

*in the*  
**ZONE**

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Soldiers assigned to the 571st Military Police Company play with Staff Sgt. Truvy, a therapy dog assigned to the 93rd Military Police Battalion. Truvy goes to different parts of Forward Operating Base Prosperity with her owner, Sgt. Tiann Smith, a chaplain's assistant with the 93rd MP Battalion.  
*Photo by Sgt. Michelle Gonzalez*

## On the Cover:

Spc. Ashley Griffith administers a mandatory H1N1 vaccination to a soldier at Forward Operating Base Prosperity Nov. 20. More than 1,000 IZ service members received the H1N1 vaccine in November.  
*Photo by Sgt. Michelle Gonzalez*

# in the ZONE



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# From the Top

## JASG-C Commander

Please allow me to wish each of you a happy Thanksgiving, a few days after the fact. I hope each of you had the opportunity to reflect on those things that make you truly thankful.

The holiday season, although traditionally a joyous time, can present emotional challenges as well. Being far from home and away from family and familiar surroundings has a tendency to leave a hollow and unfulfilled feeling with many of us. Although that feeling is somewhat normal and accepted, it affects each of us in different ways.

I ask each of you to be mindful of those around you during this season. Reach out and help a fellow military or civilian counterpart work through challenging personal times and/or feelings of loss and separation. We are all part of the team and all important to the mission.

Last month I wrote about the theme of constant change in the IZ. Department of State turned Liberty Pool over to GOI recently and we are ready to continue additional

property transfers as we draw down the U.S. footprint in the IZ. Transition of MNSTC-I, TF 134, MNC-I and MNF-I into one USF-I headquarters continues at a rapid pace. Much of what we previously referred to as the CJ-staff is now J-staff. By the time the December issue of In the Zone prints, the transition will be more than 95 percent complete.

The IZ transition continues to fuel many construction projects. Several are in full swing at Union III, Prosperity, the U.S. Embassy and LZ Fernandez. KBR operations are moving to Prosperity along with construction projects that will provide new housing, offices, a vehicle maintenance facility and a laundry facility.

We are also working on the feasibility of eliminating some of the older dry-CHUs and increasing the number of wet-CHUs on Prosperity, along with additional force protection measures around the Prosperity housing areas. We hope to start this phase in early 2010.



Col. Steven Benseid  
Commander  
Joint Area Support Group—Central

Twenty-foot T-walls are arriving at the Embassy CHU-Ville as we speak. These T-walls will have temporary positions in and around the housing area while we are building overhead cover for both CHU-Ville and the new gym. Speaking of Chu-Ville, it is appropriate to welcome to the team the new mayor of CHU-Ville, SFC Jesse Reimer. You may find SFC Reimer in the gym periodically working to improve his 415-pound bench press record.

Keep up the great work and have a wonderful holiday season.

## JASG-C Command Sergeant Major

Time has flown and this is my second to last In the Zone. By the time you read this, Thanksgiving will be a mere "I ate too much" memory, and the Packers will have beaten the Lions. Christmas and New Year's will be here before we know it.

Being away from home is not easy, especially during the holidays. Traditionally, the holidays are a time to gather with family and friends. However, when you're deployed, the holidays can be a lonely and depressing

time if you allow them to be.

This month, I want to talk about suicide prevention and intervention. Suicide is a real problem across the military. It concerns me not only as the JASG-C CSM, but also as a father and grandfather. After all, children accentuate how precious life is.

Suicide prevention is every soldier's responsibility, because real prevention starts at the individual level.

We all know or will come to know, stuff happens! That is



Command Sgt. Maj. Edgar J. Hansen  
Command Sergeant Major  
Joint Area Support Group—Central

what life is all about. Some stuff is good and some stuff is bad, but

More —>

it's all just stuff. The hardest part is getting past the emotional energy that comes with the bad stuff.

As a 19-year-old soldier in the A Shau Valley, Vietnam, I had a difficult time believing I would make it to 20, let alone see the new millennium or celebrate my 60th birthday in Baghdad. Between then and now I have been married and divorced, witnessed the birth of my son and grandson, watched my parents pass on and served with the finest soldiers America has to offer in both good times and bad.

When people ask me how my tours in Afghanistan and Iraq were I tell them, "I don't know, I haven't gotten over Vietnam yet."

I can tell you from experience that the old saying, "time heals all" is true. So, my advice to you is, do not throw your life away! Eventually, all the bad things life brings you will pass. The key to all of this is time.

How do you get past the immediate pain since time moves slowly when you are hurting? First, admit you have a problem and seek help. There is a combat stress clinic (CSC) here on FOB Prosperity. Additionally, you can call the chaplain's office. They are here to help!

That will take courage and discipline, because for most of us it is difficult to ask for help, especially young men who think they can handle anything. Sometimes you cannot handle everything, so it's

important to get help. No one can wave a magic wand and make the pain go away, but you can talk and they can listen. They can offer ways to deal with whatever life has brought you.

Now, we all know some will not admit they have a problem nor seek help. That is where we all must get involved and use ACE: ask, care and escort.

If you think a friend or fellow soldier is acting odd or different than they normally act, you may need to intervene. If situational awareness is telling you something is wrong, act.

Ask your buddy the question, "Are you thinking of killing yourself?"

If they answer "yes?"

Care for your buddy; calmly remove any means the soldier might use to harm themselves, and then;

Escort your buddy to their chain of command, a chaplain, a behavioral health provider or a primary care provider. Never leave them alone.

I hope that we will never have to use ACE, but it is better to be ready to help if needed, than to not know what to do. It is simple, just remember ACE.

To all of our partners across the IZ, I hope you had a good Thanksgiving and hope you each have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Stay safe, one team, one fight!



A view of Forward Operating Base Prosperity at sunset. Photo by Sgt. Michelle Gonzalez



# Remembrance Day

## An Australian tribute



Col. Bruce Cain, Commandant of Forward Operating Base Union III (left), Mr. Adrian Morrison, the Australian Embassy's chargé d'affaires in Baghdad (center), and Maj. Nigel Earnshaw, Officer Commanding the Australian Security Detachment XV, hold wreaths to place at the foot of a fallen soldier tribute to honor service members' sacrifices during a ceremony held at Union III Nov. 11. Photos by Sgt. Michelle Gonzalez



Australian Army Maj. Nigel Earnshaw lays a wreath of remembrance at a ceremony Nov. 11 at FOB Union III.

In the U.S., Nov. 11 is Veterans Day, but for most British Commonwealth nations it is Remembrance Day—a day not to honor military veterans as much as to remember their nations' war dead.

At FOB Union III in Baghdad, the Australian security detachment staged a small but poignant Remembrance Day ceremony as Australia's armed forces contingency here did their part "lest we forget" Australians who have fallen on battlefields from Gallipoli to Basra.

Maj. Nigel Earnshaw, commanding officer of Australian Security Detachment–Baghdad,



read Canadian Lt. Col. John McRae's famous World War I poem, "In Flanders Fields."

*... Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.*

As the ceremony drew to a close guests watched in silence while Aussie troops marched forward with wreaths to place the foot of a fallen soldier display. Representatives of the Australian embassy and U.S. forces also placed wreaths.

Lest we forget. ■



Australian soldiers salute as the Australian national anthem, "Advance Australia Fair" is played at the Nov. 11 Remembrance Day ceremony held on Forward Operating Base Union III.



Wreaths lay at the foot of a fallen soldier tribute, marked by the words "Lest We Forget" on a scarlet banner.



Col. Bruce Cain marches forward with a wreath to lay at the foot of a fallen soldier tribute at the Australian compound on FOB Union III.



# Stroke of Genius



## Art exhibition supports local women

Department of Defense and Department of State personnel, as well as contractors admired artwork on display at the Baghdad Folklore and Art Exhibition Nov. 7 at the U.S. Embassy. Photos by Sgt. Michelle Gonzalez

*By Capt. Joy LeMay*

The melodic sounds of Arabic folk music filled the air at the U.S. Embassy American Club as International Zone residents browsed locally handcrafted works of art for sale at the Baghdad Folklore and Art Exhibition Nov. 7.

The goal of the event was to boost the local Iraqi economy through promoting self-employment and education.

The event, organized by the Provincial Reconstruction Team—Baghdad, featured hand-woven baskets, homemade soaps and candles, and paintings and sketches created by local members of Women for Women—Iraq and The Fine Arts Institute for Girls.

“This event helps empower the women who are doing this,” said Maj. Elba D’Asaro, the Women’s Initiative Program Manager. “The training they have received will help them get a jump start in the economy.”

Women for Women—an international non-governmental organization—improves the lives of women in conflict and post-conflict environments



Above: Chief Warrent Officer Debra LeTexier negotiates a price for a hand-woven basket filled with homemade soaps and candles with a member of Women for Women—Baghdad.



Left: One of the many works of art on display at the Baghdad Folklore and Art Exhibition. Artists displayed pieces symbolic of their Iraqi heritage.





**A Multi-National Forces–Iraq soldier admires a piece of art created by a student from The Fine Arts Institute for Girls during the Baghdad Folklore and Art Exhibition held Nov. 7 at the U.S. Embassy.**



**Pauline Jasim, one of the event organizers, places a sold sign on a painting during the exhibition held Nov. 7 at the U.S. Embassy.**

through a one-year educational program covering topics such as women rights, vocational studies and business administration. Nearly 500 Baghdad women are currently enrolled in the program.

The Fine Arts Institute for Girls in Baghdad is a five-year program—three year high school and two year college—where young women earn an associate degree by studying Arabic script, music, sculpture and ceramics. Graduates of the school can teach elementary school art or continue their educations at a university.

“I think it’s an excellent opportunity for the Iraqi women to display their goods and services,” said Lt. Col. Porter Johnson, who attended the event. “It’s an excellent opportunity for them to share their culture and make a little money at it.”

Women for Women sold out in the first half-hour of the exhibition and took orders to fulfill the high demand. The Fine Arts Institute for Girls sold 29 pieces of art at the exhibition totaling \$3,000. The money will be invested in the school.

Nearly 20 local artists will display their artwork at a bazaar scheduled for Dec. 12 at the U.S. Embassy. ■





# Honoring a Guardsman

Multi-National Force-Iraq commander Gen. Raymond Odierno speaks about Pennsylvania Army National Guard Master Sgt. Sean M. Thomas at the dedication of the Baghdad embassy gym named in his honor. Photos by Sgt. Michelle Gonzalez

*By Sgt. Michelle Gonzalez*

A Pennsylvania Guardsman was honored during a dedication ceremony for a new fitness center at the U.S. Embassy Nov. 12.

The fitness center was named in honor of Master Sgt. Sean M. Thomas, who died of injuries sustained during a rocket attack inside Baghdad's International Zone in 2007.

Thomas joined the Army Re-

serve in 1992 and later entered the Pennsylvania Guard in 1998. He was serving with the 28th Division Support Command and was on his on his second deployment in 2007.

Ambassador Christopher Hill, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, and Gen. Raymond Odierno, the commander of Multi-National Force-Iraq, spoke about the sacrifices service members like Thomas have made to ensure a stable Iraq.

"When we complete the mission in Iraq it will be because of people like Sean Thomas," Hill said.

"Sean's legacy will live on as a testament to the strength and resiliency of all Americans both military and civilian who serve their country, who like Sean have dedicated themselves and will continue to dedicate themselves to the success of liberty here in Iraq," said Odierno.

"Thanks to Americans like

Master Sgt. Sean Thomas the people of Iraq today are uplifted by the growing hope of a bright and promising future," Odierno said. ■



Photo and guest book display inside Master Sgt. Sean M. Thomas Memorial Gym.



U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Christopher Hill; Pennsylvania Army National Guard Col. Carol Eggert; and Multi-National Force-Iraq commander, Gen. Raymond Odierno at the entrance to the Master Sgt. Sean M. Thomas Memorial Gym.



# Frame of mind

## Therapy dog boosts morale



Soldiers assigned to 571st Military Police Company enjoy playing fetch with Truvy, a therapy dog assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 93rd Military Police Battalion unit ministry team. Photos by Capt. Joy LeMay



Sgt. Tiann Smith, the 93rd Military Police Battalion chaplain assistant and Truvy's owner, takes Truvy to different areas of Prosperity.

*By Capt. Joy LeMay*

Truvy is unlike other dogs working in the International Zone. Instead of guarding entry control points or sniffing for explosives, Truvy has the unique and important mission of lifting the spirits of deployed soldiers around her.

As a certified therapy dog assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 93rd Military Police Battalion's unit ministry team, Truvy is trained to provide affection and comfort to people in stressful situations and also serves as a link between troubled troops and the UMT.

"Studies have shown the stress of deployment

compounds," said Lt. Col. Thomas Byrd, commander of the 93rd MP Battalion. "Anything we can do to help the UMTs or commanders reach soldiers, help soldiers, get soldiers to open up with what they're actually thinking is something worth supporting."

To give soldiers a chance to interact with Truvy, Sgt. Tiann Smith—the unit chaplain's assistant and Truvy's owner—takes the 2-year-old black lab and German shepherd mix almost everywhere she goes, including unit social activities, walks around company areas, religious services, and helicopter rides across Iraq.

"One of the most rewarding





Truvy attentively waits for a personal security guard to throw her ball. Truvy can be seen taking daily walks around the FOB with her owner Sgt. Tiann Smith.

parts of my job is simply seeing the soldiers faces light up when I bring Truvy around,” said Smith. “The simple act of petting or playing fetch with her helps remind them of life back home and relaxes them.”

Truvy’s affectionate and playful personality makes her great at her job.

“We love having Truvy around,” said Sgt. Tanesha Baldwin, of the 93rd MP headquarters company. “When you’re having a bad day you can always count on her to be around to help you out with that. She’s a great asset to the unit.”

“She’s not a mascot,” Byrd said. “She’s here for a reason. She’s a great stress reliever and morale booster for the soldiers and is part of the team.” ■



Spc. Michael Beavens, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, stops to pet Truvy and chat with Truvy’s owner, Spc. Tiann Smith, a chaplain’s assistant with 93rd Military Police Battalion



# Petraeus receives Patriot Award

## IZ troops attend ceremony via satellite



The American Patriot ceremony held in Washington D.C. Nov. 13 honored Gen. David Petraeus and the men and women of U.S. Central Command live via satellite to Baghdad. Soldiers from the Joint Area Support Group–Central represented U.S. CENTCOM. Photo by Event Digital Photography, Inc.

WASHINGTON/BAGHDAD — As more than 630 people gathered in Washington, D.C., the evening of Nov. 13 to honor Gen. David Petraeus and the men and women of U.S. Central Command, about 50 of those CENTCOM troops were gathering in the IZ at the same time—but before dawn the following morning—to join in the honors.

Petraeus, the former MNF-I commander who now commands all of CENTCOM, received the prestigious American Patriot Award from the National Defense University Foundation. Because the award also recognized CENTCOM's troops, Central Command was represented by soldiers, sailors and airmen assigned to Joint Area Support Group, and also by the staffs of the Combined Press Information Center and American Forces

Network.

A satellite television hook-up arranged by the 222nd Broadcast Operations Detachment in Baghdad allowed the IZ soldiers to appear throughout the event on two giant projection screens at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center in Washington, while service members in Baghdad watched the Washington festivities on a return video feed.

The senior officer present in Baghdad was JASG-C commander Col. Steven Benseid, who had the honor of representing all of Central Command's deployed forces and congratulating Petraeus on their behalf.

"It is truly extraordinary to be standing here in witness to this event today," Benseid told Petraeus. "We owe you a deep debt of gratitude for your leadership

and for what you've given all of us... and for the opportunity to serve the people of America." ■



Soldiers in Baghdad applaud Gen. David Petraeus as he receives the American Patriot Award presented by the National Defense University Foundation. Photo by Sgt. Michelle Gonzalez





Soldiers from the Ports of Entry Directorate–Transition Team celebrated Thanksgiving with their Iraqi counterparts and their families during lunch at the Forward Operating Base Prosperity dining facility Nov. 26. Photos by Capt. Joy LeMay

# Sharing the tradition

## U.S. and Iraqi military give thanks together

Thanksgiving is traditionally a day when Americans gather with family and loved ones to share a special meal and reflect on what they are thankful for. But for one group of deployed soldiers in the International Zone,



A young Iraqi guest enjoys a bite of turkey during a traditional Thanksgiving meal hosted by Team Viking soldiers.

Thanksgiving this year meant sharing the tradition with their Iraqi counterparts.

The Ports of Entry Directorate–Transition Team invited members of the Iraqi Ports of Entry Directorate and their families to join them for a Thanksgiving feast at the Forward Operating Base Prosperity dining facility.

“Unfortunately, we’re unable to share Thanksgiving with our families back in the United States, but what a special occasion to share with our family here in Iraq,” said Lt. Col. Detrick Briscoe, the POED-TT Commander. “Today was about sharing our culture with our Iraqi brothers.”

The POED-TT works with the POED to generate policies for all the Iraq ports of entry and secure the borders. The upcoming elections have put an even greater emphasis on their mission.

“We are truly thankful for the help from the coalition to the Iraqi people and for all the sacrifice the

Americans have made for us,” said Brig. Gen. Burhan Khalil Ibrahim, the POED director of planning. “God willing that next year you will be able to celebrate this event with your families. This is truly a special day for me that I will always remember.” ■



Brig. Gen. Burhan Khalil Ibrahim, the Ports of Entry Directorate director of planning (left) shakes hands with Lt. Col. Detrick Briscoe, the Ports of Entry Directorate–Transition Team commander.



# Thanksgiving in the Zone



Top Left: Sgt. Brian Wepking, a member of the JASG-C Personal Security Detail, pretends to feed Sgt. Larry Ledvina, also with the PSD team, some Thanksgiving turkey.

Top Right: Sgt. Deanna Thompson, 129th Area Support Medical Center, prepares a plate of traditional Thanksgiving foods.

Center Left: Chief Warrant Officer Craig Krenz, JASG-C, takes a photo of the holiday decorations.

Center Right: Lt. Col. Dennis Konkel (left), Command Sgt. Maj. Jeffery Fletcher (center) Lt. Col. John Loomer (right) take a break from serving hungry troops to pose for a Thanksgiving photo.

Bottom: Cpl. John Hart (left) and (right) Pfc. Haley Hart, 571st Military Police Company, sit down for their Thanksgiving meal.



# Keeping law and order

## IZ Police maintain their presence

*By Spc. Tyler Lasure*

With operations in Iraq drawing down, many units try to downplay their presence, but the International Zone Police have a different approach.

"One of the main responsibilities for the IZ Police is to do presence patrols inside the IZ and law and order inside the forward operating bases," said Sgt. Steven Mariani, a military police investigator with the IZ Police.

Every day the IZ Police patrol the streets of the IZ in their Suburbans, making sure everyone knows that while U.S. forces draw down, they still uphold law and order.

"We do a lot of community policing having our presence out there," said Spc. Timothy Bennett, a traffic investigator with the IZ Police. "We do a couple of mounted and dismounted patrols on the FOBs, and make sure we're out there being active cops."

This doesn't mean that the troops in the unit just cruise around the IZ.

"It can be real quiet some days and then you will have five accidents in a row," Bennett said.

The IZ Police respond to a variety of calls: resolving parking issues, checking the badges

of non-military personnel on the FOBs, and settling misunderstandings between Iraqi and U.S. soldiers.

"That's what's nice about this job, you meet a lot of people," said Airman 1st Class Donly Drakes, a patrol officer with the IZ Police. "There is always something going on."

The IZ Police also keep their skills sharp by running scenario training in buildings around the IZ. These scenarios often cover situations, such as hostage incidents, police hope to never face.

"I believe firmly that if we were to come into a situation they would be able to conduct themselves properly," said Mariani, who helps conduct the training.



**Spc. Timothy Bennett, a traffic investigator with the IZ Police, confirms the identity of a worker during a patrol on Forward Operating Base Prosperity.** *Photos by Spc. Tyler Lasure*



**Spc. Timothy Bennett (left) and Airman 1st Class Donly Drakes respond to a training scenario.**

Even though the IZ Police make their presence known they don't plan to be here forever.

"We aid in investigations with the IP (Iraqi Police) and IA (Iraqi Army). We let them take full responsibility and let them gain control over the entire International Zone," Mariani said.

Mariani believes the IZ Police are doing good work and that the Iraqi Police will be able to take over when the IZ is fully returned to the Government of Iraq.

"We are doing the best that we can. We go out there every day. We are here to help deter crime and aide the IPs and IAs, that way they can get more techniques and knowledge so they are set for success when we leave." ■



# Spirit of giving

## Kentucky Guardsmen spread holiday cheer

*By Sgt. Fernando Ochoa  
222nd Broadcast Operations  
Detachment*

With the Christmas season soon upon us, the spirit of giving was shown in Baghdad Nov. 16 by a personal security detail with the National Guard's 301st Chemical Company from Maysville, Ky. With their own funds, the 301st's soldiers delivered food, toys and clothes to the Dar Al Salem widow's camp in the Kadhimiya District of Baghdad.

The primary mission of the 301st is PSD for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), but on this day they went above and beyond the call of duty to carry out a humanitarian mission. They went into the Red Zone to deliver much needed supplies to the less fortunate.

"I have a bittersweet feeling about



**Staff Sgt. Travis Dugan, 301st Chemical Company, shakes hands with each of the dozens of children who came to receive clothing, food and toys. Photos by Sgt. Fernando Ochoa, 222nd Broadcast Operations Detachment**



**Spc. John Wayne Hall, 301st Chemical Company, holds one of the dozens of children who received humanitarian aid at the Dar Al Salem widow's camp.**

this camp and I wish circumstances like these didn't exist," said Staff Sgt. Travis Dugan, 34, from Maysville, Ky. "I just feel grateful that I can bring a smile to these deserving faces."

The Dar Al Salem widow's camp is refuge to as many as 150 families. Established more than two years ago, it takes in women and children of soldiers and police officers who have been killed or kidnapped.

"I feel like I'm a small part of something bigger," said Staff Sgt. Jonathon Smith, 31, convoy commander, from Flemingsburg, Ky. "Maybe if everyone does their part, then we may be able to accomplish our mission. I hope the Iraqis use our example to do their part too," Smith said.

As a convoy of MRAPs pulled into the small complex of prefabricated housing units, the children came running up to the soldiers. With smiles on their faces, laughs and giggles filled the air with excitement. The crowd of children began to make lines in anticipation of the gifts that had arrived.

Soldiers like Spc. John Wayne Hall began to greet the children, showing them attention and compassion, and





Children from the Dar Al Salem widow's camp line up to receive clothing, toys and food from the 301st Chemical Company, Kentucky Army National Guard.

trying to help as much as he could.

"Once we realized that we were coming, we gathered up everything we could," Hall said. "When we help these people we help ourselves and if we have to give of ourselves, then count me in."

When it came time to hand out the gifts, a surge of children came forward and began grabbing and carrying away the toys, clothing and food. The sparse conditions in this refugee camp have made its inhabitants weary. At times, there is no water and electricity, and many of the widows have no income at all.

"When I see these kids and how they have to struggle, I try not to get emotional," said Spc. Kelly Goode, 39, from Louisville, Ky. "I have kids at home and when I look into these children's eyes I see my own."

Soccer balls were the hot item. In fact, Staff Sgt. Smith held one until the end so that he could give it to the winner of a relay race —and the winner of the race had the biggest smile of all. The mission was a success

and as the MRAP convoy pulled away, the soldiers of the 301st felt a sense of accomplishment.

They hope to have more missions like this one. ■



Staff Sgt. Jonathan Smith, a member of the 301st Chemical Company's PSD team, uses his interpreter to talk with a Dar Al Salem elder.



# Badger jets in the air...



## Red Arrow boots on the ground

Wisconsin Army National Guard soldiers of the 32nd Brigade look over the Wisconsin Air National Guard's F-16 fighters at an air base in Iraq. Photos by Spc. Tyler Lasure

JOINT BASE BALAD — While JASG-C soldiers of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team headquarters have their boots on the ground in the IZ, some of their fellow Guardsmen from the state's Air National Guard had their jets in the sky overhead. It isn't often that aerial support for Army Guard ground troops comes from an Air Guard unit from the same state, but for two months about 300 members of Wisconsin's Madison-based 115th Fighter Wing were in Iraq with about a dozen F-16 fighters.

Two commanders—the JASG's Col. Steven Bensend and Air Guard Lt. Col. Erik Peterson—met at Joint Base Balad recently as the fighter unit was nearing completion of its mission there.

"It really hits home because you are protecting, you're helping the guys that you fight with every day back home, the guys that you live with everyday," Peterson said. "You're basically putting a face to the people on the ground that you are supporting."

Bensend called it "very comforting" to know Wisconsin

Air National Guard troops are helping to protect the soldiers of his 32nd Brigade.

"Knowing that there are Wisconsin pilots in those planes protecting us is a great feeling," Bensend said. "Not very often do we get to say 'Yea, I know that guy...and he knows I'm down here.'"

It takes a lot more than just pilots to keep the F-16s flying. Most of the approximately 300 Air Guard personnel provide support on the ground to keep the jets in the air. They also understand the troops their aircraft are supporting are fellow Wisconsinites.

"It definitely gives you a purpose when they are your own guys," said Staff Sgt. Tim Blommel, an egress systems maintenance specialist who was working on one of the jet's ejection seats inside a maintenance hangar.

The deployed

fighter package's mission includes around-the-clock overwatch, reconnaissance and both counter IED and counter mortar support.

"I think it's a pretty great experience for all of us," Peterson said. "You know every time we come over here we are focused on helping the guys on the ground and we see that as our primary mission while we are here."

"If we know that we've saved just one life, that makes it for us," Peterson said.

The troops on the ground agree. ■



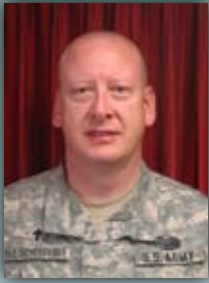
Lt. Col. Erik Peterson (left), the commander of a fighter package from the 115th Fighter Wing, explains the mission of the 115th Fighter Wing to Col. Steven Bensend.



# Chaplain's word

## Christmas Questions

Chap. (Lt. Col.) Douglas H. Fleischfresser  
JASG-C Chaplain



John 3:9; 16  
- "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. Jesus answered, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever

believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

"Hey Chaplain, when can I start playing Christmas Carols?" "Chappy, is Halloween too early to put out my Christmas lights?" "Hey Chap Flash, when can I start saying, 'Merry Christmas?'" "Chaplain, where does the tradition of the Christmas tree come from?"

What is it about Christmas that seems to bring out the questions? Wonderful, quizzical, whimsical, just curious, inquiring, deeply penetrating, light-hearted, questions! And I enjoy every single one of them. Each question asked for a different reason and each questioner curious at their own level.

I find Christmas time as a Lutheran Pastor and a Military Chaplain an especially wondrous time. I enjoy all the questions because it means people are genuinely curious. I also have my questions. Why is it we buy gifts for people who otherwise on a normal day, might drive us crazy? Those little ones (or not so little ones) who were driving our non-deployed spouse crazy because they wouldn't listen a month ago when they were told to clean their room, or get a haircut, now scamper around the house asking at every opportunity, "Mom/Dad, is there anything else we can do to be helpful?" Why do we in the 32nd bother trying to decorate our office areas reflecting the Christmas brightness, when we know our time is now becoming rather short here? Why - when we are back home - do we do things we would never normally do; like battle the freezing temperatures

and the obnoxiously rowdy crowds to get just the right present for the one we love? Why do we send out cards to people we haven't seen in years, only to look at our spouse when we ourselves get cards and ask, "Honey, tell me again. . . how do we know these people?" These are just a few questions I laughingly ask about myself and all of you, my beloved comrades—my friends—that I serve with in the 32nd.

Why indeed? Because I think Christmas is about wondering minds and inquisitive hearts. Here are a few more questions I wonder this time of year. Why would someone be willing to travel from someplace cozy and comfy, to a place where they had to struggle? For what possible purpose would anyone leave the safety of their home only to put their lives in possible danger, willing even to bleed and die for others they have never met? What would be going through the mind and heart of someone who would leave those they love knowing what awaited them was extremely difficult circumstances, hostile intentions, and outright desire to murder them?

I ask myself that question about all of you, my brothers and sisters-in-arms. What motivates you to endure what you do? But even greater I wonder that about my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Why, would He be willing to leave heaven to join us down here? Why would a King leave His throne of Glory and Grace, just to mix with His subjects? In heaven He was honored as the Son of God and He wanted for nothing. But He voluntarily left a place of safety, to be mocked, made fun of, despised by those who He shed His blood for, and abandoned by His closest friends - the disciples—because of fear. He would be betrayed by one in His inner circle and even His blood half brothers and sisters thought Him crazy until after His Resurrection. Why would the One who is completely perfect be

willing to leave His home in heaven for us? Why?

Why indeed? Because His heart aches for us, His prized creation. He loved us so much that He couldn't stand to leave us in our condition. He journeyed to earth so that we would know what He was willing to suffer for us, His children. His death that looked so much like a loss on Good Friday, was in reality a precious gain. In three days He would rise again and proclaim freedom and victory for all who follow Him. Why does it take a death for so many to realize the preciousness of life . . . here and for eternity? Ah, more questions.

Christmas is for questions—and answers. From a cradle—to a cross—to a crown of victory. Our Savior Jesus Christ couldn't stay out of the war for our souls He had to get involved—get bruised, beaten, bloodied—because He cared too much to stand by.

Perhaps all our questions won't get answered in the time we want them to, or in the way we want them to. But at least we are asking and looking for answers from Him who was willing to come to us, as an infant, poor and humble, to suffer and die in our place, so that we might live with Him and all those who die with faith in Him!

So play your Christmas Carols whenever you want because it reminds you of His love! I know some people who never take their Christmas lights down because they like how the lights remind them of Christmas year round! And the joy that comes with wishing some a Merry or Blessed Christmas can continue everyday as you wish them God's Blessings! And the tradition of the Christmas Tree . . . well, that's a journey you are going to have to take for yourself!

Merry Christmas 32nd and God's Richest Blessings as we again celebrate the birth of His Son into our world . . . and our lives—for now and forever!



## Another great federal benefit to consider

Capt. David James

JASG-C Deputy Command Judge Advocate



Thinking about buying a home when you return from deployment? If so, read on. This article outlines a recently revised

law that extends and expands the first-time homebuyer tax credit (FTHTC) to many people who already own a home.

For “first-time homebuyers” (those who have had no ownership interest in a principal residence in the three year period ending on the date of purchase of the new home), this credit can be up to \$8,000.

A \$6,500 maximum credit is available to those taxpayers

who are considered “long-time residents.” A “long-time resident” must have owned his or her own home for any five consecutive years during the eight-year period ending on the date of the new home purchase.

The law previously required that this credit be repaid to the government over 15 years — not anymore. There is no recapture as long as the home remains your principal residence for 36 months after purchase. If you are ordered to move because of military duty during that 36 month period, don’t worry, the recapture rules won’t apply.

The FTHTC is only available for a limited time. For most people to

take advantage they must have a binding contract for sale by May 1, 2010, with a closing date by July 1, 2010. For individuals serving on official extended duty (more than 50 miles away from home) outside the United State for at least 90 days between December 31, 2008 and May 1, 2010, these dates may be extended to 2011.

Early 2010 should be a great time to buy a home, especially when factoring in the FTHTC and historically low interest rates. Remember, individual circumstances will vary, so talk with your real estate and tax professionals at home when considering such a purchase.

## Ain’t no need for the radio:

Country singer Aaron Tippin performs at Prosperity



Country singer Aaron Tippin (left) performs for soldiers during a Stars for Stripes concert Nov. 28 on Forward Operating Base Prosperity.

Spc. Michael Potter poses with country singer Aaron Tippin after Tippin autographed his head. Tippin performed some of his hits, including “Ain’t nothing wrong with the radio,” during a concert Nov. 28 on Forward Operating Base Prosperity.





## Editor's note

*This month, Outside the Zone takes you to Safwan Hill, in southern Iraq, where soldiers provide security for communications towers and provide overwatch.*

# Safwan Hill

*By Spc. Tyler Lasure*

From atop one of the only hills in southern Iraq a group of Wisconsin National Guardsmen keeps a watchful eye over the surrounding area.

Soldiers of Company C, 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry and Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2-127 man an outpost on Safwan Hill, far away from the comforts of Camp Bucca. The soldiers on the hill provide security for communications towers there and give a birds-eye view to units in the area.

"Having that overhead view is a real good thing for the guys on the ground," said Spc. James Hegner, an Infantryman with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2-127. "Knowing that we've checked it out before hand, I think gives them more of a warm and fuzzy on the inside."

Life on top of the hill is different than life back at the camp. Soldiers on Safwan Hill do not have the comforts of the



**Spc. Stephan Mcessey keeps watch from the outpost atop Safwan Hill. Mcessey and others in Company C, 2-127th Infantry, provide a birds-eye view for troops on the ground. Photos by Spc. Tyler Lasure.**



**The makeshift weight room on top of Safwan Hill. Soldiers living on the hill have to give up the comforts found on the larger Forward Operating Bases.**





Pfc. Kevin Lewis mans an M-240B machine gun at one of the guard towers on Safwan Hill.

camp: there isn't a large chow hall like the base has, instead soldiers rely on one cook; there is no conventional gym, instead soldiers set up a bench press and a rack of dumbbells; there aren't enough rooms for spacious living, instead soldiers sleep six or more in a room.

Even with all these inconveniences, soldiers enjoy their time away from the base. "I really enjoy that it's small, you are away from the flagpole," said Staff Sgt. William Poor, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the hill, and a squad leader for Company C. "I'm in charge of the entire hill; it's great to be in charge of something again."



The brothers of Safwan Hill, Spc. Kyle Bestul (right) and Spc. Kory Bestul (left) of New Holstein, enjoy their time on the hill and see it as a chance to hang out with each other.

For two soldiers in Poor's squad, manning the hill is a family affair. Spc. Kyle Bestul and Spc. Kory Bestul are brothers who work at the outpost together.

"It's a good time, I enjoy it, he is an interesting character," said Kory, an infantryman with Company C, 2-127, about working

with his brother.

"It's pretty sweet actually, I get to hang out with him," added Kyle, who serves in the same company.

These soldiers will continue to watch over the area until their return to Wisconsin sometime in January 2010. ■



# Know where to go *Life on the FOBs*

## ***Common Access Cards***

The IZ Common Access Card (CAC) office is in Room 110 on the first floor of the Palace (Bldg. 100) at FOB Prosperity, Monday through Saturday from 0800 to 1700. For questions, call DSN 312-239-1765 or e-mail: [jasg-chrm@iraq.centcom.mil](mailto:jasg-chrm@iraq.centcom.mil)

## ***TMC***

Those eligible for care at Troop Medical Clinics include active-duty U.S. and Coalition Forces, retired U.S. military and Department of Defense federal government employees.

Routine immunizations and Post Deployment Health Assessments are available for individuals during sick-call hours. For groups of 10 or more and immunizations call the TMC to schedule an appointment.

Ortiz Consolidated Medical Clinic is located in Bldg. 87, behind the fuel point. Sick-call hours for walk-ins are Monday through Friday from 0800 to 1000 and 1300 to 1500. Medical staff is present 24/7 in case of emergency. The clinic is closed on Saturdays and Sundays. Services now available include primary care, dental, combat stress control, laboratory, radiology and pharmacy.

The Union III TMC relocated to the west side of Bldg. 5. Sick-call hours for walk-ins are Monday through Friday from 0800 to 1045 and 1300 to 1500, 0800 to 1045 Saturdays.

Audiology services are now located at Phipps TMC in Balad; optometry and dermatology are located at Camp Liberty's Witmer TMC.

## ***Dining facility***

The Prosperity dining facility across from the Palace (Bldg. 100) offers four

meals a day with Grab-n-go options between meal hours. Meal hours are:

Breakfast: 0530 to 0830  
Grab-n-go: 0830 to 1100  
Lunch: 1130 to 1330  
Grab-n-go: 1330 to 1700  
Dinner: 1730 to 2000  
Grab-n-go: 2000 to 2230  
Midnight Meal: 2230 to 0100  
Grab-n-go: 0100 to 0530

The Union III DFAC across from the Bldg. 1 parking lot offers four meals a day. Meal hours are:

Breakfast: 0530 to 0800  
Lunch: 1130 to 1330  
Dinner: 1730 to 2000  
Midnight meal: 2330 to 0100

## ***Gym/MWR***

The Prosperity gym is located on the first floor of the Palace and is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The MWR center, in rooms 122, 125 and 127, are also open 24/7 and offer a large-screen television, DVDs, books, boardgames, and other fun activities.

The Union III gym is located in Bldg. 5 and is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The MWR center, next to the gym, is also open 24/7 and offers a large-screen television, DVDs, books, boardgames, Xbox, and other fun activities.

## ***Post office***

Free mail, limited to 13 ounces, still exists for the letter home. If you are mailing pictures, a small souvenir in an envelope or packages, then you must go to the post office. Packages will be inspected and limited to three items per visit. A military ID card is required for the transaction. Civilians need two forms of identification to conduct postal transactions.

Items forbidden to be shipped include weapons items, drugs, alcohol, and perishable material. For a com-

plete list of items, consult CENTCOM AR 25-200 or HRSC Policy 07-26.

FOB Prosperity: Located at the west entrance of the Palace. The hours are 0900 to 1700 daily.

FOB Union III: A mailbox is located in front of Bldg. 6. The post office is located in Bldg. 5. The hours are 0800 to 1730 daily.

## ***Laundry***

Since dirty laundry is serious business, the FOBs have a seven-day-a-week laundry service that at a maximum takes three days to complete. Individuals using the service can only have 20 pieces of laundry in each bag. Blankets and comforters must be separated from clothing or uniform items.

FOB Prosperity: 0700 to 2000 daily  
FOB Union III: 0700 to 1900 daily



## ***Finance***

Finance operations include check cashing, Eagle Cash Card transactions, military pay issues, collection and review of travel vouchers and other military pay-related documents, and more.

Eagle Cash Card (ECC) applications are available. The service member must provide a current bank statement or LES to verify bank routing and account numbers. As a reminder, you can load up to \$350 per day to your card. You can get cash back up to \$200 per month. Checks can also be cashed for up to \$200 per month.

Prosperity finance operations are in Room 108 on the first floor of the Palace. Hours are from 0900 to 1600 Saturday through Thursday.

Union III finance operations are in Bldg. 6, A-Wing, room 2A from 0900 to 1600 Saturday through Thursday.



# around the zone



Iraqi contractors perform maintenance on an inlet pipe along the Tigris River. The water from the river is transferred to Lake Viejo where it is treated to become a second water source to personnel living in the International Zone. Photo by Capt. Joy LeMay

Chief Warrant Officer Debra LeTexier, Joint Area Support Group contracting officer, offers candy to Iraqi children.

Photo by Sgt. Michelle Gonzalez



Pfc. Jason Trikoris, 551st Military Police company, unloads a sandbag to create a barrier. More than 3,000 sandbags were used to complete the barrier. Photo by Sgt. Michelle Gonzalez

Lt. Col. Thomas H. Byrd, the 93rd Military Police Battalion commander (left) and Lt. Col. Marc A. Garcia, the 336th Military Police Battalion commander, stand in front of the formation and salute the colors during a transfer of authority ceremony Nov. 25. Photo by Capt. Joy LeMay



## H1N1 vaccinations:

Military personnel who have not received an H1N1 vaccination can get immunized at Forward Operating Base Prosperity's Ortiz Medical Clinic from 1000 - 1200 Monday through Friday.





**Soldiers enjoy a Thanksgiving feast  
at the FOB Prosperity dining facility  
Nov. 26.**