

# TASK FORCE TRAILBLAZER NEWSLETTER



Left: The 130th Engineer Brigade Insignia Right: 18th Engineer Brigade Insignia; Insignia worn by the Task Force Trailblazer's new higher HQ who are based out of Campbell Barracks in Heidelberg, Germany.



Guidon's reach for the sky as 65th and 326 EN BN Soldiers rehearse for the Transition of Authority (TOA) ceremony, COB Speciber, Iraq

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"Slow is Smooth —  
Smooth is Fast."

- COL Matthew Russell, 18th Engineer  
Brigade Commander

## *Transition of Authority* by MAJ Aaron Dorf

Eight months of planning, training, and preparation has prepared the Soldiers from the 65th Engineer Battalion for this historic day. The TOA or Transition of Authority Ceremony is the formal battle hand-over from one unit to another. On Jan 30, 2009, the 65th Engineer Battalion, Trailblazers, from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii formally Relieved In Place

(RIP) the 326 Engineer Battalion Sapper Eagles from Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Although the Trailblazers were already in the left seat, conducting operations and planning combat operations, the Sapper Eagles still were officially in-charge. With the casing of the 326th Engineer Battalion colors and the uncasing of the 65th Engineer Battalion colors, the transi-

tion was official. As part of the transition, Task Force Trailblazer officially assumed operational control of the 511th Engineer Company (Sapper) from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and Charlie Company, 84th Engineers (Vertical and Horizontal Construction) from the 6th Engineer Battalion in Anchorage, Alaska.



[Distinguished guests], thank you for joining us today. I am proud to be part of the Swords Up Brigade providing combat and construction effects throughout [Northern Iraq]. I can assure you that TF Trailblazer will continue to excel in providing effective partnership, assured mobility, and general construction. The professionalism and dedication of our route clearance company, sapper company, and construction company has and will make a difference. I would like to extend a special welcome to our partners from our sister [Iraqi Army] Engineer Regiments.

**B**ismillah ar-raHman ar-rHeem...A-'aqeed Juma, wa mu-quaddam Hameed, was-muqaddam Kamil, wa-'aree faqdam Quday. Ha-darkum al-yowm huwwa sharaf kabeer. Ana farhahn minshaan at-ta'awun al-qawee bayn al-handaseh wa-aS-Sadahqa baynana inshalah. Shukran li-ziyarahatkum lana wa-khidmatkum ila waTankum.

**M**ugam Hameed and Huqaam Juma, I am honored by your presence and look forward to a strong partnership and friendship. Thank you for being here and serving your country.

**I**t is also a pleasure to have other leaders from the Swords Up BDE, TF Lightning, TF Bronco, TF Blackjack, Gulf Region Division North, and EOD here today. This is without a doubt a team effort, and I believe you will soon see that the 65th EN BN as an organization of combat multipliers that will go the extra mile, stay focused on our common goals, and reach out to assist our brother in arms. These soldiers represented before you are truly honored to be part of the 7th TF Trailblazer. The efforts of our predecessors have truly blazed a trail that will ultimately lead to a string and prosperous Iraq. LTC Parrott and his Sapper Eagles have set the conditions for continued success. The 326th has been tremendously successful in building a team from multiple units from separate commands that came together to nearly eliminate the threat of IEDs on critical routes, improve force protection and quality of life for us and Iraqi Soldiers, and established a strong partnership to assist training Iraqi Army Forces to do the same. Lee, we've done this kind of transition 4 times before, so I knew we would have a smooth handover. You and your team are true professionals, and CSM Morse and I thank you for your hospitality, candor, and most of all your great ideas and proven methods. You and your Soldiers have a safe return to the U.S. and enjoy some well-deserved down time with your friends and families. We'll take it from here, but we'll never forget our fellow Sappers who have paid the ultimate sacrifice as part of TF Trailblazer. SPC Roberto Martinez and SGT Gene Hawkins of the 14th ENGR BN, SGT Gregory Wright and SGT Jonathan Kingman of 1st EN BN, and CPL Johnathan Lahman and PFC Theron Hobbs in the 326th are



among the heroes who we will continue to honor. TF Trailblazer is ready to serve the American and Iraqi people with courage, selflessness, and integrity.

**S**WORDS UP, FIRST IN, LAST OUT, TRAILBLAZERS.

—LTC Scott Petersen,

30 January 2009





*Left: Color Guard for the 326th EN to 65th EN TOA Ceremony with the addition of our Iraqi Engineer Partners. Above: LTC Scott Petersen delivers his remarks in both English and Arabic as part of the TOA Ceremony. Below: LTC Scott Petersen and CSM Morse Uncase the Colors. The colors or Battalion Colors were cased as part of the deployment ceremony held at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii on December 31, 2008. The uncasing of the colors formally signifies that the 65th Engineer Battalion has completed the Relief in Place (RIP) from the 326th Engineer Battalion from Fort Campbell, Kentucky and is in charge of operations based at COB Speicher.*





## Charlie Rock

By MAJ Aaron Dorf

Charlie Company, 84th Engineer Battalion, a 'legacy' company from the 6th Engineer Battalion at Fort Richardson, Alaska has joined Task Force Trailblazer. They bring construction and general engineering skills to the Task Force and help to add to the variety of missions that TFTB can accomplish. The company deployed to Iraq in November 2008 and was originally assigned to the recently departed Sapper Eagle Task Force. For the casual reader, the multiple battalions in their name is confusing, and even more baffling as they have no formal relationship to the 84th Engineer Battalion who are stationed at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. To help explain,—if possible to do both in a both a succinct and interesting fashion—the short story is as follows. The company, like most lettered engineer companies in the Army, was a product of downsizing. When the Army modularized starting in 2004, the Army Corps of Engineers rapidly shed battalions, including the 65th which deactivated in 2005. However, to keep some engineering capability, usually one company from a battalion remained and maintained its original letter company designation. This 'lettered' company was often moved on paper and reactivated somewhere far from the original parent battalion, and in Charlie 84th case, Fort Richardson, Alaska. This differs from the current 84th and 65th Engineers battalions which are kluged together from any number engineer line companies that are designed to be 'modular' and thus detached and reassigned once deployed. Now, as you have probably read more about are unit designations that you might ever care to—back to the introductions. Charlie 84th or Charlie 'Rock' as they are usually referred to has been extremely busy since they hit the ground in Iraq and completed their relief in place from the 232nd Engineer Company from Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. The company maintains its pre-modularization formation which has both horizontal (earth moving) and vertical construction (carpentry, plumbing, electrical) capability in a single company. This is a great asset to the Task Force and has help to expose the company to a myriad of diverse engineer projects across the battlespace. TFTB is excited to have the Soldiers from Charlie 84th as part of the Taskforce, and looks forward to working with them on any number of joint construction projects through out the deployment.



*Clockwise from Top Right: The company Logo; The EM platoon emplaces T-Walls using a HYEX tracked excavator; An armored D-7 Dozer is used to level out an area on an Iraqi camp as part of the unit's partnership efforts; PFC Karney from 2nd Platoon discusses the finer points of timber construction with his Iraqi counterpart on a joint construction project. [Pictures courtesy of C/84th Operations]; Overleaf: Soldiers from C/84 conduct Crater Repair missions*







*The Soldiers from Charlie Company, 84th Engineer Battalion conduct crater repair as one of their routine missions. The photos shown are a short synopsis that depicts C/84th in action fixing a road damaged from an IED. Top Left: Before Soldiers dismount their armored vehicles, the areas is thoroughly checked for any other explosives or materials. Top Right: Soldiers prep the crater by digging out rubble and other materials and scrape down to hard pack soil. Digging is usually done the old fashioned way using picks and shovels. Middle Left: The crater is filled with concrete from a concrete mobile mixer, an organic piece of tactical engineer equipment. Middle Right: Once the crater is filled, it is leveled with a trawl to conform with the existing surface of the roadway. Notice the white speckles on the photo; this is indicative of dusty being kicked up, a relatively familiar problem in Iraq. Bottom Left: The engineer castle is spray painted on the final surface to ID who completed the job. Bottom Right: Final product, painted and marked—the squiggly lines help the next convoy spot any changes or tampering.*





## *TFTB and TFSE assist local Iraqi School*

By MAJ Aaron Dorf

As one of their final missions in Iraq, Task Force Sapper Eagle (TFSE) teamed up with Task Force Trailblazer (TFTB) to provide relief and supplies to a local primary school in downtown Tikrit. As part of the effort, the team delivered school desks, benches, and dry erase boards. The school was specially selected by our Iraqi

Army counterparts as a great place to build community relations and enhance our ongoing partnership efforts. The desks and benches were designed and constructed by carpenters within the Taskforce. The mission was by all means a huge success. Members from the TFTB staff and Combat Security Team (CST) carried the school supplies while the students and children looked on. Several cases of bottled

water and other supplies were handed out which gathered many cheers from the children. As the mission closed the children waved goodbye and the combined Taskforces headed back to base. This project is very similar to several COMREL (Community Relationship) projects that the 65th Engineer Battalion conducted back at home station with local schools in Oahu.



*Photo Gallery: Photography by 1LT Miguel Lima (Above Right) An Iraqi boy carries off a case of water bottles while a TFTB Soldier carries a hand crafted bench to the schoolhouse. (Left) A primary school aged Iraqi boy gives a big thumbs up in Iraqi Style in appreciation for the school support. (Below) A typical town scene with the villagers coming out to see what is happening and the TF soldiers and interpreters discussing the upcoming community rela-*

*tionship mission as the children smile to get their photo's taken. (Opposite Page Clockwise from Top Left) LT Elliot Bruzek poses with two Iraq boys who are watching the days activities; several Iraqi children pose for a photo while clutching several bottles of water; a TFSE soldier hefts a bundle of dry-erase boards from the vehicle enroute to the Iraqi schoolhouse; CPT Arben Vuthi, the Battalion physician assistant is surrounded by children and villagers as he addresses medical issues; TFTB soldiers move a primary school desk down a dirt road to the schoolhouse as children scurry about; MAJ Dale Snider, the Battalion S-3 hefts a wooden bench as part of the community relationship effort.*









## ***Iraqi Slang Encyclopedia Part 1*** by MAJ Aaron Dorf

One thing is for sure, there are many new acronyms and slang terms used in everyday tongue by Soldiers, contractors, and other FOB inhabitants in Iraq. Some of these are used back in garrison and other are entirely new, regardless, this lexicon of terms is essential to understanding life on the FOB. Selected are a few of the tasteful examples of GI slang Iraqi Style:

**BREEZE**—Synonymous with Adobe Connect, a multimedia computer briefing and chat software that is used to conduct most staff meetings and battle updates

**BUB**—Battle Update Brief; the recurring brief given by the staff and company commanders to the Battalion Commander to keep him informed on the status of operations

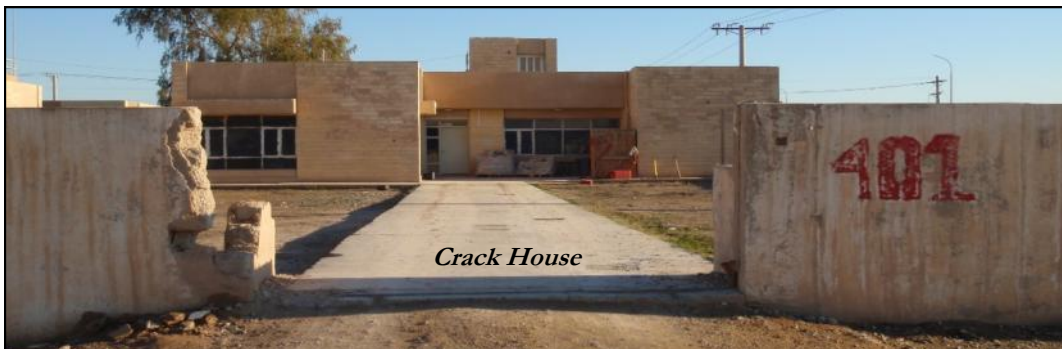
**CHOW HALL**—Dining Facility

**CHU**—Containerized Housing Unit; a wheel-less trailer (shipping container) that was converted into a Soldier billet that hold 1, 2 or 3 personnel

**COB** – See FOB

**COL**—Contingency Operating Location; not to be confused with Colonel, but an Iraqi compound shared with coalition forces

**CRACK HOUSE**—A single family, single story, concrete Iraqi style dwellings that are used to house US troop in the ‘COB’ Speicher historical district; due to their exterior condition and worn appearance they have received this name



**FOB** – A Forward Operating Base or US Compound housing troops; a COB, like COB Speicher is a larger ‘FOB’ also know as a Contingency Operating Base

**FOB Runner** – An unarmored tactical vehicle that is used only on the FOB; sometimes referred to as a Fobber

**FOBBIT** – An individual who exclusively stays on the ‘FOB ‘ and never leaves ‘The Wire’

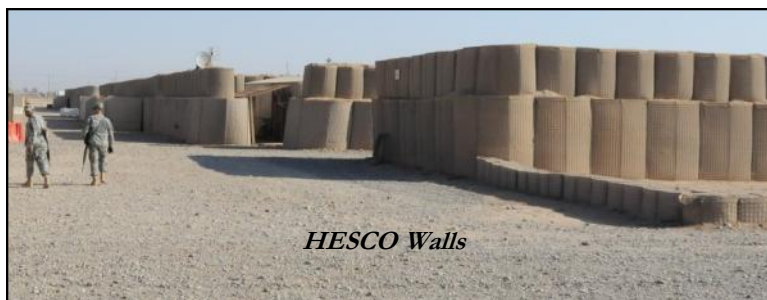
**FOO**—Field Ordering Officer; The money person who buys the unit supplies in cash

**Full Kit**—Term given to the complete array of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) which include body armor, deltoid protectors, ballistic helmet, weapon, ammo, eye-protection, and gloves



**HESCO**—A force protection engineer barrier material consisting of a metal cage and textile liner used for building hasty walls; HESCO is the company that produces the item and the company name is now synonymous with the product; wall sections come in 7 sizes

**IRAQI GOOD**—Similar to the old adage “Good enough for Government Work”; used primarily as an excuse for poor workmanship or sloppy execution of a task





**JAMBO**—[ä-mmm-bo] Means “Hello” in Swahili; the greeting given to the Ugandan guards at the ‘Chow Hall’ who will reply with Jambo-son

**LSA**—Life Support Area; a separate compound divided with ‘Hesco’ walls that contains blocks of ‘CHUs’; areas vary in size with the larger ones supporting up to 500 Soldiers

**KBR**—Kellogg Brown and Root; the infamous contractor that provides the Army’s multi-billion dollar LOGCAP contract and is responsible for everything pertaining to life support on the FOB

**MEAL TICKET**—A soldier’s weapon; All Soldiers must carry a weapon at all times and it is required to enter the ‘Chow Hall’; many ‘Fobbits’ refer to their weapon as their meal ticket [Don’t worry, all weapons on the ‘FOB’ are on safe and in a Green Status meaning they do not have a magazine in them.]

**MRAP**—The generic term given to the new family of Mine Resistant Armored Vehicles; MRAPs come with a variety of names to include: RG, Caimen, Buffalo, Husky, Cougar, MaxxPro, and Badger [Iraqi]

*Buffalo [MRAP]*



*Caimen [MRAP]*

**SADDAM’S REVENGE**—Also synonymous with the Kuwaiti Krud; the annoying chest cough that every Soldier experiences when they spend time in the Middle East

**SPAWAR**—The contractor that provided the connectivity for the MWR Internet Café’s across

the ‘FOB’ including the one in the Town of Vengeance.

**T-Wall**—A large 12 or 15 foot high wall that is 4 feet wide; these walls are tongue and groove and slot together; also included in this category is Alaska Barrier which looks like a gigantic highway jersey barrier and is 9 feet high and weight over 30 tons

**TERP**—Short for ‘Interpreter’; an Iraqi civilian [or other contractor] hired to interpret or translate Arabic to English

**The Wire**—The term given to the outer perimeter of the FOB; when a Soldier is “going outside the wire”, they are conducting operations

**V-Town**—The Town of Vengeance or location of the Battalion Headquarters; named by the 326 EN BN to honor their WWII brethren; entrance to the town is adorned by a large red and white Sapper Tab signifying that this is the home of the Engineers.



*T-Wall Emplacement*



## Chaplains Message

By CH Keith Ferrell

Trees. That's the first thing I noticed upon arriving in Iraq. Now mind you, they are not what one might expect to call a tree, especially if your from a rural environment. Nevertheless they are trees and they give this desert realm a small sense of normalcy in the midst of a canned military camp. Normalcy is exactly what many of us need as the operational tempo continues to escalate now that we are in charge of the mission that we have

taken from the 326<sup>th</sup>.

The training is over, the missions have begun, and life is beginning to settle into what will be our 'battle rhythm' for the next 11 months. We stand on the promise of 2 Chronicles 15:7 which reads, *"But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded."*

What happens here is preparing a nation for democracy, that which is normal for us. May God continue to Bless us and those of you back home.



**Vengeance Town  
Lahmann Hall**

FIRST IN-LAST OUT

Chapel Services

Contemporary Protestant Service  
Sundays 1030

Bible Study  
Wednesdays 1930

Trailblazer Religious Support Team  
Chaplain (CPT) Keith Ferrell  
SPC Amanda Conway





## *Believe it or not, I live in a CHU*

By MAJ Aaron Dorf

Red CHU, Blue CHU, Big CHU, Little CHU, Wet CHU, Dry CHU. This sounds like something from a Dr. Seuss Storybook; however, it is a reality in Iraq. During the past few years, living conditions on most of the larger FOBs have greatly improved, with many Soldiers having the opportunity to live in a relative comfort. CHU, pronounced 'Chew' is the acronym for Containerized Housing Unit. CHUs come in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, colors and configurations. When the concept was first born, shipping containers, mainly forty foot MILVANS, were converted from cargo haulers to housing units. These units were

rows separated by walls to provide compartmentalized blast protection from indirect fire. They look like an out of place ship yard in the desert but comfortable house several companies worth of troops. Regardless of their appearance, they became an instant hit with the deployed service members who were mainly living in tents and captured Iraqi Army facilities. The first units remain easily recognizable as they still contain their original cargo doors. They were highly



*40 MILVAN CHU with curious exterior furnishings*

however, a few luck few do get the 'wet' one. These have a water tank on top which provides limited wash and latrine facilities. Based on the size of the CHU, rank of occupant, and location, Soldiers and leaders are billeted at one, two, or three to a unit. Although forbidden now, some CHU modifications have taken place, with custom paint jobs, decking, and porch additions. Regardless of their exterior appearance, CHUs are a far cry from the creaky OD green tents that I lived in Operation Iraqi Freedom I in 2003.

*Left: CHU with porch and bench additions. Below: Newer CHU with split-unit air conditioning. Luckily most CHUs now have the Sniper Hill internet in the rooms, although at pricy \$95 per month!*



port Areas (LSA). These LSAs are nothing more than a configuration of CHUs in long

desired over the hard stand temper tents for obvious reasons. CHUs provide some overhead protection, are easy to relocate,

and are far easier to mount air conditioning units to than the tents they replace. More importantly, they do not blow away every time it gets windy and they provide some degree of dust protection, which tents definitely do not. Unfortunately, most CHU are considered 'dry' which means they have no running water or plumbing;



*Temper tent on a wooden platform reminds us of how much living conditions have improved.*



## Connections

By 1LT Miguel Lima

I paid about \$50 for cable internet back in Hawaii. It was great because it was fast, reliable and all mine. I realize now that these are some of the wonderful aspects of life at home that I took for granted. Now before I continue, let me say that we have free internet. Available at MWR tents and Town of Vengeance has one right in the middle of the compound. Soldiers can surf the net and check email while the tent is open. I personally like to be able to use it whenever I need or rather, want to use it. In each of our CHUs is an Ethernet cable for internet. For a price, you can have the internet right in your own room! That's a pretty sweet luxury. It does come with a questionable price tag, however. For \$95 a month you can stay connected at a time and place that is convenient for you. Now, there are a few drawbacks to this deal. One of which I pondered about as the entire Town went down for nearly an entire day. There is no number to call for billing issues or pro-

rating that goes into effect when you lose service. It's a flat 30 days, rain or shine, that you have your service. That's a downer. Especially when you consider that the \$3.16 you are losing pretty much pays for a haircut over here. Monopolies aren't fun (unless you have multiple editions of the board game and if that were the case, I would high five you in person because that game rules) and unfortunately there is only one service provider that is hardwired to the CHUs.

But Soldiers are a resourceful lot. Some that are more tech-savvy look to the skies for a different way to get their internet. A craving like that of MTV in the eighties, "I want my Internet" is a desire for most everyone here. Email and Skype help you stay in touch with loved ones for practically nothing. Shop, bank...it's the best way we have to reach back home and do stuff. That's why I didn't think it was weird at all when on cold nights, as I'd come back to my CHU at night and find my neighbor, 1LT Andrew Thorell, standing on top of

his CHU's roof adjusting the position of a satellite dish he bought from the previous signal officer from 326<sup>th</sup> EN. He was diligent about making the slightest of adjustments to angle the dish just right to catch the satellite's signal. For three days, he adjusted the dish. Most were interested in the prospect of a faster internet connection as the dish would promise. The dish was costly but the service if split would be cheaper than CHU-net. One day, as 1LT Christopher Hallett helped Drew hunt for the signal, I heard Chris exclaim, "Oh, 80!" He was referencing the signal strength which lingered around the low teens. Hard work had paid off for the pair.

Even with a dish or CHU-net, no one here is rocking the high speed we enjoyed back in Hawaii. The highest option you can purchase through CHU-net is 128kps (in layman's terms: slow but better than dial-up). It gets slow during the evening when everyone that bought into

having their own line jumps on at the end of the day. Certainly not the best situation, but it makes me value it all the more when I receive an email from an old friend or laugh at a picture someone sent. It's pricey but when I consider what I get in return, I'd pay more for the same service if I had to. Just don't tell the service provider that!



*Top Right: 1LT Thorell stares at the computer as he makes his adjustments; Above: SGT Cleveland gives a big thumbs up while he awaits customers at the MWR Internet Café in the Town of Vengeance; Right: 1LT Thorell and 1LT Hallett fish around for a good signal.*





*Picture Gallery—Clockwise: PFC Dagg serves as a gunner on a Combat Security Team (CST) Mission; MAJ Dale Snider receives the ceremonial S-3 Saber from LTC Andy Kiger signifying the passing of operations; CPT Mark Kubar pins the rank of PFC onto PV2 Geary in front of the Town of Vengeance; 1LT Chris Hallett works his on Arabic by discussing the finer points of American dining facility cuisine with LTC Hameed as part of partnership.*





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## Editor's Notes

*Filling in for the Editor this week is the Editor in Chief: After three editions of the newsletter, I'm still not entirely sure of what an Editor in Chief should do. However, I assume that I should continue to bug the editor about deadlines, pick out catchy titles for the front page, and remove all inappropriate content. Since we haven't heard any negative feedback, I guess we're doing ok. Since the last edition, Task Force Trailblazer has assumed the mission and is focused on doing the best job they can. Days are long, and still quite chilly. It will be several more months before we reach the balmy weather of Hawaii, but most days are pleasant reaching the low 60's. Chow is good, Internet is available, and there was even the option to have two real beers for the Super Bowl. This was a one-off special occasion to have a real drink on Uncle Sam's nickel. Feel free to send any feedback (good or bad), suggestions, or your wish list for future articles to Brigdet. Look forward from hearing from you. Shokran (thank you) —MAJ Aaron Dorf, 08 Feb 2009*



## Commander's Corner

Aloha! Task Force Trailblazer is less than a week into our mission and making great strides. We are working closely

with our Iraqi Engineer partners, witnessed a successful major election, were able to enjoy (up to 2) cold beers during an exciting Superbowl, and have had a number of successful operations that helped keep roads free of improvised explosive devices. It's hard to believe that we've been deployed over a month already. The one month milestone means that all 65th Soldiers and 511th Engr Company can now wear the infamous "combat patch" (our unit patch on our right shoulder). We had a number of small ceremonies to accentuate that we have trained hard to earn the distinction of combat veterans. Friends and families I'm sure feel some pride in that, and I am personally grate-

ful for those of you supporting us. You serve our country with distinction too. Since we had a couple of incidents this week, I wanted to remind you that the next of kin of any seriously injured Soldier will be the first family member to know. We do have a dangerous mission, and there may be future incidents. If you are hearing news from someone other than a notification officer, consider it to be good news and don't fall prey to exaggeration and rumor. We have extremely good protective equipment and vehicles to do our missions-- not to mention some of the best trained Soldiers in the Army. The security situation in Iraq is surprisingly better than it was a year ago. In short, don't worry about your loved one too much. Hard to do, I know -- especially when the news media focuses on bad stuff. There's a lot of good things happening here, and Iraq is well on the way to a state of normalcy, in my opinion. More to do, but we are up to the task! Until next time, Trailblazer 6, out.

