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Fuel tests keep Air Cav operational



Photo by Sgt. Travis Zielinski, 1st ACB PAO, 1st Cav. Div.

After stirring up the fuel, Pfc. Cindy Crain, from Kokomo, Ind., a fuel handler in Company A, 615th Aviation Support Battalion, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, pulls a fuel sample for testing in the petroleum lab, here, Dec. 29.

Story by Sgt. Travis Zielinski

1st ACB PAO, 1st Cav. Div.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – In a mobile lab filled with graduated cylinders, beakers, filtration systems and various other tools – the life blood of military vehicles is tested.

The fuel sample tests performed by the petroleum specialists of the 615th Aviation Support Battalion, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, are an important step before the fuel is distributed for use.

The fuel lab is responsible for testing fuel used by the 1st ACB, the Iraqi Air Force and civilian contractors, here, and at Forward Operating Base Kalsu, said Sgt. Anthony Adame, from Lubbock, Texas, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the fuel lab.

"We average around five to seven samples a day; on peak days we have gone as high as 16 samples," said Adame.

Spending an average of two hours for each sample, Spc. Juan Rodriguez-Cano, from Edinburg, Texas, a petroleum lab technician, will run one gallon of fuel through different instruments to determine its quality.

"We test all types of fuel, anything from ground fuel to aviation-type fuel," said Rodriguez-Cano.

The fuel sample requires multiple tests such as checking for contaminants, water and sediments. The fuel's flash point is tested – the temperature at which the fuel ignites – and the density of it is also tested to be sure it is the correct type of fuel, said Rodriguez-Cano.

"If a sample comes back bad, the submitting unit will be notified and the fuel will have to be run back through the filters before it can be tested again," said Rodriguez-Cano. "Sometimes it is just bad filters and the unit will have to replace them before running the test again."

Keeping a steady pace from the beginning of the deployment, the petroleum lab has completed its 1,000th test.

"Forty-four million gallons is the amount represented of the samples we have done. When [the previous unit] left they were at 30 million (gallons); and with four months left on this deployment, it just shows how much work we have done," said Adame.

"To us it is a big deal ... we don't go outside the wire, but those guys that are out there flying 24/7, we want them to stay in the air, we want their mission to keep on going," said Adame. "That is what we are here for."

"If that fuel [doesn't meet the specifications] or there are contaminants or water

inside of it, the birds (helicopters) are going to fall from the sky and our primary job is to prevent that from happening," said Adame. ✂



Photo by Sgt. Travis Zielinski, 1st ACB PAO, 1st Cav. Div.

After pouring a fuel sample through a filter, Spc. Juan Rodriguez-Cano, from Edinburg, Texas, a petroleum lab technician, in Company A, 615th Aviation Support Battalion, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, carefully pulls the filter off so it can be placed in an oven and later weighed, here, Dec. 29.

Troops raise money for N.C. Boy Scouts

Story by Spc. Ruth McClary

30th HBCT PAO, MND-B

BAGHDAD—Soldiers counted down the minutes to Christmas as they tallied donated pogs, small circular paper disks used at the Post Exchange instead of coins, for a North Carolina Boy Scout Troop, Dec. 24.

Spc. Rob Campbell, with 230th Brigade Support Battalion, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, launched the "Pogs for Presents" campaign by placing gift wrapped boxes for pog donations around Forward Operating Base Falcon, here, to support his former Boy Scouts Troop as they raise money for the needy.

"I'm like Santa Claus ringing a bell," said Campbell. "Only I can't ring a bell and [the Army] won't let me wear a Santa suit."

Troop 223, located in Campbell's hometown of Southern Pines, N.C., helps needy families by collecting canned goods during the Christmas holiday season.

"I can't collect can goods, but I can collect money to get the stuff that's not put in the bins," said Campbell. "When I was a boy scout it was a big deal for us."

The former Eagle Scout came up with the idea when he realized that many Soldiers did not value the paper coins. He vowed to match the donations dollar for dollar thinking he would raise around \$100.

"A lot of [Soldiers] have stacks of [pogs] and unfortunately people don't really see them as money," said Campbell. "Everybody's getting ready to go home and they are packing up and finding them everywhere."

Campbell tore open the display boxes like a kid on Christmas morning; pouring out a

around \$214 worth of pogs. The total count was a little more than \$265, after adding in cash donations from Soldiers that forgot to bring pog donations the day of the count.

"I will go to [the Army Air Force Exchange Service] to [cash-in] the pogs on Christmas and then I will call my wife and tell her to write a check," said Campbell.

According to Yvonne Ward, AAFES assistant team leader, the pogs can be exchanged at any AAFES location abroad or in the states. The cardboard coins, which display photos of Soldiers of all branches, were adopted in 2002 due to high shipping rates charged on the weight of metal coins.

"It saves taxpayers hundreds of dollars and Soldiers can cash them in or take them home for souvenirs," said Ward.

"I don't know if it will be a problem cashing them in but I will send the donation

regardless," said Campbell referring to the large amount of pogs donated.

Campbell revealed one Secret Santa when he mentioned that Staff Sgt. Stephanie Brasington, of Stafford, Va., gave a donation that almost matched the total value of pogs, raising the amount to \$750 for the needy.

"It's Christmas; to me it just makes sense," said Brasington.

To Campbell, the importance comes from finding a way to keep his family's time honored tradition alive even while deployed here in Iraq. His father, brother and uncles were all Eagle Scouts and he said he hopes to continue the legacy.

"I have friends that are involved or will be involved [with the scouts]," Campbell said as he made hand gestures as if he were knocking on wood. "If I have sons one day, I'd like to encourage them to be scouts." ✂



Photo by Spc. Ruth McClary, 30th HBCT PAO, MND-B

Sgt. Lara Rodriguez (left), of Salisbury, N.C., and Spc. Janette Michno, of Raeford, N.C., sort pogs for donation to Boy Scouts Troop 223, Dec. 24 from Soldiers at Forward Operating Base Falcon. Spc. Rob Campbell, of Company C, 230th Brigade Support Battalion, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, spearheaded the campaign; raising \$750 for Troop 223, in his hometown of Southern Pines, N.C., to support its annual needy family's holiday campaign.



Questions, comments, story ideas? Contact the Crossed Sabers at nicholas.conner@mnd-b.army.mil. The Crossed Sabers is an authorized publication for members of the U.S. Army. Contents of the Crossed Sabers are not necessarily official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, Department of Defense, Department of the Army or the 1st Cavalry Division. All editorial content of the Crossed Sabers is prepared, edited, provided and approved by the 1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs Office.

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No radioactivity at Sha'ab school

Story by Pfc. Bailey Jester

1st BCT PAO, 1st Cav. Div., MND-B

TAJI, Iraq –The Iraqi Government and American Soldiers confirmed there is no radioactivity at the Aden School for Girls in Sha'ab, north of Baghdad, during a visit, Dec. 13.

"We are here to assist the Iraqi's [Explosive Ordnance Disposal Team] in ending rumors about radioactivity in the vicinity of the school," said Col. Maria Zumwalt, 1st Brigade Special Troops Battalion commander, from Bayamon, Puerto Rico.

During an earlier District Council meeting, American commanders learned of possible radioactivity fears in the school.

Iraqi doctors had diagnosed several teachers with different cancers within a small time frame. Some locals thought it came from radioactivity in the area. Once parents heard these rumors, many transferred their children to surrounding schools in the area, said Iraqi Lt. Khalid, an 11th Iraqi Army Division EOD team leader.

"We asked the U.S. forces to assist us in this because the students' parents don't trust our equipment," explains Khalid. "If [U.S. forces] confirm our reading is accurate, parents will feel more comfortable with their children in this school."

Zumwalt, a trained chemical officer, immediately offered to investigate the situation and assist the Iraqi Security forces to prove the school is safe.

"The Ministry of Environment tested the area before we arrived," explained Zumwalt. "Then, to ease the worries of parents, they asked us to validate a negative reading with our own equipment."

Taking all claims of radioactivity seriously, the Americans sent specialized Soldiers to the school to assist and confirm the Iraqi results. Soldiers searching the building took all necessary precautions by dressing in bright, green protective uniforms with blue mouth covers to shield themselves from any possible radioactivity found.

Zumwalt discussed the situation with prominent figures of the school and community as Iraqi EOD investigated the school.

After both the Iraqi EOD and U.S. Soldiers completed their tests, Zumwalt announced to the Iraqi media present, "There is no radioactivity in the area, it is safe, clear and there is nothing to worry about." ✂

'Ironhorse' Soldiers earn their spurs

Story by Sgt. Jessica Reaves

1st BCT PAO, 1st Cav. Div., MND-B

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – As the sun set and rain pelted down, Soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division "rucked up" for an age-old tradition of earning their Silver Spurs.

The Soldiers spent the night traversing across Camp Taji, trudging through the sludge, trying to stay awake and motivated while successfully completing a variety of basic combat tasks, before passing an interview with the 1st Brigade Special Troops Battalion commander, Col. Maria Zumwalt.

"The hardest part of the Spur Ride was moving under direct fire, or responding to fire," said Brookhaven, Miss. native, Sgt. Raymond Nelson, a retransmission team chief assigned to 1st BSTB. "It was the worst!"

"It was so cold when the rain started," said Sacramento, Calif. Native, Pfc. Krystal Curl, a human resources clerk assigned to 1st BSTB. "We were covered in mud."

Taking partnership to another level, Iraqi Soldiers from the Field Engineering Regiment for the 11th Iraqi Army Division, also participated in this challenging, character building event that inducts Soldiers with the drive into the elite group of Silver Spur holders.

"The Iraqi Army Soldiers are well-trained. They really know what they're doing," said Albert Lea, Minn. native, Spc. Matthew Carlson, radio retransmission



Photo by Sgt. Jessica Reaves, 1BCT PAO, 1st Cav. Div., MND-B

Soldiers participating in the Silver Spur Ride on Camp Taji, Dec. 12, carry the Order of the Spur platform to the first obstacle of the challenge. The Spur Ride lasted 19 hours and contained nine no-fail tasks that each participant was required to complete.

operator assigned to 1st BSTB.

"They were a huge addition to our team," agreed Champaign, Ill. native, Pfc. Joel Rosenbeck, a line of sight operator assigned to 1st BSTB.

All the participants, working together as a team, kept each other motivated through all the stations and challenges. The Soldiers toiled through the various arduous events for nineteen hours, making the reward even sweeter in the end.

After fighting through the weather, the "Shave tails" or new spur candidates,

proved they were worthy of being inducted into the order of the Silver Spur. Drenched and caked with mud, with a smile of victory, the Soldiers assumed the position as their sponsors rewarded them by placing silver spurs on the heels of their muddied boots.

"It was definitely challenging and difficult, but looking back on it now it was definitely worth it," proudly stated Lancaster, Penn. native, Spc. Sean Bonifas, a radio transmitter operator for 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. ✂



Photo by Sgt. Jessica Reaves, 1BCT PAO, 1st Cav. Div., MND-B

Champaign, Ill. native, Pfc. Joel Rosenbeck (front), assigned to 1st Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, crawls under a concertina wire obstacle to finish the Silver Spur Ride at Camp Taji, Dec. 12. The Spur Ride lasted about 19 hours and required the participants to push themselves to accomplish many challenging tasks.



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Baghdad 104.1
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Combined U.S., IA patrol in Ur

Story by Staff Sgt. Jeff Hansen

MND-B PAO

BAGHDAD – Security technology is constantly improving and changing; satellites, infrared cameras and biometrics systems are at our fingertips. However, sometimes a good old-fashioned foot patrol is the best way to go.

Soldiers of 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division put boots to the Iraqi mud during a foot patrol at Joint Security Station Ur, Dec. 15.

Although the unit is equipped with Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected vehicles, Bradley Fighting Vehicles and M1A1 Abrams tanks, Soldiers used their feet to travel the streets during their most recent presence patrol.

According to Capt. John Ulsamer, commander of Company A, foot patrols are less intimidating, and the unit gets better cooperation from the local populace.

Trekking through muddy streets, surrounded by local children, the Soldiers made contact with several townspeople,

conducted impromptu vehicle searches and handed out flyers to children.

The flyers informed children of the risks of carrying toy guns and running around military convoys. First Lt. Nicholas Ramos, a platoon leader with Co. A, said the safety of the children is just as important as ensuring the village's overall security.

"We just want [the Iraqi people] to know we are still here for them," said Ramos, a Nokesville, Va., native who has been part of these patrols for over six months.

Not ones to take much time off, troopers also conducted a patrol the next evening. This time the Iraqi Army led the way through northeastern Baghdad to look for a weapons cache.

The search was driven by a cache that exploded on the grounds of a school while the students were burning trash. School officials requested that the IA clear other schools in the area to ensure insurgents hadn't hidden any additional caches.

The combined patrol consisted of IA, U.S. Soldiers and a military working dog. In the past, dogs have proven to be a



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jeff Hansen, MND-B PAO

Gina, a military working dog, clears the outside of a school in Sadr City while Senior Airman Christopher Kench, her handler, receives further instruction from 1st Lt. Nicholas Ramos (right), during a night patrol, Dec. 16. The three were part of an IA-lead combined patrol to clear area schools of weapons caches.

crucial asset to the team.

"We can only find so much, but Gina finds everything," said Senior Airman Nicholas Kench, a working dog handler.

Ulsamer said he considers both missions successful. Although his Soldiers like excitement, sometimes having no excitement is better in the long run.

CSI training gives Iraqi police an explosive edge

Story by Spc. Ruth McClary

30th HBCT PAO, MND-B

BAGHDAD – Gloved hands carefully handled little jars of powder, brushes and tape as Iraqi Federal Police officers exposed fingerprints from makeshift bombs during crime scene training, at Forward Operating Base Falcon, Dec. 15.

Soldiers from 252nd Combined Arms Battalion, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, hosted the training for 24 Iraqi officers of 1st Mechanized, 2nd Federal Police Brigade in an attempt to reduce contamination of evidence at improvised explosive sites.

"The purpose of this class is to [give pointers] to Iraqi Federal Police [on the collection of] evidence and preserving a site without contaminating it when they approach an improvised explosive crime scene," said Capt. August Melchoir, of Wilson, N.C.

Instructors Sgt. Zulfikar Keskin and Sgt. Hiram Montalvo, both of the Weapons Intelligence Team, 203rd Military Intelligence Battalion, led the officers through several scenarios on approaching crime scenes and how to determine, handle and collect evidence.

"The difference between us and [Crime Scene Investigation] back home is they have days to investigate a crime scene, but when they tell us [we are] out, we pack up our stuff and go," said Keskin. "Wearing full battle rattle makes it a little more difficult too."

Keskin, of Phoenix, Ariz., planted shrapnel among rocks and an unexploded makeshift bomb on the drive shaft of a

military vehicle to observe how Iraqi officers approach and handle evidence. He gave instruction on handling small pieces of shrapnel and where to find legible fingerprints on unexploded bombs.

"Once the [explosives ordinance disposal team] clears the scene it's our job to recognize and collect the parts from the IED," said Keskin. "The information from the [blast site] is sent up, analyzed and can lead to the identification of IED cell leaders; helping in overall war-fighting here."

"That's why it is so important you don't touch anything without your gloves because your fingerprints will get on it; then everyone on the scene will have to be fingerprinted," said Montalvo, of Bronx, N.Y., as he addressed the officers.

After the evidence was properly contained, they began lifting prints. Montalvo pointed out that although an individual's prints are unique, there are three main types of prints which helps officials determine a positive match.

Iraqi police officers asked several questions, making sure they understood exactly where to look for good solid prints.

"Can you get a print from a dead body?" asked one officer.

"How long does a print stay on the surface of an object?" said another officer.

Montalvo and Keskin put fingerprints on objects and the officers took turns lifting legible prints.

Iraqi officer, Ahmed Kadem, asked that he not be shown where Keskin placed a print on a beaker, so he could discover it. Obscuring his view, Keskin placed a

print on the beaker. Kadem dusted the inner and outer surfaces failing to locate a print. They all laughed when Keskin said, "Did you check the bottom?"

Keskin, Montalvo and the officers came up with more challenging scenarios as the little brushes highlighted print after print. The officers admitted that the hands-on training will help them be more keen and alert with their approach.

"This was good training," said Maj. Hussain Ali Latef, the FP route clearance commander. "This is the first time these

[officers] have trained on [containing improvised sites and materials]."

"The information from the [blast site] is sent up, analyzed and can lead to the identification of IED cell leaders; helping in overall war-fighting here."

– Sgt. Zulfikar Keskin



Photo by Spc. Ruth McClary, 30th HBCT PAO, MND-B

Husham Saddam Raad (middle), of the 1st Mechanized, 2nd Federal Police Brigade, looks for fingerprints during improvised explosives crime scene training at Forward Operating Base Falcon, Dec. 15. After thoroughly checking the outer and inner lining of the beaker, Raad was surprised when U.S. instructors asked if he checked the bottom.

Partnership construction project

*Photos by Staff Sgt. April Mota,
16th Eng. Bde., UPAR*



BAGHDAD - Working side by side, Pfc. Joshua Tillmon (left), of Burr Oak, Mich., with the 1434th Engineer Company, and Pvt. Hayder Jabar Kamal, 6th Iraqi Army Field Engineer Regiment, complete a truss to add to the roof of the Joint Operation Center on Contingency Operating Location Constitution. The JOC, a joint construction project, should be complete mid-January.



Getting his tape measure ready, Pvt. Mustafa Aala Jamaeal (left) of the 6th Iraqi Army Field Engineer Regiment, obtains the proper measurement for the piece of wood to be used in a truss for the Joint Operations Center being built on Contingency Operating Location Constitution. Soldiers from the 6th IA FER have been working on the job site with Soldiers from the 101st Engineer Battalion for the last two weeks.



Pvt. Mustafa Aala Jamaeal, of the 6th Iraqi Army Field Engineer Regiment, uses the circular saw to cut a piece of wood to be used in a truss for the new Joint Operation Center on Contingency Operating Location Constitution.

Soldiers aid Iraqis after sticky bomb attack

Story by Sgt. Samantha Beuterbaugh

MND-B PAO

BAGHDAD – As the U.S. Soldiers crossed an intersection in the Tarfa area, south of the capital, here, Dec. 12, they passed a distorted vehicle, burnt and misshapen.

Twenty-four hours later, Soldiers from the Iraqi Army contacted the Americans and informed them that the driver of the truck was a friend, who was now in critical condition as a result of the explosion of a sticky bomb, said 1st Lt. Andy Ziadi, a platoon leader with the 150th Armored Reconnaissance Squadron, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team.

U.S. Soldiers are aiding the IA in an investigation after the sticky bomb, also known as a magnetic bomb, was placed on the vehicle of a local shaykh, and a former member of the Sons of Iraq. The shaykh recently received a micro-grant for a drip irrigation project that was managed by the Americans.

There was a delay of 24 hours in reporting the incident to U.S. forces due to the IA taking control of the investigation independently, said Ziadi. The IA reported the incident up through their chain of command, and then contacted U.S. forces, who responded to the situation, Dec. 7.

“In the past, the [Iraqi Army] would come to us immediately,” said Ziadi. “It’s a sign of them becoming more independent.”

Although Ziadi appreciates their efforts to stand

alone, he said the downside is that it sometimes takes U.S. forces longer to react to situations.

His involvement in the investigation consisted of a discussion with Col. Hamid Hatam, the commander of the 3rd Battalion, 23rd Brigade, 17th Division, Iraqi Army, speaking with the family members of the sheikh, and asking questions in the market place of a local village.

“We have a good working relationship with the colonel,” said Ziadi.

Each time the Soldiers meet with members of the 3rd Battalion, there are three essential things covered: identifying recent significant acts, tracking of the Sons of Iraq, and the answering of any additional questions, said Ziadi.

Cooperating and comparing of information with the IA helps both parties, said Staff Sgt. Brian Brake. The information that the North Carolina National Guardsmen gain will help Hatam with his investigation of the sticky bomb incident, said Brake.

After the security agreement went into effect, many U.S. units were turned away from IA compounds, said Brake. The strong relationship that they have built with 3rd Battalion permitted their steady presence and created a sense of need for their bond as both parties’ success is somewhat contingent upon each other, he added.

“It’s a two-way street,” said Ziadi. He added that both the IA and U.S. forces coordinate the needs of each other and share training updates. Coordination is done face-to-face to continue to build their relationship, he added.



Photo by Sgt. Samantha Beuterbaugh, MND-B PAO

First Lt. Andy Ziadi, from Oakland, Calif., inspects the remains of a vehicle after a magnetic bomb attack.

Female Soldiers max fitness test, motivate others

Story by Spc. Ruth McClary

30th HBCT PAO, MND-B

BAGHDAD – A cool breeze evened out temperatures on a warm, sunny morning, as Sgt. 1st Class Melissa Strouse and Sgt. Donna Smith trained fellow Soldiers with a structured fitness work-out, Dec. 11.

Strouse, of Company D, 230th Brigade Battalion, and Smith, of Troop A, 150th Armored Reconnaissance Squadron, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, raised the bar by exceeding the maximum fitness test score recently in Iraq; motivating others who barely met the minimum.

Four of ten female Soldiers assigned to the 500-strong squadron exceeded the 300 point maximum score on the Army Physical Fitness Test. Strouse and Smith immediately arranged remedial training for other Soldiers who failed to meet minimum requirements, here, helping them to pass before returning back to the States.

“I volunteered to do remedial training with our guys,” said Smith, of Williamson, W. Va. “We train twice a day since some of the guys are out on missions in the morning. I drag those guys when we run; making them do push-ups when somebody stops.”

“Even though we had a lot of [noncommissioned officers] who offered to help us [Sgt. Smith] was the one who stuck by us to make sure we passed,” said Spc. Matthew Champman, of Barboursville, W. Va.

The fitness test consists of a two-minute round each of push-ups and sit-ups, and then a two-mile run. Scores are based on gender and age with a minimum requirement of 60 percent to pass in each event. Ranging in age from 29 to 47, the four women’s test scores were equivalent to military maximum fitness scores for Soldiers 17- 20 year olds.

Strouse, of Center Hall, Pa. scored 317 with 40 push-ups, 76 sit-ups, 16:11 run; Smith scored 347 with 50 push-ups, 68 sit-ups, 15:50 run. First Lt. Kristi Berry Ann, of Morgantown, W. Va., scored 306 with 50 push-ups, 76 sit-ups, 15:13 run; Sgt. Frankie Hibberd, of

Charleston, W. Va., scored 462 with 137 push-ups, 119 sit-ups, 13:07 run.

“It’s good that somebody noticed,” said Berry Ann. “It gives females more credibility too; especially in this type of unit.”

Cavalry units traditionally fought mounted on horseback. Today tanks and other armored vehicles have replaced horses and Troops are ready and mobile for combat. Female Soldiers are only assigned to headquarters elements, making them a minority in these types of units.

Several male Soldiers of the squadron, who had not taken their test, worked harder to achieve higher scores after word got out about the female Soldiers accomplishments and those that didn’t pass joined the remedial training; some improving their scores within two weeks.

“It feels good that they think we can help them and that they want us to help them,” said Strouse.

Most of the Soldiers in remedial training failed to meet their minimum time for the run. Smith, Strouse and Berry Ann said they think the reason for failed run times was due to them lifting weights to bulk up without giving much time to running or cardio-fitness.

“I just couldn’t make my run time on the [fitness] test,” said Spc. Jarred Testerman, of Williamson, W. Va. “Sgt. Smith ran with me nightly and paced me on the run for the [fitness] test, leaving me with a 15:07 run time. She was great!”

“Both Sgt. 1st Class Strouse and Sgt. Smith were great,” said Spc. Luke Shipman, of Bruceton Mills, W. Va. “Sgt. Smith ran every step with me on my [fitness] test so I came across the finish line at 15:32.”

Shipman passed his run after two weeks of remedial training with Smith and Strouse, improving his time by four minutes. He and Testerman continue to work-out with the remedial group and Shipman said he will continue the same type of workout once he returns home.

Smith pulled a muscle running with the guys but continues to work-out with the group.

“It’s funny because now the guys that I do remedial

training with can out run me,” said Smith. “I always tell them don’t just stop [running], stretch or do something. The other day we were running and I stopped [due to my injury] and one of the guys yelled back at me, ‘don’t just stop, stretch or do something.’”



Photo by Spc. Ruth McClary, 30th HBCT PAO, MND-B

Sgt. 1st Class Melissa Strouse (forefront), of Center Hall, Pa. runs with a group of 150th Armored Reconnaissance Squadron Soldiers during remedial training at Camp Stryker, Dec. 11. She exceeded the maximum score of 300 on a recent Army physical fitness test.

Micro-grant given for new flower shop

Story by Sgt. Mary Phillips

30th HBCT PAO, MND-B

BAGHDAD – Soon, the Rasheed Market, south of Baghdad, will be welcoming a new flower shop, thanks to a micro-grant given by leadership of 120th Combined Arms Battalion, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, Dec. 16.

U.S. troops presented the micro-grant to Sinaa, the former head of the women's committee in Rasheed and her husband.

"I didn't know you guys would make my dream come true," said Sinaa to the Soldiers giving her the money. "When you called and told me to be here, I was so happy."

Sinaa said she just recently hired more women to work at the shop.

"In a month you will be able to come and see them all working," said Sinaa.

The shop will initially employ five to ten women, all of whom are the sole provider for their family. It is hard for women in Iraq to find work and even harder in rural areas like Rasheed. It was important to Sinaa to help the women living near her.

"Some of them are widows and some, the husband will not be able to work, so she must support the family," said Sinaa. "That's why I chose them to work."

"This has particular interest into giving support to the war widows," said 1st Lt. Matthew Mason, of Garner, N.C. "Providing them with income long after U.S. forces have left Iraq."

The \$5,000 micro-grant will be used to start the business. The money for the grant comes from the commander's emergency response program; a program intended to support short term projects like the start-up of a business.

"They have the space available and this money will be used to purchase the initial equipment to start the business and pay the employees," said Mason.

Seeds will also be bought with the money because the flowers are going to be grown by the employees. The shop provides a service that has been lacking in the Rasheed area. It is projected that the business will do very well.

"This is the only florist in the Rasheed market," said Mason. "That's why I believe it will be successful."

Flowers are used for decoration, funerals and weddings. Until now, fake flowers were often used because locals would have to travel to get fresh flowers.

Mason said that the micro-grant will also help to stimulate economic growth in the area. ✂

Soldiers bring joy to Iraqi children

Story by Spc. Kelly LeCompte

30th HBCT PAO, MND-B

BAGHDAD – A man pulls toys from a giant bag, while his comrades try to keep the growing crowd of excited children in an orderly line as they wait their turn.

It's December, but the temperature is nearly 60 degrees. Instead of a wintery-white snow, the mostly bare little feet run across dusty and muddy earth towards men wearing camouflage and smiles.

Two Soldiers of Company B, 252nd Combined Arms Battalion, organized the surprise toy delivery for children living just outside the walls of Forward Operating Base Falcon in southern Baghdad, where the Smithfield-based unit is serving.

Spc. Michael Petro, an infantryman, said he had the idea to start collecting goodies for the children after driving past their neighborhood to and from missions in the Baghdad area.

"It's one of the poorest areas that we drive through," Petro, of West Chester, Pa., said. "Every day that we drive through that area the kids come out running and waving ... there's plenty of kids and families that have a lot less than we do."

Spc. Garrett Manis, a fellow infantryman, said he had similar sentiments about the area and wanted to help.

"We drive by that area all the time, and they're frequently bare-footed ... and they always run out, waving their hands, hoping we'll stop and give them something; and you think, 'That's really not a whole lot to do,' and it could potentially have a tremendous impact in some kid's life," Manis, of Chapel Hill, N.C., said.

Petro said it all started with an email.

"I just sent my mom an email just basically saying, 'Instead of sending me stuff, send stuff for the kids,' and then she forwarded that along, and that got forwarded along and it was really just an avalanche. What was originally intended to be just a few boxes here and there turned into [a two-and-a-half ton cargo vehicle] full of clothes and school supplies and toys."

The Soldiers said the idea spread across the home front, growing bigger than they ever imagined.

"People at home really went above and beyond what I had ever envisioned," Petro said. "Going down to mail-call every day and five more boxes came in, seven more boxes came in, eight more boxes came in; it was really kind of unbelievable how it snowballed."

"My aunt did a drive; she's an administrative assistant at Durham Academy," Manis said. "She sent like ten boxes or so that they collected from the school. I got a lot from all over. It kind of just took off, it started as just an idea to get a few things together."

The shipments started arriving in September, and the duo collected the boxes in a larger storage room in their barracks, waiting for the chance to hand it all out. Petro said because of the company's busy mission schedule, it took a while before they had a chance to make the stop. After much anticipation, they finally got their chance; just in time for the Christmas holiday.

"I was actually hoping to do it a lot sooner, but just because of our mission schedule and the way things worked out, it happened to be closer to the holidays, which is kind of nice," Petro said. ✂



Photo by Spc. Kelly LeCompte, 30th HBCT PAO, MND-B

Spc. Michael Petro (right), of West Chester, Pa., hands a bag of toys and school supplies to a child and father near Forward Operating Base Falcon, in southern Baghdad, as fellow Company B, 252nd Combined Arms Battalion Soldiers manage the growing crowd of children waiting their turn in the hand out, Dec. 12.



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MASCAL training prepares Soldiers for the real thing

Story by Pfc. Kimberly Hackbarth
4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div., MND-B

BAGHDAD – Pfc. Tessa Marsh, a combat medic, arrived on the scene where she found five people “injured” from a simulated mortar attack during a mass casualty exercise here, Dec. 14.

After checking with a combat life saver-qualified Soldier who had already assessed the wounded, Marsh treated the most critically injured person by quickly placing a tourniquet on a man’s severed arm, simultaneously explaining to a fellow Soldier how to tourniquet the man’s leg.

As she aided the injured man, Marsh had two things on her mind: her medical skills and communication with those around her.

Because of the limited number of medical staff on site, she worked hard to do what was best for the patients while communicating with others who could provide assistance on scene, in order to provide aid to the most seriously injured, explained Marsh, a Lacrosse, Wisc. native, with the 702nd Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division.

Marsh’s team evacuated casualties to Riva Ridge Troop Medical Center where Staff Sgt. Charles Ensminger, the medical evacuation platoon sergeant acted as the triage officer, sort-

ing incoming patients into medical categories, based on the seriousness of their injuries before sending them to treatment.

Using the DIME method, Ensminger separated the patients into four medical categories: delayed, immediate, minimal, and expectant.

‘Delayed’ patients can wait more than two hours for treatment without compromising his or her health, while ‘immediate’ patients require assistance within two hours to preserve life, limb or eyesight. Patients categorized as ‘minimum’ are walking wounded and do not usually require hospital admission or the services of operating room, and ‘expectant’ patients are those severely injured and not expected to survive even with treatment.

Ensminger knew that even with outlined standing operating procedures in place, not everything flows perfectly under stressful conditions, especially in the medical profession.

“With medicine, the book answer is not always the correct answer, sometimes it’s just situational,” said Ensminger, a Port St. Lucie, Fla. native.

Head trauma, shrapnel injuries, burns and severed limbs were just some of the many medical situations the staff had to deal with during the exercise.

The medical providers and medics treated each patient accordingly and used available assets such X-ray machines and intravenous therapy.



Photo by Pfc. Kimberly Hackbarth, 4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div.

Staff Sgt. Charles Ensminger (right), the medical evacuation platoon sergeant, from Port St. Lucie, Fla., assists Lt. Col. Chris Soltis (center background), a physician from Gaithersburg, Md., unload a “patient” during a mass casualty exercise, Dec. 14.



Photo by Pfc. Kimberly Hackbarth, 4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div.

Sgt. Natalie Dalimata (right), a troop medical clinic supervisor from San Jose, Calif., along with other 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division Soldiers, carry a space blanket-wrapped “patient” on a stretcher outside to be evacuated during a mass casualty exercise, here, Dec. 14.

Capt. Christopher Staley, a physician with 702nd BSB, said he believed that the exercise was an overall success because of everything the training offered.

“It gets you mentally prepared to deal with a chaotic event such as a mass casualty,” said Staley, a Salem, Ore. native. “It helps you to identify areas that might be weak in the system, areas that need improvement, and areas that are done well.”

After aiding more than ten injured Soldiers and civilians with the cooperation of more than 100 civilian firefighters, paramedics, and military medical Soldiers, the exercise ended with an enlightening after action review.

“As [a lower enlisted] medic, I only get to do what’s in my lane,” said Marsh. “Seeing the big picture and what everyone had to say was educational.”

Marsh ended her day by evacuating a real-life patient, who wasn’t involved in the training, to the casualty cache where she had taken the simulated patients earlier in the day. While it was not as hectic of a trip, she was reminded that if it was, she could handle it, thanks to the practice and training of the day. ✂

Persian Gulf War

JAN 17

On this day in American Military History

Operation Desert Storm begins

The Persian Gulf War began Aug. 2, 1990, when Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait. The conflict ended after a cease fire Feb. 28, 1991

At 2:10 a.m., Baghdad time, on Jan. 17, 1991 the coalition began a massive aerial bombardment. This was followed by a ground assault Feb. 23, 1991. This offensive was codenamed Operation Desert Storm. The operation continued, with more than 1,000 raids being launched per day.

Iraq responded by initiating the first Scud missile attack. Eight Iraqi modified Scud missiles were launched into Israel the next day. These missile attacks on Israel were to continue throughout the six weeks of the war.

Iraq also scored a few air-air victories as well, though only two coalition planes were shot down, some came back damaged from air-air combat.

The Persian Gulf War is sometimes called the “computer war”, due to the advanced weapons used in the air campaign, which included precision-guided munitions and cruise missiles.

Five hours after the first attacks, Iraq’s state radio broadcast a voice identified as Saddam Hussein declaring that “The great duel, the mother of all battles has begun. The dawn of victory nears as this great showdown begins.”

The war was officially ended when President George H.W. Bush declared a cease-fire to take place at midnight, Baghdad time, Feb. 28, 1991. This cease-fire took place 100 hours after the ground campaign began.

By Mar. 8, 1991 the first of the 500,000 U.S. troops returned from Kuwait.

1991

Al-Muthana command center nears completion

Story by Spc. Brian Johnson

16th Eng. Bde, UPAR, MND-B

BAGHDAD – After almost four months of work, thousands of construction man-hours, and many hours teaching and training, the Joint Operations Center at the al-Muthana Airfield, here, is nearly complete.

The airfield, currently home to the 6th Iraqi Army Field Engineer Regiment, has been the site of a mammoth project undertaken by the 6th IA and U.S. engineers from the 16th Engineer Brigade. Soldiers from each of these units have been working side by side to build a first-class joint facility.

The operations center for the 6th IA brings the command and control elements together under one roof resulting in more effective planning, coordination and facilitation of the IA's missions.

"This was a joint construction project that involved not only the Iraqi engineers, but Iraqi products: wood, plumbing materials, electrical materials and furniture," said Maj. Roger Lewis, from Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, the brigade's partnership officer.

The goal of this joint construction project was to increase the Iraqi engineer Soldiers' construction proficiency and ability to conduct their own independent operations as the U.S. forces conduct a

responsible draw down.

Staff Sgt. Mark Green, of Petoskey, Mich., with the 1434th Engineer Company, explained that there were many trials and tribulations during the construction mission, but everything is now coming together nicely.

"At the start of the project, the communication gap between the Iraqi and U.S. Soldiers was a struggle; once it was overcome, everything started moving along," said Green. "This was a chance not only for our Soldiers to teach the Iraqi's, but the Iraqi Soldiers to teach us."

Sgt. Mark Gosbeth, of Monroe, Mich., also with the 1434th Eng. Co., said that this project has been a learning experience for all involved.

"For the younger Iraqis, this is on-the-job training for them to increase their carpentry skills," said Gosbeth. "For the veteran Iraqi Soldiers, this mission was a chance for them to fine-tune their skills and leadership."

Gosbeth, who has been with the project since it began, said that the Iraqis are very hard-working and eager to learn. Many of them have taken ownership of the project, to include site security.

One of these Iraqi Soldiers, a sergeant with the 6th IA who is known simply as Joe, helped provide security on the site for the Soldiers while they work.

"All of the U.S. Soldiers that I have met have been very easy to get along



Photo by Spc. Brian Johnson, 16th Eng. Bde UPAR, MND-B

Staff Sgt. Joseph Pigeon (left), of St. Helen, Mich., and Staff Sgt. Mark Green, of Petoskey, Mich., both of the 1434th Engineer Company, cut plywood molding for finish work, Dec. 15, at the Joint Operations Center construction site at al-Muthana.

with," said Joe. "They are all my friends. I will be sad to see them go."

"The experience of working with the Iraqi Army has been very educating," said Pvt. Aaron Piggott, of Jackson, Mich. "We have been able to learn parts of their language, they have learned some of our language, and we have been able to help teach construction techniques."

This construction project brought together two distinct cultures, yet both managed to communicate and work well together regardless of the language barrier. Upon completion, both Iraqi and U.S. forces will have a deepened relationship and a place to conduct operations that will work towards a safer and more peaceful Iraq. ✂

Tractor trailer training at COL Constitution

Story by Staff Sgt. April Mota

101st Eng. Bn., PAO, MND-B

BAGHDAD – Engineers from the 101st Engineer Battalion conducted training on Iraqi tractor trailers with Soldiers from the 6th Iraqi Army Field Engineer Regiment on Joint Security Station Constitution, Dec. 16.

Five Iraqi Soldiers from the 6th IA FER attended the class taught by Staff. Sgt. Frank Lopez, of Webster, Mass., and Sgt. Steve Cyr, of Uxbridge, Mass. The course covered preventative maintenance checks and services, driver's training, hook up of the trailer, and how to properly tie down equipment.

"This course was different than the others, we trained the Soldiers on a piece of their own equipment," said Cyr. "We had to adapt, but we take what we learn from the military and apply it to their equipment."

The 6th IA FER is responsible for multiple types of engineering projects, to include construction, route clearance, and transporting and maintaining equipment.

The trailer is a very important piece of equipment because it is the best way to haul heavy equipment to a job site. The trailer hauls equipment that is used to place reinforcement barriers and increase security, according to Lt. Ammar, a platoon leader with the 6th IA FER.

"This type of equipment cannot be driven faster than 5 kilometers per hour, being able



Photo by Staff Sgt. April Mota, 101st Eng. Bn. PAO, 16th Eng. Bde., MND-B

Sgt. Cleveland Wade (left), of Akron, Ohio, 1192nd Engineer Company, watches as Pvt. Ahmed Sabar Abdulhamaza, 6th IA FER, secures a load onto a tractor trailer.

to load [the heavy equipment] on the trailer to transport it to the job site cuts down on the time it takes to complete a mission," said Lt. Ammar.

The tractor trailer used during the training is a new piece of equipment for the 6th IA. Of the five Soldiers who attended the class, only one has had experience with the equipment.

Lt. Ammar is responsible for choosing

which Iraqi Soldiers attend training like this.

"When I assign who is to attend, I always take one Soldier who will be the primary operator and additional Soldiers who will form a basic understanding that they can build on after the course," said Lt. Ammar.

Ammar is thankful for the opportunity to train with Soldiers of the 101st Engineer Battalion. He has already noticed a difference in

the way his Soldiers operate and maintain the equipment.

Upon completion of the training each Soldier was presented a certificate by the 101st Eng. Bn. Commander, Lt. Col. Charles Cody, of Braintree, Mass.

"Take care of your equipment, and it will take care of you, the more you learn, the better you will be," said Cody. ✂

'Signal Day' recognized Air Cav efforts

Story by Sgt. Alun Thomas

1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs, MND-B

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – The U.S. Army Signal Corps and its Soldiers are responsible for keeping the communications of any unit up and running.

The signal section of the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade is no exception and as a show of appreciation for their efforts on the current deployment, Dec. 12 was named "Signal Day" in their honor, here.

The event was initiated by leadership of the brigade's commo section, said Master Sgt. Jeffery Jackson, from Columbus, Ga., who added that recognition for the Air Cav. signal community was overdue.

"We wanted to give them a token of gratitude for what they've done to make our job a little easier," Jackson said. "We had been thinking about doing this since the halfway point of the deployment and thought it would be a good time to give back to them because they're always working and working."

To make the day special, Jackson helped create a

unique signal coin, which was presented to all those involved in the 1st ACB communication shops.

"The cost didn't matter, it was the thought behind it and it made it a big difference being a personal gift from myself and Maj. Burks [the brigade's communications officer]," he said.

Seeing the looks on the Soldiers faces receiving the coins was an uplifting experience, Jackson said.

"As we presented the coins, I saw their faces lighting up; they were surprised to see it," Jackson said. "It was the least we could give them for the job they do."

Lt. Col. Rodney Garfield, from Portsmouth, Va., the 1st Cav. Div. communication section commander, also attended the day's events.

"It's times like this that we must take the time to recognize these deserving Soldiers," said Garfield. "It's especially humbling that the brigade S-6 is going around recognizing all the signal support specialists in the brigade, which is why I came today."

Garfield, who was joined on the visit by Sgt. Maj. Maurice Rambert, 1st Cav. Div. G-6 sergeant major, said he was impressed with the concept behind having a spe-

cial day specifically for signal.

"I think this is something the Soldiers will remember and hopefully it will turn into a tradition, which is something the Signal Regiment has gotten away from," Garfield said. "I think the 1st ACB is paving the way, and this is something I plan to put in my kitbag and take with me back to the division level."

The visit was well received by Chief Warrant Officer Lau San Foster, from East Orange, N.J., a signal support technician with 1st ACB, who said Garfield and Rambert are the best command team he has known in his 12 years of service.

"They're always ready to lend an ear, give advice and have never turned us away or failed to take care of us," he said.

Foster said the day was especially gratifying for some of the younger Soldiers, who deserve to be lauded.

"When I was younger we didn't have stuff like this going on ... this helps every Soldier feel recognized, which is good for them and what they're doing," Foster said. "It gives them more incentive to keep working hard." ✂

Air Cav maintenance pilots help keep operations going

Story by Sgt. Travis Zielinski

1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs, MND-B

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Keeping a helicopter air-worthy requires a vast knowledge of the systems and components that make up the aircraft.

Maintenance test pilots go through specialized training on a particular type of airframe to gain a thorough understanding of how that machine operates. A combination of their training and experiences make MTPs a valuable resource in any aviation unit.

"A warrant officer out of flight school is just an operational pilot," said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Shawn Marrin, from Lantana, Fla., the MTP section chief and UH-60 Black Hawk MTP for Company B, 615th Aviation Support Battalion, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division.

"There are four tracks that a (flight) warrant officer will eventually be tracked on; there is the instructor pilot, there is the safety officer, a tactical operations officer and the maintenance test pilot," he added.

Marrin said the normal progression for an operational pilot that has been in a unit for a while is to find a track, either by the commanders needs or by their own desires.

"Usually they (MTPs) come from a background of maintenance – as an aircraft mechanic – and their specific goal, professionally, is to become a maintenance test pilot," said Marrin. "So they would let that be known to command and if the opportunity presents itself then hopefully they would get to go."

There are two components to the maintenance test pilot course; learning the systems and learning the MTP checklist.

"Knowing the checklist allows the MTP to run tests on different systems and verify whether the system passes or not," said Marrin. "If it does not pass then the MTP can fall back on the knowledge of the systems to quickly identify the fault and troubleshoot it to find a solution and fix the fault."

A MTP's experience can be used in many situations, said Marrin, which include finding solutions to a specific fault or conducting a general test flight on

an aircraft once it has come out of phase maintenance.

"A general test flight is where we conduct a complete maintenance test flight checklist, doing all the checks possible for an airframe," said Marrin. "We do that after a phase because the aircraft is disassembled to a great extent and even if certain systems have not been touched, we still evaluate all of the checks to ensure that everything has passed before we send it off as airworthy."

"In most cases as a line pilot you will never do all the checks, so it is nice being a maintenance test pilot and being able to run through all of the aircraft checks on a general test flight," continued Marrin.

MTPs make an effort to share the learned knowledge through experience with each other to help understand the systems functions. Benefits of going to a fellow MTP for guidance can sometimes produce faster results than referring to the maintenance manual, said Marrin.

"Sometimes just the systems knowledge will give you the capability to identify the fault without going to the maintenance manual," said Marrin. "Sometimes the fault won't be in the manual so you have to rely on that systems knowledge and that is why we are taught about the systems in great detail."

The aircraft maintainers are able to fall back on the MTPs systems knowledge when an unforeseen maintenance issue arises.

"They (MTPs) are a book of knowledge ... they know a lot more than we do, generally speaking," said Spc. Casey Henson, from Dallas, a Black Hawk maintainer in Co. B, 615th.

"The MTPs make the final call once all the maintenance is complete," said Henson. "At the completion of a phase the aircraft will not return back to its company until they sign off on it."

As in most situations where knowledge and experience is depended upon, certain bragging rights come with being able to identify and fix aircraft issues.

Marrin loves his job because he gets to troubleshoot issues. He prides himself on finding the fault first – and being right.

"Sometimes it makes your head swell bigger I guess," he said.

"There is always a competitive camaraderie going



Photo by Sgt. Travis Zielinski, 1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

To find out about issues with the current UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter phase, Chief Warrant Officer 5 Shawn Marrin (left), from Lantana, Fla., the maintenance test pilot section chief talks with Black Hawk mechanics Spc. Casey Henson (middle), from Dallas, and Spc. Jesse Hooker (right), from Shreveport, La., here, Dec 13.

on between the test pilots to see who can identify what the true problem is," added Marrin.

Even with the competition to display knowledge, all MTPs are working toward the same goal – maintaining the force to complete the mission.

"How well we do our jobs is how well we are able to identify if the systems are working well," said Marrin. "That ensures that when the line units get their aircraft they can have fault-free operations for an extended period of time."

"We want to have high operational readiness, and the better we do our job we can sustain a high operation rate," said Marrin. ✂

Bringing Taji leaders together

Story by Pfc. Adam Halleck

1st BCT PAO, 1st Cav. Div., MND-B

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – During the holiday season many people choose to celebrate with the people that matter most to them, it is the same for Soldiers deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

American leaders from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, and the Camp Taji-based Baghdad embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team-North, invited Iraqi civil and military leaders from the Taji area to attend a holiday dessert social, here, Dec. 15.

“The local leaders have been more than hospitable toward us when it comes to

celebrating and honoring their cultural traditions,” said Capt. Matthew Hopper, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment. “We wanted to return the favor to them during our holiday season.”

The group of guests was as diverse as the dessert menu. Local military officers were rubbing elbows with local sheiks, businessmen and council leaders, while enjoying chai, an array of fresh fruit, as well as assorted cakes and cookies.

“It’s not often that we can get the leaders from the New Taji Nahia Council, Qada Council, Iraqi Army, and Iraqi Police into the same room,” added Hopper, from Little Rock, Ark. “Offering the local leaders an opportunity to meet their counter-

parts should help forge working relationships that could benefit the people of Taji.”

“Sweetening the deal with ice cream and cake doesn’t hurt either,” joked White-water, Wisc. native, Staff Sgt. Nicholas Lien.

“[Local leaders] were generous enough to invite us into their homes during their holiday festivities,” added Lien. “We thought it would only be fitting to invite the local leaders of Taji into our home to celebrate with us during our holiday season.”

As the battalion prepares to redeploy after their year-long rotation, they want to capitalize on every opportunity to strengthen the relationships among local leaders, added Lien.

“With the help of the local leadership we have brought a lot of progress to Taji,” added Lien. “Without the people in this room, the schools we’ve built, the roads and bridges we’ve mended, and the growth of Taji would have never come to fruition.”

The gathering was a gesture of the American leaders’ appreciation for the hard work the Taji leaders put in for the future of Taji.

“I thank you all for your dedication to the people of Taji and the future of Iraq,” said Lt. Col. Eric Schwegler, a native of Ozark, Ala. “As [American forces] celebrate the holiday season it’s nice to be able to come together and share quality time with the people that matter most to us.” ✂



Ozark, Ala. native, Lt. Col. Eric Schwegler (left), commander of the 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, speaks to Siham Nadeem, a leader of a non-governmental organization for widows in Taji, during a holiday dessert social at Camp Taji, Dec. 15.



Photo by Pfc. Adam Halleck, 1BCT PAO, 1st Cav. Div., MND-B

Little Rock, Ark. native, Capt. Matthew Hopper (right), commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, speaks to New Taji Nahia council member Fakhri Najim Abdullah, during a holiday dessert social at Camp Taji, Dec. 15.

Securing rural area for upcoming elections

Story by 1st Lt. Josh Risher

1st BCT UPAR, 1st Cav. Div., MND-B

BAGHDAD – While upcoming elections, scheduled for next spring, give many Iraqis a sense of hope in their ability to improve their government and way of life, insurgents view elections as an opportunity to conduct attacks and impose their own agenda.

American Soldiers are hard at work to deny the insurgency any ground within the Istiqlaal area, northeast of the capital, and outlying areas.

Soldiers from 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division have conducted a series of raids and cache searches in and around Istiqlaal to interdict weapons and explosives trafficking into areas closer to Baghdad.

Throughout this month, U.S. troops

worked long days with their partners from the 6th Iraqi Emergency Response Unit and 2nd Brigade, 1st Iraqi Federal Police Division, executing raids and cache searches in the rural Rashidiyah and Fahama areas along the Tigris River.

The combined forces began work early in the morning, arriving at several different agricultural areas while the sun came up. Soldiers and ISF spread out across fields and through groves to search for caches of explosive materials and weapons.

Meticulously, the team searched and cleared over 22 suspected cache sites throughout Rashidiyah and Fahama and searched many target houses.

Partnered teams of Soldiers and Iraqi Police established traffic control points everyday to interdict weapons trafficking while others searched populated areas for illegal weapons and worked to arrest wanted insurgents with warrants issued by the Iraqi courts. ✂



Photo by 1st Lt. Josh Risher, 1BCT PAO, 1st Cav. Div., MND-B

Sgt. Chad Haynes (right), a cavalry scout from Austin, Texas, and an Iraqi policeman check a motorist’s identification card against a list at a traffic control point in North Rashidiyah.

Air Cav command team's Christmas visit

*Photos by Sgt. Travis Zielinski
1stACB PAO, 1st Cav. Div.*



AL ASAD, Iraq – Col. Douglas Gabram (left), from Cleveland, Ohio, the commander of 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, gives a coin to Sgt. Michael Bedsole, from Houston, an aircraft powerplant mechanic in Company D, 4th Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st ACB, for his part in helping fix an Air Force aircraft, here.



Filling the role of door gunner, Command Sgt. Maj. Glen Vela, from Dallas, the command sergeant major for the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, makes a flight to al-Asad, Iraq, on Christmas Day to visit Soldiers that are a part of a 1st ACB detachment conducting operations in Multi-National Force – West.

Christmas Eve candlelight chapel service in Iraq

*Photo by Staff Sgt. Robert Jordan
30th HBCT PAO, MND-B*



BAGHDAD – Soldiers of the 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team sing during a candlelight Christmas service at Forward Operating Base Falcon's chapel, Dec. 24. The evening service ends with one candle lighting the all the others in the chapel. The chaplain lights one candle, which is used to light by hand several others held by fellow Soldiers. As each member of the congregation lights other members' candles, the entire chapel is illuminated by their fellows' candles.

LIVING THE LIFE



LEGEND IN 2009



Cav band prepares for final performance

Story by Sgt. Samantha Beuterbaugh
MND-B PAO

BAGHDAD – The 1st Cavalry Division rock band jammed at the division chapel, Dec. 22, in one of their last performances before the unit redeploys.

As the band members prepare for their redeployment, they performed a holiday concert, thanking their many supporters and contributors to their success.

“The performance was set up for [Division Special Troops Battalion],” said Staff Sgt. Dennis Milne, of Rockford, Ill.

On behalf of the band members, vocalist Staff Sgt. Renatta Draper formally thanked both the DSTB members for their support and the chaplain for the use of the chapel for both practices and concerts.

The intent, while searching for the music to be performed at the concert, was to find popular, widely-recognizable tunes as well as to find pieces that would incorporate the use of the horn section, said Milne.

The collaboration included popular hits like Mariah Carey’s “All I Want for Christmas is You”; classic sounds like “Little Drummer Boy”, and comical pieces like Alvin and the Chipmunks’ “Christmas Don’t be Late”, in which the sound technician, Staff Sgt. Bran-

don Colley, changed the pitch of the vocalists’ voices to imitate the chipmunks’.

For these band members, the preparation for this particular concert wasn’t just about reading a sheet of music and playing the tunes. The members actually had to listen to multiple CD’s in order to compose their own musical notes by ear.

“The band members had no written music,” said Milne. “They had to listen to the songs to figure out their own way to incorporate their instruments into the piece.”

There are two band detachments with the 1st Cav. Div.; the traditional band members who march and play at ceremonial events, and the contemporary rock band, which plays pop, salsa and country tunes.

The rock band has been working together for 11 months and comprises one guitarist, one bass player, one pianist, one drummer, two trumpet players, one saxophone player, one trombone player, two vocalists and one sound technician.

Although the rock band hasn’t practiced together in weeks because of ongoing redeployment demands, Milne said that he couldn’t have been more pleased with the band’s impeccable performance Tuesday. The last time the band rehearsed was during a week-long tour that began Dec. 1, to boost Soldier morale on four more remote U.S. posts.

“This is one of the most talented groups I’ve ever been with, from the horns to the vocalists, to the rhythm sections,” said Milne.

Before this, the band typically practiced together at least every other day, and until more recently, they were performing 10 to 15 gigs a month, said Milne. A typical performance lasts one to two hours.

The night’s performance lasted just over an hour, and the chapel was nearly one-third full. Draper said it was the largest turnout for the rock band during this deployment.

“It might not always be a big crowd, but it feels good to be a part of a group that provides those few Soldiers stress relief,” said the trombone player, Staff Sgt. Jesse Brown, from Tecumseh, Okla.

The band boosts Soldiers’ morale, instilling the will to fight, building community relations as the band members and the Iraqi symphony come together for events, and reminding people of the Army’s history, said Brown.

“We get to tell the Army’s story through music,” Brown said.

Brown said it is an emotional experience to play for the Soldiers, especially during the many welcome home ceremonies, which are typical gigs in the states. Several band members were already sent back to Fort Hood, Texas to prepare patriotic hymns for the

welcoming home of the 1st Cav. Div. as they redeploy.

The rock band’s final performance in theater took place at the Pegasus Oasis dining facility Christmas day. ✂



Photo by Sgt. Samantha Beuterbaugh

Spc. Phil Terrell, a trumpet player in the 1st Cavalry Division’s rock band, performs in a holiday concert, Dec. 22, at the division chapel as a special thanks to the Division Special Troops Battalion for all of the support provided throughout the band’s deployment.

COMMANDO

Medic treats himself after being shot by sniper

Story by Sgt. Jennie Burrett

2nd BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div., MND-B

BAGHDAD – “I was probably two feet from my door of my truck when I heard gun fire and it felt like someone just cracked me in the right shoulder

blade with a hammer,” said Spc. Matthew Mortensen, of Olathe, Kan.

The combat medic, with 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, was part of a presence patrol conducting a neighborhood search, Dec. 10, in an area historically known for weapons caches, rockets and mortars.



Photo by Pfc. Ryan Nolan, 2nd BCT, 10th Mtn. Div.

Spc. Matthew Mortensen (center), of Olathe, Kan., a combat medic with 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, shows high spirits, with Pfc. Juan Ortega (left), of Belen, N.M., and Pfc. Jorge Cruz, of Waterbury, Conn., after he was shot in the shoulder by sniper fire while on a presence patrol in Baghdad, Dec. 10.

As the patrol walked the streets, a mounted element went from check point to check point providing security for them. Having reached the last check point, Staff Sgt. Manoj Prasad, of Waretown, N.Y., and Mortensen dismounted to maneuver the trucks into a static security posture, when shots were fired.

“I saw a bullet hole in his shirt, and when I cut it open all I could see was blood,” said Prasad. “I looked for an exit wound and couldn’t find one.”

Being the medic on scene, Mortensen provided first aid care to himself after he was injured until he reached the Joint Security Station Loyalty aid station. Combat medics are responsible for providing first aid and frontline trauma care on the battlefield with the primary role to provide medical treatment to wounded soldiers.

“After I was shot, I had my platoon sergeant examine for a wound and he found one on my right shoulder blade,” said Mortensen. “Then I jumped into the truck, threw off my kit because I couldn’t reach my right side with my kit on. After I took it off, I started cleaning up some of the blood with gauze then I used the package for the gauze and created a pressure dressing over the wound just in case it penetrated my chest cavity. I didn’t know what happened to the

bullet so that was the only thing I was really worried about.”

After the initial treatment, Mortensen was medically evacuated to another JSS. Mortensen kept his composure throughout the event and was able to provide Prasad with the proper medevac procedures for entering the JSS.

The day following the incident, Mortensen was awarded a Purple Heart and a Combat Medical Badge while he was in the hospital at Victory Base Complex.

The Purple Heart is awarded to those who have been wounded or killed while serving on or after April 5, 1917 with the U.S. military. The CMB is a decoration of the United States Army which was first created in January 1945. The badge is awarded to any member of the Army Medical Department, pay grade Colonel or below, who are assigned or attached to a medical unit (company or smaller size) which provides medical support to a ground combat arms unit during any period in which the unit was engaged in active ground combat.

Mortensen was sent back to the United States for rehabilitation and recuperation. After spending a month back in the States, he anticipates he will return to his platoon in Iraq. ✂

W. Va. Soldier finds direction, discipline

Story by Spc. Ruth McClary

30th HBCT PAO, MND-B

BAGHDAD – Sporting work gloves covered in engine grease, Spc. Jeremy Williams maneuvers an air wrench as he changes the tires on a humvee at Camp Stryker, Dec. 11.

Changing tires is just the tip of the iceberg of responsibilities for Williams, of 150th Armored Reconnaissance Squadron, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team. He overhauls engines, installs fuel injector pumps and replaces brakes and transmissions since becoming a wheeled vehicle mechanic and arriving here in May.

“He does his job on vehicles as if he had gone to school for it, and he is one of the best Soldiers on the maintenance team,” said maintenance supervisor, Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Reynolds, of Huntington, W. Va.

Williams, a native of Poca, W. Va., has learned how to maintain every type of military vehicle that rolls or is hauled into the motor pool.

He and his co-workers are responsible for the upkeep of around 40 vehicles, ranging from humvees to two-and-a-half-ton cargo trucks, and their work has been recognized and applauded by leaders in their military chain of command.

“We were recognized for having the best record for dead-lined vehicles,” said Williams. “We send up a dead-line vehicle report, that’s the report that tracks vehicles [out-of-service] for over 24 hours; well, we never let one sit like that. We get them up and running within 24 hours.”

Proud of their motor pool record, Williams and his fellow Soldiers work well together setting standards that make their

section stand out from the rest.

“We were the first to install 400-amp generators in our vehicles, which gives the vehicles more electrical power,” said Williams. “The 200-amps makes the [navigation system] go down. The generators serve the same purpose on a military vehicle as an alternator on a car.”

Adaptation has played a major role in Williams’ success as a wheeled vehicle mechanic. Initially he was upset when he was involuntarily transferred for deployment, and thrust into a different position halfway around the world in a matter of months. Now with a positive attitude he actually enjoys his new position, working sometimes 16 to 18 hour days as needed.

“Spc. Williams went above and beyond in his duties to make sure every vehicle was up to standard and ready for a mission, even on his days off,” said Reynolds.

Making a change in his life and adapting is what led to Williams’ entry into the military.

After a brief brush with the law, William’s mother suggested he join the National Guard and get his General Education Development certificate. The troubled youth took her advice and has served in the West Virginia National Guard more than three years now.


After this deployment, he plans to attend the Warrior Leadership Course; a course that helps junior leaders transition into a non-commissioned officers role. He said he credits the Guard with his growth and maturity and plans to retire in the military.

“I joined the military to get some discipline in my life, and it has paid off,” said Williams. “It gives me something to look forward to and keeps me out of trouble.” ✂



Photo by Spc. Ruth McClary, 30th HBCT PAO, MND-B


Spc. Jeremy Williams, of Poca, W. Va., climbs on top of a humvee to check fluids during a preventative maintenance check at Camp Stryker, Dec. 11. Williams received on-the-job training as a wheeled vehicle mechanic since arriving here in May. Through self-instruction, he learned how to maintain two-and-a-half ton vehicles and palletized load systems. Williams joined the West Virginia National Guard a little over three years ago and credits the Guard for becoming more disciplined after a troubled past.



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You are my brother, my sister, my fellow Soldier. It is my duty to stand up for you, no matter the time or place. I will take **ACTION**. I will do what's right. I will prevent Sexual Harassment and Assault. I will not tolerate sexually offensive behavior. I will **ACT**.





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We are American Soldiers. **MOTIVATED** to keep our fellow Soldiers safe. It is our mission to prevent Sexual Harassment and Assault. We will demonstrate mutual respect. As Soldiers, we are all **MOTIVATED** to take action. We are strongest... together.



“Garryowen” got talent

*Photos by 1st Lt. Josh Risher
1st BCT PAO, 1st Cav. Div., MND-B*



BAGHDAD – Soldiers from the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, perform the hit Christmas song, “Feliz Navidad”, as the final act in a Squadron talent show at Joint Security Station Istiqlaal, Dec. 21. The Soldiers entertained their fellow Troopers during the “Istiqlaal’s Got Talent” show.



Sgt. Taurus “Mack” McDaniel, a cavalry scout from Kountze, Texas, performs his original song, “Mr. Krashtown”, during his solo act in a talent show held by the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division at Joint Security Station Istiqlaal, Dec. 21. Soldiers transformed the station’s dining facility into a concert hall to entertain their fellow Troopers.



Staff Sgt. Jason Feaga, a tracked vehicle mechanic from Modesto, Calif., performs a medley of hit songs by the band “Metallica” during a talent show at Joint Security Station Istiqlaal, Dec. 21. “I’ve never played in front of this big of a group,” Feaga told the dozens of fellow Soldiers from 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division.



Cpl. Thomas “Yung Capp” Taylor, a human resources specialist from Columbus, Ohio and **Sgt. Marchello “Squeezie” Jimerson**, a cavalry scout from Bastrop, La. perform their original song, “Monster”, during their Squadron talent show at Joint Security Station Istiqlaal, Dec. 21.

Securing COP Carver

*Photos by Maj. Timothy Hyde
2nd BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div., MND-B*



BAGHDAD- Staff Sgt. Alexis Rodriguez, of Saginaw, Mich., a squad leader in 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, coordinates with his subordinate team leaders over his radio while on a base defense patrol around Contingency Operating Post, Dec. 16, to prevent attacks on the installation.



Pfc. Marc Fisher, of Boston, Mass., a Soldier in 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, patrols around Contingency Operating Post Carver, Dec. 16.



Staff Sgt. Alexis Rodriguez, of Saginaw, Mich., a squad leader with 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, observes his surroundings during a base defense patrol around Contingency Operating Post Carver, Dec. 16.

Air Cav setup traffic control points

*Photos by Sgt. Travis Zielinski,
1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs*



TAJI, Iraq – A Soldier from 3rd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, waits for an approaching vehicle to stop at a traffic control point, here, Dec. 12. The Air Cav. Soldiers partnered with the 34th Iraqi Army Brigade, to set up the TCP in support of a 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cav. Div., mission.



Supporting Soldiers from the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, during a traffic control point operation, Staff Sgt. Marcelo Figueroa, from Harrisburg, Pa., a working military dog handler in Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cav. Div., leads his dog, Sgt. 1st Class Lasso, during a search of a vehicle, here, Dec. 12.

Air Cav assists with civilian wounded after IED attack

Story by Sgt. Alun Thomas

1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs, MND-B

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Medevac crews from the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, lent urgent medical transportation and care to Iraqi civilians after an improvised explosive device detonated south of Baghdad, Dec. 11.

The IED, which exploded south-west of Baghdad, near the Euphrates River, injured multiple Iraqis. For the air crews, the extreme nature of the attack and injuries prompted actions outside of normal protocols. Usually, Iraqi emergency services evacuate civilians to the nearest local hospital.

After the explosion, fellow Iraqis transported their severely wounded to nearby Forward Operating Base Yusafiyah with hopes of U.S. military medical aid.

The Soldiers who encountered the wounded quickly provided first aid and immediately called for air medevac assets stationed nearby, said Capt. Audrey Boenker, from Huntsville, Ala., operations officer with 2nd Battalion,

1st ACB.

"The crews launched to Yusufiya and once they arrived there, we received the initial [report] that three personnel were injured," Boenker said.

The medevac teams flew to FOB Yusafiyah and found that there were more wounded than there were medics to treat them.

Flight medics quickly jumped off the aircraft, helped evaluate the injured Iraqis and loaded them up for the flight to the 28th Combat Support Hospital at Camp Sather in Baghdad, she said.

While en route to the 28th CSH, the medevac team received an additional call for five more injured Iraqis at FOB Yusafiyah who needed to be evacuated to a CSH.

"We went through a quick course of action ... the clear answer at the time, given the position of the team that was out, was to give it to them as a secondary nine-line," Boenker said. "They could handle the additional five patients that were being called in."

Because of the massive influx of critically injured patients, the Kalsu medevac team communicated to their counterparts in Camp Taji that they may be called

upon to transfer some of the wounded, whom they just dropped off at the 28th CSH, to another CSH in Balad.

"We informed Taji to let them know if for some reason there was a follow on from Sather to Balad then we would be passing it off to them," Boenker said. "That way we could do more turns going back to Yusufiya in order to pick up further patients."

The air team returned to FOB Yusafiyah, picked up the remaining five patients.

"The crew then made a smart decision to re-direct to [another medical facility] where our crew dropped off their last two patients there before returning back," Boenker said.

The air medevac team transported eight wounded Iraqis to the two hospitals between two trips in only 70 minutes.

"We haven't had near the patient load or casualty load compared with previous rotations, so this was a great test of the systems we have in place," Boenker said. "The systems we put in place worked. Everybody was able to do the critical thinking required to ensure the mission got done." ✂

16th Engineers at Old Ministry of Defense

Photos by Staff Sgt. April Mota
16th Eng. Bde, UPAR, MND-B



BAGHDAD – Sgt. Phillip Howell, a member of the 16th Engineer Brigade’s convoy security team of Marblehead, Ohio, who works in the canine police unit in his civilian job, is pleasantly reminded of home when a stray dog at Old Ministry of Defense decides to have a seat at his feet.



Reminding everyone to “Have a nice day,” Sgt. Remi Bald Eagle, a gunner on a convoy security team of West Lake, Ohio, with the 16th Engineer Brigade, pulls security at Old MOD, in central Baghdad, Dec. 9.



While on a short break during his radio communications class with the 11th Iraqi Field Engineer Regiment at Old MOD, Dec. 9, Master Sgt. Jim Fritts, of Sugar Grove, Ohio, 16th Engineer Brigade, takes a moment to enjoy his surroundings.

Cavalry troops search for caches in Taji

*Photo by Pfc. Adam Halleck,
1st BCT PAO, 1st Cav. Div., MND-B*



Taji – Oakdale, N.Y. native, Sgt. Fabrizio Bustos, an armor crewman assigned to Company C, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, takes cover behind a pillar while pulling security during a search for caches at the Nassir Factory Complex, Dec. 20.



Redding, Calif. native, Staff Sgt. Jereme Espinosa, an armor crewman assigned to Company C, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, searches for weapons caches in a field of rusted pipes at the Nassir Factory Complex in Taji, Dec. 20.



Killeen, Texas native, Spc. Joshua Rayburn, an armor crewman assigned to Company C, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, walks through a scrap yard at the Nassir Factory Complex in Taji, Dec. 20.

Makin' a list, checkin' it twice

Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kristina Scott
MND-B PAO



BAGHDAD – Spc. David Alvarez, an Avenger systems repairman assigned to 3rd Battalion, 4th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, grins as he lays out vehicle equipment for inspection, here, Dec. 22. Alvarez is a native of El Paso, Texas.

OLD HICKORY

Soldier serves community in more ways than one

Story by Spc. Kelly LeCompte

1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs, MND-B

BAGHDAD – Sgt. Olin Wilkinson, of Greenville, N.C., is probably not the kind of person one might think of as a typical high school English teacher.

An infantryman currently serving his fourth deployment, Wilkinson's service includes several years as a Marine and nearly seven years in the North Carolina's National Guard.

Wilkinson earned a Master of Arts degree in teaching from East Carolina University, and barely completed his first semester on faculty at Roanoke High School when called to deploy to Iraq with the 252nd Combined Arms Battalion, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team.

"I had been out for a while and kinda missed it," Wilkinson said of joining the National Guard after his term in the Marine Corps. "And I live in North Carolina so [I thought] let me do something that's going to serve the state, the local community."

Wilkinson was a student at East Carolina University when he enlisted in the National Guard, and the benefits of the Guard enabled him to earn a bachelor's degree in English and

History and then pursue graduate school.

"I was still an undergraduate when I joined the National Guard, Wilkinson said. "Getting a master's degree, for me, was more of a goal; it was something I just wanted to do."

Wilkinson said the National Guard helped him obtain that goal.

"If it wasn't for the National Guard, I probably would not have gotten my master's degree, or it would have been a long process, little-by-little. The financial benefits that they gave me allowed me to do it one fail swoop."

Wilkinson said serving his community as a service member and a teacher have both been rewarding, and his experiences in the military help him in teaching in countless ways.

"Especially in the infantry, you never go do anything without a plan, without a rehearsal. The hardest part is getting ready. [It's] the same with teaching... if you go in there and try to wing it, they're going to eat you alive," Wilkinson said. "And also, having been a [non commissioned officer], and standing up in front of people, talking to people; you feel comfortable doing that. It's really intimidating when you walk into a classroom. Also, you have to learn to work with people."

With his education, Wilkinson could commission as an officer. He prefers the hands-on environment being an

NCO offers saying that it is the same thing he likes about teaching.

"I like being a squad leader, I like being a team leader, I like being an NCO," Wilkinson said. "It's good duty. You get a lot more hands-on... and I think that's why I like teaching, it is really hands-on... you get to know their emotions; what they're thinking, what they're feeling."

Wilkinson, who seems compelled to serve his country and community, said the rewards of being in the military are immeasurable, and he wishes others could share in the experience.

"Less than one percent of the U.S. population is in the military, and I think that's a terrible thing, because this is worth doing," Wilkinson said.

As a Soldier, Wilkinson says that he does not worry about politics just the mission.

"We don't get to choose what wars we fight or what duties we pull. I've guarded refugees in Albania, stopped genocide in Kosovo, I'm here in Iraq now. I didn't get to choose any of that. But I know there are people whose lives are better, because I was on a street with a gun and I didn't back down."

"Whatever else happens the rest of my life, I know I changed the world, and 99 percent of our population is never going to experience that." ✂

That's no ordinary tire change

Story by Spc. Luisito Brooks

4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div., MND-B

BAGHDAD – Just imagine that while driving, you get a flat tire; only the tire that needs changing is nearly half the size of some cars.

For Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 12th Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, tackling the task of changing a few larger than normal tires on a Stryker vehicle, Dec. 18, is no run of the mill task.

Whatever the reason nails, sharp rocks, shrapnel or just the wear and tear of driving on harsh terrain that causes a tire to go flat it needs to be changed quickly to maintain the unit's combat effectiveness.

"Not being able to change a tire on a Stryker quickly can greatly affect a mission," said Spc. Jordan Smith, from Jacksonville, Fla. "It can leave a unit short a vehicle that could have been sent in support of a mission"

For the Soldiers that change these nearly 400 pound, \$2,000 tires, it is no simple task.

"It is a two man job and even with two guys it takes about 45 minutes to an hour to change just one tire," said Spc. Robert Riddle, from Dallas, Texas. "We used the basic issued items that came with vehicles in order to change the flat."

Most Strykers can remain combat effective if just one tire is flat, thanks to its seven other tires, but there are some situations where that one tire matters.

"The tire needs to be changed if the weather is bad or if the vehicle needs to travel for long periods of time," said Riddle. "If it can't be changed on-site, depending on how many tires are flat or how bad the flat is, the vehicle may need to be towed by another Stryker or a wrecker vehicle to an area where it can be serviced."

Having a flat tire on a Stryker can be a headache, but the Soldiers in the unit use it as an opportunity to perfect skills and contribute to the fight.

"By working on issues like these we are helping the guys on the line," said Smith. "If we can get their vehicles back to them faster, we are actually adding to the fight." ✂



Photo by Spc. Luisito Brooks, 4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div.

Spc. Robert Riddle, from Dallas, Texas, slides a new tire under the slat armor of a Stryker in order to change a tire on the vehicle, at Joint Security Station Justice, Dec. 18.

Taking training to new heights

Story by Spc. Luisito Brooks

4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div., MND-B

BAGHDAD – It takes more than just hot air to get the Aerostat surveillance system up in the sky, it also requires many hours of training.

Soldiers from 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division have spent the last month learning from the ground up how to assemble, operate and perform minor maintenance on the system, here, at Joint Security Station Muthana.

The surveillance systems that are mounted on the Aerostat blimp have the ability to view objects or locations many kilometers away, during day or night.

"With this training (we) will be able to operate the system ourselves and provide an aerial view across the area of operation," said Sgt. Peter Burkes, a infantryman from Austin, Texas.

"The Aerostat is a pressurized flexible structure that's filled with helium and it looks like a blimp."

Part of the 28-day training on the \$4 million piece of equipment required the Soldiers to spend two weeks in the classroom learning the ins and outs of the system.

"In the class we learned about each part of the system, how to put them together and operate it," said Spc. Val Tapia, a fire support Soldier from Stockton, Calif. "The class was very helpful because we were able to ask all the questions we needed."

At the end of the classroom session of the course the Soldiers had to take a written exam to test their knowledge on the system.

"I studied very hard for the written test," said Spc. Roy Justin, a radar repair specialist



Photo by Spc. Luisito Brooks, 4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div.

Spc. Justin Roy, with the Headquarter and Service Battery, 2nd Battalion, 12th Field Artillery, 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division from Castleton, N.Y., stabilizes the Aerostat as he holds on the side rope guides at Joint Security Station Muthana, Dec. 19.

from Castleton, N.Y.

Every Soldier that did well on the written exam continued on to the hands-on portion of the course.

"We inventoried each piece of the system and then basically put the entire thing together," said Tapia. "It took us two days to put it together."

The final portion of the course required

each person to master how to launch and recover the Aerostat.

"It took a team of about eight people 15 to 20 minutes to launch and recover the system and each person on the team had to learn everyone else's position," said Tapia. "We launched and recovered the Aerostat at least 50 times, under the supervision of the civilian instructor, so that everyone would be confident

no matter what position they were thrown in."

The Soldiers completing the Aerostat training course will provide a major asset to the area.

"The training was excellent," said Burkes. "Now that this team is almost done with the training, we will be able to provide the visual support that is very essential for the safety of our Soldiers." ✂

Soldiers stay busy outside the wire

Story by Sgt. Mary Phillips

30th HBCT PAO, MND-B

BAGHDAD – U.S. troops have moved out of Iraqi cities and Soldiers with 252nd Combined Arms Battalion, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team are still busy south of Baghdad; going outside the wire daily.

The missions are different now for the North Carolina National Guardsmen, as they have transitioned from aggressor to supporter.

“Our objective has changed,” said Sgt. Aaron Butler. “We have gone from attack mode to helping.”

Many of the Soldiers believe that they are still playing a crucial role in Iraq, helping prepare the Iraqi security

forces for when U.S. forces leave.

“We are still providing security and they’re [the Iraqi Army] still learning from us,” said Spc. Cody Stewart. “They’re still learning valuable tools and knowledge from us to help them better provide security once we’re gone.”

The Soldiers’ patrol includes meeting with local sheiks and Iraqi security

forces leadership, counter-improvised explosive devise missions, and being ready to respond as a quick reactionary force.

“We go out every day,” said Sgt. Scott Bang. “If we’re not going out we are on [Quick Reaction Force] supporting the other platoons that are going outside the wire.”

The Soldiers have been able to notice the rewards of their hard work by the lowered violence seen in the area.

“To me, it seems like IED attacks have gone down since we started out CIED missions,” said Bang, of Hope Mills, N.C.

Bang also said he feels that he is providing a beneficial service because of the large number of U.S. and Iraqi forces that use the roads his company performs CIED missions on.

1st Lt. Michael Mazie, a platoon leader, is proud of what his Soldiers have been able to accomplish and their continued dedication to their mission.

“Charlie Company, 252nd Combined Arms Battalion is used to conducting multiple missions at one time,” said Mazie. “Second platoon is currently maintaining a strong force outside the wire to continue contributing to the security of Iraq and develop our Iraqi security forces counterparts and Iraqi federal government.”

“There is still work to be done in Iraq, and the dangers are still very real, although progress is everywhere. My Soldiers use skill sets and advance soldiering tasks. Every day we remain vigilant and ready to respond.”



Photo by Sgt. Mary Phillips, 30th HBCT PAO

Spc. Daniel Clark, of Longs, S.C., a medic attached, 252nd Combined Arms Battalion, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, talks with a local woman about her daughter’s health, in southern Baghdad, Dec. 12.

Whether the Army Owns It or You Do. . .

THINK

WEAPONS SAFETY!

- T**R**E**A**T** every weapon as if it is loaded.
- H**A**N**D**L**E every weapon with care.
- I**D**E**N**T**I**F**I the target before you fire.
- N**E**V**E**R** point the muzzle at anything you don't intend to shoot.
- K**E**E**P** the weapon on safe and your finger off the trigger until you intend to fire.**

'Good goals' keep Soldier on track

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Kristina Scott
MND-B PAO

BAGHDAD – Spc. Seth Crowell, a nuclear, biological, chemical operations specialist assigned to Company A, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, has been recognized by members of his command for his ability to step outside the traditional role of an NBC specialist, and to adapt to the ever-changing landscape of military necessity.

Crowell, a native of Forestville, N.Y., who started his military career in the Army Reserve, chose to go active duty a little over a year ago. Shortly after going active, he deployed to Iraq in January 2009, with the 1st Cav. Div. His decision to join the military, he said, was based on trying to straighten out his life.

"I was looking for something different," said Crowell.

And it seems to have been a good choice.

"Spc. Crowell has exceeded our expectations," said Capt. Robert Texter, commander of Co. A, from Philadelphia, Pa.

According to Texter, Crowell has the ability to remain flexible and because of this, was assigned as the

personnel status report manager, a job which requires Crowell to track over 450 Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen throughout the MND-B area.

"He is working well outside of his [military operations specialty]. He has a lot of knowledge – he keeps so much knowledge about individuals," said Texter.

Additionally, Crowell was in charge of issuing out and tracking over 142,000 rounds of ammunition for various weapons systems, a role that some might find surprising for a specialist with only two years of experience in the Army.

"He is very squared away, very reliable," said Sgt. Orianna Martinez, a native of Forest City, N.C., the company's supply sergeant and Crowell's former supervisor.

But winning awards isn't the only area in which Crowell excels. He seems to be an all-around good Soldier.

"He has a [physical fitness] score of 290, he shoots expert on the M16, and he has qualified at the level 1 Army combatives course," said Sgt. James Alfred, from Uncasville, Conn., the training non-commissioned officer in charge for Co. A, and Crowell's current supervisor.

"He has good goals. He's constantly trying to improve upon himself," said Alfred.

While Crowell does not currently see himself as a career active duty Soldier, the 22 year-old says he has tentative plans to return to the Army Reserve once this enlistment is over. Additionally, he is planning to pursue a bachelor's degree in criminal jus-

tice, which he has been working on throughout this deployment through the Army Military University online. Crowell also said he is looking forward to reuniting with his fiancée, whom he plans to marry, after returning to the states. ✂



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kristina Scott, MND-B PAO

Spc. Seth Crowell (left), a nuclear, biological, and chemical operations specialist from Forestville, N.Y., demonstrates to Sgt. James Alfred, a native of Uncasville, Conn., how to replace a head-harness strap on a chemical mask, here, Dec. 22.

Mail clerks act as Santa's little helpers during holidays

Story by Staff Sgt. Jeff Hansen
MND-B PAO

BAGHDAD – If your local mail clerks look a little stressed or over-worked during this holiday season, they have good reason to be.

With the holiday season here, Soldiers in Iraq receive more care packages than any other time of year, and Camp Liberty is no different.

This is great for the Soldiers of Multi-National Division – Baghdad, but it also causes a great deal of work for mail clerks.

Spc. Krystal Juarez, a mail clerk assigned to Company B, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, estimates that she delivers about twice as much mail daily during the holiday season. This has been going on since around the end of November and shows no sign of slowing down.

"It hasn't stopped," Juarez said.

Most of the mail received recently has been care packages, whether from individuals' families or non-profit companies like the United Service Organizations. Some companies even send care packages directly to the mail room, the contents of which are distributed to any Soldier who comes into the mail room.

Juarez said she wants to make sure

everybody gets something, and having a box full of items like candy and "thank you" cards seemed like a good way to hand things out.

The Karkh Area Command Military Transition Team receives more care packages than any other unit this time of year. Part of their mission involves handing out care-package items to Iraqi children and their families, which several companies in the U.S. have been more than happy to assist with by shipping food, clothing and toys.

The combination of official mail, care packages, medical supplies and Army Direct Ordering items makes for a big enough work load, as is. However, this is only part of it as the 1st Armored Division prepares to arrive in Iraq.

Spc. Laura Baily, a mail clerk assigned to Company A, said the holiday rush is nothing she didn't expect, but with the addition of the incoming unit's mail coming earlier than they had hoped, there has been more to carry and sort through.

With her fellow service members in mind, Juarez helped start a program she calls "Soldier to Soldier" to assist troops at remote locations who do not receive mail as often as those on the main bases.

Bases like Contingency Operating Station Hammer, for example, only

receive their personal mail when their shipping container is full, due to the manpower and time it takes to deliver bulk mail over great distances.

Juarez, with help from Spc. Ashley Callines, Spc. Murphy Wakefield and Spc. Ryann Gilmore, has asked division staff and unit members who find themselves with an abundance of care package items to donate to the Soldier to Soldier program. This way, she hopes, the shipping containers will fill up faster, and Soldiers can receive their

personal mail more often.

During the excitement of opening care packages, Juarez and Baily want to ensure Soldiers still remember to protect their personal information. Tear mailing labels off of packages and burn them, do not just throw them in the trash.

Next time you're opening a care package during this holiday season, remember there are Soldiers working very hard to ensure that package made it to you. ✂



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jeff Hansen, MND-B PAO

First Lt. Ethan Clements (right), of the 17th Fires Brigade, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division picks up a care package from the division mail room at Camp Liberty, while Spc. Krystal Juarez, spreads holiday cheer, Dec. 23.

Air Cav undertakes chemical training

Story by Sgt. Alun Thomas

1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs, MND-B

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – For a brief moment it appeared heavy snow had taken a Christmas-like effect at one of the many desolate scrap yards, here.

On further reflection it turned out to be copious amounts of foam, used for containing chemicals during an attack.

The safety foam was part of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear training held by the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, Dec. 22, to refresh basic skills for Soldiers trained in the chemical field.

“The purpose of the training was to give the Soldiers realistic CBRN scenarios that are driven to support the Air Cav.,” said Capt. Charles Penn, from Union Springs, Ala., the brigade’s chemical officer. “The most important thing we’re trying to get from this training is the reality of it.”

The training took a walk, crawl, run method, Penn said, where classroom-based training was utilized before conducting an actual physical exercise.

“The tools we learned in the class were applied to three realistic scenarios using a foam type agent,” Penn said. “Instead of using the actual decontamination solution itself, we used a training aid similar to the solution which decontaminates structures and terrain.”

Penn said the training was successfully handled by the Soldiers participating, who easily mastered the use of the safety foam.

“The Soldiers were excited to get to the hands-on portion and their morale definitely increased,” Penn said. “This (CBRN) is a perishable skill and being in an aviation brigade, CBRN is a skill we don’t want to lose ... we want to adhere to conducting refresher training at least annually.”

Taking part in the training was Spc. Wilson McMullan, from Corpus Christie, Texas, who said the training was valuable for those in a chemical military occupational specialty.

“This training is something you don’t get much in an aviation unit and it’s good to get out here and do it,”



Photo by Sgt. Travis Zielinski, 1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

Learning techniques to spraying safety foam as part of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear training, Spc. Forest Johnson, from Reno, Nev., the CBRN non-commissioned officer in charge for 2nd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, sprays down vehicles in a scrap metal yard, here, Dec. 22.

McMullan said. “It helps you train for the best and train for the worst.”

McMullan said he was unfamiliar with the safety foam techniques used in the training and was grateful to learn something new.

“The hands-on training was fantastic and it’s the best way to learn,” McMullan said. “The fire foam we used is capable of killing biological contaminants and has a shelf

life of up to eight hours, while the chemical (foam) contaminant has 12 hours of shelf life.”

Spraying the foam on to derelict buildings and vehicles in the scrap yard made for an enjoyable training experience, McMullan said.

“It wasn’t just good training, it was fun training,” he said. “Every little chance I can get, even if it’s as small as possible, I’ll take all the training I can.” ✂

A Christmas gift of Catholic confirmation

Story by Sgt. Alun Thomas

1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – With the traditional anointing of the chaplain’s thumb, seven service members from the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade received a long-awaited gift just days before Christmas.

It was a gift that had taken months to achieve and was being given in the most unlikely of places – a warzone.

After 20 weeks of studying and practice, the Soldiers were officially confirmed as Catholics in a confirmation mass at the Tigris River Chapel, here, Dec. 19, bringing them fully into the realm of the Catholic Church.

It was the final step in their path to becoming Catholics, said Chaplain (Maj.) Tyson Wood, from Long Beach Island, N.J., with the candidates beginning their training almost seven months ago.

“We began this program, called the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, about three weeks after we deployed here,” Wood said. “My intention was to build good Catholics and receive them into the church just before the Christmas season to celebrate with us all the Christmas joys.”

Wood said he had to obtain special permission to confirm the group because of the location and circumstances surrounding their confirmation.

“Not every sacrament can be celebrated by a Priest, there are a couple that are reserved for bishops; ordination

and confirmation,” he explained. “With good standing, a priest can receive special delegation; the Arch Bishop of the Army gave me permission to confirm.”

For Wood the end result was worth the months of study, as he noted the exuberant reaction of those confirmed.

“It gives me great joy, it’s what I live for,” Wood said. “I have felt like a kid waiting for Christmas ... to me this is Christmas and this day could not come soon enough.”

“It was an awesome privilege to do this and I’ve had the chance to do this every time I’ve been deployed, which you don’t get to do often as a priest ... it was an honor,” Wood added.

The ceremony was a special one for 1st Lt. Marjana Mair, from Albany, N.Y., who along with her confirmation, was baptized and received her first communion.

Mair said she was part of another religion for many years, but wanted to become a Catholic upon discovering the faith.

“I grew up (Muslim) for 18 years, but when I started studying (Catholicism) I found I related to it ... there was something beautiful about it and I wanted to be part of it,” Mair said.

Before she could be confirmed, Mair said she had to undertake the required classes to be eligible for the blessing.

“Over the 20 weeks I learned about the religion through the Bible; what it means to be a Catholic and the way they do things” Mair said. “I felt I had a good grasp of it after that.”

Mair said she found her baptism to be a moving experience, despite her nervousness at being in front of the large attendance.

“Once Father Wood was up there with me it felt right, I knew I was doing the right thing,” Mair said. “It was a beautiful ceremony and will be one the biggest things I take from this deployment.”

The ceremony was also a milestone for Capt. Jeffrey Schenck, from Bitburg, Germany, who said becoming a Catholic was an ambition he had wanted to realize for a long time.

“There’ve been so many good people in my life that have been Catholic and it’s the faith that I saw which they believe in that drove me to become a Catholic,” Schenck said. “What sealed the deal was meeting my fiancée who is Catholic, which made us take a look at walking down the Catholic life together.”

Schenck said receiving the confirmation vows was remarkable, considering the location and environment he is currently in.

“It felt wonderful to be able to do it here in Iraq with this setting and I couldn’t have found a better priest to take me under his wing and educate me,” Schenck said. “He (Wood) kept it down to earth and explained everything from a layman’s point of view.”

“It’s just been a great experience doing it here in the middle of everything else going on 24 hours a day especially in the circumstances we’re in,” he said. ✂

Pilots lend a hand to air-ground training

Story by Spc. Luisito Brooks

4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div., MND-B

BAGHDAD – Close air support provided by helicopter gunships is an invaluable tool on the battlefield, however knowing how to properly call in support is what truly makes it effective.

Calling upon the experts, Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division received a visit from the very helicopter pilots that provide them air support at a class, here, Dec. 18.

“The better information we receive, the faster we can provide over-watch and fire support for you guys,” said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Santiago Torres, a 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division AH-64D Apache attack helicopter pilot from New York City. “If you don’t know how to fully use the tools in your tool box you are shorting yourself.”

The Air Cav pilots gave a short presentation to the troops stationed at Joint Security Station Justice, which demonstrated the capabilities of the AH-64D Apache attack helicopter and how to properly call for support.

“The [presentation] had awesome videos that showed how combat effective the birds are,” said Staff Sgt. Shane Gallagher, a squad leader from York, Pa., “It actually got me thinking about becoming a pilot one day.”



Photo by Spc. Luisito Brooks, 4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div.

Pilots from 1st Air Cavalry Brigade conduct a class on air support for Soldiers of Company C, 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division on a landing pad at Joint Security Station Justice, Dec. 18.



Photo by Spc. Luisito Brooks, 4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div.

Warrant Officer 4 Santiago Torres (left), a New York City native, explains to Soldiers from Company C, 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division what the Apache helicopter brings to the fight, during training at Joint Security Station Justice, Dec. 18.

The training then went from the classroom to the landing pad, for an up close look at the AH-64D.

“When we got to the landing pad, there it was, an Apache,” said Sgt. Robert Pierce. “The pilots answered every question (we asked), from how the Apache operates, to how a unit is supposed to request air support.”

After answering everyone’s questions, the pilots put on their flight suits, climbed into the Apache and flew away, leaving the class with a better understanding of air support and what it brings to the fight.

“I really appreciate the pilots for coming here for this training,” said 1st Lt. Adam Karboski, from Camden, N.Y. “My Soldiers had a chance to speak to these guys face to face on how to communicate better with them, making us more combat effective.” ✂

