

Rakkasan Review

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A monthly publication of 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault)





Sgt. 1st Class Kerensa Hardy

Command Sergeant Major Dennis Carey, U.S. Forces Command command sergeant major, talks to a group of senior noncommissioned officers July 9 at Camp Striker as Command Sgt. Maj. Derrick Maffett, 3rd Special Troops Battalion, and Command Sgt. Maj. Richard McCord, 1st Squadron, 33rd Cavalry Regiment, look on. Carey visited troops in Iraq, Kuwait and Kosovo during a seven-day trip. See story on page 4.

On the cover:

Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and Marines salute during a mass reenlistment ceremony at the Al Faw Palace on Camp Victory July 4. Twenty Rakkasan Soldiers were among the 1,215 service members who participated in the ceremony where Gen. David Petraeus, then-commanding general of Multi-National Force-Iraq, administered the reenlistment oath. See story on page 8. (Photo by Spc. Justin Snyder)

Rakkasan Review

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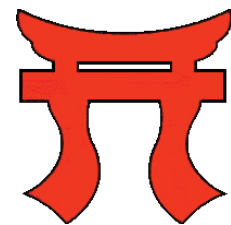
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We welcome the submission of news items, articles and photographs. Submissions should be made to the 3rd BCT Public Affairs Office via e-mail at: rakkasanspao@yahoo.com.

Rakkasan 7 Notes

As we approach the transition stage of our mission here in Iraq – now more than ever – I need NCOs to enforce and uphold the standards at all times and in every situation. This is the point in time where complacency and lack of focus can lead to injuries or death of Soldiers. We can ill-afford to lose a single Rakkasan to a preventable accident. This applies to conducting combat operations as well; the enemy is still watching constantly and waiting for the perfect opportunity to take advantage of our lack of awareness.

Maintain the same level of readiness that has gotten you to this point and continue the mark of excellence that sets the Rakkasans apart from the rest. Continue to look out for one another,

and do not take short cuts.

I want to let our Family Readiness Groups know that we continue to appreciate their constant support and hard work and dedication to the Soldiers and units. Your efforts have been instrumental in the Rakkasans' success during OIF 07-09, and the continued fight against global terrorism; we cannot say thank you enough. The same goes for our Golden Rakkasans, everything they continue to do for the deployed team and the family members back home is truly a blessing to us all.

Finally, I would like each and



**Command Sgt. Maj.
Gregory Patton**

every Rakkasan to know how deeply proud I am to serve with you and to witness firsthand the magnificent job you continue to do, day in and day out – simply incredible. Your commitment to mission accomplishment will

surely add to the Rakkasan legacy and uphold the finest traditions we have set to date. Keep up the tremendous hard work.

 **Rakkasan 7**



Eagle 6 sends



Greetings from Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, home of the Combined/Joint Task Force-101 (CJTF-101). I am continually impressed with how we as a division, installation and community are facing a variety of challenges associated with this current deployment.

In Afghanistan, our Screaming Eagle Soldiers have teamed with United States Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and several coalition nations to form a powerful force leading security and development efforts in our sector as well as supporting U.S. military deployed throughout the country. This arduous task is providing hope for the Afghans in Regional Command East and freedom loving people throughout the world.

In Iraq, the Bastogne, Strike and Rakkasan Brigade Combat Teams continue making progress in securing and stabilizing the country. Tenacity and hard-fought battles are paying off as the level of violence throughout the nation has significantly dropped, due in no small part to the efforts and professionalism of our Fort Campbell Soldiers

and

At Fort Campbell, the Families of our warriors continue to live and serve our community. These wives, husbands, daughters and sons are the stalwarts of the division, supporting our units in ways many will never know. Bravely facing their 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th deployment, these unsung heroes continue to live in the absence of their Soldier. Kids still play on the high school's champion football team and attend band practice; Spouses continue working and participating in Family Readiness Group meetings; everyone pulling together to make the best of a stressful situation.

We are strong because of the caring community we have in the surrounding areas around Fort Campbell. I'm convinced that no other post in the Army has the same level of sincere support from the people, businesses, and organizations of the local community, both on and off-post. Our Soldiers and Families are able to handle the rigors and stress of deployment because of you.

On behalf of the over 30,000 Soldiers

and 55,000 dependants at Fort Campbell, I commend you and thank you for all you do.



**Maj. Gen.
Jeffrey Schloesser**

These significant contributions have come at no small price. Our community has lost hundreds of Soldiers since 2001, while many are still recovering at medical treatment facilities around the country. These are difficult times for our Soldiers and their Families but it is made easier with the support of our fellow citizens of the greater Clarksville, Hopkinsville and Oak Grove communities. Continue to remember the Families of our brave warriors in your prayers.

Air Assault!!

August 2008

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Eagle 6

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626th BSB celebrates 90th birthday

By Sgt. 1st Class Charles Walton
626th BSB

The thrum of aircraft engines and the throbbing beat of helicopter blades filled the air as noncommissioned officers dressed the lines of their formations.

The 626th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) gathered briefly to celebrate 90 years of support to the division.

"We are the oldest battalion in the 101st Airborne Division and hold the longest continuous lineage supporting Screaming Eagles," said Command Sgt. Maj. David Thompson of Fayetteville, N.C., 626th BSB command sergeant major. "Our Soldiers are very proud of their heritage and long his-

tory."

Originally formed as the 326th Sanitary Train of the 101st Division July 23, 1918, the battalion carries with it a medical lineage and history. After the 101st Airborne Division was created for action in World War II, the Sanitary Train was designated the 326th Airborne Medical Company and participated in every campaign the division fought in during World War II including Normandy, Market Garden and the Battle of the Bulge.

The battalion continued its service with the division as the 501st Airborne Medical Battalion and later again as the 326th Medical Battalion in Vietnam and Desert Storm, after which it was made into a multifunctional logistics battalion and designated 626th Support Battalion.

The battalion colors bear 20 campaign streamers and 15 unit decorations that include the French and Belgian Croix de Guerre with palm, Netherlands Orange Lanyard, two Presidential Unit Citations, and three Meritorious Unit Citations for combat actions in their 90-year lineage.

"We have supported 3rd Brigade Combat Team ever since the Army created multifunctional support battalions," said Sgt. 1st Class Scott Peck of Fort Lauderdale, Fla. "This battalion has deployed to Afghanistan once and Iraq three times since 9/11 and has provided all the supply, transportation, maintenance and medical support to the BCT in war."

"The battalion motto, Assurgam, has come to mean many things to

See Birthday, Page 5

FORSCOM CSM meets with senior NCOs

By Sgt. 1st Class
Kerensa Hardy
3rd BCT PAO NCOIC

The U.S. Forces Command's senior-enlisted non-commissioned officer sat down with senior NCOs from the Rakkasans at Camp Striker July 9.

Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis Carey addressed issues such as enlisted strength, career progression, professional development and – the top concern for the last several years – deployments.

"At some point we'll cut back (in Iraq)," Carey said, but for now troops can expect the deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan to continue.

"We've got to do what's best for the Army and

what's best for the country," he said, acknowledging that those things may not necessarily fall in line with what Soldiers or their families want to hear.

He said the leadership of the Army will be challenged for the next few years as the Army goes through growing pains.

Carey talked about automatic promotions, which has been a point of contention since their implementation. But, he said, "There's no such thing as an automatic promotion that can't be stopped."

Unqualified Soldiers get promoted when their leadership fails to counsel them and give justification why they shouldn't be promoted.

Many NCOs complain young Soldiers are getting

promoted too fast. "We're not promoting folks too fast – we may not be training them to measure up with the job," Carey said. "They're getting promoted when they should."

Today's Soldiers are a different breed. They are seeing things many career Soldiers haven't seen.

"This (operational tempo) came at the end of our career, they're getting it at the beginning of theirs until the end of their careers," Carey said.

There are some Soldiers who have been in the Army four years and multiple deployments under their belt, while some senior NCOs who have or will retire with no or one combat tours.

Carey admonished the senior NCOs to prepare

themselves for the challenges involved with redeployment.

Taking care of Soldiers here, he said, requires less effort than in an uncontrolled environment.

"It's easy in a way to do your job now because you've got everybody 24/7; the only time you lose control of them is when they go on leave," he said.

"When you get back there the first thing everybody does is take leave. You hold your breath and hopefully they're all going to come back.

"We're losing guys on block leave," he continued. "You guys have to watch (your Soldiers) when you get back. We've got to get this next generation ready to take over for us."

SSA troops support mission behind scenes

By Spc. Justin Snyder
Special to 3rd BCT Public Affairs

Working out of a warehouse on Camp Striker, a single platoon of Soldiers works relentlessly to provide troops the tools they need to be successful.

From pens to plywood to wheels, the Company A, 626th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) Supply Support Activity Platoon, provides it all.

The warehouse stores Class I (food and sustenance), Class II (unit supply), Class III (oils and petroleum), Class IV (Construction materials) and Class IX (repair parts for vehicles) supplies.

"People don't always know who we are and exactly what we are doing because we work behind the scenes," said Cpl. Courtney Smith, Co. A, 626th BSB. "It's not really about being noticed, though. If we don't do things right, the unit can't succeed."

Units throughout the Rakkasan area of operations put their orders through the

SSA. After the order is received, it gets processed and loaded up in shipping containers for transport to the unit. If the items are not available at the warehouse, the Soldiers coordinate with other SSA warehouses to get them.

"It's kind of like if you were at home and needed bread, you would go to the store and get it," said Sgt. Patricia O'Connell, Co. A, 626th BSB noncommissioned officer in charge of storage. "We are that store, and if we don't have something, we are working to get it."

The SSA plays a big part in making the Rakkasan Soldiers' missions possible. These Soldiers put in long days to keep up with the daily grind of supporting the entire area of operations.

The SSA Soldiers drive forklifts, pack materials, input information into computers and load the shipping containers for delivery.

"Our Soldiers do all of the work," said O'Connell, a native of Syracuse, N.Y. "They do everything from packing to distribution.



Photos by Spc. Justin Snyder

Private First Class Joshua Biggs, Co. A, 626th BSB Supply Support Activity Platoon, carries water on a forklift at the SSA compound on Camp Striker July 16.

Without them, we'd be hurting. They do a great job of covering all the necessary angles to make this operation a success."

The units will often turn in extra or non-working supplies to the SSA. The supplies are then either destroyed or sent out to units who may need them. Turning in the unused supplies saves the Army money.

The SSA also must perform a 100 percent inventory of all materials prior to leaving country, which can take up to four days.

"We have (more than) 5,000 lines of supplies throughout the different pa-

trol bases in the AO," said O'Connell. "All of that needs to be accounted for and is an important task to get done."

Smith said she loves her job and is proud to know she is partly responsible for the success of the brigade.

"Almost everything comes from here. Whether it's water or other supplies, we make it happen," said Smith, who is from Decatur, Ga.

"It's a lot of responsibility, but without us there is no mission. I'm not out there fighting as an infantryman, so this is my way of contributing."

Birthday

From Page 4

many people over 90 years," said Lt. Col. Matthew Redding, 626th BSB commander. "It has transcended the Latin translation of 'we rise up.'"

"To the Rakkasans of 3rd Brigade Combat Team, it means capability – the capability to ... destroy the enemy

and the ability to maneuver unconstrained in the harshest physical environment on earth ... knowing that support for victory is at hand," said Redding, a native of Oxford, N.Y.

Specialist Daphne Singleton of Zeeland, Mich., said, "I am proud to be a Soldier and the history of this battalion is amazing. My birthday is

today and sharing it with the battalion makes it a very special day."

"The history of this battalion is the history of the 101st Division," Redding said during his comments at the birthday celebration. "As long as Screaming Eagles exist to defend freedom, Assurgam Soldiers will be ready."

South Baghdad re

By Sgt. 1st Class Kerensa Hardy
3rd BCT PAO NCOIC

Rakkasan Soldiers are preparing to hand over their area of operations, but not to Coalition forces.

“Our plan is to conduct a transfer of authority of Southern Baghdad, not with another Coalition forces element, but with the 17th Iraqi Army Division,” said Col. Dominic Caraccilo, commander of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault).

“The conditions are set for the 17th IA Div. to take charge of its area of operations – which is virtually all of the Mahmudiyah Qada,” said Maj. David Jones, operations officer for 3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT).

At the helm of the forces, which have taken control of the area, is recently promoted Maj. Gen. Ali Jassim Muhammad Hassen Al Frejee, commander of the 17th IA Div. He was the former commander of the 25th IA Brigade.

With the promotion to two-star gen-



Iraqi Army Soldiers and Soldiers with 3rd Platoon, Battery A, 3-320th FA, 3rd BCT 101st Airborne Division conducting a clearance operation that kicked off Marne Piledriver Ap

eral, Ali now has three brigades – an additional 4,000 Soldiers and 80 officers – under his command.

“The mere fact that the brigade oper-

ating in this area has been directed and has had the ability to transform itself into a division speaks volumes of the capability of the Iraqi Army leaders and the local support of its own security forces,” Caraccilo said. “Major General Ali is, no doubt, a leader with a nationalistic view on how to secure his area of operations. He is willing to take on all that the Coalition forces have and are doing, to include the (counter insurgency) fight.”

Massive cache turn-ins and tips from Iraqi citizens leading to the capture of criminals indicate the people of the Mahmudiyah Qada are also ready for change, and they support Iraqi Security Forces.

“It is readily apparent, statistically speaking, that the number of attacks has reduced significantly in the past year – a drawdown of (more than) 90 percent per week,” Caraccilo said. “What this means to us is that the population, which has always been the prize in the counterinsur-



Staff Sgt. Tony Lindback

A U.S. Soldier from 3-187th Inf., 3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT) and Iraqi Army Soldier pull security during Operation Marne Courageous Nov. 16 in Owesat.

Ready for transition



Pvt. Christopher McKenna
1st Abn. Div. (AASLT) travel together through fields moving April 15.

agency fight, has chosen peace over violence.”

When the Rakkasans arrived in Iraq in late October, the operational environment required a heavy focus on security. Now, drastic security gains are evident. Attacks are down – not only in the Mahmudiyah Qada – but by 80 to 90 percent throughout all of Iraq. While security will remain a concern, it is no longer the primary focus.

“We’ve had, really, an evolution occur in this battle space over the last 10 months that I find pretty remarkable,” Jones said.

“Through constant operations and relentless pursuit of the enemy, we were able to defeat a lot of the insurgent factions, or at least neutralize them to the point where they were incapable of conducting follow-on

attacks,” Jones explained. “The situation became stabilized in January, three or four months into our deployment.”

Once the security situation was under control, it became possible to focus efforts elsewhere: governance, economics and revitalization projects, and the local government has shown a commitment to providing essential services to its citizens.

Rebuilding efforts began in mid-April with Operation Marne Piledriver. The operation was the first capacity-building mission throughout the Mahmudiyah Qada.

“We also had to focus on tactical overwatch operations in which we would take the IA and teach, coach and mentor them, letting them watch Coalition forces conduct operations,” Jones said of

the relationship with the IA in past operations.

“We were leading, and they’d watch. That lasted until March or April, when the Iraqis turned a corner,” he added.

Now, Caraccilo is convinced the 17th IA Div., under the well-able leadership of Ali, is ready to take the reigns from the Rakkasans.

“(General Ali) knows he has defeated the enemy, now he has to replace the Coalition as the lead for security,” Caraccilo said. “He will do this by establishing a permanent presence at each of the 18 patrol bases we transition, thicken his lines with added IA (battle positions), and the maintenance of positive control of all of the 800 plus (Sons of Iraq) checkpoints across the qada.

“He can do all this because he has established himself and his unit as a credible force that the enemy fears, sheikhs respect and the government of Iraq relies upon,” Caraccilo said.



Pvt. Christopher McKenna
IA Soldiers from 4th Co., 3/22/6 IA and Soldiers with Co. B, 1-35th Armor Regt., attached to 3rd BCT 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT), load onto a UH-60 Black Hawk upon completion of Operation New Town, an air assault mission in the Shakriyah area, June 10.

Rakkasans take part in mass reenlistment

By **Spc. Justin Snyder**
Special to 3rd BCT PAO

"I, your name, do solemnly swear," began Gen. David Petraeus, commanding general of Multi-National Force - Iraq.

Twenty Rakkasan Soldiers, amidst a total of 1,215 service members, repeated those words, took part in a mass re-enlistment ceremony at the al Faw Palace on Camp Victory July 4.

"That I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic," continued Petraeus, with the re-enlistees right on his heels. "And that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God."

With those final words spoken, they shouted a thunderous "Hooah" that could've woken the spirits of their forefathers; those who gave the very first oath of enlistment in 1776.

The ceremony began with a slideshow, where the patriotic music of country superstars Hank Williams Jr. and Toby Keith serenaded the crowd.

Command Sergeant Major Marvin Hill, MNF-I command sergeant major, opened his speech by shouting, "Freedom," and thanking all the service members. On a day when the Army celebrated its 35th anniversary of an all-volunteer Army, he said the large group of volunteers was a sign to enemies and allies alike:

"This ceremony and the amount of people re-enlisting shows that we are strong, committed and united," Hill said.

This was the third re-enlistment for Sgt. Thomas Gilmore Jr., Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st Squadron, 33rd Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne

Division (Air Assault). However, this was his first ceremony.

"I was in the Navy and got out, then came back; then, I joined the Army. Those were the only re-enlistments I had," said Hill, a native of Oklahoma City. "Guys kept telling me how cool these ceremonies were, so I wanted to experience it for myself. I wasn't let down."

Soldiers can re-enlist from two to six years and, depending on their situation and time in service, can receive a bonus of up to \$30,000. While the bonus is a good reason to re-enlist, it's not the only reason the Rakkasan Soldiers did so.

"My wife really encouraged me to sign back up," said Spc. Christopher Cora, Company B, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT). "With the way the economy is at home, this was the best choice for us."

Petraeus said, to his knowledge, this was the largest mass re-enlistment ever, referring to the service members as "America's new greatest generation."

A large flag hung from the rafters of what used to be Saddam Hussein's palace, serving as a backdrop for the ceremony on America's birthday. Petraeus, who assumed command of the MNF-I in 2007, thanked the Soldiers for their support of the war and their country.

"For no bonus – no matter the size – can adequately compensate you for the contribution each of you makes as a custodian of our nation's defense," Petraeus said. "I'm proud to have served this great nation with all of you."

Following the ceremony, the Rakkasan Soldiers returned to Camp Striker, where they took part in a knife ceremony. Every Rakkasan who re-enlists receives a custom knife engraved with the unit's motto, "Let valor not fail."

Private First Class Anthony Burkman, Company A, 3rd Special Troops Battalion, 3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT), said that he was planning to re-enlist soon, but the mass re-enlistment was the perfect opportunity.

"It was only a matter of time before I re-enlisted, and this way, I could meet Gen. Petraeus," said Burkman, a native of Malen, Mo. "The Army has given me and my family a good life, and this was a good way to give back. I love being in the Army."

Gilmore said he will always remember this day, even after he's out of the Army. He has eight more years of service until he reaches the minimum 20 years he needs to retire. By taking part in the Independence Day mass re-enlistment ceremony, he can now go out with a bang.

"When I joined the Army, they asked when I wanted to sign the papers and I told them July 5," Gilmore said. "The office was closed on the 4th (of July); and that way, when I retire from the military, I can celebrate my service yearly with a fireworks celebration."



Spc. Justin Snyder

More than 1,200 take part in a mass re-enlistment ceremony at the Al Faw Palace at Camp Victory July 4.

Ex-stuntman makes leap to ministry

Chaplain takes on new challenges, answers call to reach Soldiers

By Spc. Justin Snyder
Special to 3rd BCT Public Affairs

Chaplain (Capt.) Eric Light gives a weekly sermon and is available for counseling whenever a Soldier might need it.

However, he is not your ordinary chaplain.

"When I was in college, money was kind of hard to come by," said Light, currently serving with 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). "So, I became a stunt guy to pay for college."

In the late 1980s, Hollywood was experiencing a writers' strike. Feeling the pinch from a lack of work there, some of the companies in show business took their shows on the road.

"A guy who was a stuntman moved into town and would put on a Wild West show while trying to obtain the contracts for movies when they came through," said Light, a native of Kingspen, Tenn., and a graduate of East Tennessee State University. "We happened to go to the same church, and he took me under his wing, teaching me the ropes."

Light began working at the Wild West show, which led to performing a few stunts for television shows such as "Unsolved Mysteries" and "Rescue 911". The work on those shows paid most of his way through college.

Following college graduation in 1993, Light quit the stuntman life and began what he said he believed to be his true calling, ministry. He started working with college students in a counselor-like role at the Univer-

sity of Michigan, then at the University of California State – Fullerton.

After the university's program diminished due to a lack of funding, Light found himself without a job. He struggled to find employment for a few years, eventually distributing a resume with the hope someone would contact him for work.

He finally got a call, but from an unexpected place: the Army.

"I got a call from a retired Army chaplain asking if I'd be interested in being a chaplain in the military. I told him, 'no,' because I wanted to work with college-age kids from 18 to 25 years old," Light said.

"He kind of laughed at me after that statement because Soldiers of that age make up a lot of the Army. After that, the light bulb came on, and I knew this was what God was calling me to do."

Over the next 15 months, he lost 50 pounds to meet the Army's weight standards and headed off to basic chaplains training. After graduation, he was assigned to the 1-187th Inf. Regt., 3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT), where he received word that he would be deploying to Iraq in Support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"Getting deployed was never a problem for me," Light said. "All of

the active-duty people in my class were getting deployed so I knew it was a matter of time. What good

would I be if I could not deploy with the Soldiers I am here for?"

Light said he is constantly learning and trying to improve himself as a better chaplain during his first de-



Chaplain (Capt.) Eric Light, 1- 187th Inf. Regt., 3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT) chaplain, helps Soldiers now. He worked as a stuntman to pay for college before he got a call to join the Army.

ployment. Recently, he had an experience that served as a confidence booster.

"I was sitting outside reading when the company commander came walking by and told me I was a good chaplain," he recalled. "For someone outside of the chaplain corps to randomly come up to me and notice what I was doing, that really proved to me that being here was the right thing and that I was doing a good job."

While he isn't outside the wire all the time, Light said he knows his job is equally as important. Not only must he be there for the Soldiers who are deployed, he must be there for their families back at home.

"Never in our nation's history have families had to give up so much," he said. "While I'm not out there on the front line fighting, it's my job to be there for (Soldiers) when they come back. If I can help prepare these Soldiers to go back to their families, I'm doing my part."

USO tour visits to give back to troops

By Spc. Justin Snyder
Special to 3rd BCT PAO

Celebrities paid a visit to Soldiers from 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) at Camp Striker as part of a United Service Organizations tour July 8.

The group included National Football League stars Drew Brees and Osi Umenyiora, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, former college football coach Jack Lengyel, actor Milo Ventimiglia and two Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders.

The stars posed for pictures and answered questions with all of the Soldiers before sitting down to sign autographs.

The NFL has a long-standing reputation of supporting the troops, working with the USO for the past 40 years, and was the first sports organization to send athletes overseas when they visited Vietnam in 1966. With Goodell joining in on this trip, it marks the first time that a commissioner from any sport has ever visited the troops.

"I am inspired by the many NFL players that, over the decades, have volunteered to visit our troops overseas and have talked about it being a life-changing experience," Goodell said in a recent interview with the Pegasus News. "I want to do my part and emphasize that the entire NFL appreciates and supports the work that our military does to protect our country."

Brees, quarterback for the New Orleans Saints, was making his third USO tour. He traveled to Kuwait in 2007 and Okinawa, Japan, earlier this year. He joked with Soldiers and said he was glad that he could show his support for the service members overseas.

"I do these trips for these men and women," said Brees. "Whatever I can do to show my support – whether it's signing footballs or just talking to them – is worth it."

This was the first tour for

Umenyiora, defensive end from the Super Bowl-champion New York Giants. A few Soldiers got the opportunity to wear his championship ring that he received following the Giants victory in Super Bowl XLII.

The Cowboys cheerleaders, often known as "America's Sweethearts," have made 66 USO trips over the years in support of the troops. The two cheerleaders smiled, posed for pictures and talked to the Soldiers.

"It's always good to see high-profile people like that over here," said Capt. Seth Palmer, personnel officer for 1st Squadron, 33rd Cavalry Regiment, 3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT). "It's a very good morale booster."

Ventimiglia, who plays Peter Petrelli on the hit show "Heroes", said he has wanted to do something for the troops for the last three years and was glad to finally get the opportunity to come over and show his support.

His family has a long legacy of military service, with his father serving twice in Vietnam and his grandfather serving in World War II. Before turning to acting, he had an appointment scheduled at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., however, he never went.

"The tendency is for people to just read the news and talk about the war. That wasn't enough for me," Ventimiglia said. "To be able to come out here and say 'thank you' was important to me. It made me really happy to see smiling faces. That's what it is all about, knowing I made their day."

For some Soldiers, meeting Ven-

timiglia helped make what can be a long day at work a little easier.

"It really made the females in our office's day. He plays our favorite character on 'Heroes,'" said Capt. Holly Brewer, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT) executive officer. "All of us are big 'Heroes' fans and we are always talking about the show. It was really cool to meet him and take pictures."

Lengyel is most notably known as the coach who succeeded Rich Tolley at Marshall University in 1971 following a plane crash that killed a majority of the team and the inspiration for Matthew McConaughey's role in the movie, "We are Marshall," said he was glad to be a part of this special trip in honor of our troops. He also spent 14 years working as the athletic director at the U.S. Naval Academy.

Ventimiglia, who has also been on the popular sitcom "Gossip Girl" and played Rocky's son in "Rocky Balboa," said he was glad to make some Soldiers' day. He added, unlike the character on television, he wasn't the real hero.

"The sacrifices these guys make over here is way more than anything I could ever do on television or in the movies," he said. "These Soldiers are the real heroes and I respect them a lot for what they do for our country."

The USO is a private, nonprofit organization whose mission is to support the troops by providing morale, welfare and recreation-type services to the men and women in uniform. Their slogan is "Until every one comes home" and the organization serves as a way for the American public to support the troops.



Spc. Justin Snyder

Capt. Holly Brewer, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (AASLT), poses for a picture with Milo Ventimiglia, star of the television show "Heroes", during an USO trip at Camp Striker July 8.

Rakkasans help Iraqis build wealth

By Capt. Steve McGregor
3-187th Inf.

For \$2 Gazwan Almasaodi makes a tasty kabob.

Ground beef, onions and spices are formed around skewers and cooked over a fire. Then the meat is served in a pocket of unleavened bread, cucumbers and tomatoes.

Almasaodi wants to buy a new refrigerator for his restaurant but profits from the kabobs are too small.

A U.S. businessman in this situation would just take out a loan. But banks are scarce in Iraq, especially for farmers and other citizens living outside Baghdad. And even if Almasaodi could find a bank, he lacks collateral and a credit history. Traditionally, he is considered "unbankable." So he is stuck.

The Rakkasans of 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) living in rural Yusif

fiyah recognized this economic challenge. Their search for a solution led to a non-governmental organization known as Izdihar.

As violence decreases in Iraq, NGOs and relief organizations have played an increasingly important role in restoring social, cultural and economic stability.

Since 2003, the U.S. Agency for International Development has invested more than \$150 million in Iraqi micro-loans. With USAID funds, Izdihar implements the loan program by establishing regional offices and training loan officers.

A loan officer was selected for Yusifayah: Mohammed Malik, who is a small businessman himself. After attending training in Baghdad, Malik walked the streets of Yusifayah to advertise the new loans.

That's when he noticed Almasaodi.

Malik said Almasaodi met the loan criteria because of his "experience, reputation, and knowledgeable workers."

Almasaodi borrowed \$1,500 to buy chairs, a generator, cooler and to increase his daily purchasing of meat and ice. Other upcoming loans will go to businesses that sell women's clothing, truck repair services and cooking equipment. These shop owners are all "unbankable" entrepreneurs.

"It's great because it teaches responsibility and independence," said Staff Sgt. Jeremy Smith of 3-187th Inf. civil military operations team.

Smith, a native of Fontana, Calif., met with USAID representatives to establish the program in Yusifayah. "Before this program the business-owners had no support," he said. "Now they have hope."

The Yusifayah micro-loan office establishment proves the versatility of the Rakkasans and their concern for the Iraqi people. Smith insisted said, "it's not just about security" for the American Army, "it's about making Iraq a better place to live."

Almasaodi's delectable kabobs are proof.

What does personal courage mean to you?



"... believing in yourself and doing what must be done."

Spc. John Pollock
Headquarters and Headquarters Battery,
3rd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment

"... being able to stand up and do what's right no matter what anyone else thinks."

Sgt. Randal Hines
Troop B,
1st Squadron, 33rd Cavalry Regiment



"... facing head-on any and all problems and obstacles that present themselves through life."

Staff Sgt. Charles Cummings
Company A,
1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment



"Doing what you need to do regardless of how afraid you are."

Sgt. Daniel Eger
Headquarters and Headquarters Company,
3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment



Actor Gary Sinise of *CSI: NY* and *Forrest Gump* signs a wooden torii at the 626th Brigade Support Battalion headquarters at Camp Striker July 14. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kerensa Hardy)