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Tiger
Force





"No Slack" Soldiers render a 21-Gun salute for a fallen brother.

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MAGAZINE

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OPERATION: PARALLEL PARK

Taskmaster Soldiers teach Iraqis to drive



Staff Sgt. Calvin Avant teaches an Iraqi Army driver hand and arm signals during driver's training.

Story and photos by
Sgt. Rick Rzepka
1st Brigade Combat Team
101st Airborne Division (AA)



TIKRIT, Iraq— A long line of armored vehicles screams down the highway, weaving in and out of traffic like a drunken serpent. Behind the wheel of most of these vehicles are young Iraqi Army Soldiers, most of whom have never properly learned to drive.

A danger to themselves, other drivers and civilians, these road warriors need professional help. Soldiers from 426th Brigade Support Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (AA) know what safe driving looks like and have teamed up with the IA to provide a driver's training course. The "Taskmaster" battalion has driven more than 90,000 miles on long stretches of road in the Salah ad Din province keeping the "Bastogne" team in the fight.

As the Iraqi Army matures and begins to assume a larger role in securing the people of the province, they are looking more and more to their coalition partners as mentors and teachers.

The "Taskmaster" drivers noticed a need for driver's training after seeing greenhorn Iraqi drivers struggle to

control their trucks.

"They were having accidents in the motor-pool," said Master Sgt. Derek Cook, 426th BSB. Cook, along with other BSB drivers, has helped to train several dozen Iraqi Army Soldiers from various units across the Salah ad Din province, how to operate the battle-proven machine.

"We're here to give them the tools that they need to become safe, successful drivers," said Cook as he watched Iraqi Soldiers practicing their parking skills.

"The biggest challenge is getting their attention," he said. "They pick things up better doing it hands-on." One major obstacle the Soldiers face while learning is the language barrier. Cook and his team, with the help of an interpreter, use hand and arm signals to teach the Iraqis how to drive.

"Slow down!" screamed Cook pumping his hand, as an Iraqi Soldier weaved through the orange cones. "They are very set in their ways," said Cook.

Accident prevention and humvee familiarization are critical to helping the Iraqi Army mature, said Cook.

"We are getting good instruction from our American teachers," said Cpl. Beston, an IA Soldier with the 4th Iraqi Army Division. "We haven't had good teachers in the past," he said.

Uncommon Bond Uncommon Valor....


Story and photos by
Sgt. Rick Rzepka
Bastogne PAO

This ain't your father's Army. Some say it's a kinder, gentler Army, wary of political correctness and public perceptions. Some say that this has caused Soldiers to lose touch with their roots, to disconnect themselves from the past. But for one Infantry platoon, at the heart of the fight in Iraq, some things never change and they are neither kind nor gentle.

Somewhere, in the dusty expanse of the Salah ad Din province in Iraq, the Tigers are lurking. They patiently wait for their prey in the city and in the desert. They are keenly aware, not only of their immediate surroundings, but of their heritage as well. They know they have some big boots to fill.

Tiger Force, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), is the most highly decorated platoon sized element in the U.S. Army. Over the past 48 years, Tiger Force Soldiers have earned two Medals of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, numerous Silver Stars for valor and countless other commendations. Names like Hackworth, Gertsch, and Gardner are synonymous with the Tiger legacy, which began in the sweltering jungles of Vietnam.



A close-up photograph of a soldier's helmet, showing the top and side. Below the helmet, there is a stack of magazines or papers. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the soldier's gear.

"Out guerilla the guerillas"

In 1965, as the Vietnam War picked up steam, Army brass recognized a need for more unconventional, guerilla style warfare. A young Lt. Colonel in the 101st Airborne Division named David Hackworth proposed that by utilizing small, highly trained units, Viet-cong tactics could be effectively countered. The brass liked what they heard and the Tigers were born through highly experienced, hand selected volunteers from the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. Their mission: "To out guerilla the guerillas," according to Hackworth, or as MoH recipient Staff Sgt. John G. Gertsch said, "how to really be there, but not be there." "During the Vietnam years, Tiger Force went through many changes in the full spectrum," said Hank "Doc" Ortega, who served as a Tiger Force medic in 1968. During their time in Vietnam, Tiger Force Soldiers ran the gauntlet of small unit operations, from scouts, ready reaction and long range reconnaissance. "We were basically the eyes and ears of the battalion commander," he said.

"Here is a platoon deep-rooted in history and tradition,"

said Lt. Col. Peter Wilhelm, "Above the Rest" Battalion Commander. "A platoon that I reserve for the best of the best," he said.

Tigers today, still serve at the behest of the battalion commander in the surly terrain of the Salah ad Din province. To pigeon hole the Tigers, would be to say that they simply serve as the battalion's sniper and recon asset, but like their predecessors in Vietnam they have found themselves covering down on a wide array of missions and have been instrumental in taking high-value targets, weapons caches and IEDs off of the streets, as well as conducting various non-lethal operations.

"We do what is necessary in the area of operations to defeat Improvised Explosive Devices, secure high value targets and support the division's effort," said Sgt. Josh Smith, Tiger Force sniper section team leader. "Today's battlefield requires so much more out of every element," he said. "There's no arguing that what we are doing today is the graduate level of warfare. You've got to think outside the box or wind up in a box."

The Bond

For Smith and other Tiger Force Soldiers, preserving the Tiger's legacy is an important part of the job. "We do everything with the past in mind," said Smith. "The bond that the current members have with the past members is unbelievable," he said.

During a 101st Airborne reunion event dubbed "Week of the Eagles", in the summer of 2000, Ortega and other Tiger Force veterans returned to Fort Campbell, KY, to give young Soldiers a glimpse into their past and have been dropping in on the Tigers ever since.

"We gave these young men back their history," said Ortega. "We brought names like James Gardner and John Gertsch to life because we knew these men and served with them," he said. "They are not just names on a wall to us, and the young guys deserve to be connected to that history."

In garrison, it is not uncommon for an old Tiger to stop by the battalion to see how the platoon is coming along. During these visits, tales are swapped and the vets get a chance to check out the newest tools of the trade. "Back in the day they were using M-14 rifles with big old Starlight scopes and they were really impressed with the new gear," said Smith. "They get a kick out of it and we get a kick out of doing it because it's just old meets new."

In today's rapidly evolving force, Soldiers often overlook the history of their units and have little or no link with the warriors who came before them.

"I would say it's very rare," said Smith. "I'm in touch with at least a dozen Vietnam-era, Tiger Force vets, and a few in between," he said. "We are very much a big extended family."

Veterans of Tiger Force send care packages and essential items to their deployed brethren in Iraq and have acted as a support system through the hard times.

"December was a bad month for us," said Smith. On Dec. 4, 2007, Tiger Force lost its Platoon Leader, Capt. Adam Snyder and two fellow Soldiers, Sgt. Eric Hernandez and Pvt. Dwayne White to an IED attack. The loss was devastating to Tiger Force Soldiers both young and old.



"When we lost men on Dec. 4th of 2007, it felt the same to us vets as when we lost those we served with exactly the same," said Ortega. "These young guys are our brothers."

Tiger Force veterans were in attendance at each fallen Soldier's funeral services and were there to provide support to loved ones. "They got in touch with the families, made trips for support and basically did everything they could to make them as comfortable as they could be in their time mourning," said Smith. "You're not going to see that level of dedication, 40 years later, in many other places," he said.

For Ortega, supporting the Tigers isn't a random act of kindness, it's fulfilling the oath of honor and country.

"For my own part, my wife and I spent almost two months at Fort Sam Houston at the bedside of a Tiger who was wounded, assisting him and his family with his recovery," said Ortega. "I would work in the aid-station if I could."

"Doc" Ortega's selfless-service to his country and to the Tigers is the model upon which the latest generation looks up to.

"All I can hope for is that the new Tigers are as receptive to the older guys as we are," said Smith. "They go so far above and beyond. So many people get out of the Army and leave it all behind," said Smith. "They are who we are."

Ortega would like to see more of these uncommon bonds forged between warrior generations. "I think that more and more Vietnam-era veterans, especially of combat units, are making an effort to relocate their buddies and as a part of that effort, they are sometimes making contact with their younger counterparts at the reunions," said Ortega. "We need to make this sort of contact and support far less unusual."

For Smith and the rest of the Tigers in Iraq, bridging the generation gap has bred a sense of respect and admiration to the Tiger name. "We're just proud to know them, you know? "The best thing for us is for them to feel like they're still part of the team."



UP: Vietnam era Tiger Force Soldiers circa 1968. Top row, second from left, MoH recipient SSG John Gertsch and Hank "Doc" Ortega. DOWN: Current Tiger Force Soldiers.



Balls Soldiers & IA provide relief

Story and photos by

1st Lt. Jonathan J. Springer

2nd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment

Zuhari, Iraq – Soldiers from Alpha Battery, 2nd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), and Iraqi Soldiers from 4th Battalion, 4th Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division, spent a day together dropping off humanitarian aid supplies in the village of Zuhari on Apr. 29.

The village, which lies southeast of Balad, has around 300 people and lacks clean water, medical supplies, and consistent electricity.

“This was great opportunity to show the people of Zuhari that we truly care for their well-being. I think that by working together, the Iraqi and US Soldiers made a huge difference for some really great people during this mission,” said Capt. Adalberto Rodriguez, battery commander for Alpha Battery, 2-320th FAR.

During the HA mission, IA and US Soldiers handed out hundreds of shoes, shirts, pants, hygiene and sanitary items, food and water, schoolbooks, book bags, and soccer balls for the children. Also, medics from the 2-320th FAR were on hand to give much needed medical attention to the people of Zuhari.

“It’s one of our priorities to do as many of these HA drops as we can while we are deployed; these types of operations have a great impact on the local community,” said Rodriguez.

Fostering good relations between Coalition Forces, Iraqi Security Forces, and the local populace is vital in the battle for democracy in Iraq, and Rodriguez believes that HA missions are an imperative component to winning this war.

“The more times we can do this kind of thing, the more we build confidence between the people and their government. This is becoming more of an Iraqi-led type of operation, and that’s what we want,” said Rodriguez.



First Lt. Damien Barrineau treats a young girl for a stomach ache during a humanitarian mission in Zuhari, Iraq. Iraqi Army Soldiers, along with CF, delivered much needed aid to the village.

WHAT RIGHT LOOKS LIKE

BALAD AREA FIGHTERS RECONCILE WITH IRAQI GOVERNMENT

Story by **Sgt. Rick Rzepka**

1st BCT, 101st Airborne Division (AA)

Balad, Iraq – More than 140 fugitives in the Balad area turned themselves in to Iraqi Security Forces May 22, setting off a wave of Iraqis in the area wishing to reconcile with the government.

Iraqi nationals, suspected of planning and carrying out attacks on Iraqi and Coalition Forces, initiated the process of reconciliation at the Joint Coordination Center in the city of Balad as a result of increased pressure on Anti-Iraqi Forces in the last several weeks.

Tribal leaders in the area have made an attempt to end the stand off with Coalition and Iraqi Forces by bringing the men under their influence into the governmental fold.

“Today’s reconciliation is an example of local leaders taking a broad step forward in the future security and in the legitimacy of the Iraqi legal process,” said U.S. Army Maj. Ramiro Salazar, operations officer for the 1st Squadron, 32nd Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division. Along with

Iraqi Security Forces, the squadron is responsible for security in Balad.

A local Sheik taking part in the reconciliation said, “We are tired of fighting and want peace. The reconciliation process is a step in the right direction, and now there will be a common goal of peace between the government and those who had fought it.”

As the security situation in the area improves, more and more former insurgents are making the move to take part in legitimate governmental processes here, including taking part in elections, which are to be held in the fall.

Iraqis wishing to reconcile must sign a cease-fire agreement and stand before the Iraqi court system before being fully reintegrated into civil society.

“The reconciliation process is a great start for those who have been reluctant to approach Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces and have been increasingly isolated from Iraqi society,” said Salazar. “Iraqi citizens will feel safer knowing that this process is working to improve their lives.” Since May 22, more than 400 Iraqis, seeking to participate in the democratic process have reconciled in the Balad area.



Cavalry Soldiers take time to make sure those wishing to reconcile are treated fairly. Former fighters must agree to a cease-fire with Coalition Forces as part of the reconciliation process.

Water, Water Everywhere...

Story and photos by

Maj. Johnpaul Arnold

TIKRIT, Iraq - Bottled water or tap water? For several years this has been an unfiltered debate in the United States. Now it is a debate for the citizens of Abu Ajil, Iraq.

A water treatment facility project was recently completed in Abu Ajil, which is located just outside of Tikrit, Iraq. The facility will provide a better purified source of water for more than 15,000 Iraqi citizens who inhabit the famed Fertile Crescent region.

For thousands of years, the Tigris River has been the wellspring of life for Iraq, providing abundant refreshment to crops, animals and the people of ancient Mesopotamia.

The Tigris River has seen dramatic changes in the last fifty years. During the 1960's and 70's several dams and barrages were created to harness the river for irrigation and hydroelectric purposes according to a Georgetown University report. Additionally, former dictator Saddam Hussein created forced droughts on marsh lands in southern Iraq by constructing river obstacles.

Today, the Soldiers of Charlie Company, 1st Special Troops Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division opened

the floodgates of the newly completed water treatment facility initially built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers several years ago. The 1st STB Executive Officer Maj. Tim Povich said, "This project was stalled for a little while and it took C Co. commander Capt. Mike Gacheru working with Abu Ajil leadership as well as the Provincial Reconstruction Team to help get this project moving again." Povich added, "It's a start, but there is still a lot of work to be done."

Water managers and engineers were concerned about leaks in the water pipes due to poor sealants. Poor sealants may cause low water pressure. Charlie Company commander Capt. Mike Gacheru said, "It's a great day opening up this water project in Abu Ajil. The residents did not have water for about a year. Most of the people had to buy bottled water at the store. The people were getting sick from non-bottled water."

The people of Iraq have endured a parched lifestyle for decades. This water treatment facility is a step forward in quenching their desire for a better life. A local Iraqi citizen said, "Thank you very much. This is a great project."

No Breather from Work

By Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Doheny
Bastogne PAO

SAMARRA, Iraq--Acting as the "heartbeat" for the No Slack Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, a group of unsung heroes are sustaining the battalion's operations in Samarra. Without daily recognition, these Soldiers roll around in oil and grease, pots and pans, sweat and dust; all to keep their No Slack brothers "in the fight".

The "Executioners" of the Forward Support Company don't ask for much. Their uniforms show it all. The grease mixed with sweat and dust shows everything that needs to be said about these Soldiers.

Underneath a Mine Resistant Armor Protecting (MRAP) vehicle, an FSC Soldier may be laying on his back servicing a transmission. Another Soldier may be preparing a pallet of supplies to push out to Patrol Base Olson or Joint Security Station Love in Samarra. Another Soldier feels the sweat beading down her face as the temperature rises in the dining facility as she prepares the dinner chow.

These are the images of the FSC Soldier. "It isn't an easy task to support all four of the organic infantry companies as well as all the other attachments operating here," said Capt. Roy Horikawa, FSC commander. "The Soldiers of this company do whatever it takes to sustain, feed, arm and transport the force."

The Soldiers of FSC are comprised of many different elements and job skills.

According to Horikawa, who is Ranger qualified and has an infantry background, his company provides more services than just fixing vehicles and preparing meals. He said his Soldiers are a combat multiplier that fits the mold of a combat service support Soldier in a counter-insurgency fight.

In the counter-insurgency fight, each Soldier is expected to do much more than their primary job,"

he said. "Yes, my Soldiers are ultimately supporting the war fighters, but they have to adapt a 'warrior' mentality. They have accomplished this by changing the mentality of the 'common' CSS Soldier. We have instilled a fight-first, job-second mentality, and they have adapted well."

The No Slack battalion and its attachments are conducting operations in the city of Samarra at different locations.

In the past, if a vehicle needed maintenance, the respective unit would have had to drive on the precarious roads in and around the city to Forward Operating Base (FOB) Brassfield-Mora, where the company is headquartered.

Being mindful of quick-response customer support, Horikawa decided to place small teams at these locations to provide services, previously only found at a larger FOB.

Having these assets available to them, the Soldiers at each location travel less to Brassfield-Mora, which ultimately reduces the risk taken by traveling on the roads.

"We pushed out some of our cooks and maintainers to certain locations, to allow the Soldiers in the city more time to concentrate on missions in Samarra," said Horikawa. "There are now fewer patrols to Brassfield-Mora for maintenance or resupply. These Soldiers can service them in the city."

Horikawa said his Soldiers and non-commissioned officers have gained valuable experience here in Iraq. He said the experience they have been able to attain is unobtainable in any training environment, and attributes the company's success to the hard work of his Soldiers.

"My NCOs, Soldiers and junior leaders have accepted these challenges and stepped up to the plate," he said. "They know they are making a difference in this fight. They know that the battalion is identifying where the threat is and protecting the Iraqi population."



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR BASTOGNE RE-ENLISTEES!

MAY 2008

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PFC William Wesley Nottage- HHC BDE
PFC Christopher Edmonson- HHC BDE
SPC David Ovens- HHC BDE
PFC Joseph Bruno- HHC BDE
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SGT Benteal Atkins- HHC BDE
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PFC Willie Wyche-426 BSB
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SPC Matthew Hanson-426 BSB
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