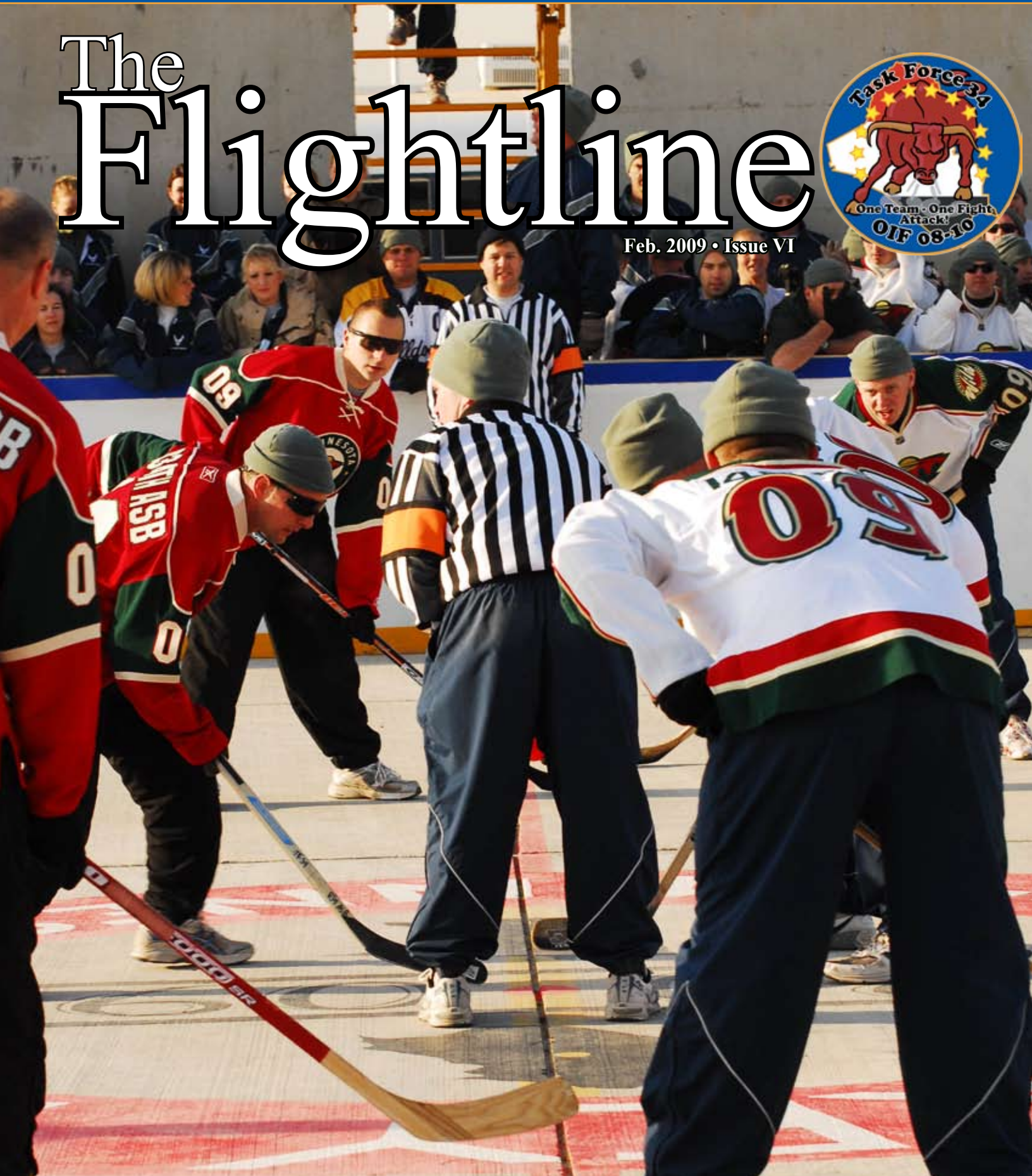


Telling the Story of Task Force 34

The Flightline

Feb. 2009 • Issue VI



Hockey Day • Super Bowl • Tour of Biblical land



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Task Force 34 Commander
COL Clay Brock

Task Force 34 Command
Sgt. Major
CSM Gery Thesing

A special thanks to over 50 part time Unit Public Affairs Representatives telling the story of their companies to their Soldiers, families and hometowns.

Task Force 34 Public Affairs Office
MAJ Roy Fuhrmann
Task Force 34 Public Affairs Officer
SFC Daniel Ewer
Task Force 34 Public Affairs Chief
SGT Lynette Hoke
Task Force 34 Public Affairs Journalist
SGT Richard Brown
A Co. 834th ASB Unit Public Affairs Rep.
SPC Jodi Krause
HSC 834th ASB Unit Public Affairs Rep.

Commander's Corner

With the New Year now fully in swing, it is time to really assess where we are as a Task Force. I have had the opportunity to fly on many of our mission sets and I am very pleased with the proficiency and tactical expertise of our winged warriors. Our operations tempo is very demanding. Every day, our crews, maintainers and support personal are doing a great job of keeping this Task Force flying. We are seeing some changes with the implementation of the new Status of Forces Agreements, however, our mission is just as vital today and the daily tasks are just as important as they were the day we arrived.

I am sure it is no news to anyone that we are now over half way through our deployment. The next couple of months will be marked by significant changes for many of our units. Last week, I said "Thank you" for a job well done to LTC Todd Farmer, Commander of 2-641 AVN TF Cascade and to many of his fine staff. I also welcomed LTC Christian Rees who is taking the reins and will continue to lead our fixed wing warriors in support of our longer range missions. For those of you who don't know, TF Cascade is from the Oregon National Guard and USAR, and is comprised of the C-23 Sherpa, the C-12 Huron or King Air and the UC-35 Citation Jet. These aircraft conduct daily inter-theater missions, filling the gap between the strategic and intra-theater missions performed by the Air Force and the tactical maneuver movement of the Army rotary wing missions. TF Cascade has done a superb job filling this essential mission

set and I am confident that our newly arrived leaders will continue to uphold their reputation.

On 22 Jan., a very important event also happened for Task Force 34 over 6,000 miles away. The 28th Combat Aviation Brigade, our replacements, reported to their mobilization training site at Ft. Sill, OK. We will soon be sending some of our key staff members stateside to provide valuable real world training experience for their mobilization readiness training exercises. Although we are excited about all of these events, we continue to stay battle focused on our daily mission sets as our number one priority.

This is also a time when many of our families and Soldiers may be experiencing some post holiday and R&R challenges. Most of us know what it is like to be away from our loved ones during the holiday season. If you have recently returned from R&R and/or you sent your Soldier back to us to complete their mission, each of you knows that there are a few more long months ahead. Take one day at a time, and in short order, we will all be home again. I ask each of you to make a special effort to stay connected at this time, by writing letters, e-mailing and having your Soldier make regular phone calls home. Keeping in touch with each other continues to be very important to help us maintain our mental toughness and, of course, a daily smile.

Finally, I want TF 34 Soldiers to be proactively involved to maintain the



COL Clay Brock
Task Force 34 Commander

highest safety standards, continue to fight complacency, stay battle focused and mission oriented, and remember that good judgment comes from experience, experience overtime comes from learning from our mistakes. Continue to maintain situational awareness and good common sense. In other words, don't approach a rank horse from the rear!

Family members and friends of TF34, as I always request, please keep all of us in your prayers.

ONE TEAM-ONE FIGHT, ATTACK!

Written by COL Clay Brock





CSM Gerry Thesing
TF 34 Command Sergeant Major

Hello again families and Soldiers of Task Force 34. The majority of the Task Force is now looking at less than four months left on this deployment, and the 1-244th Assault Helicopter Battalion from Louisiana is less than two months until their return home.

How are your plans for vacation going? I have just recently returned from my rest and recuperation. It was great! I found a better appreciation for the finer things we have in the United States like smooth and wide roads, no dust on everything, quiet and sound sleeping, sidewalks, and my home.

We all need to stay focused on our mission here, continue to be safe doing our mission, and we will all return to the finer side of life; our homes and loved ones. I did discover while on leave that hamburgers do taste good when cooked with all beef and not have them soaking in juice. I love a good grilled hamburger, and now I remember why!

To all the Soldiers of Task Force 34, continue to be safe, and stay in touch with your family members back home. Continue to do the great job you are doing here in Iraq; it is because of the skills and contributions of each and every Soldier that we are successful in our mission as the Corps Combat Aviation Brigade in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Get through the cold nights and prepare for the hot days that will be here in a few more weeks. Make each day the best it can be for you and your battle buddy; always make the best of it, "it is what it is."

To the family members, stay strong and keep in touch with your loved ones here in Iraq. Write, e-mail and set times to talk on the telephone. We know your days are complicated and busy; never doubt that we do understand how hectic and stressful your life currently is. And if I may speak for the Task Force, Thank You for all you do! A lot of us will need some re-training on the daily activities, such as paying bills, mowing the grass, BUYING groceries, and driving when we return home.

One last note for the Task Force Soldiers, stay vigilant, do not get complacent, and watch your battle buddy.
WILD 7, out

Written by CSM Gerry Thesing

ARMY FRG

The mission of the Task Force 34 Family Readiness Groups is to establish and maintain a fully-functioning chain of concern to work alongside the military chain of command to provide an avenue for mutual support, assistance and communication among family members, the chain of command, and community resources.

www.ArmyFRG.org



Wing and a Prayer

As a person who has been on more than one tour in Iraq, I can tell you this is the long part of the deployment...over half way home. Mid-tour rest and restoration is over (most of them), and we have a date to look towards. Yet one can get complacent at this point in the deployment. What do I mean by that? As a person who has run 16 marathons (training for 17), 28 half-marathons, I know that the most critical point in the marathon is just past halfway. You know you are half way done, you sense the finish, yet you know you have a long way to go. Leaning on one's training is the key; and pace is everything, not too fast, not too slow. In other words, depend on your training and don't become complacent and try to run too fast. Know the race will end, but save energy to finish strong.

This brings me to a piece of scripture I am reminded of: Hebrew 12:1 *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."*

We see here we are all in a race, (the deployment) and all have had things that might slow us down. But the word I love here is "perseverance." And what does that mean for us? I think it will be a bit different for everyone. I hope we can learn that this deployment is a marathon and not a sprint, that we hold tight to things like the mission, home and family with perseverance. The meaning of this word is key; it means to have "persistent determination" in what we do.

TF 34 and all the battalions have amazing Soldiers who are well trained and need to lean on this thing called perseverance. I think this could be done in a few ways.

1. Have a battle buddy to run this race with you.
2. Read good material that helps one to come home well and reintegrated.
3. Talk if you need, to a chaplain, NCO or person you can trust and bounce things off of.
4. Exercise all aspects of your life, physically (running), spiritually practice whatever faith group you may belong to, and socially exercise by getting out of your normal routine, change things up a bit, learn something new about yourself.

Remember we are a part of a great "cloud of witnesses" who are cheering us on the finish line, our leaders and families. So let's together finish the race strong and with perseverance.

Written by SSG Jeffrey Dexter



SSG Jeffrey Dexter
TF 34 Chaplain Assistant

Remembering Easy 40 - 20 Jan., 2007



Angels, one for each of the crew and passengers of Easy 40, sit on the railing in front of the Easy 40 Lounge to honor our fallen Soldiers on the 2nd anniversary of this tragic event. A flight crew, lead by CW2 Robert Mason, C Co. 1-244th ARB, flew these Angels on 20 January, 2009 in their honor. Let us never forget the price paid by the members and families of this crew.

SELF-CARE:

Do you ever find yourself playing the AAFES doctor, trying to match your symptoms with the medications offered in the aisle? Are you ever frustrated with the limited selection offered at AAFES? If you haven't experienced this either your immune system is amazing or your patience level has increased. Since neither describes me I am going to share the best kept secret in the Task Force. Your Aviation Medical Clinic (AMC) has a self-care assessment program. Therefore, there is relief nearby if you can spare a few minutes in your already overwhelming schedule and better yet it is FREE!!! You will be logged into the AMC, screened by a Healthcare Specialist (Medic) and provided a Self Assessment worksheet (see below). Once completed, you will be provided the corresponding over-the-counter medications with instructions and advice to return to the clinic to see one of our providers if the symptoms worsen or if they do not improve. Bottom line: don't hesitate to visit your local neighborhood Aviation Medical Clinic.

*Written by SFC Gwen Zimmerman
TF 34 HQ Medical Operations NCO*

Legal Lines

Veterans' issues focus of teleconference from Iraq

The Southern Illinois University School of Law next week will participate in a teleconference from Iraq that focuses on issues that soon-to-be returning veterans will face.

The law school's Veteran's Legal Assistance Program is coordinating with the John Marshall Law School and the U.S. Army to receive a live broadcast from U.S. Army Capt. Lyndsey Kimber in Balad, Iraq. John F. Lynn, the law school's assistant dean for administration, said Kimber will discuss issues she is seeing in Iraq that returning troops will bring home with them when they return. Because many of these troops are with National Guard and reserve units and not returning to a military base structure, civilian attorneys will be dealing with these issues, Lynn said.

Participants will be able to e-mail questions to Kimber, Lynn said.

In July, the law school established a program to assist veterans with disability claims appeals. The program, similar to John Marshall Law School's Veteran's Legal Support Center and Clinic, is expanding its role to include other veterans-related issues.

Kimber is an international law officer and trial counsel with the U.S. Army's Task Force 34 in Balad. Her insights are "invaluable in preparing the foundation for veterans' legal support when the Illinois National Guard's 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team returns" later this year, Lynn said.

The broadcast is 1 to 2 p.m., Friday, Jan.

23, (10 p.m. in Balad, Iraq) in the Hiram H. Lesar Law Building, Room 104. Due to space considerations, anyone interested in attending should contact Lynn at 618/453-8760.

The conference will give program case managers, students and staff a glimpse into what they can likely expect in six to eight months when the infantry brigade rotates, Lynn said. Current issues include divorce, creditor issues and disability benefits, he said.

"This puts a touch of reality to it," he said. "You are able to see a real person other than just dealing with files. For our students it's a great opportunity to talk with a JAG (Judge Advocate General) live in Balad."

Discussing what military officials are now seeing assists the program's ability to meet expected demands, Lynn said.

"If we can reach out to Balad, Iraq, and talk about issues we will see in six months it only builds on our future," he said.

Since its inception in July, the law school's veteran's legal assistance program has handled 45 cases, including 16 to 18 active cases, Lynn said. Two of the resolved cases benefited veterans approximately \$500,000 in respective service-connected disability claims involving emergency medical treatment.



In one case, the Veterans' Administration has agreed to pick up \$375,000 in one veteran's medical bills, and accepted on appeal a previously denied \$124,500 claim.

There are now four paid student workers, and the program has a licensed nurse to assist in interpreting medical records, Lynn said.

"The program is real strong," he said. "We have very good faculty support."

SIUC's program received a \$100,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs last summer to initiate the program. Second- and third-year law students provide pro bono legal services to veterans who cannot afford or do not have access to legal representation in appealing service-connected disability claims.

*Written by Pete Rosenbery,
SIUC University Communication*



To view the teleconference video, visit: www.TaskForce34.org

REAP the education benefits

Department of Veterans Affairs
Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) - Chapter 1607

What Is REAP?

REAP (Chapter 1607 of title 10, U.S. Code) is a new education program that provides up to 36 months of education benefits to members of the Selected Reserves, Individual Ready Reserve (IRR), and National Guard, who are called or ordered to active service in response to a war or national emergency, as declared by the President or Congress.

Who Is Eligible?

Eligibility will be determined by the Department of Defense (DoD) or Department of Homeland Security (DHS), as appropriate. Generally, a member of a Reserve component who serves on active duty on or after September 11, 2001 under title 10, U.S. Code, for at least 90 consecutive days under a contingency operation, is eligible for REAP. There is no specific time frame to use REAP; however, your eligibility generally ends when you leave the Selected Reserves.

National Guard members are eligible if their active service extends for 90 consecutive days or more and their service is:

- authorized under section 502(f), title 32, U.S. Code,

- authorized by the President or Secretary of Defense for a national emergency, and
- supported by federal funds.

How Much Does VA Pay?

The educational assistance allowance payable under REAP is a percentage of the Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty (MGIB) rate based on the number of continuous days served on active duty. Persons released before 90 days due to an injury, illness, or disease incurred or aggravated in the line of duty receive the 40% rate. Current rates of payment can be found on our Internet web site or by calling the toll-free number below.

- Members who serve 90 days but less than 1 year will receive 40% of the MGIB 3 year rate.
- Members who serve 1 year but less than 2 years will receive 60% of the MGIB 3 year rate.
- Members who serve 2 or more continuous years will receive 80% of the MGIB 3 year rate.

The amount VA pays is based on the type of training program and training time (i.e. full time, half time, etc). If attendance is less than a month or less than full-time, payments are reduced proportionately.

What Programs Are Available?

The following programs are available: College or University Degree Programs, Flight Training, Vocational Programs, On-the-Job Training and Apprenticeship Programs, Independent Study or Distance Learning Programs, Entrepreneurship Courses, and Correspondence Courses.

Note: VA does not approve schools or programs for benefits. Each individual state approves schools and courses. To find out if your school or program is approved for VA educational benefits under REAP, contact your school's VA Certifying Official, or call VA at the toll-free number below.

How Can You Apply?

Once you find a program approved for VA training, complete VA Form 22-1990, Application for Education Benefits, and send it to the VA regional office that serves the state where you will train. Indicate on the form you are applying for REAP. You can also apply online through our web site at <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp>.

For More Information, Call Toll-Free 1-888-GIBILL-1 (1-888-442-4551) or Visit Our Web Site at <http://www.gibill.va.gov>.



For more stories and photos of Task Force 34 Soldiers, visit: www.TaskForce34.org

Public Affairs Guidance

Personal Websites

Have a personal blog, myspace, or other web page? Let us know, so we can better tell our story! See the blog link on www.TaskForce34.org.

Company Website

Did you know your company has a website? See www.TaskForce34.org/units. Please send us feedback!

Photos

Please send us photos of any promotions, reenlistments, or company events to daniel.ewer@iraq.centcom.mil, or stop by the Public Affairs Office in the ALOC next to Catfish Air.

Stories

Have a story idea? Tell your company Unit Public Affairs Representative (UPAR). Help them represent your company to your families and hometowns.

Written by SFC Daniel Ewer, TF 34 Public Affairs Chief



**LTC James Yates,
TF 34 Equal Opportunity Advisor**

What if I think I have an EO complaint?

There are three things that make up an EO complaint:

- 1) you must have experienced an unwanted form of discrimination as outlined and defined in AR600-20 chapter 6.
- 2) It must fall in one of these five categories related to race, gender, religious belief, color and national origin or you experienced some form of reprisal because you filed or were a witness to a reported form of discrimination.
- 3) You require a resolution regarding the illegal discriminatory behavior (i.e. behavior stopped, release from duty to attend worship granted, adverse counseling statement removed). It is always recommended that you first address the violator of the illegal behavior and tell the violator to stop. If this is not possible or probable you can tell your complaint to a third party, however it is recommended that you contact your company EOL or a member in your chain of command who can assist you with your complaint. Discrimination based on race, gender, religious belief, color and national origin in the U.S. Armed Forces is illegal and will not be tolerated. Remember, if you want it to change you must confront it and report it. It was said by author Edmund Burke, "All evil needs to triumph, is for good men to do nothing." Together we can make a difference!

If you have any questions, please contact your unit EOL or the TF34 EO Office at (318) 483-4589.



**SGT Derek Weber
HHC, TF34 EOL
(318) 483-2305**



**SFC Jason Gangl, NCOIC
HHC, TF34 EOL
(318) 483-2722**

Joint Base Balad Celebrates African American History Month

This month provides a welcome opportunity to recognize and celebrate the contributions that African-American/Blacks have made and continue to make towards our country's progress. Task Force 34's EO Officer, LTC James-Michael Yates will be the Guest Speaker at Black History Celebration Luncheon on 19 February at 1100 hours. The theme is "The Quest for Black Citizenship in the Americas."

Congratulations 02-2009 Equal Opportunity Course Graduates!

Five students from Task Force 34 have successfully completed the Equal Opportunity Leaders Course (EOLC). MSG Domingo Padron, D Company 2-149 GSAB; SFC Robyn Major, HSC 834th ASB; SSG Marcella Love, HHC 2-641 AVN TF; SSG Terence Tate, HSC 834th ASB and SGT Tammy Carver, HSC 834th ASB spent six long, difficult days learning their new craft as Equal Opportunity Leaders. These five individuals, out of a class of forty-five students, worked hard to demonstrate TF34's commitment to Equal Opportunity. All will return to their commands with renewed vigor, ready to address the various leadership issues that await them. Congratulations on a job well done!!

Thought for the Day

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Fact for the Day

Title: Army Desegregation

Date: 30 September, 1949

Fact: Opened all occupational specialties to those qualified, abolished racial quotas for Army schools, and ended its racially separate promotion systems and standards.

Upcoming Special Observances for 2009

African-American History Month
February 2009 (Entire month)

Women's History Month
March 2009 (Entire month)

Irish American Heritage Month
March 2009 (Presidential Proclamation)

Holocaust Remembrance Day
21 April, 2009

Days of Remembrance
19-26 April, 2009 (Sunday to Sunday)

Asian Pacific Heritage Month
May 2009 (Entire month)

Task Force Cascade is the Corps CAB's Fixed-wing task force. It is comprised of three separate companies: HHC 2-641st AVN from the Oregon National Guard, I Co. 185th AVN from Connecticut, California, Mississippi, and Missouri National Guard, and C Co. 2-228th AVN from the US Army Reserve in Fort Bragg, NC.

I Co. 185th AVN is the C-23 Sherpa Cargo airplane company which transports high priority cargo and passengers throughout the theatre. All Sherpa units come from the Army National Guard, with two or usually four states making up one full company. A normal deployment period for a C-23 company is six months.

C Co. 2-228th AVN is the C-12 and UC-35 company which transports VIP and DV passengers throughout the entire region. Being a very small company in overall numbers, some members of C Co. are able to mobilize for six months, while the company flag and about half of its members will remain for the entire year.

HHC 2-641st AVN is the Headquarters and Headquarters Company and makes up the Command group, primary and special staff members. Also a very small company, the HHC is rotating about half of its members at the six month mark. Not exactly organic according to its Modified Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE), the HHC had many personnel from other units and other states volunteer for this deployment, thus retaining enough flexibility to allow for shorter mobilizations.

While mobilizations in the National Guard and Reserve are not "voluntary" there are an incredible amount of true volunteers who serve in Task Force Cascade. Even seven years into the Global War on Terrorism, Soldiers from all across the country are still raising their hands to serve the great American public and the ideals and beliefs of our great nation. It is truly an honor for all of us in Task Force Cascade to serve here to ensure the preservation of our American way of life.

Written by MAJ Alan Gronewold, Outgoing 2-641 AVN RGT XO



MAJ Alan Gronewold
Outgoing 2-641 AVN RGT XO



TF 34 Chaplains lead archeology tour in ‘Land of Abraham’



In ancient times, Ur, Iraq was the site of Abraham’s decision to follow the voice of his God, rejecting the comfortable life and gods of his contemporaries, guided only by his faith he abandoned Ur. One man’s decision prepared the way for three world religions - Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

In contemporary times it was the Ur archeological site in Tell el-Mukayyar, Iraq that brought together Soldiers of Task Force 34. Some followed the Chaplain’s tour for a personal connection to Biblical history, others were fascinated by the ancient ziggurat, palace ruins and tombs; still others were amazed at the dynamic geology that could place an ancient sea in a modern desert. Other Soldiers were nominated for the trip by their units and just wanted to take advantage of



a travel opportunity.

“It’s one of those once in a lifetime opportunities that if you don’t take it you might regret it later” said SPC David Roark of the 2-149 General Support Aviation Battalion, a native of Owasso, Okla.

SSG Darryl Kelly of the 2-641 Aviation Regt. appreciated the time off. He’d like to see the history of the whole area. “Anything that you can see without being shot would be good” he joked.

Chap. (CPT) Ken Harris, 834th Aviation Support Battalion (ASB), resident of St. Paul, Minn, led a group of Soldiers from each of the units of Task Force 34 stationed at Joint Base Balad, Iraq to the Ur site located just outside of a coalition Forward Operating Base in



Tallil in southern Iraq. This religious and cultural training event was originally organized for the Soldiers of the 834 ASB and was quickly opened up to all Soldiers of Task Force 34.

The Soldiers received advanced training for the tour by Chap. Harris who gave a presentation on the history and religious history of the Ur region. LTC Waage, Commander of the 834 ASB, who has a bachelors degree in geography and geology, was uniquely qualified to explain how the changes in the physical landscape impacted the development of cultures around the Persian Gulf.

The Soldiers arrived at Tallil on Jan. 24 by way of a pair of CH-47 Chinooks. This chilly ride was a new experience for some, but spirits were high. The Soldiers bunked down that night after

Land of Abraham cont. on p. 11

Above Left: SFC Daniel Ewer, TF 34 Public Affairs Chief, stands on the reconstructed walls of Abraham’s house in UR, Iraq.

Above Right: SFC David Sepeda, A Co. 834th ASB Operations NCO, stands in one of the oldest archways in the world.

Left: TF 34 Soldiers ascend the main staircase of the Ziggurat of UR.



Land of Abraham cont. from p. 11

some quick chow.

A drizzly rain the next day did not dampen the Soldiers spirits as they jammed on the bus with their gear. The Ziggurat came into view before they even left the post. Arriving at the archeological site the Task Force 34 Soldiers took the obligatory group photo and began their tour guided by Dhaif, the grandson of one of the site's excavators.

The highlights of the tour included climbing the ziggurat, stepping through ancient temple archways, entering royal tombs, and walking through Abraham's reconstructed home.

"In Abraham's home, walking where him and Sarah walked, experiencing that time" reflected CW3 Pamela Howell, Task Force 34 Headquarters, "and hearing LTC Waage talk about, and then seeing, the shells and knowing the ocean

was up that far. Just amazing!"

"I can't believe I've walked in one of the oldest cities in the history of the world ... the father of Christianity, Islam, and Judiam, I sat in his house today ... its kinda too much for words" marveled SGT Joshua Hale, B Co., 834 ASB, a resident of Bloomington, Minn.

For another Soldier the two day trip had quite an impact.

"It seems Ur could be the setting for a personal spiritual revival" he said. "Abraham left behind his old life and set out to answer his calling. I drew a parallel to my own spiritual commitment. It's time to leave a few things in the desert of Iraq and make a change."

By SFC Daniel Ewer, TF 34 Public Affairs Chief



For more Task Force 34 UR tour photos, video and audio, visit: www.TaskForce34.org



Top Left: SPC Clifford Veit, B Co. 834th ASB, sitting at the top of the Ziggurat stairs overlooking the ruins of Ur.

Bottom Left: MAJ John Berry, 2-149th GSAB Chaplain (left), Dhaif, grandson of one of the site's original excavators, CPT Ken Harris, 834th ASB Chaplain (middle right), and SSG Jeffrey Dexter, TF 34 Chaplain Assistant (right), with the UR tour guide





Minnesota Guardsmen historical hockey happenings

You can take the Guardsman out of the State of Hockey, but you can't take the hockey out the Guardsman. That claim would be put to the ultimate test when hundreds of Minnesota National Guardsmen deployed to the deserts of Iraq to support Operation Iraqi Freedom in early 2009.

Unwilling to forget their state's pastime sport, the men and women of the Minnesota Army and Air National Guard came up with a plan, to join the 'State of Hockey' in the official 'Minnesota Hockey Day' on Jan 17.

Along with the Minnesota Wild and Fox Sports Net, dozens of Minnesota Airmen and Soldiers worked tirelessly to create a unique environment for the players and fans. Innovation and motivation were set in motion to create a hometown hockey rink.

"It was nice to see both components come together for Hockey Day in Minnesota, we work for separate branches of the service but we all are from Minnesota, and hockey brings people together, especially Minnesotans," said CW5 Jeffery Pratt, Standardization

Officer, Task Force 34 Headquarters.

Early morning Jan. 17 as the desert sun rose above the horizon, the scene was set. A make-shift rink, side boards painted and mounted on each end of a concrete aircraft parking pad. Center 'ice' had its own custom made Minnesota Hockey Day – Iraq logo and the goalie nets were in place.

Finally, the commanding officer of Task Force 34, COL Clay Brock, drops the puck to signal the official start of the game between the Minnesota Army National Guard's 834th Aviation Support Battalion "Skaters" and the Minnesota Air National Guard's 148th Fighter Wing "Bulldogs."

"I could not have dreamed up such a great day!" said Senior MSG Steve Samuelson, Quality Assurance Inspector, 148th Fighter Wing. "The weather was perfect, with a chill in the air, the competition was great and the sportsmanship was outstanding."

Nine hours before Minnesota would start broadcasting their hockey games, the Soldiers and Airmen of the state's

National Guard would start their game in the Iraqi desert.

"It was a wonderful opportunity to be part of something historic," said CPT Bruce Kelii, Medical Operations, 834th Aviation Support Battalion. "It will be a moment in time that will not be forgotten for any participant or spectator. Both squads played fabulous and the crowd turn-out was awesome."

In an ironic twist the flight line hockey rink attracted spectators from the air. The usual subject of everyone's attention, Black Hawk and Chinook helicopters, paused in their usual routes to check out the game. Hockey fans and air crews waved too each other between pictures.

The Zone

"I thought about home a lot during the game. Goalies find a place called 'the zone', it is a tunnel vision/hearing thing. We don't hear anything other than the ball/puck being struck and whizzing through the air," said CPT Kelli, a native of Bloomington,

Hockey Happenings cont. on p. 13

Hockey Happenings cont. from p. 12

Minn. "As the game began and I started to slip in and out of the zone - all I could think about was that ... It's my wife Barbara's birthday today, and I was hoping her birthday gift will arrive back home today."

The screams of the fans and the click of the sticks really set the stage for a great day for hockey.

"You could really feel how much people miss the sport of hockey by the way everyone put everything they had out on the rink," said Senior MSG Samuelson. "The fans really made the day special too, their cheers and chants made me feel that I was at an actual hockey game."

"Their sportsmanship was great," said SPC James Riely, Chinook Mechanic, 834th Aviation Support Battalion. "I think that being able to take time away from a busy day to play the great game of hockey brought lots of joy to many people. Everyone played well together."

As the scoreboard made its final read, the Minnesota Air Guard beat Minnesota Army Guard 4 to 2. Being beaten on the rink, didn't faze some Soldiers soaring spirits after playing an old school game of street hockey.

"So many people from Minnesota and Soldiers in Iraq had to coordinate so many pieces to the puzzle to make this a successful event," said CPT Kelii. "We were part of a very special day here in Iraq and our state recognized hockey day. It is the most unique hockey event I have ever been part of."

The Airmen of the 148th Fighter Wing of Duluth, Minn. are expected to be back in the state later this month. The Soldiers of the 834th Aviation Support Battalion are expected to return to Minnesota early this summer.

Written by SGT Lynette Hoke, TF 34 PAO Journalist



For more Task Force 34
Hockey photos and video visit:
www.TaskForce34.org



Super Bowl Sunday boosts morale at JBB

Task Force 34 Soldiers enjoyed a break from the action in theater and watched Super Bowl XLIII. The Pittsburgh Steelers triumphed over the Arizona Cardinals in dramatic fashion on a last minute Ben Rothlisberger touchdown pass to Santonio Holmes.

Adding to the electric atmosphere was the rare, but well deserved, chance to enjoy two beers as theater Commander Gen. Odierno relaxed General Order #1 for the event.

The Morale Welfare and Recreation Center (MWR) was rocking as the giant screen and blasting tiered sound system showed all the action. With three minutes to go, the Steelers faced a third and long on their own one yard line. The front row exploded as Rothlisberger connected with Super Bowl MVP Holmes on a 20 yard pass for an apparent first down.

The joy was short lived as the Cardinals fans in the audience cheered, a holding penalty in the end zone, not only nullifying the first down, but drawing a two point safety for the Cardinals.

"Let these boys play football!" exclaimed Air Force TSG Renee Munshower.

On the ensuing Cardinals' possession, the sudden momentum shift resulted in a rare big play for the potent Cardinals offense as Larry Fitzgerald crossed over the middle wide open for a 70-yard touchdown. A loud groan came from the front row as the mostly Steelers fans audience listened to the few Cardinals fans' shouts filled the air. "GO, GO, GO, GO!" yelled one enthusiastic fan.

The Steelers fans got the last laugh when Rothlisberger took the Steelers on an impressive 78-yard drive punctuated by his trademark throw on the run under a heavy rush. The last of these was to game MVP Holmes who caught a beautifully arced pass between two defenders in the corner of the end zone, tapping his toes just as he got leveled by a Cardinals' safety. The final roar from the pro-Steelers crowd was led by



Pittsburgh native SGT Jackson of E Co., 3-159th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, as Cardinals quarterback Kurt Warner was sacked and fumbled with five seconds left. 'YEEEEAAAAAH' he shouted as he ran up the aisle.

The festive atmosphere was definitely enhanced by the relaxation of General Order #1.

"I couldn't keep track after the first quarter," said MSG King of E Co., 1-244th Attack Helicopter Battalion replied when asked how many beers they had given out. "I didn't even get a chance to look up and watch the game."

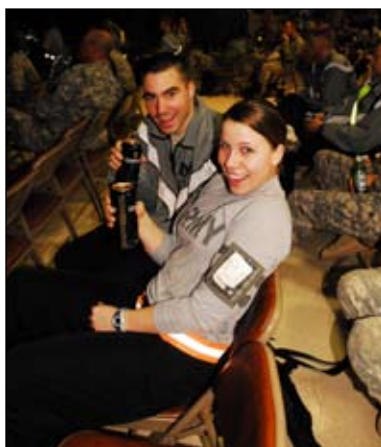
A well deserved break for Soldiers to enjoy themselves, as no serious incidents were reported.

Was the MWR production a success? Two Red Bull Soldiers said it best.

"I used this opportunity to take my whole section over to the MWR and enjoy each other's company in a non-work setting with a couple of beers," said MAJ Weaver, TF 34 Human Resources Officer.

"It was nice to forget about work for a while and just have fun," said PFC Audrey Devries, TF 34 Human Resources Specialist. "It was like you could forget for a while that you were in Iraq!"

Written by SGT Timothy Stocking, TF 34 Retention NCO



For more Task Force 34
Super Bowl photos and video
visit: www.TaskForce34.org



40 Years in Aviation

Soldiers of the United States Army come from all walks of life, cultural backgrounds, races, genders and ages.

The Soldiers in 2nd Battalion, 641st (2-641) Aviation Regiment are no exception. The Soldiers of the unit vary in race, culture, and upbringing. The most interesting factor is the span in ages of these Soldiers.

The oldest Soldier is Chief Warrant Office 5 Fredrick Bailey, Tactical Operations Officer, who is almost 60 years old and will be required by the US Army to retire after returning from deployment. The youngest Soldier is nearly 40 years his junior. Private 1st Class Eric McAllister, Flight Operations, just recently turned 18 and just a few months ago would have been too young to deploy with his unit.

"Back in 1969, when I joined the military, the draft was in effect," said CW5 Bailey. "I went to a recruiter



and asked what my options were ... I wanted to go Special Forces, but they said you have to go infantry and then apply ... Then I said 'aviation,' I tested and got in."

"I never really gave any thought to any other service when I was looking to join," remarked PFC McAllister. "My grandfather, father and brother

all served in the Oregon National Guard ... most of all the person that inspired to join is my brother."

When a person decides to join the United States military, it is usually because of a variety of reasons or desires. Forty years ago, the typical service member didn't have a choice if they want to serve in the United States military.

"The most significant change is the all volunteer force now," said CW5 Bailey. "When I first came in, people who joined were serving four years whether you liked it or not."

"Back then you had

people who would get in trouble with the civilian authorities and the judge would give them the choice, jail or military," said the native of Fayetteville, Ark. "Today's Army is different; everyone is here because they wanted to be here, whatever the reason."

Always an Aviator

To be a part of the small demographic of Army Aviators usually only attracts the hardworking and strong willed. This is prominent in the two Soldiers, despite the age range.

"Flying is something that I always wanted to do," said PFC McAllister, a native of Portland, Oregon. "If I could I would build myself a set of wings and be off the ground all of the time."

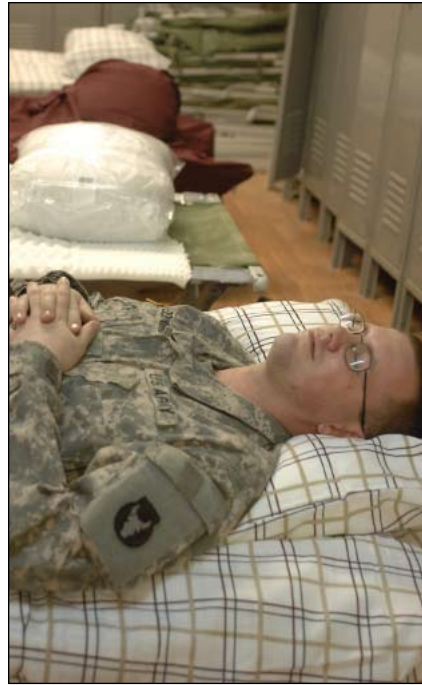
"I chose the Army, over the other services, primarily because I could fly," said CW5 Bailey, the combat veteran who has seen eight commander-in-chief changes during his military career. "I wanted to fly helicopters and the Army would let me fly them right out of flight school."

*Written by SGT Lynette Hoke,
TF 34 Public Affairs Journalist*



For more 40 Years photos
visit: www.TaskForce34.org





Sleep for Soldiers brings sweet dreams to TF 34 Soldiers

"Meredith Read sent her husband a bed set after he came back from patrols to find other Soldiers sleeping in his bed. So she decided to set up other Soldiers with the same comfort," said SGT Timothy Stocking, Task Force 34 Retention Noncommissioned Officer.

Sleep for Soldiers is a non-profit company based in North Carolina, started by a North Carolina National Guardsman's wife while deployed to Afghanistan.

When other units showed interest in her special care packages she decided to start a

charity and took donations.

"I read a human interest story about it and sent her an e-mail," SGT Stocking said. "The next thing I knew I had 10 boxes waiting for me."

SGT Stocking put the word out about the packages containing sheet sets, mattress pads and pillows, and Task Force 34 Soldiers were happy to receive the contents.

"It is a lot more comfortable then when I was here in 2003 sleeping in a truck," said SPC Damon Downing, A Co., 834th Aviation Support Battalion (ASB) Transportation Specialist. "We get a lot more sleep and wake up in a better mood."

The Task Force 34 Force Protection received several boxes for their sleeping area where Soldiers sleep when on call. Prior to receiving the packages they had cots and whatever else they could scrounge up to sleep on.

"It makes us more comfortable and is a little closer to a real mattress," said SPC Israel Aguero, A Co., 834th ASB. Overall the Soldiers of Task Force 34 were very grateful for the donation.

SPC Blia Lor, A Co., 834th ASB, said, "it raises morale knowing that people back home are thinking about us over here."

Written by SGT Richard Brown, A Co., 834th ASB Unit Public Affairs Representative



For more Sleep for Soldiers photos visit: www.TaskForce34.org and sleepforsoldiers.com



Family Matters: Spouses, Sweethearts, Soldiers



Richard and Jennifer Deering

For Soldiers, one of the most difficult aspects of being so far away from home is missing loved ones. For a handful of Task Force 34 Soldiers, a precious piece of home has tagged along. Here is a look at two couples experiencing marital bliss at Joint Base Balad, Iraq.

The Deerings

With no prior relationship, the couple became acquainted due to their same last name. When 834th Aviation Support Battalion (ASB) was put on warning orders, Richard reenlisted to join the battalion to deploy with Jennifer.

"The best part of being here together is just being able to be around each other," said SGT Richard Deering, A Co. 834th ASB Unit Supply Specialist. "We get to come home from work and talk about our day, just like at home. When we go to our room, that's our space and our time."

The couple realizes keeping their military bearing is essential to the mission.

"We don't get to hold hands in public or anything like that but that's not a big deal," said SGT Jennifer Deering, A Co. 834th ASB Distribution Sergeant. "We know when our 'us' time is. We don't have to separate it at all, we are Soldiers and we are married. It is just a matter of being a professional."

Outside of the mission, this deployment has been beneficial to their relationship as well.

"We've been through a lot together as a couple and this deployment has brought us even closer in our relationship. This has also helped us to respect each other more because of the level of care that we show each other," Jennifer said. "Being in Iraq and living happily in an 11x11 foot room for nine months has made us realize that there isn't anything we can't accomplish together."

The Brewers

When Carrie's name came up for the deployment, James volunteered to come. The couple was married in Mexico



James and Carrie Brewer

about a month before mobilizing to Fort Sill, Okla. in June.

"Even though my wife is a trained American Soldier, she does have the tendency (by tendency I really mean life-consuming urge) to worry," said CPL James Brewer, TF 34 Commander Driver. "And it would have eaten me alive to be at home and not able to help her."

For St. Paul, MN natives James and Carrie Brewer, this deployment has brought them closer together. This is not only due to the small living quarters.

"This has forced us into learning how to deal with each other when we are crabby or stressed or whatever else," said PFC Carrie Brewer, Headquarters Support Company 834th Aviation Support Battalion TFAV CPN Operator. "At home, you can always get away when you need to. Here we share the same room and about a one-mile stretch of desert. You just learn to get along, even if you don't always feel like it."

Unlike couples living in different time zones, the Brewers are able to share in day-to-day life.

"The best part of having my wife in country is that we are sharing this experience. When I get home I am able to share frustrations, boredom, and emotions that commonly accompany deployments," James said. "I am grateful that all the little experiences that are unique to Iraq and deployment are discussed and laughed about, or appreciated and not lost through thousands of miles of separation."

"I try to remind her that it's normal for newlyweds to struggle, and this is our struggle. Later when we have children we will have the 'Remember when' stories," James said. "Like, '[Kids], we had to ride a camel nine miles to work every day uphill in a dust storm with mortars and rockets going off.'"

*Written by SPC Jodi Krause, HSC 834th ASB
Unit Public Affairs Representative*



For more Family Matters
photos visit:
www.TaskForce34.org



Send Valentine wishes home this 14th

Have you asked yourself “What can I do for my loved ones back home over Valentine’s Day?” We’re too far away to really do anything for them. That’s not exactly true. Here is a list of things you can do for your loved ones even though you can’t be with them this Valentine’s Day.

1. Just tell them you love them. Everyone needs to hear that they are loved and knowing that you are thinking about them will help them feel closer to you.

2. Send a card. Who doesn’t love to get mail? We are always receiving packages. Now it’s time to return the favor and send your loved one a note or card that shows them how you feel. Just remember to mail your cards early.

3. Send them flowers, balloons, or edible arrangement (fruit or cookies, candy bars etc). It’s easy to send these things. Just go online and have them delivered to your favorite sweetheart in time for Valentine’s Day.

4. Send them something personal and thoughtful (something that is individual to your loved one). Send something from the heart. If they like jewelry, send a little something from here that shows you’re thinking about them.

5. Send a love coupon book that is redeemable upon your return (i.e. back rub, foot massage).

6. Send a scrap book of pictures of you here to make them feel closer to you. Pictures are always a hit. Just remember OPSEC and don’t send anything that would violate OPSEC here.

7. Plan a memorable event upon your return. Make reservations for a romantic getaway. Just make sure that you give yourself plenty of flexibility because we all know our Demob dates have a tendency to change frequently.



8. Read your child or loved one a book at the weekly USO United Through Reading program. The program allows you to video tape yourself reading the book and gives you the book to send home.

Showing someone you love them, even if you aren’t with them can be challenging. It takes a little bit of thought and ingenuity, but it can be done. Show your loved ones you care and do something special for them this Valentine’s Day.

*Written by SFC Nancy Pine, 2-641st AVN RGT
Unit Public Affairs Representative*



For more stories and photos of
Task Force 34 Soldiers visit:
www.TaskForce34.org

“We spend time together, but don’t get each other gifts. Valentine’s Day to us is more than just gifts, it’s about us understanding the love that we share. We try to make every day Valentine’s Day!”

-SGT Jennifer Deering, 834th ASB Distribution Sergeant



“I did what any self respecting guy should do, I polled about 100 women and took their advice. They informed me that a reflector belt and neck gator are not Valentine gift worthy. So what to do? Buy her something she wants, ship them here for her to open and then ship them home to store until we are done.”

-CPL James Brewer, TF 34 Commander Driver



Weather in Iraq

Upon arrival at Joint Base Balad, Iraq, in August the weather was intense. Extreme heat swarmed Soldiers in the beginning of the deployment. Day temperatures reaching 140 degrees Fahrenheit were not uncommon. The ground temperatures blazed, converting the normally cool breezes they are used to from the states and changing them into the sensation of a gigantic blow dryer fanning across the face. High temperature is the obvious culprit of weather in Iraq, but contraire to popular belief, Soldiers experienced a plethora of forecasts by Halloween.

Sand storms hackled Soldiers more than once, leaving nothing uncovered in dust. The dust settled similar to snow and came in like a blizzard. Dust masks and goggles were a must to continue daily operations. The storms were sporadic and would sometimes hang around for several days. One storm even turned the skies orange, creating the look of a sunset that filled the heavens.

By the end of September, the intense heat passed and weather was similar to that of fall in the Midwestern United States. The night temperatures dramatically drop down to the low 50's and overcast

days were not uncommon. The rainy season welcomed the Soldiers abruptly with intense flash flooding. The rain immediately turned the never-ending amounts of sand into mud. Housing areas flooded and massive water puddles scarred the base. Wearing rain gear, over-boots and Gore-Tex coverings had helped combat the drizzles and mud.

The Iraqi weather is frequently changing and challenging Soldiers to tough it out. Some days feel like home, while some Soldiers can't wait for more familiar environmental conditions. Whether it is the unbearable heat, thunderstorms, sandstorms, or cold, Soldiers learn to gear appropriately to handle day-to-day operations. With the proper Personal Protective Equipment and acclimation, Soldiers are able to work in virtually any type of weather. It is crucial to their mission to be able to evolve with the ever-changing forecasts of Iraq, and continue to be ready to operate anywhere in the world.

*Written by SPC Nolan Kohlrusch, B Co. 834th ASB
Unit Public Affairs Representative*



For more weather photos, visit:
www.TaskForce34.org

