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INDEPENDENCE *Gazette*



Pounding ground

Constant patrols and searches are making the battlespace safer



INDEPENDENCE
Gazette

Commander

Col. Marc Ferraro

Command Sgt. Major

Command Sgt. Maj. John Jones

56th SBCT PAO

Capt. Cory Angell

Public Affairs Officer

Capt. Maggie White

Public Affairs NCOIC

Master Sgt. Sean Whelan

Public affairs NCO

Sgt. Doug Roles

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independencepao@yahoo.com

Why the Independence Gazette?

The name for the 56th SBCT magazine and newsletter is derived from the unit's historic ties to Benjamin Franklin and the city of Philadelphia.

The 56th Brigade is known as the Independence Brigade because the brigade is headquartered in Philadelphia, the birthplace of American independence.

The name Gazette harks back to the "Pennsylvania Gazette," a newspaper run by Benjamin Franklin. Franklin did not start the Gazette but under his ownership the paper became the most successful in the colonies.

The legacy of Benjamin Franklin lives on with the 1-111th Infantry tracing its lineage back to 1747 when Franklin organized his Associators to defend Philadelphia from the threat of French privateers.

The Independence Gazette will chronicle the activities of the 56th in Iraq as it continues to build on the proud legacy of the Pennsylvania militia: "Citizen in peace, Soldier in war."

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On The Cover.

Photo by Sgt. Doug Roles
Spc. John Hill (front) of Eighty Four, Pa. and Spc. Matthew Strittmater of Cresson, Pa., both with Co. B, 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, move along a building in Abu Ghraib during a search for vehicle-borne IED-making materials May 19. The 2-112th is attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division. (See story Page 5)



Food distribution aids Taji families

By Capt. MAGGIE WHITE
56 SBCT Public Affairs

Iraqi National Police, working with Pennsylvania National Guardsmen, distributed over five truckloads worth of food and household supplies to needy women in the Taji area, north of Baghdad, May 16.

Women lined up with their children to receive food donated by the United Nations. The food was made available to them at the Taji Council building. Many of the women said they had lost husbands in the war and have been struggling to provide for their young children.

Soldiers of the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team discovered the food in a warehouse on Camp Taji when the unit took over operations last February. Civil affairs Soldiers and members of embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team— 5, based out of Camp Taji, worked with the National Police to make the food available to distribute to needy women and children.

“This is UN relief food to give to the needy, such as the handicapped, widowed, orphaned,” said Maj. James Fluck, civil affairs officer for the 56th SBCT.

Iraqi women patiently lined up for several hours in order to receive their share of food and goods, which included rice, lentils, diapers, canned goods, and household cleaning supplies. Forty-five families received food, with enough left over for another 50.

Sosun al-Ergaz, president of Services for Women and Children of the Taji area, inspected all of the food before distributing it to ensure that everything was in good condition.

She gently called the women forward and took down their names as they piled everything into large sacks to carry home.

“I feel good about this, to help a lady whose husband has died get food for her family,” al-Ergaz said. “Islam teaches us to help others, and it was the way I was brought up.”

Iraqi National Police worked with Taji officials to help coordinate the distribution at the city center. Capt. Maria Claus, a 56th SBCT Soldier who works with the Iraq Security Forces, said this operation set a good precedent for the people of Taji.

“The NP did a great job of working with the local nationals to get



Photo by Capt. Maggie White
A Soldier from the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 28th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad stands guard as Iraqi women wait to receive food aid from the Iraqi National Police. 56th SBCT civil affairs Soldiers coordinated with the NP to release to Iraqi widows 12 pallets of United Nations relief food discovered in a warehouse.

this food to the people who need it.” Claus said, “The people here see that they are working hard to take care of the Qada (area) and the people of Iraq”.

Fluck hopes that this project will be the first of many to help the citizens of Taji.

He stressed that the role of the civil affairs Soldiers and ePRT member is to help mentor the Iraqi officials to operate independently of coalition forces.

“We want to help the National Police with civil affairs and humanitarian aid training; it’s a good partnership between us and them” Fluck said.

Sa’ab al Bour to enjoy a wet future

By Capt. CORY ANGELL
56 SBCT PAO

The Directorate General of Water Resources for Baghdad, Thair Dahri, visited Pump Station One in Saab al-Bour, May 16, to encourage students learning new skills and see firsthand the recent increase in irrigation.

“This increase means [more than 6,000 acres] of land will be irrigated,” said Thair. “We are committed to increasing the ability to maintain this pump station as well.”

Thair talked with 18 students training as operators at the station and said the ministry is working on getting them employed.

“We have helped increase the output of Pump Station One from two cubic meters per second to four cubic meters per second,” said Capt. Philip Benner, assistant engineer, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, MND-B. “This has doubled the capacity of the station providing irrigation water to Sa’ab al Bour and Abu Ghuraib.”

Benner said that they are also looking to provide excavating equipment so the Iraqi’s can better maintain the canal system. This additional equipment along with 18 new operators, who will graduate the training course July 10, will increase their ability to sustain the progress.

“This project also helped fill the Ghrai Bawi canal with irrigation water,” said Benner. “This is the first time in years that that canal has had significant water.”



Photo by Lt. Duncan MacQueen
Engineer Hameed Ibrahim (left), and Directorate General Thair Dahri, both of the Baghdad Water Resources Directorate, stand in front of the irrigation outlet for Pump Station One in Saab Al Bour, Iraq, during a May 16 visit to the pump station.



Above: Journalists with Iraqi news outlets were updated May 12 on the work of the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team during a press conference held at the Freedom Rest center in Baghdad's International Zone. Below: Col. Marc Ferraro (center), 56th SBCT commander; Linda Specht (right) leader of embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team-5 and Capt. Cory Angell (left), 56th SBCT public affairs officer, listen to a question from an Iraqi journalist

Commander formally meets Iraqi media

**Sgt. DOUG ROLES
56 SBCT PAO NCO**

Col. Marc Ferraro, commander of the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, told Iraqi journalists Tuesday that his Pennsylvania Army National Guard Soldiers, working alongside Iraqi Security Forces, have improved security in the Taji and Tarmiyah regions, north of Baghdad. Ferraro and an embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team leader also discussed ongoing efforts to improve local infrastructure during a press conference and luncheon held at the Freedom Rest center in the International Zone, Baghdad, May 12.

Over 30 Iraqi journalists, from media outlets based in Baghdad, attended the event. After making their opening statements, Ferraro and Linda Specht, the PRT leader, answered questions on topics ranging from security to freedom of the press to irrigation.

"Security does remain our number one priority within the qadas [regions]," Ferraro said. "We continue to conduct combined patrols with the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police throughout the qadas. We feel we have disrupted the enemy's ability to conduct operations."

Ferraro said the implementation of the new Status of Forces Agreement will have little impact on the work of the 56th SBCT because it operates in a mostly rural area of Iraq. Ferraro said implementation of the SOFA, which directs Coalition Forces to withdraw from cities by June 30, will not cause the brigade to reposition its forces.

Ferraro and Specht reported that the brigade, working with local Iraqi leaders, has 39 ongoing civil affairs projects. Another 50 projects

have been proposed, they reported.

Specht, a career State Department employee and foreign service officer, explained the role of the local ePRT.

"We work on helping the Iraqi government and the Iraqi people to help themselves improve the standard of living within the Tarmiyah and Taji qadas," she said. "We're an extension, down to the grassroots level, of the U.S. Embassy in Iraq."

One journalist asked about what he said is "desertification" of one area along the Tigris River near Taji. Ferraro and Specht said increasing irrigation is a goal of civil affairs teams.

The May opening of a refurbished pumping station at Sa'ab al Bour will provide 20 percent more water to residents there, Ferraro and Specht reported.

One journalist asked Ferraro if Iraqi Soldiers and police officers are ready to take over when Coalition Forces pull out. Ferraro said much progress has been made and reminded reporters that "Four years ago there wasn't an Iraqi Army."

He said the Iraqi Army Soldiers his Soldiers work with are proficient down to the platoon level and are able to conduct patrols on their own. However, he said Iraqi Security Forces in the 56th's area still have need of reconnaissance and intelligence gathering assets. Ferraro pointed out that the 56th SBCT operates a combined information center to better enable brigade Soldiers to conduct missions

jointly with the ISF.

Capt. Cory Angell, public affairs officer for the 56th SBCT, said meeting the media was an important mission for the brigade as well as an opportunity for journalists.

"It's important for us to interact with the Iraqi media, to tell them about the work we've been doing with the ISF," Angell said. "An event like this helps develop their information gathering agencies, so they can develop as the nation does."

Ferraro concluded the press conference by telling the journalists there's "one mission" for Coalition Forces, Iraqi Security Forces and the people of Iraq – to better the quality of life for all Iraqis.

Ferraro extended an invitation for journalists to embed with units of his brigade so they can witness firsthand the day-to-day work of his Soldiers and the Iraqi Security Forces.

"Anyone of you is welcome," he said. "Come on up and see what we're doing."



Micro grants fund brighter future



Photo by Staff Sgt. Mark Burrell
First Lt. Reed Preece, a native of Gettysburg, Pa. and a platoon leader assigned to C Troop, 2nd Squadron, 104th Cavalry Regiment, 56th "Independence" Stryker Brigade Combat Team, talks with Mohad Faisal in Falahat May 9. "With the money the Americans have given us, we've bought new freezers," said Mohad. "I feel very good because I get to help out the local people with my shop."

**By Staff Sgt. MARK BURRELL
MND-B PAO**

A few months ago there were desks caked with dust piled in a corner, no fans or air conditioning, no books—filthy conditions and broken windows in a dilapidated building that was supposed to be al-Irshad primary school in Bata.

But according to Pfc. Nickolas Klingel, a cavalry scout from Kresgville, Pa., assigned to 2nd Squadron, 104th Cavalry Regiment, 56th "Independence" Stryker Brigade Combat Team, during their 90-day micro grant assessment May 9, this school has transformed into a safe-haven for Iraqi children to come and learn.

Because of the micro-grant program, this school, along with local businesses, now has proper facilities to help improve security and resurrect the Iraqi economy.

At the al-Irshad primary school, the children's future is brighter and the parents notice.

"It's a big improvement when you talk to the adults that have aspirations for their children to become better and bring home more money with their education," said Klingel. "I see the kids getting smarter and learning because the parents know it's a safe place to send their kids."

Independence troops conduct frequent patrols through Falahat to

continually assess the progress of businesses that received the \$2,000 grants to see if they are using the money properly. From the 30-day assessment to the 90-day assessment, Staff Sgt. Brian O'Donnell, a senior cavalry scout from Fannettsburg, Pa. said that about 60 percent of the 20 businesses that were given micro grants in their area have been using them successfully.

"I think they want to show improvement and they don't want to let us down," added 1st Lt. Reed Preece, a troop platoon leader. "For those who took the project seriously and spent the money for their businesses, it was successful."

Preece added that the locals appreciate the Soldiers and are happy with the support the Coalition forces provide by giving them an opportunity they might not otherwise have "All my products are very good," said micro grant recipient and store owner Arkam Hatim. "I try to help out the community because a lot of guys who didn't have a job, now have a job. There's also less al-Qaeda because of the many businesses."

By employing more and more Iraqis through the micro grant program and constantly patrolling the area where the businesses are located, neighborhoods are secure, added Preece.

"I think it does improve security," said O'Donnell. "They look at Americans as friends instead of just people that invaded their country. You can definitely tell it's helping the community."



Photos by photo by Staff Sgt. Mark Burrell
Above: Preece (right) talks with a local business owner May 9. At right: Sgt. Eric Varner, a cavalry scout team leader from Chambersburg, Pa., assigned to C Troop, 2nd Squadron, 104th Cavalry Regiment, 56th "Independence" Stryker Brigade Combat Team, pulls security as an Iraqi child looks on during a micro grant assessment patrol in Falahat May 9.



Nightshift Cavalry

The shadow shows Spc. Frank Killeen's ready posture. Killeen, a Trooper from B Troop 2/104th CAV (RSTA), is pulling security in the town of Sa'ab Al Bour while in support of an Iraqi Army operation.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Hutson



Below, left: A 2-104th Cav. Soldier pulls security in a palm grove near Sa'ab al Bour prior to a raid late on the night of April 29. At left: A 2-104th Soldier prepares for the raid at the rear of a Stryker vehicle. Photos by Sgt. Doug Roles

Below: Pfc. Kerry McCarty, of McConellsburg, Pa., with C Troop, 2-104th Cavalry Regiment, pulls security during a micro grant assessment patrol (see related story Page 3) as the sun sets in Falahat the evening of May 9. Photo by Staff Sgt. Mark Burrell





Photos by Sgt. Doug Roles
1st Sgt. Harry Buchanan (left) of Altoona, first sergeant of Co. B, 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, looks over a courtyard in Abu Ghraib May 19 as Iraqi Army Soldiers prepare to use a metal detector. The Soldiers were hunting for vehicle-borne IED-making materials in an area where VBIEDs have posed a threat to Soldiers and civilians alike in the past. The 2-112th is attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division. Below: 1st Lt. Michael Keckler of Bel Air, Md., a platoon leader with Co. B, 2-112, photographs a room of a building formerly used as a school during the search. Below left: Supported by two buddies, Keckler peeks into an air vent.

'Paxton' Soldiers join IA in hunt for car bomb-making materials

**By Sgt. DOUG ROLES
 56th SBCT PAO NCO**

Pennsylvania Army National Guard Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry "Paxton" partnered with Iraqi Army Soldiers May 19 to search several locations in Abu Ghraib for explosives. The joint patrol was part of an ongoing effort to lessen the threat of vehicle borne IED's in Abu Ghraib by searching for

components used in making car bombs.

No explosives were found. Soldiers from Co. B, 2-112th, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, said the continued patrols with Soldiers from 2nd Battalion and 3rd Battalion, 46th Iraqi Army Brigade are a deterrent to would-be insurgents.

"We do joint patrols. Today was a counter-VBIED [vehicle borne IED] search and attack," Capt. Jason Hoffman, commander of Co. B, 2-112th, said.

"The VBIED is one of the greatest threats. We were actively patrolling to mitigate that threat," Hoffman said. "We maintain a near constant presence."

Hoffman said Soldiers of the 2-112th faced "a big challenge" in Abu Ghraib, at one time one of the more volatile areas of Iraq, but said he is proud of the way his Soldiers have met that challenge and have represented both the Pennsylvania Army National Guard and the U.S. Army. Hoffman said the civilian experience teachers, corrections officers and emergency medical technicians bring to theatre as Soldiers is invaluable. He said his Soldiers are involved in "full spectrum operations" that range from combat patrols to assisting with civil affairs missions.

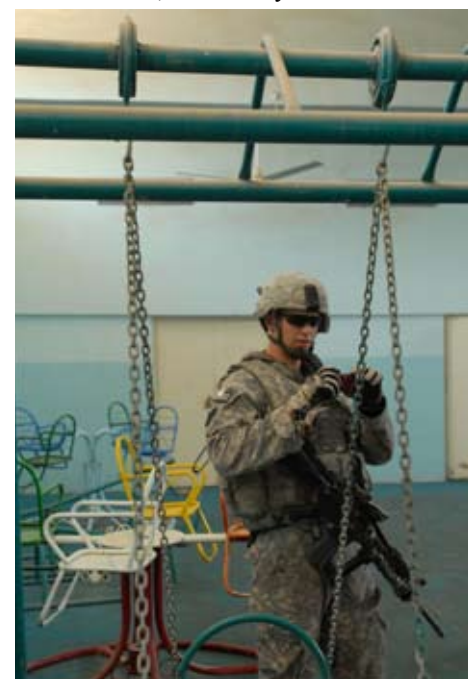
"We've done a lot of great things here," 1st Lt. Michael Keckler of Bel Air, Md., Co. B's headquarters platoon leader, agreed.

Keckler's platoon was in charge of securing a landing zone during the May 19 operation, in the event that medical evacuation by air was needed. He echoed Hoffman, saying, his platoon maintains a near constant presence in sector. He said that level of activity pays off with locals providing more tips on insurgent activity.

"The civilians are stepping up. They're a little less scared, because we're out there all the

time," he said. "They're less scared to come and talk to us."

The 2-112th is attached to 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division.



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Keystone Soldiers, Iraqi Police focus on Taji Market security, caches



Photo by Sgt. Doug Roles
Spc. Adam Feldon of Allentown, Pa. (center) talks with an Iraqi boy May 4 as a patrol of Pennsylvania Army National Guard Soldiers and Iraqi Police officers moves through Taji Market. The "Keystone" Guardsmen are from Company C., 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team.

Sgt. DOUG ROLES
56th SBCT PAO NCO

Pennsylvania Army National Guard Soldiers and their Iraqi counterparts have been hitting the streets to maintain security in Taji Market, one of the busiest sectors of the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team's area of operations, north of Baghdad. The market is a lynchpin in the security effort there because it's where the lives of locals intertwine.

"Being the main market area, that's the economy," 1st Lt. Joshua Fox of Harrisburg, Pa. said following a May 4 patrol through the market.

"Everybody in the area is linked to the market," Fox, a platoon leader with Company C., 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry 56th SBCT, said. "They work there or they buy there."

The market is in the area of operations of Guard Soldiers stationed at Joint Security Station Hor Al Bosh. Patrolling Soldiers regularly talk to shopkeepers and with Iraqi Security Forces manning checkpoints. Fox said his Soldiers incorporate into their patrols as many Iraqi Police as are available on a given day. The IP also discuss with Coalition Soldiers heading out on patrol any outstanding arrest warrants for individuals who may be in the market area.

Staff Sergeant Corey Bukousky of Harrisburg, Pa. said his Soldiers have gotten to know the market "like the back of their hand." He and Fox said Soldiers on patrol are always on the lookout for signs of

security threats.

"It's one of those places that could turn into a bad place," Bukousky said. "That is one particular place where something could happen very easily."

Bukousky said the company conducts an "above average" amount of missions but said leaders also consider wear and tear on Soldiers in their planning.

"I'd say we average 14 hours a day in sector," Fox said. "We do a lot of localized patrols. We're still infantry; that's how we operate. To defeat the enemy you have to beat the streets."

The infantry Soldiers use their Stryker vehicles for overwatch and screening of dismounted patrols as well as for resupply and casualty evacuation.



"Strykers are an extremely useful platform," Fox said. "It's definitely a great asset."

Prior to the move-

Photo by Sgt. Doug Roles

Staff Sgt. Corey Bukousky of Harrisburg, Pa., with Company C., 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team pulls security in front of an Iraqi storefront May 4 during a patrol through Taji

ment through the market May 4, Soldiers participating in

the patrol pulled security at the Iraqi Police station in Taji as company leaders met briefly with a local leader.

Bukousky said his Soldiers see that assignment as a necessary albeit sometimes boring task.

"We know and everybody knows the meetings [with local leaders] are a good thing," Bukousky said. "We're there for security. That mission's not a big favorite but we understand its importance."



Photos by Sgt. Doug Roles
At left: Spc. John Schloder of Ridgeway, Pa., from Company C, 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, runs a metal detector over a pile of straw May 4 at a farm near Taji. Soldiers of the 1-112th searched the farm and the berm of a canal, located at the far end of the fields in the background. The Soldiers were searching for weapons caches in an area where a large cache was found the week before. At right: Sgt. Daniel Kysela of Pittsburgh searches a portion of the canal embankment.



Talk of the town



Photo by Sgt. Doug Roles
Spc. Keith Mason of Philadelphia, a Soldier with Co. A, 1st Battalion, 111th Infantry, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, watches a street in Nadeem, west of Camp Taji, as an Iraqi Army Soldier and other Co. A Soldiers pause their patrol to talk to locals. Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition Soldiers often discuss security concerns and other issues with locals during patrols. An Iraqi boy, in the background, has joined the grown up conversation.



Photo by Sgt. Doug Roles
1st Lt. Patrick Smith (center, above), a Reading, Pa. resident and commander of Co. A, 1st Battalion, 111th Infantry, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, and an Iraqi Army major (right) talk with residents of Nadeem May 14. Iraqi Army Soldiers and Soldiers from the "Associators" battalion routinely patrol the area, west of Taji.

BSB honors reenlisting Soldiers, new sergeants

**Sgt. DOUG ROLES
 56th SBCT PAO NCO**

Soldiers from a 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team unit took time May 24 to recognize peers who have reenlisted while mobilized. The unit also welcomed newly-promoted sergeants into the noncommissioned officer ranks.

Dual morning ceremonies honored outstanding service before the Soldiers of the Lancaster, Pa.-based 328th Brigade Support Battalion launched into an afternoon of Memorial Day weekend fun that included a cookout and softball and basketball games.

Twenty-three recently-promoted sergeants signed the NCO charge and read the Creed of the NCO in front of a battalion formation. Sixty-two reenlisted Soldiers then walked the stage at the front of the pavilion to receive a U.S. flag and a certificate verifying the flag was flown in theatre.

"For everyone who reenlisted since the mobilization, we flew a flag for that Soldier, over the battalion TOC [tactical operations center] and presented it to them," BSB Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Buck of Myerstown, Pa. said.

Before the recognition of individual Soldiers, Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Michael Curran of Pine Grove, Pa., praised the Soldiers for their work in Iraq.

"'Outstanding'. 'Superb'. 'Magnificent.' These are some of the things others are saying about you," Curran said. "I couldn't be happier. I couldn't be more proud."



Photo by Sgt. Doug Roles
Flanked by their battalion colors and Command Sergeant Maj. Thomas Buck (at left), 23 Soldiers of the 328th Brigade Support Battalion who were recently promoted to sergeant – including Sgt. Angela Horst of Silver Spring, Md. (second from right) and Sgt. George Henschel of Fayetteville, Pa. (third from right) – read the Creed of the NCO during a ceremony May 24. Soldiers of the BSB, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, also recognized 62 Soldiers for reenlisting during their mobilization.

Sergeant major receives memories to last a lifetime

By Capt. ED SHANK
1-108 FA PAO, 56 SBCT

Command Sgt. Maj. Stephen Klunk keeps a box in his home in Hanover, Pa. In it are keepsakes that remind him of significant events that have shaped his career as a Soldier over the past 38 years in the military.

When he returns home in the fall, he will need a bigger box.

That's because Klunk, the senior enlisted staff member of Task Force Joshua, 108th Field Artillery, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, has new memories – memories of the time he spent helping to prepare his unit for deployment to Iraq; memories of time spent in Mississippi and Louisiana training for an ever-changing war in the Middle East; and memories of time spent at Camp Taji, Iraq where his unit is responsible for both traditional missions as well as a slew of non-traditional field artillery missions.

One of the things that his box of memories is sure to include is a stack of letters from the Spring-Ford Middle School Seventh Grade Center in Royersford, Pa. where his daughter, Melinda, teaches math.

Susan Fryer, a reading teacher at Melinda's school, thought that it would be a good project for her students to write letters to Command Sgt. Maj. Klunk and his fellow Soldiers, adding, as she put it, "a ray of sunshine" to the lives of Soldiers serving in the 56th SBCT.

"First of all it means, to me, that these young students are being taught by good teachers," says Klunk. "They're trying to instill the right things and they care. [The letters] put a big smile on my face. A couple of these even brought a tear to my eye. It means a lot that this young generation is thinking about our freedom. It gives you hope."

Klunk, a full-time Army National Guard member, has spent most of his career supporting Soldiers who have deployed to places like Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. But, because of his posi-



Photo by Capt. Ed Shank

Command Sgt. Maj. Stephen Klunk reads a letter written by a student from Spring-Ford Middle School in Royersford, Pa. Klunk, a 38-year veteran of the Pa. Army National Guard, says that it is the kindness of strangers, like these children, that keeps morale high within his battalion.

tion within the 28th Infantry Division, the career Soldier was never afforded the opportunity to deploy – a fact that has weighed heavily on him for a long time. Finally, after years working at division headquarters, Klunk returned to the unit from which he came, the 1st Battalion, 108th FA, just in time to deploy.

"[Deploying to Iraq] just puts the icing on the cake," he says. "Everything I've done to this point and being in the position I'm in makes it all worthwhile."

Although he says he speaks to both his wife and daughter on a regular basis, Klunk now feels like he has dozens of children – none of which he's ever met – who share their support, dreams and aspirations with him.

"A lot of the letters I've received are personalized," he says as he reaches for one of more than 100 sheets of paper sprawled out on his desk. "This one that takes particular attention was done by a boy named Ryan. It says 'Yo! I'm just an average kid in the Seventh Grade Center. I would just like to say that it's awful brave for people, such as yourself, to join the Army. Also how much it means to everyone that you're willing to fight for our country. I'm sure that everyone in the U.S.A. appreciates you and your fellow inmates.'"

Klunk chuckles for a moment, then adds, "He's not too far off calling us 'inmates,' but at least we can get out of jail free at the end of the day."

Soldiers of the 56th SBCT have gotten thousands of boxes from individuals and organizations throughout the commonwealth. Although the contents may vary, the sentiment is the same – someone back home is thinking of them.

"For me, you can see the love and thought and care that goes into each and every box," he says. "They pack them as full as they can get them. It's like I told my wife the other day, I probably have enough shaving cream to last me for another deployment!"

To thank Mrs. Fryer and her students for their kindness, Klunk has prepared a special care package of sorts. It contains a flag that was flown over Task Force Joshua's headquarters building [the Base Defense Operations Center (BDOC)], as well as a memorial plaque, photos and a letter of his own, thanking the teacher and her students for all that they have done.

Klunk hopes that, in some small way, his efforts will be a reminder to the children of Spring-Ford Middle School that their thoughtfulness was appreciated by the members of his unit. It is his hope that, like the keepsakes he stores in a box in Hanover, the students will be able to look at the flag with fond memories of what they did to improve the morale of a Soldier thousands of miles from home.



Photo by Capt. Ed Shank

Command Sgt. Maj. Stephen Klunk (left) and members of Task Force Joshua, 108th Field Artillery, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, display an American flag that was flown over the Base Defense Operations Center at Camp Taji, Iraq. The flag will be sent to Susan Fryer's seventh grade writing class at Spring-Ford Middle School in Royersford, Pa., as a token of appreciation for letters sent by Fryer's group of students.

ARMY STRONG

Photos by Sgt. Doug Roles



Willpower meets weights at a makeshift gym on the back porch of the 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry's tactical operations center at Camp Liberty, Iraq. Despite the heat a steady stream of "Paxton" Soldiers use the facility. Clockwise from right: Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Plummer, of Quarryville, Pa., with the 112th Anti-tank Detachment, moves enough weight to make on-lookers shrug their shoulders in disbelief. Spc. Eric Bankert, of Red Lion, Pa., 2-112th Forward Area Support Co., grits out one more set of leg presses while Sgt. Michael Ortiz of State College, Pa., Co. C, 2-112th, is a blur of movement as he jumps rope. Above at left: A Soldier imagines biceps as big as mountains before beginning his workout.



Safety notes ...

'Take 5' to assess hazards

As the Brigade Safety Officer, I have access to all the accident reports Army wide, both in the U.S. and overseas. Seventy-five percent of the accidents in MND-B are what most of us would consider minor injuries and often fall under a category the Army calls "Personal Injuries." A Soldier trips over an object and sprains his ankle, or cuts his hand with a knife and needs three stitches. Back in the states this minor injury costs the unit a five-minute trip to the post medical clinic and a Soldier who may not be able to train until the injury heals. In Iraq, that same "minor injury" may require the unit to send out a combat patrol of three vehicles and 15 soldiers to transport the injured soldier to Company C, 328th BSB at the Taji Clinic for an x-ray. Until that Soldier heals there is one less person to help with the combat mission; one less set of eyes looking for the enemy; one less set of hands to help carry the load.

The Army has developed a simple program to assist Soldiers and junior leaders prevent personal injuries called "Take 5." As a Soldier, take just 5 seconds to think about what can go wrong (hazards) and what you can do to prevent Injury (controls). This is something as simple as checking the ladder before climbing into the guard tower or removing a tripping hazard from the walk way. If you find a hazard that you can't easily fix take five seconds to inform your chain of command so they can get it fixed before you or someone else gets hurt.

If you are a junior leader responsible for other Soldiers' well being, the Army wants you to take just five minutes to conduct a Hasty Risk Assessment. This is an informal process used to recognize potential hazards and

implement controls to prevent/reduce injury. When given a task, such as down loading a vehicle, take five minutes to evaluate the task, determine what is likely to get someone hurt, and get the right equipment to do the task safely. You may think that by the time you do all that you could have down loaded the vehicle and been back inside where its air conditioned. But being hasty and not taking five minutes to prepare for the task, can lead to a lot more time spent taking a Soldier to the medics, cleaning up a mess and doing paper work explaining what happened. This is minor compared to the pain and suffering of one of the Soldiers you are responsible for. Let's not forget about that. For more information about Hasty Risk Assessments talk to your unit safety officer/NCO or Read DA PAM 385-1 (Small Unit Safety Officer/NCO Guide)

Remember, your fellow Soldiers are relying on you to be mission ready. Your family wants you to come home healthy. Do some personal risk management and stay safe. Take 5!!!

By 1st Lt. Michael Green
56 SBCT Safety Officer



Soldier's wife honored for family support group efforts

PITTSBURGH - Patricia Reidenbach (above, right) of Mechanicsburg, Pa. was recently named a recipient of a Highmark Inc. Jefferson Award for Public Service. The insurance company honored 12 of its employee volunteers with the award. Reidenbach was honored in part for her service with the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team's Family Support Group. Reidenbach serves as the group's committee co-chair and communications chair for the group which provides support for families of deployed Soldiers. Reidenbach is the wife of Staff Sgt. Thomas Reidenbach, HHC, 56th SBCT.

Legally speaking ...

JAG office, battalion paralegals can help Soldiers with issues ranging from house purchases to taxes

Your brigade legal assistance team is ready, willing and able to assist with any and all legal questions or issues that arise during a deployment. Our goal is to provide timely and accurate assistance with any of your questions. We want to help you keep your mind in the game and mission focused by assisting in eliminating any legal distracters that may be going on in your life.

The services we provide include but are not limited to domestic relations law (divorce and child custody), wills and powers of attorney, name changes, tax questions, landlord-tenant issues, civil suits, Service Member Civil Relief Act, and immigration matters. If you are in doubt as to whether your issue is truly a legal issue, feel free to reach out to the paralegal assigned to your battalion and ask. They are here to assist you and can often guide you in the right direction. All are welcome to stop

by Building 542 and schedule an appointment for a Tuesday or Thursday, the brigade's legal assistance days. However, if you are out at a JSS we try to accommodate you based on your schedule.

For those of you thinking about refinancing or buying a new home either while deployed or once returning home, please stop by if you have any questions. Mortgage rates are at historic lows and refinancing may be worth it depending on your particular situation. If you have questions stop in at the legal office. In addition, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, dated Feb. 19, 2009 (the stimulus law) has some benefits in it for first time homebuyers. If you are planning on using some of that extra tax free money this year to purchase a new home, you are in luck if you are going to be a first time buyer. If you purchase and close on a home between Jan. 1

and Nov. 30, 2009, you can receive a credit for 10 percent of the home's purchase price, up to a maximum of \$8,000. This credit does not have to be repaid if you own the house for at least three years. In addition, the stimulus law provides money for wounded military members who must switch homes to assist with rehabilitation due to injuries. Military members must try to sell their homes at fair market value but if the best they can sell it for is less than what they paid for it, they may be eligible for a refund up to 95 percent of the cost they originally spent for the purchase of the property.

Come find out for yourself why we are the preferred legal shop of choice in Taji, Iraq.

By: MAJ Frank McGovern

Did you know?

The 112th Infantry fought with distinction though outnumbered during the Battle of the Bulge

By Col. ANDREW SCHAFER
56th SBCT DCO

Did you know? That in December of 1944 the 28th Infantry Division was involved in the Battle of the Bulge and that the 112th Infantry Regiment repulsed the initial attack by a Panzer Corps. On Dec. 16, 1944 the 28ID was attacked by 3 Corps with a total of 7 Divisions with attached element. The 58th Armored Corps with the 116th Panzer Division and 560th Infantry Division attacked the 112th Infantry Regiment.

The 47th Armored Corps with the 2nd Panzer Division, Panzer Lehr Division and the 26th Infantry Division attacked the 110th Infantry Regiment. The 85th Infantry Corps with the 5th Airborne Division and the 352 Infantry Division attacked the 109th Infantry Regiment. The morning of the Dec. 16 found the 1st and 3rd Battalion of the 112th Regiment defending a six mile front supported by the 229th FA BN and with the 2nd Battalion in reserve.

Their defense was set up in a heavily wooded forest with an adequate but mired road network due to recent rain. The Third Battalion was in captured west wall bunkers; while the first battalion was in foxholes east of the Our River. The 2nd Battalion as the Regimental Reserve was prepared to support by counterattack either battalion. Facing the 112th Regiment was the refitted veteran 116th Panzer Division with 43 Panther tanks, 13 PZJG IV and 26 Mark IV tanks. The 560th Infantry Division was a recently activated unit diverted from the eastern front.

In support of the German attack were 7 battalions of Corps Artillery. "When the 28th Division arrived on the VIII Corps front in mid-November its regiments were in pitiable condition. The fight in the Schmidt area had cost the 112th Infantry alone about 2,000 killed, wounded, missing, and nonbattle casualties. In a month's time the flow of replacements had brought the regiment to full strength. The regimental commander believed that morale had been restored to a high degree and that the new officers and men now were fairly well trained." The German plan was to seize by surprise 4 bridges to facilitate the movement west by the mechanized forces. General Krueger the German Corps commander had the following plan. "Krueger had based his plan of attack on the intelligence reports dealing with the Our bridges. Since the American troops east of the Our were deployed in the Lützkampen-Sevenig area, Krueger determined that his main effort should be made there. Roads and bridges, he reckoned, must be in shape to support the American troops east of the river.

These roads and bridges he intended to seize by surprise." As in all plans

the enemy gets a vote and this case the 112th with the support from the 229 FA PAARNG put up an excellent defense that the Germans could not defeat. The 3-112IN under MAJ Woodward in his foxholes and West Wall bunkers was attacked by the 1130RGT/560ID. During the initial surprise the 1130th made some progress but a counterattack by 2 companies from 2/112th (LTC MacSalka) pushed the Germans back and by night fall the 3rd battalion held it starting positions. The 1st Battalion under LTC Allen to the north was attacked that morning by the 156th Mechanized Infantry Regiment and the 60th Tank Regiment. In the early hours the Germans infiltrated Shock companies to get behind the defenders. "By 0630 the grenadiers were behind the command post of the 1st Battalion (Lt. Col. William H. Allen) in Harspelt; the first sign of their presence was a kitchen truck ambushed while journeying to the rear. The advance party of grenadiers had moved along the wooded draw between the two companies holding the 1st Battalion line."

"When day came the Americans (1-112th) caught the troops following the advance party of the assault company out in the open. Interlocking machine gun and rifle fire blocked off the German reinforcements some sixty were captured and the rest dug in where they could. Company D, in its support position on the high ground overlooking Lützkampen, meanwhile commenced mopping up the enemy who had filtered between the companies on the line. By noon Company D had so many prisoners that it "couldn't handle them all!" Nonetheless some part of the assault wave had broken through as far as the battery positions near Welchenhausen, where they were repelled by the .50-caliber quadruple mounts of the antiaircraft artillery." At the close of the first day the 112th still held their positions and seriously upset the time table of the attacking Germans Corps.

"Perhaps the Americans had some reason for elation on the night of 16 December, but all knew that harder blows would be dealt on the morrow. Wrote one in his diary: "Nobody able to sleep and no hot meals today. This place is not healthy anymore." The 112th continued to their tenacious defense on 17 December and continued to disrupt the German time table.

The Germans had to divert their 116th Panzer Division to the south across the Dasburg Bridge on the night of the 17/18 Dec; because of the defense by the 112th Infantry Regiment. The 112th eventually retreated to St. Vith where they fought with distinction at that historic battle with the US 7th Armored Division.

For more info on this battle go to: <http://www.history.army.mil/inquire.html>

Selecting a college part of the journey

If you're considering furthering your education, it is very important to consider all of your educational benefits while still serving in the military. Benefit packages vary from state to state. If you are considering attending college for the first time or resuming education following your tour in Iraq, there are several recommended steps to take.

First decide on the institution you'd like to attend. It is important to research the institution and evaluate the courses of study that are offered. Did you know that approximately 80 percent of college students change their major at least once? On average, college students change their major three times over the course of their college career. Doing the research now may reduce the chance of you changing your mind down the road. Some recommend that students enter college and declare as an undecided major and complete all general education requirements first and then finish with the core classes related to your major.

Once you decide on an institution and program of study, there are a set of recommended steps to take. It is important to make contact with your in-

stitution's Veterans Affairs certifying official. It is extremely important to confirm that your institution is approved by Veterans Affairs. The following site will give you the opportunity to search for any institution that is VA approved: <http://inquiry.vba.va.gov/weamspub/buildSearchInstitutionCriteria.do>.

The next step is to apply at the college or university of your choice. If you are limited on time, it may be beneficial to apply at more than one institution. Check with each institution that you apply to for specific requirements. Typically, you will be required to provide an official transcript from your high school. An official transcript refers to an un-opened official and original copy of your transcript. Often enough, they are free and are mailed directly from your high school to the institution of your choice.

Completing the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) is the next step. Each year there are specific deadlines, based on anticipated time of enrollment. Visit www.fafsa.ed.gov for more information. Your FAFSA application determines

your eligibility for low or no interest student loans as well as state and other federal grants. Be sure to mark "veteran" on your FAFSA. Send a copy of your DD 214 with your application.

You may find that your institution will grant college credit based on your military training or experience. It is highly recommended to compile all transcripts from previous colleges and any military training that can be evaluated for transfer credit. Pennsylvania Army National Guard Soldiers can find military transcripts at the following website: <http://aarts.army.mil>. Be sure to thoroughly review your transcript and report any discrepancies through your chain of command.

Often enough, service members may be able to place out of certain courses. Inquire about any required testing for placement.

(Continued on Page 13)



Chaplain's reflection

Combat tour provides greater insight

Memorial Day is viewed as the "unofficial start" of summer. With the temperatures now routinely climbing into the hundreds I believe we can safely call it the official start. In addition to Memorial Day the summer months contain some of the most special and celebrated holidays of our civic year.

June 14 is Flag Day and also the birthday of the U.S. Army. On this date in 1775 the 15,000+ Soldiers, encamped on the green in Cambridge, Mass. were officially established as the Continental Army.

July 4 is Independence Day and the remembrance of the day when the 13 original colonies declared to Great Britain and the entire world that we were now a new nation dedicated to the principles of liberty and

freedom.

These days are usually celebrated with much fanfare and festivities. We may think ourselves slighted by not having the opportunity of spending these days with family and friends doing what we normally do, however I believe that these days can and will have a profound impact on how we view these events in the future.

Knowing that we celebrated Flag Day and the Army's Birthday in the uniform of our nation's military may give us greater insight into the importance of our flag and what it stands for. Remembering that we were on active duty serving in the Army in a combat zone on its birthday may help us feel more rooted and connected to those thousands of dedicated men and women who have worn

that same uniform in difficult times throughout our nation's history and its wars. Celebrating Independence Day in a country that is still in the midst of establishing liberty, freedom and justice for its people may help us appreciate all the more the wonderful benefits that we enjoy as a nation and often take for granted in our lives.

As with our lives in general, great benefit can be gained by taking advantage of the opportunities that are presented to us at pivotal moments. At first it might seem that little if anything can be gained by our being here and missing out on spending these days with our loved ones and friends, but if we reflect and truly remember what these days mean then I think that we can grow in a much deeper awareness of



what these days are truly about: duty, honor, courage and a willingness to sacrifice for the greater good of our nation, our society and our people.

"Pro Deo et Patria"

By Col. (Chaplain) Bert Kozen
56th SBCT Chaplain

Soldier to Soldier ...

Senior NCOs must develop young leaders

With more than 200 years of serving the U.S. Army, the Noncommissioned Officer Corps has been recognized as the world's most accomplished and distinguished group of military professionals. In recognition of this service and sacrifice, Secretary of the Army Pete Geren established 2009 as "The Year of the NCO."

The history of the NCO began in 1775 in the Continental Army and the following ranks were established: Corporals, Sergeants, First Sergeants, Quartermaster Sergeants and Sergeants Major. In 1778 Inspector General Baron Von Steuben established the structure of the NCO Corps in the "Blue Book"—The Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States. The NCO Corps have commonly been referred to as the "Backbone of the American Army." In fact, the NCO Creed states these very words:

NCO Creed

No one is more professional than I. I am a Noncommissioned Officer, a leader of soldiers. As a Noncommissioned Officer, I realize that I am a member of

a time honored corps, which is known as "The Backbone of the Army". I am proud of the Corps of Noncommissioned Officers and will at all times conduct myself so as to bring credit upon the Corps, the Military Service and my country regardless of the situation in which I find myself. I will not use my grade or position to attain pleasure, profit, or personal safety.

Competence is my watchword. My two basic responsibilities will always be uppermost in my mind -- accomplishment of my mission and the welfare of my soldiers. I will strive to remain technically and tactically proficient. I am aware of my role as a Noncommissioned Officer. I will fulfill my responsibilities inherent in that role. All soldiers are entitled to outstanding leadership; I will provide that leadership. I know my soldiers and I will always place their needs above my own. I will communicate consistently with my soldiers and never leave them uninformed. I will be fair and impartial when recommending both rewards and punishment.

Officers of my unit will have maximum time to accomplish

their duties; they will not have to accomplish mine. I will earn their respect and confidence as well as that of my soldiers. I will be loyal to those with whom I serve; seniors, peers, and subordinates alike. I will exercise initiative by taking appropriate action in the absence of orders. I will not compromise my integrity, nor my moral courage. I will not forget, nor will I allow my comrades to forget that we are professionals, Noncommissioned Officers, leaders!

Many things have changed over the years but the role of the NCO is still basically the same. NCOs not only lead by example but they also lead from the front. It is every NCO's job to train their soldiers. NCOs must also use their own initiative to get things done. Senior NCOs and leaders need to use their experiences learned here in Iraq to coach, teach and mentor our junior NCOs and future leaders. This is where an NCO develops his or her leadership abilities and style.

Our NCOs must take the lead and lead by example, enforce standards and discipline. From basic training to the battlefield, the NCO is truly the back bone



that holds the Army together. To the NCOs of the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team I would just like to recognize you for your dedication to duty, strength of character and professionalism. You truly are the best and brightest this country has to offer and it is my honor to serve in these ranks with you.

The following quote by Rosalynn Carter sums it up well: "A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go, but ought to be."

See you on the Battlefield

John E. Jones
Command Sergeant Major
56th SBCT

"Strength through Honor"

Commander's Corner

Mid way through tour, 'Independence' Soldiers building on sacrifices

This month we have hit another milestone. We are half way through our rotation. What does that mean to us? Simple, we still have more work to do. Although, I think the bigger question is, do you all know what you have accomplished to date? If not here are some statistics for you:

The brigade engineers have conducted 222 route clearance missions covering 14,762km, totaling 1,163 hours, making the roads safe not just for us, but for all Iraqis

The 328th Brigade Support Battalion has traveled more than 28,000 mission miles in order to support our soldiers located at our nine joint security stations to ensure our soldiers have what they need to operate.

They have moved 280,000 bottles of water, delivered over 58,800 lbs. of ice and maintained a 97 percent operational readiness rate for vehicles in the brigade – an achievement that stands out across all the brigades in the 1st Cavalry Division

We have completed and closed out 89 projects that were started by our predecessors. Those works totaled \$21.5 million. These projects will provide or improve essential services for Iraqis, improve the quality of life and provide economic growth for the community

Our maneuver battalions have found and cleared over 79 cache

sites, disrupting the enemies ability to build IEDs and improving the security situation

Through our partnership with the ISF, our units have captured six brigade high value individuals and over 80 other lower tier targets.

Our field artillery battalion has fired over 865 rounds, more than any other in the division

We have awarded over 300 combat badges, nine Army Commendation Medals for valor and one Bronze Star for valor, this is a testament to the bravery and warrior ethos that our soldiers display and live by everyday

Now why do I bring this up? I think it is important for all of you to know the things you have accomplished in such a short time. Think about where we were eight months ago when we first reported to Camp Shelby, and now look at you today. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind who you are and what you have accomplished. Your efforts and contributions are providing a better life for the Iraqi people, while at the same time ensuring that the ISF is a capable force able to provide security for the population.

As I stated earlier there is still much to do. We are currently working on 71 more projects totaling over \$24 million. These projects are in the areas of irrigation, electricity, agriculture and security. The Brigade con-

tinues to conduct lethal operations, targeting many high value individuals. We continue our partnership with the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police through our LEAP Program. This program leverages the civilian skill sets of our law enforcement personnel in the brigade to help train and professionalize the Iraqi Police.

We have disrupted the enemy, provided essential services to the Iraqi people, enhanced security, mentored local governments with our ePRT brethren, but this has not been without a cost. On May 27, 2009, the brigade lost another great American hero. Spc. Chad Edmundson, B/2-112th Infantry, gave the ultimate sacrifice, when he was killed by an IED while conducting a dismounted patrol



in Abu Ghraib. And let us not forget the brave and courageous acts of Staff Sgt. Mark Baum who gave the ultimate sacrifice on Feb. 21, 2009. These brave men were outstanding soldiers



and will be sorely missed by all. They will eternally be in our hearts and we give condolences and pray for their families.

Citizen soldiers of the Independence Brigade, be proud of your accomplishments; they are yours. To all, I say thank you and congratulations for what you have accomplished so far. You continue to make history as part of the only reserve component Stryker Brigade, in the oldest division in the Army, the 28th Division, famed for its Iron Soldiers of World War I. You are no different. But, stay focused on the task at hand, as there is still much to do. We must continue to fight to the finish. There is still an enemy out there. Stay vigilant, stay professional, maintain the offensive, and keep an eye on each other.

"Strength Through Honor"
Marc Ferraro
Colonel, Infantry
Commanding

Independence 6

Selecting

(Cont'd from Page 11)

Most institutions hold an open house or new student orientation program. It is important to attend an orientation or tour of your school to become familiar with rules, regulations, policies, tutoring, team and intramural athletics, financial aid, and housing availability. Often enough, you may find these orientations very beneficial as you may learn about new benefits to help you through college.

Academic advisors are important faculty or staff members who work to help you accomplish your goals. An academic advisor can assist you in planning your future as well as registering for classes. Meeting with your academic advisor once a semester is highly recommended.

Applying for Veterans Affairs Education benefits is extremely important. Once you contact your VA certifying official at your institution, it will be your responsibility to apply online for benefits. With the addition of the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill, there are several benefits and forms to complete. If you are unsure of what forms to complete, contact the 56 SBCT Education Officer, 1st Lt. Robert Prah for more information. Typically, you will have to wait 8-12 weeks to receive your check from Veterans Affairs. If you are planning on attending

school during the spring 2010 semester, it is important to apply for benefits in October or November 2009. In regard to your benefits, it is required to notify your certifying official of any change in enrollment status, including adding or dropping courses, or receiving an incomplete grade. The policy for verifying attendance each month has not changed. Each student must log in to the Web Automated Verification Enrollment site to verify you were taking classes for the term selected. This process will remain in effect for the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill benefits.

Contact your institution's Disability Service or Office for Students with Disabilities if you require additional services. Most institutions now have student veteran groups or clubs. If your institution has one, it might be worthwhile to attend a meeting to see what additional services or information they have. Often enough, they have additional scholarships that aren't advertised to the general student populace. Student Veterans of American and Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America are new and very popular among college students today. Visit www.studentveterans.org and www.iava.org for more information.

By 1st Lt. Robert Prah
56th SBCT Education Officer

"Department of the Army personnel must place Loyalty to Country, Ethical Principles, and Law above private gain and other personal interests."



LOYALTY

DUTY

RESPECT

SELFLESS SERVICE

STRENGTH THROUGH HONOR!

INTEGRITY

PERSONAL COURAGE

