



65th Engineer Battalion, US ARMY

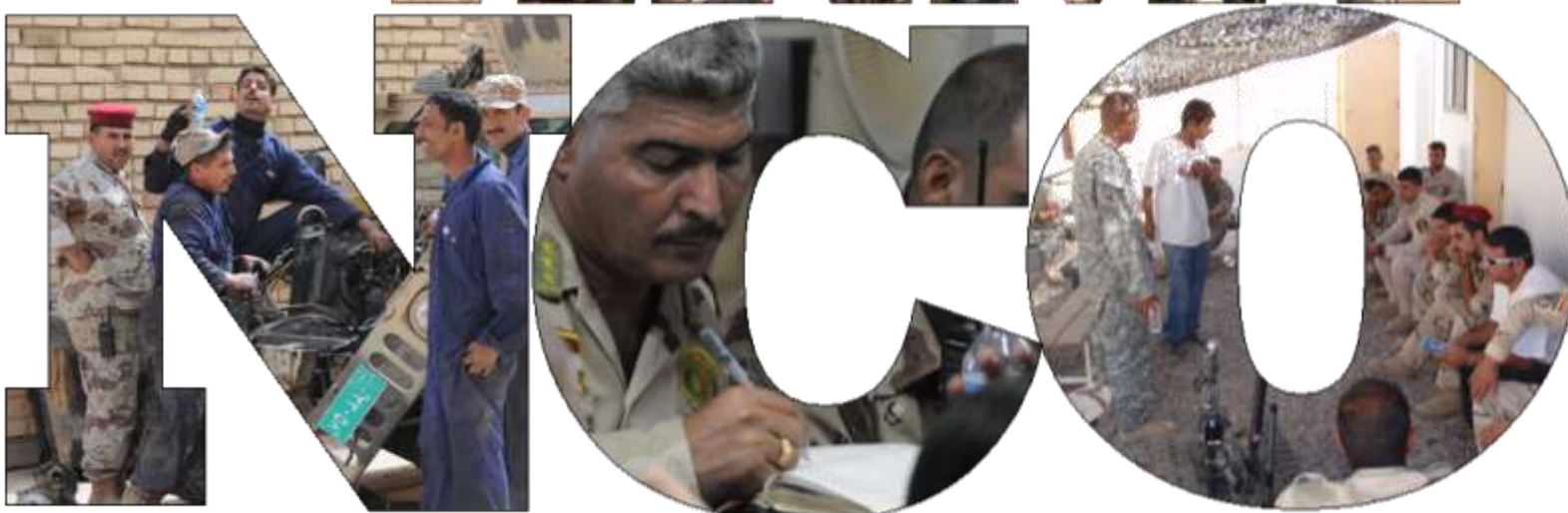
TASK FORCE TRAILBLAZER NEWSLETTER

Wednesday, August 18, 2009

Volume 1, Issue 16

IRAQI

ARMY



Intro By CPT Miguel Lima

Partnership between Task Force Trailblazer and the 4th and 12th Iraqi Army Engineer Regiments has been a learning experience for both sides. One of the most dynamic learning curves has been that of understanding the role of the Iraqi NCO. Its worth noting that despite the multiple similarities in our way of conducting business, there are differences in the way the Iraqi Army and American Army operate. The role of the NCO is one very large difference between our two armies. Our NCOs are emboldened with the long held tradition of upholding the units' standards. They are subject matter experts, trainers of Sol-

diers, executors of orders, and loyal confidants and mentors of officers. They represent the very best of military training and tradition. Both the junior enlisted and ranking officers will note that NCOs are the essential bond to a strong and cohesive fighting unit capable of executing the mission. While the IA have NCOs, they operate with a different mindset than our own on the role of an NCO.

The next two articles discuss the interactions and observations of working with the IA in order to train their NCOs and empower them to be able to carry out the job they need to do to contribute to the mission of the Iraqi Engineers.

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The NCOs in the 4th IA Field Engineer Regiment

By MAJ Dale Snider

This insert to the newsletter I'd like to talk about Non-commissioned Officers (NCOs) in the Iraqi Army (IA) and what I've learned about them the past few months. They play a very different role in the IA Army than NCOs in our Army. My perspective is primarily from my observations of my interactions with our partnered units the 4th and 12th IA Field Engineer Regiments (FER).

Non-commissioned Officers in the Iraqi Army are doers of what the officers tell them. They do not show the initiative and proactive nature of our NCOs. I believe this is because they have not been allowed to do so in the past. Iraqi Army NCOs are not empowered to make decisions on their own, or to be responsible for initiating training at the Soldier level. Decision making in the IA is held at the highest level. Mistakes made at the lowest level are not protected by supervisors when they are honest, initiative driven. Mistakes made that damage equipment or fail to accomplish the mission are punished, occasionally by jail time.

This situation acerbates training, mission execution, subordinate development and delegation to name a few areas. Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Morse, our Battalion Sergeant major created an NCO development training program several months ago with the intent



to training basic soldier skills into the 4th FER IA NCOs. The CSM and his hand-picked senior NCOs from the battalion have conducted four of these NCO Development courses. Some of the training areas have included map reading, leadership, physical training, weapons marksmanship and the like. What we have discovered is some of the IA NCOs coming through the program show great intelligence and aptitude and when given the opportunity they can lead. For example, during weapons marksmanship we have lead, supervised and performed the duties of leadership at the ranges the first three sessions. This past range they performed those leadership responsibilities and since then they have successfully executed one range all on their own. They can now also lead their own

physical training with their Soldiers. The NCO Development Course we just completed had the additional purpose of identifying the above average IA NCOs during a 10 day process so that the next course could be conducted out at the 4th FER IA base, COL Spider. We have jointly planned another future NCO Development course and during that training they will be the trainers and our NCOs will act as mentors. The IA CSM, CSM Qisar, has been taking notes in leadership and methods our CSM and NCOs have used in the past few months, and has shown improvement and initiative of his own.

A side benefit I have noticed from our close partnership with the IA FER Units these past few months is the impact on leadership training our command team has



had simply through example. LTC Petersen and CSM Morse have a command team relationship that is common in our Army. They discuss ideas and recommendations and work together for the betterment of training objectives. From the officer standpoint, in our Army, officers and NCOs are teamed up early on when we are platoon leaders working with a platoon sergeant. This officer/NCO relationship and command team method of execution is natural for us. But, this is not so with the IA. In our Army, NCOs are the primary trainer of our Soldiers at the small unit and individual level and CSM Morse has the lead in oversight of Soldier's training in the battalion. There isn't a similar leadership command team relationship model within the IA. However, in the past seven months, they have been witness to this type of command and the methods of tag teaming command issues and training. Since CSM Qisar has been able to see this leadership in action, it appears he is engaging the IA Regimental Commander more and more in areas of training. He is definitely present more than he use to be during our partnership visits.

Our partnership is at a unique position with the 4th IA FER. We are preparing to transition our battalion's main effort to the 12th IA



FER out of Kirkuk and the 4th IA FER will have to be able to conduct their own resourcing and training. They still have some ways to go to be self-sufficient, but they are on their way. With the next NCO Development training being conducted by their own brand of NCOs on COL Spider, they are making the next critical step toward independent operations.

Until next time, keep your finger on the trigger and your eye on the horizon.



IA NCO Professional Development



By 1SG Adam Hurlocker

Senior Non-commissioned officers (NCOs) have a critical responsibility above and beyond their war time mission. That responsibility is to mentor junior NCOs and Soldiers of lesser experience so they may reach their personal and professional potential. This can be a very difficult task, but must be done so that experience and knowledge is maintained throughout our ranks. One way to accomplish this is through Non-commissioned Officer Professional Development (NCOPD).

NCOPD typically focuses on key tasks related to our war-time mission, thus providing the mentorship necessary for success on the battlefield. In the 95th Wolfpack, NCOPD is conducted on a regular basis to ensure our leaders are imbued with the ideals of the Warrior Ethos while ensuring the technical knowledge needed to be successful is never lost.

Recently we conducted NCOPD on the types of equipment and capabilities of our

company. This training involved all of the non-commissioned officers in the battalion. SFC Legg was the primary instructor chosen by me because of his demonstrated proficiency and ability to communicate and mentor Soldiers of all levels. The training he provided was first rate, and once again SFC Legg has proven his unsurpassed ability to lead from the front.

We have also been training the Iraqi Army so that they will be able to build a strong backbone in their fighting force unques-





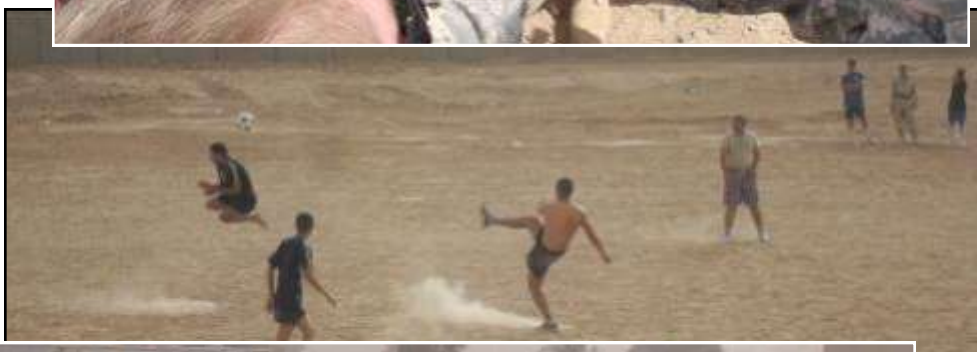
tionably necessary for their success after US forces leave Iraq. The training we provide isn't called "NCOPD" like it is in our Army, but the message is clear and simple: The Noncommissioned Officer Corp is powerful and successful due to the type and method of our training techniques.

We try to convey that message to the Iraqi Army (IA) at every opportunity, and it is becoming very evident that the message is sinking in. The IAs have developed rapidly, and they are a force to be reckoned with. SFC Wryn, SSG Church, SSG Daige and the rest of 3rd Platoon have been instrumental in coaching, teaching and mentoring the IA's. They are true professionals who make me proud to serve beside them.

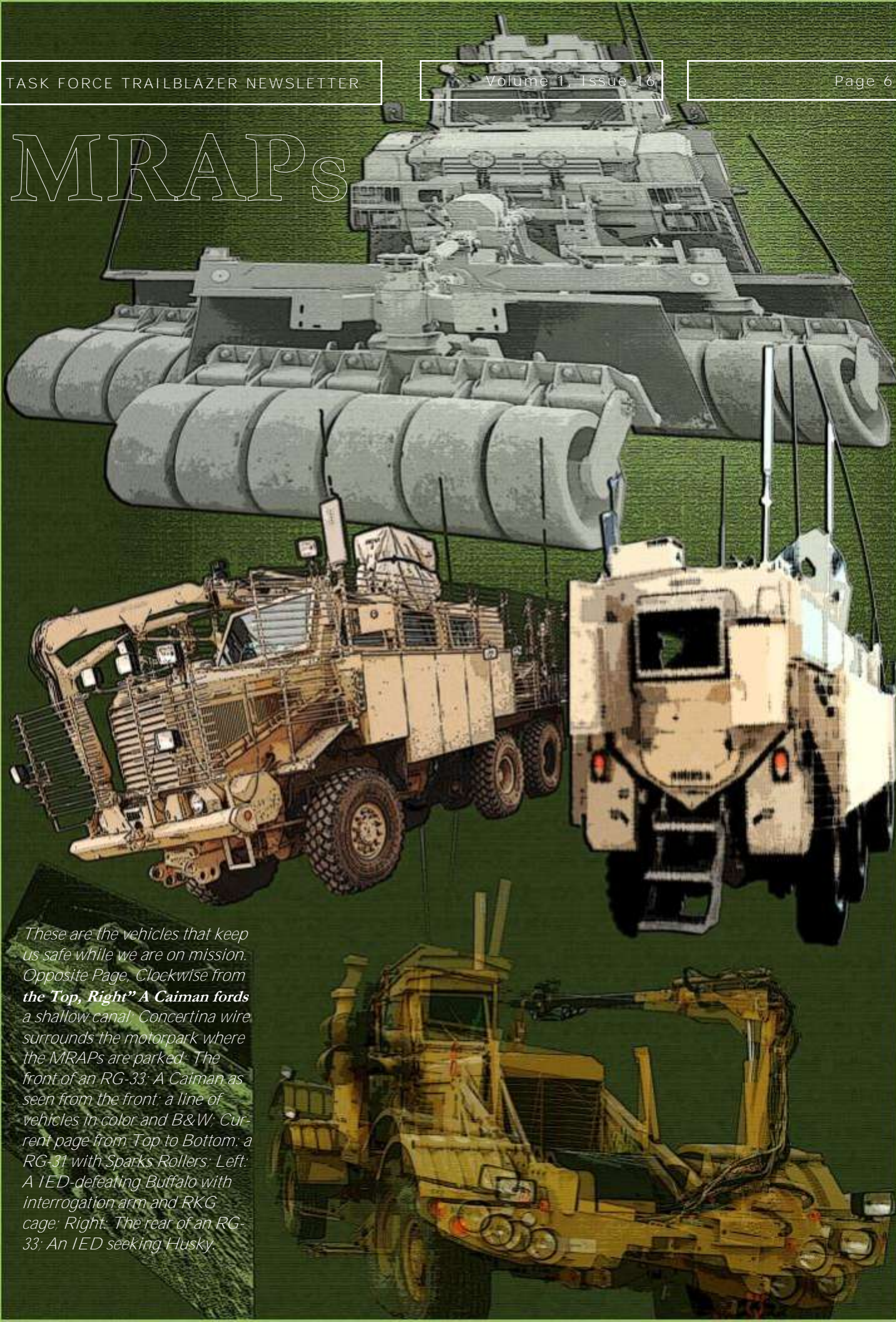
WOLFPACK!



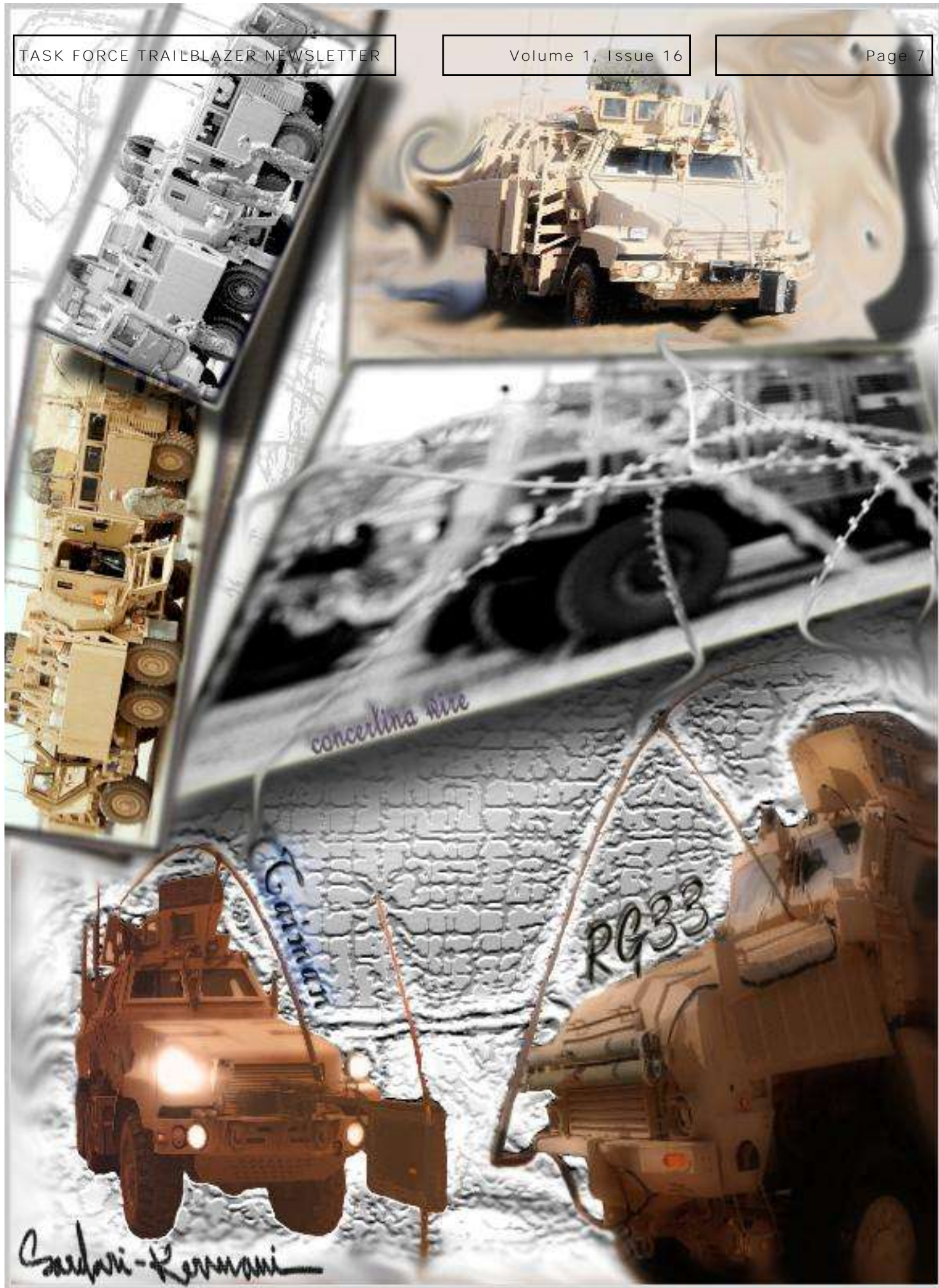
Opposite Page, Top: A mixed formation of Iraqi Jinnod and 95th Soldiers conduct warm-up exercises before a PT session at COL Spider; Below: 4th IA Jinnod and Soldiers from 95th's 3rd platoon get ready for a patrol; Current Page, Clockwise from Top, Left: Jinnod practice urban MOUT operations; Iraqis learn how to insert an IV; Jinnod and Soldiers come together for a huddle before a joint mission; A soccer game is an alternative to normal PT at COL Spider; But sometimes, normal PT is better.



MRAPs



These are the vehicles that keep us safe while we are on mission. Opposite Page, Clockwise from the Top, Right" A Caiman fords a shallow canal; Concertina wire surrounds the motorpark where the MRAPs are parked; The front of an RG-33; A Caiman as seen from the front; a line of vehicles in color and B&W; Current page from Top to Bottom: a RG-31 with Sparks Rollers; Left: A IED-defeating Buffalo with interrogation arm and RKG cage; Right: The rear of an RG-33; An IED seeking Husky.



Pictures of the Soldiers, NCOs and Officers of the C/84th Engineer Company. Clockwise starting from Left: The Headquarters Platoon led by 1LT Frehulfer and SFC Johnson with CPT Matthew Painter, C/84th CO; the Earthmover (EM) Platoon led by 1LT Keyes and SSG O'Neil; 1st Platoon led by 2LT English and SFC Lynch; the Legendary C/84th CST led by SSG Velmer; 2nd Platoon led by 2LT Clowes (not pictured) and SSG Silva; the Maintenance Section led by WO1 Collins and SFC(P) Butterworth (not pictured); Center: The Entire C/84th Company in formation at ease (this photo was composed by PFC Sardari)



C/84th Company Picture





Armchair Combat Evolved



CPT Jones watches his corner of the screen as he plays in the Halo Tourney; Below: a screen capture from Halo 2

By PFC Robert J. Presswood Jr.

As my battle buddies headed left around the obstacle to flank the enemy, several things were going through my mind. “How would I react as I rushed into the room, bullets flying around me?” “Was the enemy aware that I was about to burst through the doorway, with intent to kill him?” “Would my teammates be able to save me if I got hit?” But I knew I had to keep all these thoughts in check, and remember part of the Warrior Ethos: “I will always place the mission first.”

As the first one in the stack to clear this room, I decided it would be best to frag the room, as I was certain that there would be no collateral damage caused by the grenade. So, pulling the pin, I threw the grenade through the open door against the wall I could see, hoping that the trajectory of the bounce would land the grenade at my enemy’s feet. It appeared I was successful, as I heard the enemy shouting. It was now or never.

I rushed into the room to discover that there



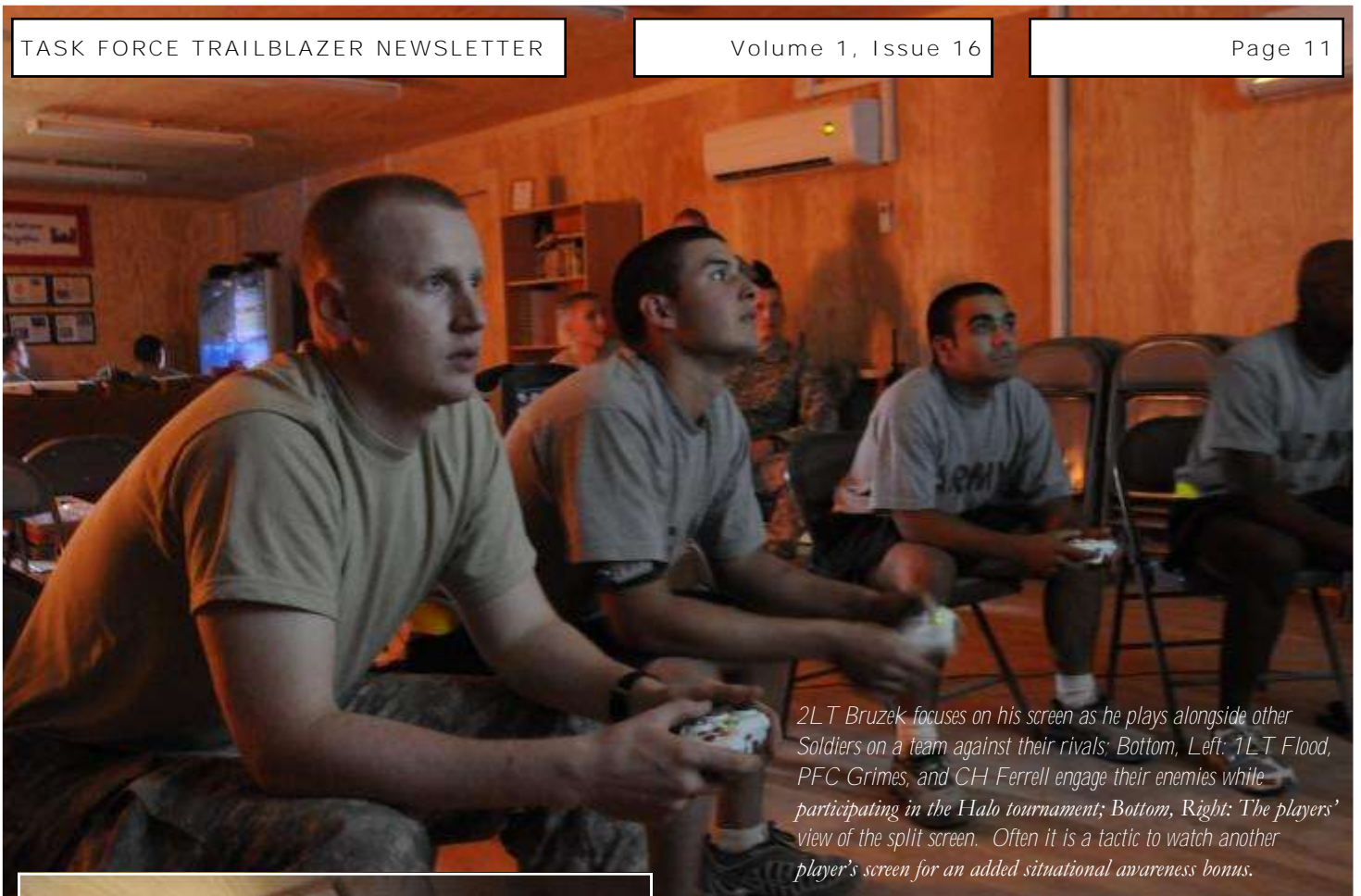
were more of them than I had anticipated. There were three, rather than the two we had thought. My fully automatic rifle finished off the one that my grenade had wounded. My flanking team then entered in from the other door, and took out another. But then, the unexpected happened. The last remaining enemy shot me with a rocket launcher at point blank, killing us all.

“You know that a suicide means that you

don’t respawn for thirty seconds, right?” I asked the guy sitting to my left.

“I know.” He responded. “But killing all four of you got me eight points.”

Of course, I am giving the account of what happened in the Halo 3 tournament that took place at Lahmann Hall, where some of our MWR activities take place, and where we have Chapel services at 0900 on Sunday mornings. We decided to have the



2LT Bruzek focuses on his screen as he plays alongside other Soldiers on a team against their rivals; Bottom, Left: 1LT Flood, PFC Grimes, and CH Ferrell engage their enemies while participating in the Halo tournament; Bottom, Right: The players' view of the split screen. Often it is a tactic to watch another player's screen for an added situational awareness bonus.



Halo 3 tournament in order to give us soldiers some time to get together, relax, and see who could kill the most people in ten minutes.

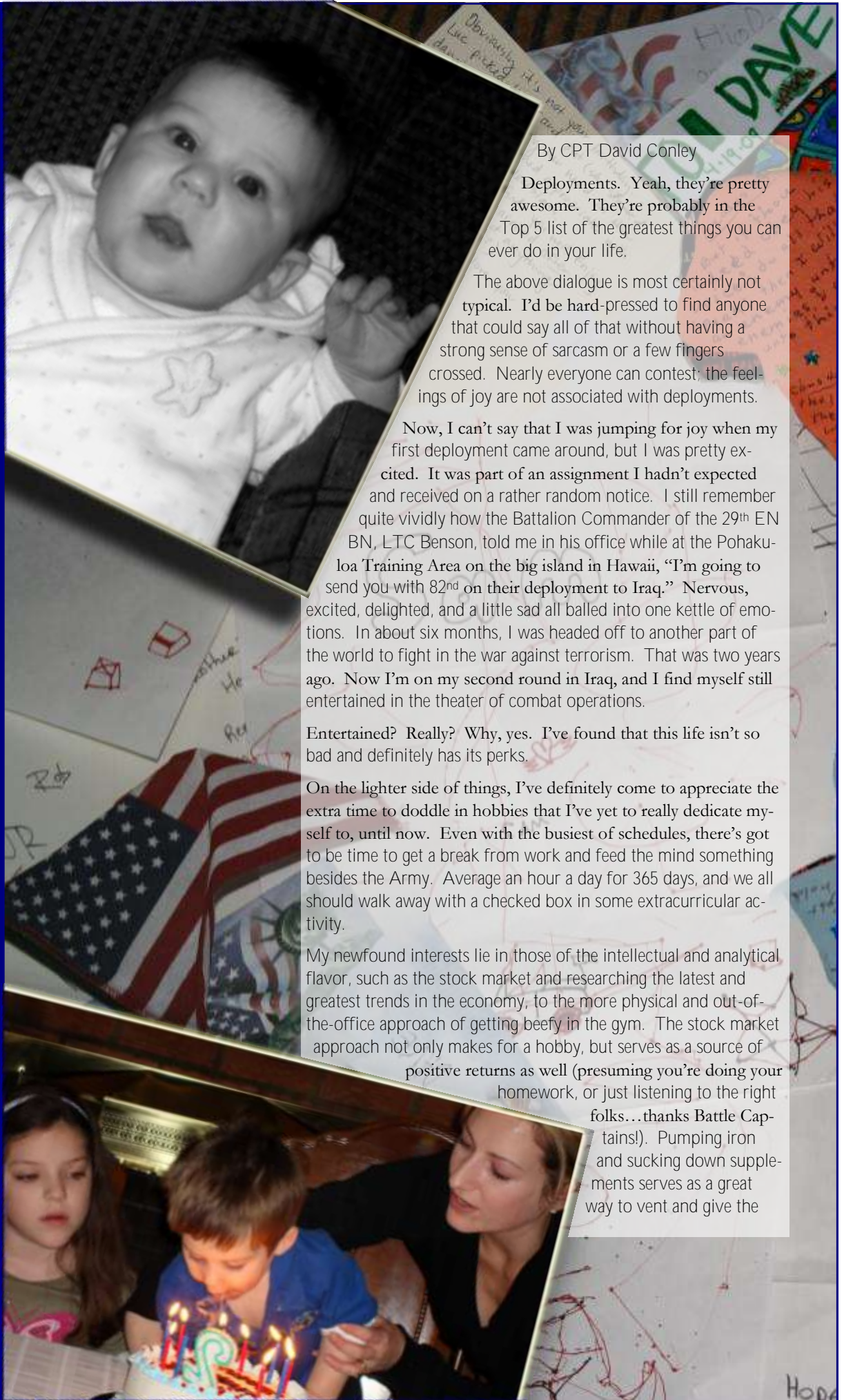
We set up the tournament in a three round format. First round we had eight people all play "Every man for himself". Second round we paired people up in teams of four. Third round we played "King of the Hill". After those three qualifying rounds, the top eight players were then matched in a free-for-all match to determine the top Halo 3 player. Much to HHC's dismay, the player who won was SPC Jeremie Alvarez from C/84th. In order to keep up the reputation of HHC, we then challenged the top players from C/84th to a team match against the top players of HHC, which ended as a victory for HHC.

Our next game night is scheduled to be a "Rock-a-thon" with Guitar Hero. Players are going to be invited to come out and show us just who the greatest rocker in the 65th EN BN is. 2LT Johnson, in conjunction with CH (CPT) Ferrell and SPC Conway, has come up with a few other ideas to get people involved.

All in all, video game competitions are a great way to have some fun, meet others from the battalion, and get away from the "war atmosphere" for awhile.



The Optimistic Side of Deployment



By CPT David Conley

Deployments. Yeah, they're pretty awesome. They're probably in the Top 5 list of the greatest things you can ever do in your life.

The above dialogue is most certainly not typical. I'd be hard-pressed to find anyone that could say all of that without having a strong sense of sarcasm or a few fingers crossed. Nearly everyone can contest; the feelings of joy are not associated with deployments.

Now, I can't say that I was jumping for joy when my first deployment came around, but I was pretty excited. It was part of an assignment I hadn't expected and received on a rather random notice. I still remember quite vividly how the Battalion Commander of the 29th EN BN, LTC Benson, told me in his office while at the Pohakuloa Training Area on the big island in Hawaii, "I'm going to send you with 82nd on their deployment to Iraq." Nervous, excited, delighted, and a little sad all balled into one kettle of emotions. In about six months, I was headed off to another part of the world to fight in the war against terrorism. That was two years ago. Now I'm on my second round in Iraq, and I find myself still entertained in the theater of combat operations.

Entertained? Really? Why, yes. I've found that this life isn't so bad and definitely has its perks.

On the lighter side of things, I've definitely come to appreciate the extra time to doddle in hobbies that I've yet to really dedicate myself to, until now. Even with the busiest of schedules, there's got to be time to get a break from work and feed the mind something besides the Army. Average an hour a day for 365 days, and we all should walk away with a checked box in some extracurricular activity.

My newfound interests lie in those of the intellectual and analytical flavor, such as the stock market and researching the latest and greatest trends in the economy, to the more physical and out-of-the-office approach of getting beefy in the gym. The stock market approach not only makes for a hobby, but serves as a source of positive returns as well (presuming you're doing your

homework, or just listening to the right folks...thanks Battle Captains!). Pumping iron and sucking down supplements serves as a great way to vent and give the

“The OPTIMISTIC side

may have never looked so GOOD.”

2 Page Spread:
Photos from CPT
Conley's family with
letters they have sent
during his deployments.



mind some time to unwind. And of course, it's a great way to prepare for heading back to the beaches of Hawaii.

Reaching beyond the benefits of picking up a few new skills, enjoying the fact that I never have to cook for myself or do my own laundry, and even solidifying those friendship bonds you won't accomplish anywhere else; I find the benefits beneath the surface have an impact that are far greater and will leave an impression that will never escape.

The knowledge and cultural experience alone is certainly more than one could ever gain through any classroom. I've become intimately familiar with a foreign culture through several experiences. From sitting down to share a meal with the local Iraqi Army to helping a poor local farmer get water to his crops, all of my encounters with the Iraqi populace have given me a perspective I couldn't achieve anywhere else. I've driven (and even floated) across rivers that I only read about in history books. I've seen the landscape and lifestyle of a place I would never have thought about otherwise. It is an experience that is truly unique to those of us that have served as fighters of Iraq's freedom.

The benefits reach beyond my cultural experience and even dip into the realm of family life. With a handful of young nieces and nephews at home, I get cards and gifts as a result of arts and crafts time. The doodles and scribbles that I usually only see when I go back home end up being pasted around my room and even the office. My grandmother has sent scriptures and letters with conversations we somehow would've managed to not have had if I were home. My relationship with parents still grows, as the sense of 'absence make the heart grow fonder' still holds true.

And then, there's the work. Back in the states, our garrison work always seems like it's missing something. And for me, it is. I have to be engaged in something that's more than just another job. Something that I know will have a greater impact than keeping the ball rolling through the next day. Here, I'm part of a team that's working to rebuild an entire country. Everyday we're making strides to improve not only someone else's life, but a whole nation of people that have suffered for centuries in a society controlled by fear. From local economics and governance to removing leftover debris from a terrorist's car-bomb, we're consistently striving to better the life of a foreign nation. All the while, we're risking our safety to do so. This is the real Army, and this is what we do.

Although we find ourselves separated by thousands of miles on the other side of the world; missing birthdays, anniversaries, and the days of our loved ones, we should all be able to find some solace in the means of the greater good.

The optimistic side may never have looked so good.



A Post June 30th Media Engagement

By 2LT Taylor Oney

On Wednesday, 29 July, LTC Petersen and LTC Hameed sat down with Salah ad Din TV to discuss how the partnership and the 4th IA FER are progressing, as they had done many times before. This time, however, the topic was not on a special project that the 4th IA FER was working on or the combined efforts to save a bridge from collapsing, but something that effected everyone in Iraq, not just the 4th FER or the 65th EN BN. This interview was focused on

our post June 30th mission and partnership goals. In a dust filled room (thanks to the sandstorm that had brewed up since we arrived at COL Spider), two reporters from the local Tikrit television station set up their camera and microphone, and began to ask the two Commander's a series of questions. While the overall focus was to discuss the effects of the Security Agreement, our role in partnership since 30 June, and the success of our partnership and the missions that we conduct together, there was also a heavy focus on what missions we had currently ongoing or planned that would impact the civilian population in the area in a positive way.

2 Page Spread: In a hazy office at COL Spider, LTC Hameed, LTC Petersen and Huda the Interpreter sit and listen to the reporter's next question; Opposite Page, Inset Left: The cameraman, interviewer, LTC Hameed and LTC Petersen and Huda the Interpreter; Inset Right: The view of the camera's view screen while recording LTC Petersen's comments.

LTC Petersen and LTC Hameed were both very careful not to give away sensitive information, and also not to promise anything to the population, as it could have a detrimental impact to our partnership and the civilians of Iraq if we were unable to follow through. The Commanders did, however, discuss missions that we are currently hoping to get funding for,

such as a road which would allow for more children to go to school, and the clearing of rubble in Samarra to assist in pilgrimages and improved trafficability. When asked about our role since the June 30th “out of the cities” deadline, LTC Petersen told the media that there was basically no change to our partnership, and we are still in the advise and assist role, which

we had been in pre-June 30th. “The 4th FER is in the lead,” LTC Petersen told the media, “we are just here to advise and assist them in their current missions.”

While this was the most difficult interview that both LTC Hameed and LTC Petersen have conducted so far, they both agree that it was a great interview, and hopefully settled any questions that the local population had regarding the United States Forces and the Iraqi Army post June 30th.



Postcard: The Monastery of Saint Elijah

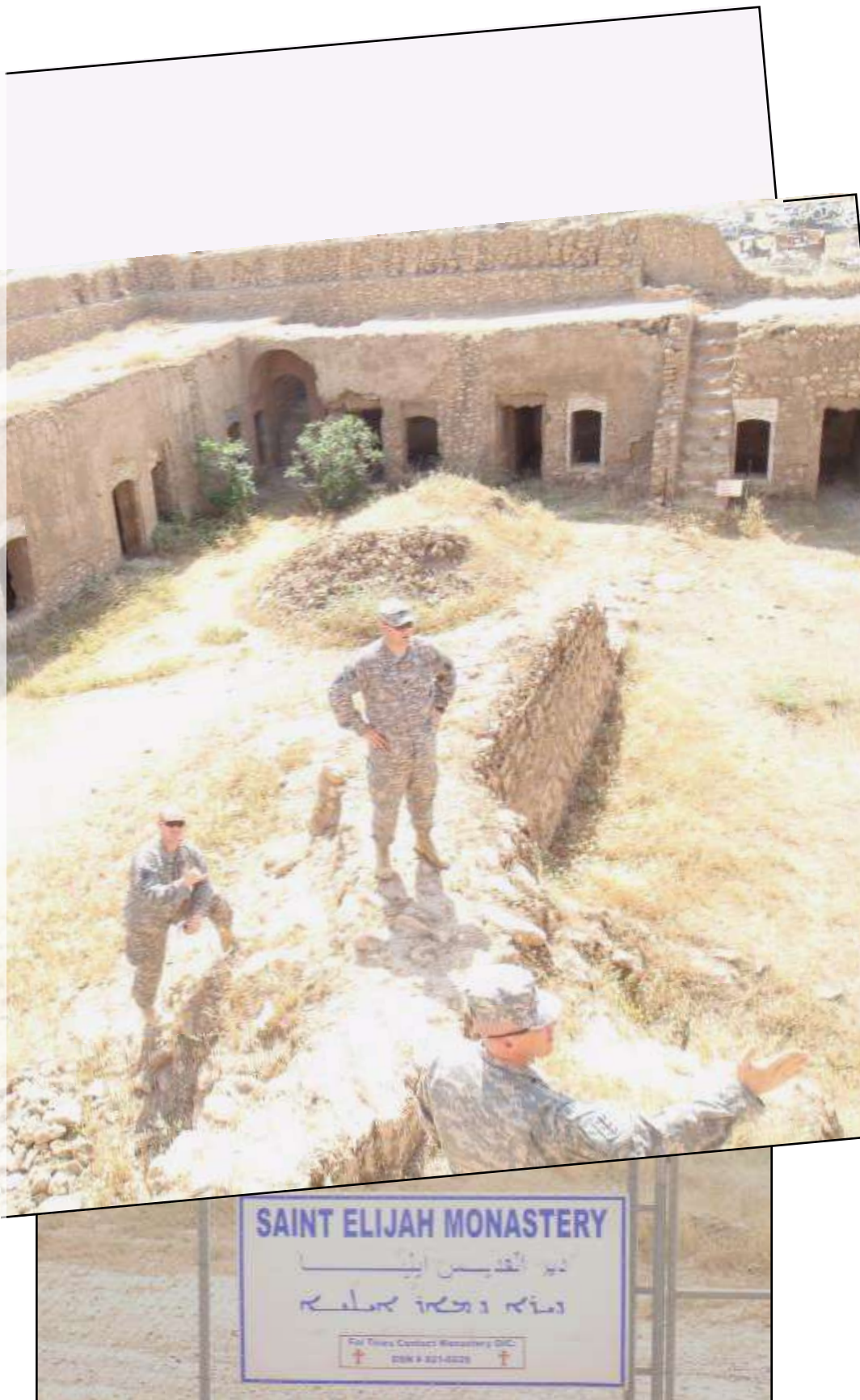
A Flower in the Desert

By SPC Amanda Conway

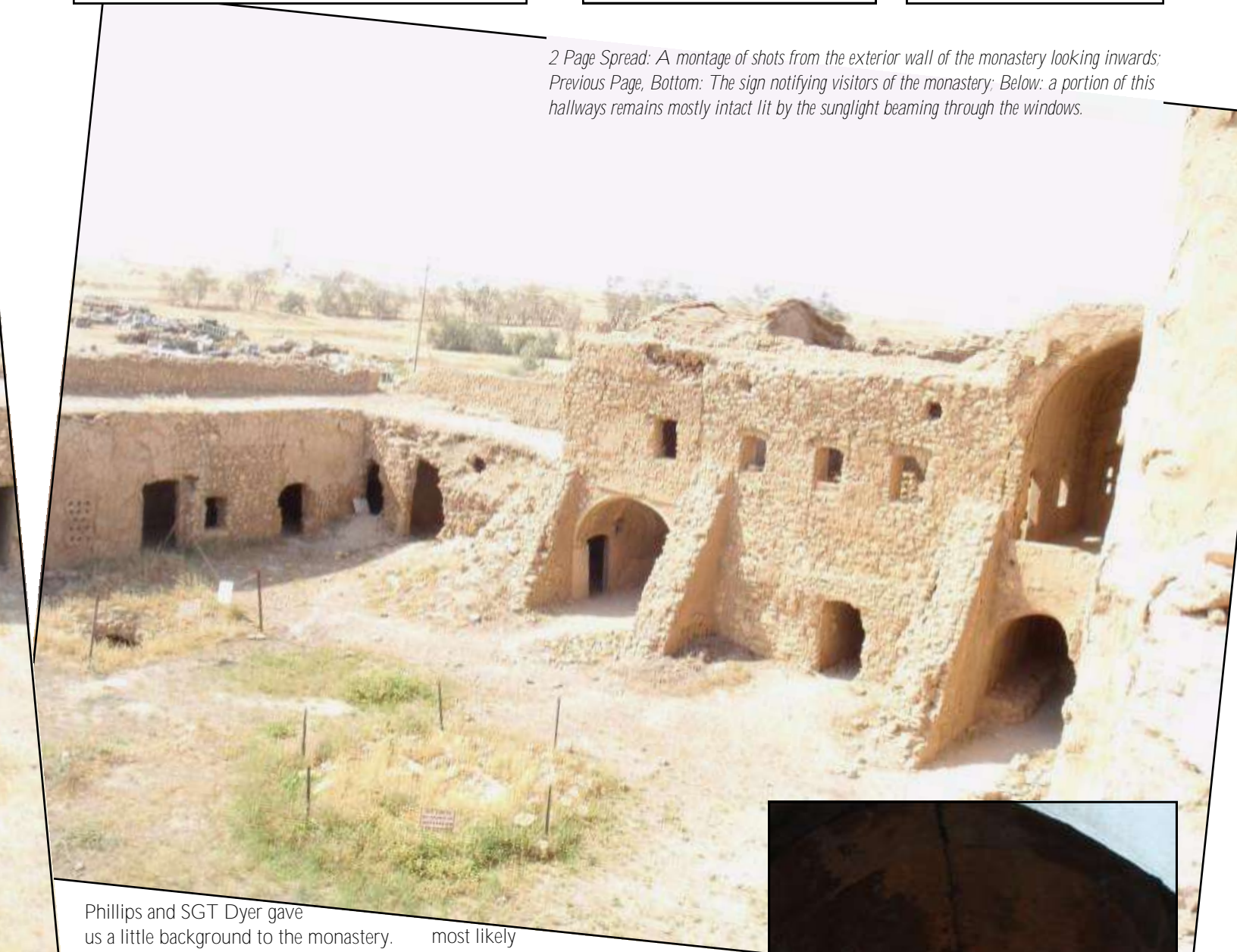
I'm an architecture nut. When I get to see old buildings, especially churches and monasteries, I love to explore every crack and crevice, trying to determine which rooms were used for what purpose, how people lived, and all that. And, I take lots of pictures. Ask my grandmother who took me to Portugal a few years ago, and witnessed this as we toured countless churches and monasteries. I took about 1000 pictures in one week exploring only a small fraction of the country's historic buildings. And, only a handful of them actually had people in them. As I prepared for this deployment, CH Ferrell often asked me, are you bringing your camera? It's not the greatest, but I brought it. Then I was issued a much nicer one to use throughout our travels, and I have definitely been putting it to good use. I had expected most pictures would be the standard group shots, and candid shots of soldiers doing crazy things or the Chaplain praying with groups getting ready to roll out on mission. I envisioned the backdrops would be the standard: dust, trash, and maybe some with the vehicles we drive out in. I know I'm not alone in that presumption. I mean, we're in the desert. What else could there be here?

A couple months ago, CH Ferrell and I were traveling by Chinook up to Warrior to visit the guys in 511th. Some dust kicked up along the way, and we ended up staying overnight at Marez. So we looked up our comrades in 84th EN BN, CH Phillips and SGT Dyer. They were surprised to see us, but offered to take some time that afternoon to show us around, and they insisted that we had to see "the monastery". I was confused. Iraq is an Arabic country, what kind of monastery were we going to see on a FOB in the middle of the desert. Now, don't get me wrong, I know that not all Iraqis are Muslim, and that before Desert Storm, there were some 1 million Christians throughout Iraq, but I was just not expecting to see a monastery in the middle of a FOB.

As we made our way to the monastery, CH



2 Page Spread: A montage of shots from the exterior wall of the monastery looking inwards; Previous Page, Bottom: The sign notifying visitors of the monastery; Below: a portion of this hallways remains mostly intact lit by the sunlight beaming through the windows.



Phillips and SGT Dyer gave us a little background to the monastery. It was recognized for what it was shortly after the 101st Airborne Division ousted the Iraqi Republican Guard from the area and had themselves taken up residence within the fortress-like ruins. One of the **Division's Chaplains** recognized it as an ancient monastery, and after some research, discovered that it was Dair Mar Elia (the Monastery of Saint Elijah), the oldest Christian monastery in Iraq with a history dating back to the 6th century. It was built by Assyrian monks, but at some point it was taken over by Chaldean Catholic monks. It served as a residence and place of worship for about 11 centuries. The surrounding lands suggest that it was once a verdant pasture and the monks

most likely harvested food to support themselves and the local community. Monastic communities follow this model even today, seeking to remain self-sufficient and offer the excess to their local communities. The monastery was thriving until 1743 when Persian invaders ordered the monks to leave. Probably 150 monks resided there at the time, and when they all refused to leave, the Persian leader had them slain, and nearly destroyed the buildings. It was used as a refugee center after World War I, and was incorporated into the Iraqi Republican Guard base in the 1970s. At that point, the monastery practically fell off the radar of the school of archaeology at the University of Mosul, and its history was



left to the oral tradition of another local monastery, Al Qosh.

From my experience exploring monasteries in Europe, the tradition was to have a fortress like outer wall to prevent invasion and persecution from the outside community, and offer peace and privacy for the monks as they went through their daily routines of prayer and work. What remains of Saint Elijah Monastery shows that it was built according to the same concept. While the monks themselves did not withstand the invasion of the Persians, what remains of the monastery has withstood being in the center of a major battle in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As the US assaulted the Iraqi Republican Guard, they fired a missile at one of the Iraqis' Russian tanks, blowing the turret off the top and into the side wall of the monastery's chapel. The outside of the wall suffered damage, but the point of impact is not even noticeable from within the chapel itself. In fact, the chapel is almost the only large room of the monastery that is still mostly intact. The Scriptorium's roof has collapsed in, and all the smaller cells have cracks in the ceilings. Even the Abbot's office is missing parts of its ceiling. The only major damage to the chapel itself is a large crack where the ceiling is beginning to separate from the wall above the sanctuary and looters have come through and taken most of the priceless artifacts from it.

Visiting the monastery, I loved every minute, poking into all the rooms, trying to guess

what its purpose would have been, kitchen, refectory, observatory, bedroom "cell", etc, discussing the history of monasticism, and taking pictures. Lots of pictures. As I sit back and reflect on my experience there, I can't help but equate this monastery to an ancient story told by Loki, a member of the Sioux nation, of a flower in the desert:

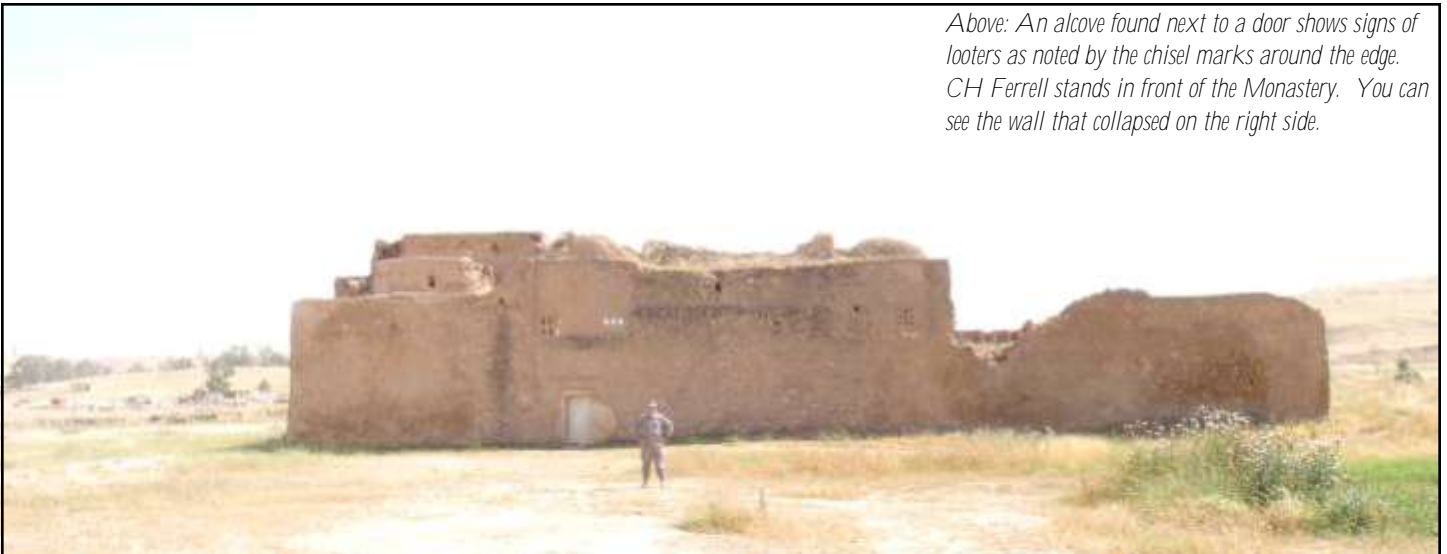


"There was a young flower in the desert where all was dry and sad looking...It was growing by itself...enjoying every day...and saying to the sun "When shall I be grown up"? And the sun would

say "Be patient"---Each time I touch you, you grow a little"...And she was so pleased. Because she would have a chance to bring beauty to this corner of sand...And this is all she wanted to do---bring a little bit of beauty to this world. One day the hunter came by---and stepped on her.---She was going to die---and she felt so sad. Not because she was dying ---but because she would not have a chance to bring a little bit of beauty to this corner of the desert. The Great Spirit saw her, and was listening.---Indeed, he said ...She should be living...And he reached down and touched her---and gave her life. And she grew up to be a beautiful flower...and this corner of the desert became so beautiful because of her."

Each week the chaplains offer tours of the monastery to those interested, as an opportunity for Soldiers to put a human face on Iraq, to help encourage respect for the Iraqi people as they see tangible evidence of the history and traditions of this country. Saint Elijah Monastery is that flower in the desert for each of these Soldiers, displaying the beauty of its history and tradition even from within its ruins. As we pass through the walls, we are able to envision the monks living there, listen to their stories whispered through the walls. We can walk away from our visit with a deeper appreciation for the beauty

that has been poured out on this monastery and the surrounding countryside, and a hope for a brighter future in this war-torn country.



Above: An alcove found next to a door shows signs of looters as noted by the chisel marks around the edge. CH Ferrell stands in front of the Monastery. You can see the wall that collapsed on the right side.

Learning to Shoot



The 511th SAPPER Engineer Company Partnership Effort continues with additional skills being taught to the Iraqi's as they prepare to receive new equipment. The focus of the past several weeks was marksmanship and drivers training. The Reapers taught their partners how to assemble and disassemble weapons, reflexive fire drills, and a myriad of other weapons related tasks. Following weapons familiarization, the Jinood were instructed how to operate the HMMWV. Although many had never driven a vehicle before, and Sappers seized the opportunity and taught the basic principles of operating a tactical vehicle. Each Solider was afforded the opportunity to navigate a drivers course, ground-guide a vehicle to a parking area, and actually cruise the streets of K1 with no reported accidents...yet!! [EIC]



Clockwise from Top Left: SGT Cox and a group of instructors supervise the disassembly and assemble of the AK-47 assault rifle; Individual instruction is provided to ensure each Jundi properly assembles his weapon; SPC Beattie demonstrates the proper method of holding a weapon in the kneeling firing position; SGT Cox from 1/511 demonstrates the prone position in the classroom setting during the crawl phase of weapons training.



Clockwise from Top, Left: SGT Cox demonstrates to MAJ Awad, the 1st Field Engineer Company Commander, the prone unsupported firing position prior to training his company; Two Jinood are timed on the disassembly/assembly drill with their AK-47's as part of their weapons training; PFC Kaiser from 1/511 assists a group of Iraqi Engineers on the facing movements for reflexive fire; (Inset) SSG Turley and PFC Sullivan from 1/511 demonstrate reflexive fire; SGT Cox and SPC Beattie assist a group of Jinood on the kneeling firing position technique.



Learning to Drive



Above: SGT Austin teaches a group of Iraqi's how to conduct Preventative Maintenance Checks and Service (PMCS) on a HMMWV; Right: SGT Wylesky shows Iraqi Engineers how to check the oil; Middle (Inset)—Iraqi Soldier practice ground-guiding a HMMWV forwards and backwards as part of drivers training; Below: SGT Wylesky conducts a PMCS class on the M1151 HMMWV to a group of Jinood at K1.





Top to Bottom: Iraqi Engineers practice maneuvering HMMWV's through a drivers training course on K1; (Inset) An Iraqi Jundi ground guides a HMMWV to it's parking space; Jinood ground guide a HMMWV with hand and arm signals as 511th Soldiers follow and observe; SGT Turley teaches a group of Jinood hand and arm signals.

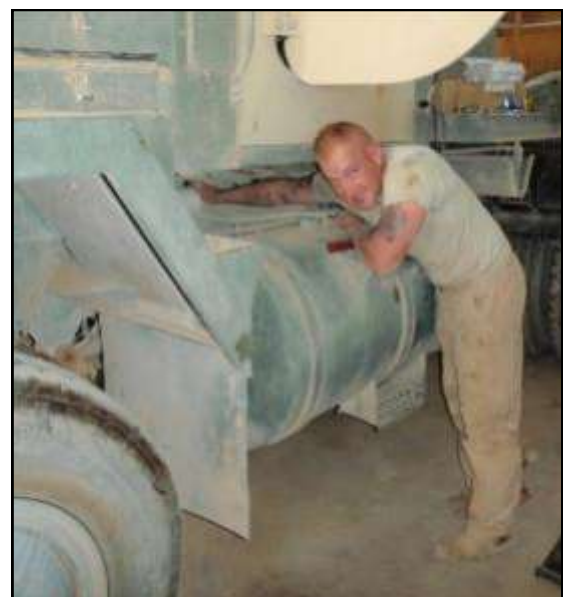
Ssg Kettinger, 1-511 EN CO, shares some water with an Iraqi Engineer during a hot day of the driver training course.



Across the Taskforce—FSC



Top, Left to Right: Maintenance Platoon conducts inventories of their mechanics' tool boxes as part of the Commanders cyclic inventory; A group gathers for a BBQ at the FSC upper motorpool to celebrate the promotion of CW2 Jefferson Whipp—wings, dogs, and burgers, three of Mr. Whipp's personal favorites were served to mark the occasion; Center, Left to Right: LTC Petersen, Mr. Whipp, and Mrs. (SGT) Whipp stand ready to start the promotion ceremony; TB6 and CW2 Whipp share a photo moment; Below, Left to Right: SSG Nicholas, SSG Barrientos, SSG Gomez and Mr. Bradley get their hands dirty working on the RG-33; SGT Ski services the M916 Tractor.





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65TH FSC Keep 130th Rolling Along

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
Staff Sgt. Melanie Trollinger
130th Engineer Brigade



Spc. Scott Burke, a Conroe, Texas, native, washes a truck at the motor pool at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, near Tikrit, Iraq, August 5. Burke, a mechanic with Forward Support Company, 65th Engineer Battalion, 130th Eng. Bde., has been in the Army for six years. (Photo by U.S. Army Capt. Miguel A. Lima, 65th Eng. Bde.)

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, TIKRIT, Iraq—Soldiers of Forward Support Company, 65th Engineer Battalion at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, near Tikrit, Iraq, are filling critical support roles that enable other units in their engineer battalion to maintain mission readiness.

These Soldiers, not engineers themselves but rather welders, mechanics, ordnance specialists, logisticians, drivers and cooks, play an integral part in keeping the engineers in business.

The company, activated July 10, 2007, was just getting itself established when it received mobilization orders to Iraq.

Many of the newly assigned Soldiers were fresh out of Advanced Individual Training. Now over half-way through their deployment, these Soldiers are "doing awesome things," said 1st Sgt. Natasha L. George. George, a Waycross, Ga. native, who became the FSC first sergeant a few months after the company stood-up, said the unit's main mission is to support the battalion, the 130th Eng. Brigade and the overall Iraqi-U.S. Forces partnership.

The FSC Soldiers have spent their time in Iraq performing crucial vehicle maintenance, transporting materials and equipment to job sites, ordering parts and supplies and completing numerous welding projects. They've also provided a base reaction force for security on COB Speicher.

Throughout their time in Iraq, unit members have also partnered with their Iraqi Army counterparts.

The FSC Soldiers are teaching the Iraqis everything they know about fixing vehicles, using the supply system to order repair parts for vehicles and welding base entrance gates, radio towers and up-armor for vehicles.

"Their welders are knowledgeable," said FSC welder, Spc. Raymond Ramos Fee.

Ramos Fee, a Myrtle Creek, OR native,

and Spc. John Vidal, also a welder, both say their Iraqi counterparts are doing a great job on the projects they have helped the IA's complete.

"The Iraqis don't go to trade school for welding. They're taught through family and constant practice from the time they are young," said Vidal, a San Antonio, Tx, native who has been in the Army for 2 years.

With some of the mathematics involved in welding—something non-welders often don't consider about when they think of the trade—figuring out degrees and angles for various projects can be time consuming. Vidal said they often draw up several plans to see what will work best.

"If something isn't built right, or strong enough, people can get hurt," Ramos Fee said.

When the welders built deflectors for a weapons test-fire pit, the challenge was setting up more than 4,000 pounds of sheet metal at the correct angles to ensure rounds were deflected into the pit and not back on the Soldiers. They completed the project without any problems.

Vehicle maintenance for the battalion can also be a challenge. Spc. Scott Burke, a Conroe, Texas, native and FSC vehicle mechanic, performs maintenance for all the companies in the 65th Eng. Bn. Responsible for ensuring their trucks are mission ready, he said the most important thing is getting Soldiers back from missions safely.

Often times performing overflow maintenance for other units, and with so many vehicles in the battalion's fleet, Burke and other maintenance section personnel have been extremely busy. But the unit has still taken the time to mentor their Iraqi counterparts on maintenance and vehicle repair.

The FSC understands the critical role they have in keeping the 65th Eng. Bn. operational and they recognize the significance of their mentoring efforts in aiding the Iraqi Army.



Spc. Raymond Ramos Fee, a welder with Forward Support Company, 65th Engineer Battalion, 130th Eng. Bde., works on a welding project at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, near Tikrit, Iraq, August 5. Ramos Fee, a Myrtle Creek, Ore., native, has been deployed for more than six months. He works closely with Iraqi Army welders and helped train his counterparts in different techniques. (Photo by U.S. Army Capt. Miguel A. Lima, 65th Eng. Bde.)

Iraqi Slang ENCYCLOPEDIA Part 5 by MAJ Aaron Dorf

ADO— ‘Army Direct Ordering’; a program that allows Soldiers to purchase new uniforms and personal equipment through the internet on the Government’s nickel. The program was designed to replace clothing worn-out or destroyed on mission over the course of a long deployment. Every Soldier in the Task Force will receive an allocation of fund to purchase uniforms, usually in several allotments and can select via the web, the items that they wish to purchase. Items are delivered through the mail system and it may take anywhere between 15 and 75 days to receive the items based on what was ordered.

Al Sahra Air Base—Synonymous with COB Speicher; the pre-war name for the current contingency operating base and the name used by the local populace—although most know the term ‘Speicher’.

D-9 Dozer—The largest piece of heavy engineer equipment in the Army inventory. Only a handful of these machines were purchased for the OIF I in 2003 and are still being put to work today. They were one of the first armored pieces of engineer equipment and are nearly indestructible.

Due to extreme size and weight, they can only be transported by the ‘HET’ which ironically is the largest transport system in the Army (see HET).

Fobbit Trail—A slang term for the COB Speicher ECP (Entry Control Point) Road. The ‘ECP road’ or access road to COB Speicher is at least 1.5 miles long and has a minimum of 200 chicanes, gates, check-points, guard shacks, and other obstacles that require negotiation prior to entry. It normally takes a good 30-45 minutes to drive through the gates and clear weapons. The term ‘Fobbit Trail’ signifies that you have reached the end of the journey and that you’ll soon be back among the FOB dwellers, many of whom have never ventured outside of the gates of Speicher.



The mighty D9 Dozer

Handeseh—An Arabic work for Iraqi Engineer; our Iraqi partners are sometimes just referred to as ‘handeseh’.

HET— ‘Heavy Equipment Transporter’; The largest ground-wheeled transport system in the Army—originally designed to ferry M1 Abrahms tanks which weigh approximately 70 tons, the HET is extremely useful in Iraq. Task Force Trailblazer uses HETs to transport bulldozers, route clearance equipment, and other heavy concrete materials to and from job sites. It is the ultimate heavy hauler complete with its own crew compartment, much like a civilian rig.

IBIZ— ‘Iraqi Business Industrial Zone’; An area just outside the gate of COB Speicher that is the home to 15 or so Iraqi vendors and companies that have set up shop to sell commodities and materials to the US Government. IBIZ is helpful when soliciting quotes for construction materials or hard to find parts for use at the motorpool. IBIZ also accepts ‘FOO’ money which allows the Battalion Logistics Officer to provide materials for mission on short-notice as required to support the companies.

Iraqi Provinces—A cross between a county and a state and contains a Governor; Task Force Trailblazer operates primarily in two provinces: Salah Ad Din (SaD) and Kirkuk. SaD is home to the city of Tikrit and COB Speicher; Kirkuk province contains both the city of Kirkuk and FOB Warrior which is the home of the 511th Engineer Company. The 130th EN BDE is located in Ninewa which is just outside the city of Mosul. Each province is very different in geography, population, natural wealth, and political challenges. When travelling, throughout the battlespace (around Iraq), locations are denoted by provinces.



HET Tractor



MEDEVAC RED—'Medical Evacuation Condition—Red/Amber/Green; A condition where air and ground MEDEVAC is limited or unavailable; this is usually predicated by poor weather conditions or aircraft unavailability. When conditions are denoted as MEDEVAC Red, most non-essential patrols or 'out of the wire' missions are delayed or cancelled. Critical operations and route clearance will reconfigure with additional personnel, vehicles and equipment to provide a self-sufficient ground evacuation capability. Unfortunately, there have been a significant number of days of MEDEVAC red over the past several months due to the high frequency of dust storms in the Tikrit area.

On Mission—A term that denotes that a Soldier is 'out of the wire' conducting operations or traveling to and from another FOB. When 'On Mission', you are typically unavailable and questions are not asked about your whereabouts by personnel outside of the unit.

PDSS—Pre-Deployment Site Survey; when a group of individuals travel to a location of a future deployment or training site to gather information and set the conditions for their arrival. 1st Engineer Battalion from Fort Riley, Kansas has recently completed their PDSS to Iraq which is proof that there is light at the end of the tunnel and Task Force Trailblazer will be replaced!!! TFTB wishes the Soldiers and Families the best of luck as they prepare for their deployment to IZ.

Pump House—The name for the new Task Force Trailblazer gym. The previous facility, known as the 'Prison Gym' was demolished to make room for the new Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) building in ToV. The gym equipment was recently relocated to the new facility. The pump house is in a larger building, has reliable A/C, doesn't look seedy, has a water cooler, and is generally a respectable workout facility.

Scooby Bus—The nickname given to the contract busses that the Battalion has acquired. Due to their size and shape, the Soldiers have unanimously decided that they provided flashbacks to the original Scooby Doo cartoon, thus the name. Of foreign origin, these busses seat 25 children (hard pressed to get 25 adults) and have 6 folding isle seats, which makes it difficult to fill to capacity. Regardless, they are value added transportation.

SPARKS Roller—A piece of kit used to defeat IED's and other roadside hazards. Rollers of different sizes and shapes have been in the Army inventory since WWII and were, until recently most often associated with armor platforms (tanks) and used protect against land-mines. The most recent rollers were specifically designed for wheeled vehicles (MRAPS), and are used to proof roadways for convoys and other traffic. Rollers for wheeled vehicles are designed to move at higher speeds and have much greater maneuverability than ones for armor platforms. However, it is important to note that it is definitely a challenge to drive a vehicle with a 20 foot trailer like device on the front!



MEDEVAC 'GREEN'



MEDEVAC 'RED'



1st Engineer Battalion PDSS Team: Left to Right: 1LT Brooks, 1LT Rottenberg, LTC Whittle, MAJ Koeppin, W01 Garnett



Scooby Bus



SPARKS Roller

WOLFPACK



Top: A typical scene for COL Spider—Wolfpack Soldiers get ready to conduct a joint patrol with a combination of US and Iraqi Route Clearance equipment; Center, Left to Right: SSG Inch attempts to fly a downed Russian Helicopter during a reconnaissance mission; 1SG Hurlocker, right, provides instructions to SFC Keihlmeier while discussing the units security plan during battlefield circulation; PV2 Seneus walks patrol as part of 4th Platoon's security plan; Right: PV2 McKee, SGT Hughes, SSG Rodriguez, SGT Hein, SGT Olbleada pose for a pre-mission photo.



Across the Taskforce—HHC



Above, Left to Right: Iraqi Jinood toss pickets from a contract delivery into a gigantic jumble as the S4 keeps count; CW2 Holley is caught working on his new ride at the FSC motorpool—Looks like 6.5 liters of American Muscle under the hood!; Left: 1LT Vu, CPT J. Biggerstaff, Huda the Interpreter, and PV2 Bertling pose for a shot while working at the 4th IA materials yard; Middle, Left to Right: Unloading HESCOS Iraqi style; 1SG Azucena always reminds us not to keep the local critters as pets; SSG Towles, SGT Miller, Wolf, and Huda administer a PT test to several Iraqi Soldiers during training at COB Speicher; Bottom, Left to Right: 1LT Thorell is served a shot of black-Turkish Coffee following a traditional lunch at COL Spider; CSM Morse and MAJ Dorf prep for movement to COB Speicher; SSG Torres chilling with the CST in the back of the Caiman.



Half-Way Home

By SPC Amanda Conway

On July 31st, several members of TFTB gathered for a Spiritual Fitness Breakfast to celebrate the half-way point of our deployment. It was a good chance for us to take a moment to enjoy a meal together, reflect on what we've accomplished and how far we've come in this deployment, and to begin to look forward to what lies ahead of us on our journey through the end of this deployment and back home to our family and friends. CH (LTC) Tom Wheatley, the Division Chaplain for MND-N, was our guest speaker. He helped us to realize that while we have done great things so far in our deployment, we've really only just made it to second base, and we have to finish strong in order to make it all the way. In a baseball game, he reminded us, we don't get anything for making it to second base, only for making it home. He

offered words of encouragement to help us set and achieve our goals on our journey home. Other highlights of the event included the musical talent of PFC Presswood from the S2 shop and a slideshow representing the first half of the deployment. Featured on these pages are some of the pictures used in the slideshow depicting the hard work and the fun times that we've had throughout the first half of this deployment. When CH Ferrell asked me to start thinking of songs to use for the slideshow, the first one that came to my mind was by one of my favorite bands that most have never heard of, Spoken. The song is titled "Sleep Well Tonight" and is a letter of encouragement as the singer makes his way home. I would like to share these lyrics with each of our family and friends back home as a reminder that we are thinking of you every day and we can't wait to be home with you again: soon.

*I'm sending this letter to you in hopes that it finds you well;
I wanted to say I love and I miss you.
I pray that you sleep well tonight;
I hope you dream of me.
I'll write again tomorrow;
I'll be home soon.*

*I'm a million miles away from you I can't get you off my mind,
not that I'm trying but, all I want is to hold you again.
Sleep well tonight.
All these miles that stand between us get shorter everyday.
I'm calling to say I love you and I miss you.
I can see the city skyline;
I'm not that far away.
I pull into the driveway and I see you.
Sleep well tonight.*





ORDER OF SERVICE



*Invocation	SPC Amanda Conway
*National Anthem	
Opening Remarks	CH (CPT) Keith Ferrell
Special Music	PFC Robert Presswood
Looking Back...Moving Forward	Slideshow
Scripture Reading Isaiah 35:1-7	SSG Jessica Prosper
Introduction of Speaker	CH (CPT) Keith Ferrell
Guest Speaker Hebrews 12:1-2	CH (LTC) Tom Wheatley
Final Remarks	LTC Scott Petersen
*Benediction	SPC Brandon Rogers

*Please Stand



CH (LTC) Tom Wheatley

MND-N / 25th Infantry Division Chaplain



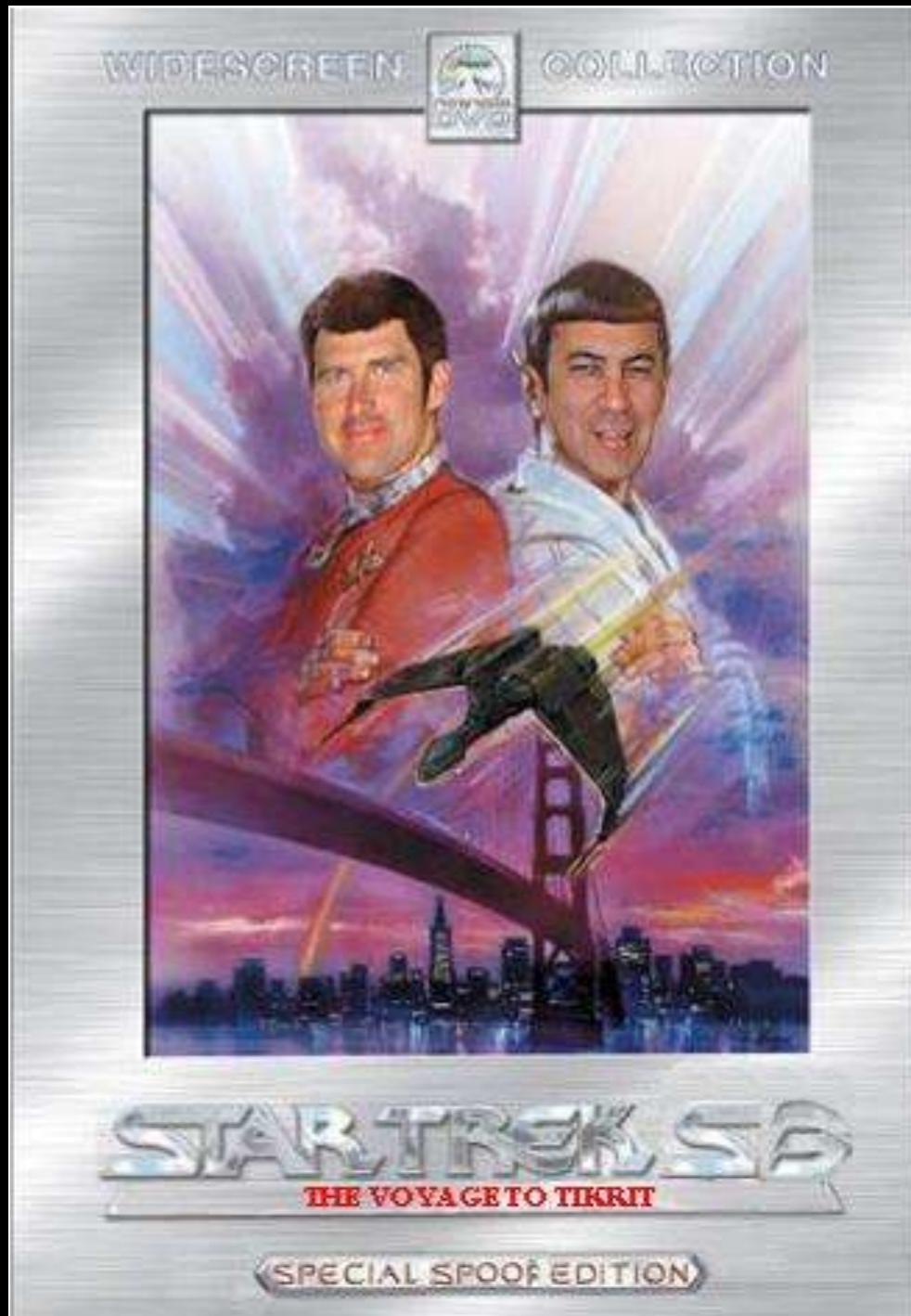
CH (LTC) Tom Wheatley grew up in Northern Virginia with his father, mother and sister. He attended the College of William and Mary where he studied International Relations, graduating in 1982. He then attended Boston University School of Theology, earning a Masters of Divinity with the purpose of becoming an Army Chaplain.

CH (LTC) Wheatley's Army career began in 1988 when he attended Chaplain Officer Basic Course at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. His subsequent assignments include the following: Battalion Chaplain for Infantry trainees and then for 3rd Ranger Battalion at Fort Benning, Georgia; Battalion Chaplain for a Signal Battalion in Taegu, Korea; Brigade Chaplain for the Ranger Training Brigade (Ranger School), again at Fort Benning; an Instructor of Ethics at the Military Police School, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri after earning a Masters of Sacred Theology at Yale Divinity School; Brigade Chaplain for the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vicenza, Italy with one tour to Iraq; Personnel Manager for Chaplains in Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Georgia; and Division Chaplain, 25th Infantry Division, Hawaii, on his second tour to Iraq with the Division.

CH Wheatley has been married to the former Nancy Jayne Allen of Squantum, Massachusetts for twenty-two years, and they have three energetic boys: Joshua, Nathan, and Daniel. Interests include seeing Hawaii with Nancy and the boys when not deployed; watching the boys' involvement in numerous sporting activities; geocaching, the Redskins and the Boston Red Sox.



The lighter side of Iraq.....now showing...



Iraq: the final frontier. Hot. Dusty. Dangerous. Their one-year patrol mission: to explore strange new provinces, to target and destroy IEDs, and partner with friendly Iraqis. These are their voyages. Battle Captains log: Stardate 0908.15. In his final mission Commanding the TOC, MAJ Martin D. Snider and his pointy-eared sidekick, MSG Gary "Monte" Montano, travel across Iraq in the USS Trailblazer (RG-33) teaching our partners the skills of the combat engineer and visiting uncharted Cities, Villages, and Localities throughout the Tigris River Valley. To them and the posterity of Iraq, we commit our future. They boldly go where no American has willingly gone before.



MAJ Snider and MSG Montano pose with their movie spoof picture. This was MAJ Snider's first and last movie spoof as he will be leaving battalion.

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Editor's Notes

Salaam,

Sometimes, when we're talking to friends and families, it seems like nothing big happens while deployed. But day by day, things do change and we do all sorts of things worth noting. I considered myself extremely privileged when two Soldiers made sure to let me know about their outstanding success in losing weight and meeting their weight goals while deployed. As CPT Conley mentioned in his article, it's easier to devote time to physical fitness without a lot of distractions. While that may be the case, some distractions are a welcome part of life, too.

One is a newly started International Film Society which I'm proud to say is a spin-off from the film festival we put on here at ToV a little over a month ago. We show international films to a growing audience of interested folks at COB Speicher. It's great to go and listen to folks just talk film in a screening format.

To the left is a picture of 1LT Kessler. The tell-tale mustache (from many months ago) and the faux camera should tip you off to his portrayal of me in a skit put on by officers for officers. Yet one more thing meant to break up the humdrum of daily life.

- CPT Miguel Lima



Commander's Corner

Aloha Families and Friends of Task Force Trailblazer,

As you see in this issue, we continue to be busy and still have a bit of fun to keep our sanity. Last week, the unit that we expect to take over our mission when we redeploy sent a team here to get a better understanding of what they will be doing—their PDSS or Pre-Deployment Site Survey. The battalion commander and some of his key staff had a great visit, and were understandably impressed with what we are doing. Our visits to our Iraqi partners were particularly useful and enjoyable. The training and relationships we've established with our engineer brothers has been paying off well, and the chance for some meeting and greeting ahead of time will make the transition of those relationships that much easier in 4 months or so. Unit transitions are pretty much constant here, and it creates challenges—our partners have to get to know a new team, units that we support come on board and change how things are done, etc. However, new ideas and fresh energy is the bright side of these transitions.

Some of you may have noticed a little less communication coming home from your Soldier. I'll make a small excuse for them—we have been very busy. C Company, 84th Engineer Battalion has been working on

some critical projects—one highlight is completion of a new, very nice building for Morale, Recreation, and Welfare at COB Speicher. We opened it to our Soldiers with a ceremony that recognized a dozen of the Soldiers who put in some extra effort, and were also fortunate to have CSM Leota, 25th Infantry Division CSM (Lightning 7) present for some other special award presentations. Six of our senior NCOs were presented with the Bronze Order of the DeFleury Medal for distinguished service and contributions to the Engineer Regiment. 1SG George, SFC Wryn, SFC Workman, SFC Legg, SFC Kiehmeier, and SFC Freitas represent some of our very best leaders and I was honored to present that award to them on behalf of the Regiment in the new "First Inn." I was similarly honored to present the Bronze Star Medal to MAJ (P) Dale Snider for his superb service to this battalion's Soldiers as "Trailblazer 3." It's been wonderful to get to know Dale and Sherry Snider, and I personally wish them the best in their new home in Washington D.C. I also extend a warm welcome to MAJ Aaron Reisinger and his wife Stacy who come from the 130th Brigade HQ to step in for the Sniders. Last but not least, I'm pleased to announce that SPC Vickers

(FSC) WON the Division's Joint Best Warrior competition that I mentioned last month. An absolutely outstanding accomplishment to earn this and be recognized as the best of thousands across this Division.

Well, that's all the great news I have for you in this issue...more to come, I'm sure. Thanks for your support to your Soldier and for your sacrifices that make the 65th such a great team of teams, and enables us to make a difference every day!

First In, Last Out,
Trailblazer 6

