarah Connors, Tamara Kisinger-Yolo, Pamela Zottes and Shari Brown prove their strength during a tug of war competition that was part of Operation Better Half, June 5, 2008 at the Urtas training area.

military," said Lt. Col. Guy Zero, 12th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) Rear Detachment Commander. "It is an esprit de corps and camaraderie building event."

According to Veronica Martin, 12th CAB Family Readiness Support Assistant, the concept worked.

She said events like Combat Day bring spouses together and allow them to get to know each other. They provide the opportunity to bond as a complete unit in a competitive environment.

"There are a lot of women who normally don't participate (in Family Readiness Group events) and this is good for them," she said. "It gives them an idea of what their spouses do and epitomizes being the better half."

The participants seemed to enjoy the experience.

"I love it," said Kelly-Anne Thompson. "The camaraderie between spouses and seeing what our husbands have gone through before and being able to experience that, it is so exciting."



Photo by Isabella Rosini

Working at the car wash

(Left to right) Elizabeth Pons, Jen Carter and Mindy Beddo help raise funds for the Task Force 49 Family Readiness Group with a car wash May 4 at the Fort Wainwright Shoppette. "We worked our butts off," said FRG Leader Jen Carter. The group raised more than \$1,000, washing the winter dirt off about 75 cars that day.

Ex-XO suffers through Kuwait

By MAJ. JAMES JONES
Former Task Force 49 Executive Officer

I am back from conquering the wild jungles and untamed territories of Mexico. I was careful to maximize my food intake to offset my output brought upon by Montezuma's revenge. I am happy to report that I kicked Montezuma's butt. While I was down in Mexico, I was discovered by a modeling agency called "Me Juevos". I don't know how posing in swimwear helps them sell eggs but hey they seemed like a reputable company and the swimwear was free. I am anxiously awaiting the proofs that are forthcoming (**Editor's note: see censored photo**). Even though leave was great, I am happy to be back here in sunny Balad where the temperature topped 117 degrees today. For those of you not able to pick up on sarcasm, the last sentence was filled with it. My new job as the S3 is great and I sit around and day all play "zuma ball" and take frequent naps (sarcasm). One good thing is that I am back helping all of you with those issues that need special attention.

Dear Ex-XO,

I have been hearing bad stories about how long it takes to get through Kuwait on your way back from R&R. Since you just came back can you tell me why it is taking so long?

-SFC I.B. Gonelongtime

Dear I.B. Gonelongtime,

I can't really pinpoint one thing but I do have some theories.

Theory 1: When you get back to Kuwait they put you in those small tents with the tubes running down the middle pumping out what you think is just cold air from the air conditioner. What it really is, is a sleeping drug that knocks you out. Then they come in and run some tests on you to see how much you enjoyed your leave. It works like this; if your leave sucked or you just have no life and can't wait to get back to your unit, when you wake up they put you on the next flight out. If your leave was great and you are not looking forward to going back, they keep you in Kuwait for another day. Of course they screw with you that entire day making you think you're getting out but you're really not. They make you show up to a whole bunch of formations, put you on a bus, load you on an aircraft, take you off the aircraft, put you back on, taxi down the runway, turn around and park, put you back on the bus, bus you back to the tent area, hold another formation, etc. This goes on for about eight to 12 hours, and then they assign you back to a tent where they continue to test you every night. After about four to five days of this, when your attitude finally gets to the point where you hate Kuwait so much that you are looking forward to going to your unit, they finally put you on a flight.

Theory 2: They keep all the alcoholics there until they sober up. Hence the four days I spent in Kuwait after my 18 day drinking binge.

Theory 3: The process is just inefficient...Naw, that can't be it!

Little know fact: The documentary "Super Size Me" was actually filmed in Kuwait at Ali Al Salim and was actually a Soldier that got stuck in Kuwait for 30 days and ate at the McDonalds until they finally got him a flight back to Balad.



Ask the Ex-XO

Dear Ex-XO,

I have noticed that COL Sherrell goes by the name "Skip" even though that's not his real name. Do you have any background on why he does this?

-CPT Ivana Seeyoufired

Dear Capt. Wowack,

I have heard a couple of rumors that may or may not be true.

1.) He used to own a boat that got stranded on a desert isle. That may be why he calls the CSM "Little Buddy." Aye, aye "Skip"per.

2.) He was never very good at dodgeball and when they picked teams they always "Skip"ped him.

3.) He was named after the sound made by my crumpled up OER as it "Skip"ped across his desk and into the trash.

PS: Even if I get fired you cannot be the S3.

Dear Ex-XO,

I am being moved from Balad to Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) in a couple of weeks and I am worried that with the downturn in the housing market that I may not be able to afford the same accommodations that I have here in Balad.

-PVT Ah CHU

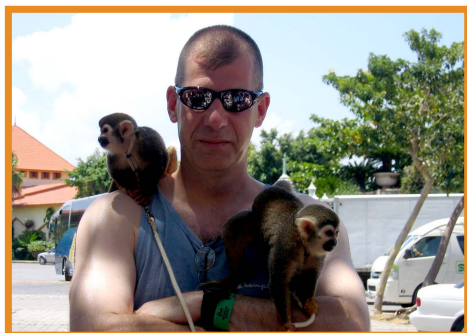
Dear Ah CHU,

My financial analyst here in Balad, (a very knowledgeable man who works at the pastry counter in DFAC #4.) has told me that the downturn in the housing market here at Balad has not affected the housing market in BIAP. It has actually had the reverse affect, your money doesn't go as far as it did here in Balad and it is a seller's market. For instance if you can afford a one bedroom, no roommate CHU in Balad, the best you can hope for in BIAP is a one Bedroom unit with a roommate who smells bad, wears his boots to bed and likes to cuddle.

If you are in a two-man CHU now, you can probably afford an eight-man tent next to a port-a-john that gets emptied once a month. Be aware, the no smoking sign is on the port-a-john for a reason, the methane gas that builds up at temperatures of 120 degrees can be deadly. The other day a Soldier lit up while doing his business, the subsequent explosion sent the Soldier and the port-a-john spiraling into the air. As a result, several Air Force crews have received their Combat Action Badges due to suspected "man" pad attack. Remarkably the Soldier was not injured since he landed in the pond by Al Faw Palace.



Maj. James Jones in his modeling debut. Photo printed with the permission of Me Juevos Inc.



"Ask the Ex-XO" Caption Contest Winners!

WINNER!

"Take the picture already, I think one of them just crapped on me!"

Maj. Christopher Chapman, HHC, Task Force 49

Honorable mention

"After seven margaritas these women are all over me!"

Capt. Christopher McNutt, 412th Aviation Support Battalion

"I can't believe how much our boys have changed in just six months!"

Maj. Christopher Chapman, HHC, Task Force 49

HAS Painting

Continued from Page 1

"There were a lot of little stumbling blocks, but we overcame all of them and just plowed through it," he said.

Christensen said help from the 412th Aviation Support Battalion marginalized a lot of the struggles. The 412th provided the painting crew with the forklift, power washers and light sets so they could work at night.

"412 was a massive asset in this entire project, especially in the planning," he said.

When all was said and done, the crew burned through four gallons of black paint, three gallons of yellow, two gallons of blue and a half gallon of grey paint.

Mitchell said he was not only happy with the final product, but very proud of what the painting represents.

"It turned out better than I anticipated," he said. "Spc. Christensen and his crew worked very hard and did a great job. When I first saw it after it was completed, I was very excited and proud to have Task Force 49's emblem displayed for years to come."

Christensen said the project was a challenge, but the image is now a permanent part of the airfield and the emblem symbolizes Task Force 49's legacy in Iraq.

"Everybody involved is very proud of Task Force 49 and we wanted to let everybody know we've been here and made a big difference on this war effort," he said. "We're definitely proud of that."

Master Sgt. William Nickoloff, Task Force 49 safety NCOIC put the accomplishment in more straightforward terms, "We saw the HAS, we conquered the HAS."

Christensen said he is happy with the final product and hopes it stands the test of time.

"30 years from now, when Iraq is calm and a good place to vacation, I'm going to come back and see my mark out here."



Photo by Master Sgt. Eric Reinhardt

Spc. Isaac Christensen, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Task Force 49, opens up a can of paint while working on the Task Force 49 emblem on June 5. Christensen and his crew worked on the HAS painting for eight nights.

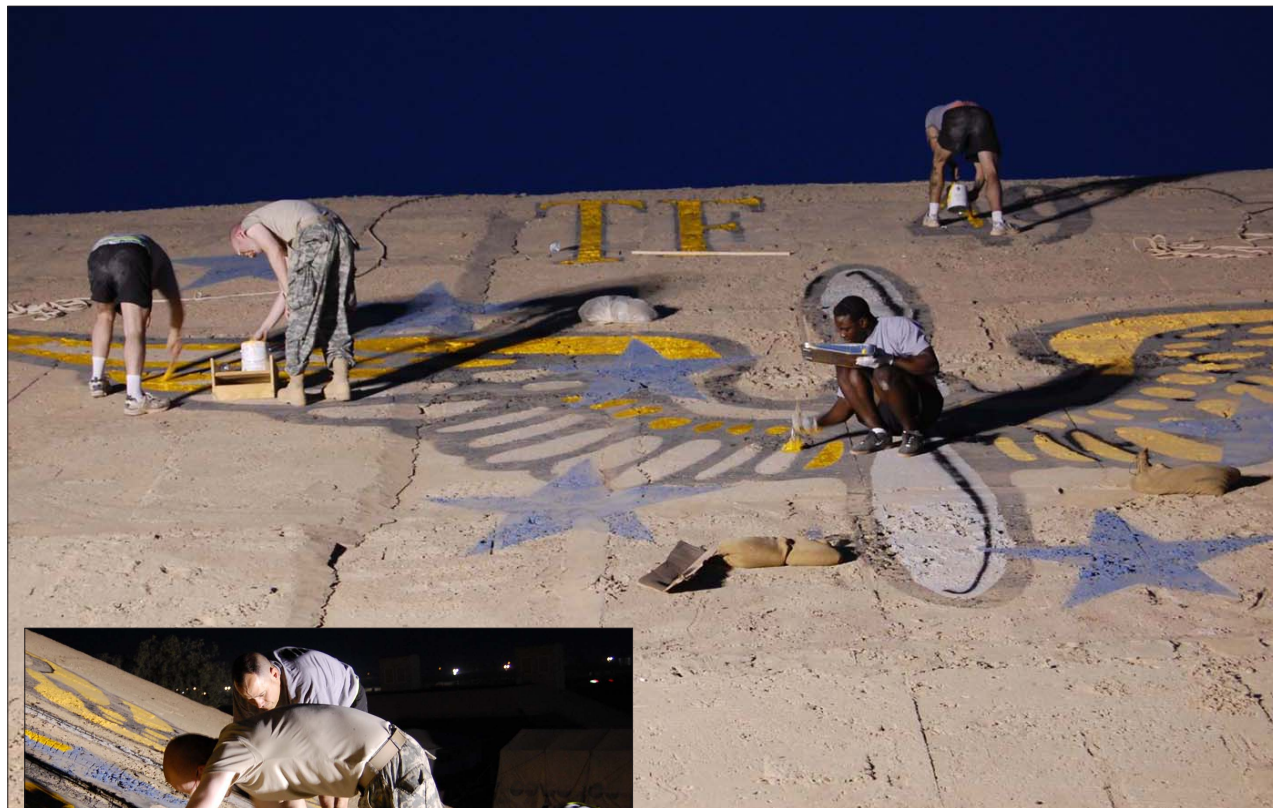


Photo by Sgt. Dale Sweetnam



Photo by Master Sgt. Eric Reinhardt

(Top) A crew of Task Force 49 Soldiers work on the Task Force 49 emblem up atop HAS 11 on the airfield. The painting surface was more difficult to paint on than the crew originally anticipated. The crew also encountered bad weather and equipment failure during the painting project.

(Left) Spc. Isaac Christensen leans forward to paint the wings of the Task Force 49 emblem. During the project, the crew used up four gallons of black paint, three gallons of yellow paint, two gallons of blue paint and a half gallon of grey paint. The project was completed on June 11.