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Combatives training teaches more than how to fight

Story & photo by Spc. Daniel Schneider
366th MPAD, USD-C

BAGHDAD – Soldiers of Battery F, 26th Field Artillery Regiment, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Armored Division, passed on their hand-to-hand knowledge and expertise to other Soldiers during a 40-hour class held at East Liberty Jan. 25-29.

This training provides more than just defensive techniques when attacked in close quarters, said battery leaders.

“Combatives training boosts Soldiers’ self-esteem, enforces the Warrior Ethos of never quitting, [and] provides knowledge of incapacitating an attacker,” said 1st Sgt. Michael Strate, first sergeant of the battery. “We train the Soldiers to finish the fight. In a real combat situation, whoever finishes the fight first can help battle buddies win theirs.”

One of the goals of this training is to provide Soldiers with enough knowledge and ability in level-one combatives to go back to their units as subject-matter experts, capable of teaching their battle buddies life-saving fighting skills.

“If I was ever in a situation where I need to use what we learned, I will make sure me and my battle buddy can walk away from it,” said Pfc. Adrian Richardson, assigned to Battery E, 3rd Battalion, 4th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Armored Division.

The class consists of rigorous

training, pushing Soldiers to their limits through exercising, conditioning, drilling new moves, and sparring with other Soldiers in bouts lasting anywhere from three to five minutes at a time.

“At times, I was tired and didn’t want to go on, but I had to drive through it to keep going,” said Richardson. “I’m looking forward to continuing to more advanced combatives training so that in my next deployment, I can help my fellow Soldiers.”

“[The class] may feel uncomfortable at first, but by the end it may save your life or your battle buddy’s life,” said Spc. Warren Kirby, a chaplain’s assistant assigned to Co. B, DSTB, 1st Armd. Div.

Even with an extensive background in martial arts and wrestling, Kirby learned new skills during this course.

“I had to adapt to never exposing my back to an enemy, and learn how to react to stressful situations,” said Kirby. “The instructors trained us how not to panic, and to think while under stress. Sometimes, it’s better to slow down and prepare for your next step rather than freaking out in a situation when you can’t move.”

Unarmed combat training has evolved over the years due to suggestions made by veterans of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, said Strate.

Strate recalled reading an Army Times article asking combat veterans about their close-combat experiences. In the article, the veterans noted that the greater majority of these sit-



Pfc. Adrian Richardson, assigned to Battery E, 3rd Battalion, 4th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Armored Division, attempts to achieve the clench while Staff Sgt. Erik Hickey, also with Btry. E, strikes him with boxing gloves during combatives training held at East Liberty Jan. 25-29. The clench is a technique used to inhibit an opponent’s ability to punch.

uations resulted in the enemy being incapacitated by unarmed means.

Despite suffering from an injury to his foot on the fourth day of training, Kirby said he is determined to complete the final day of training as soon as he heals so he can earn his

certification.

“In an environment where most combat occurs in an area no larger than 8-feet wide,” said Strate, “being proficient in hand-to-hand combat may be the deciding factor of a Soldier surviving.”

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Dual military spouses: a challenge in itself

Story & photo by Sgt. Tracy Knowles
101st Eng. Bn., 16th Eng. Bde. PAO, USD-C

BAGHDAD – Planning who will pick up the kids after Karate practice when both parents are working late can be stressful on any family. Planning for a deployment while your spouse is already deployed becomes a whole other story.

Capt. Sean Keegan and his wife, Maj. Kathleen Keegan, are facing these challenges right now.

Both serve in the Massachusetts Army Na-

tional Guard, but that's where the similarity ends. Sean serves with 101st Engineer Battalion in Iraq. Kathleen serves with Joint Force Headquarters and is preparing for a deployment in Afghanistan.

The couple met in a fighting position in 1991 during a two-week annual training with 26th Division Support Command.

A simulated attack erupted at 2 a.m. Sean grabbed his weapon and protective mask, ran to his fighting position and started returning fire. Soon after, Kathleen jumped in, shot a couple of rounds and started to leave. When asked where she was going, she stated that she had grabbed

her makeup bag instead of her protective mask and would be right back.

"I was dumbfounded, I knew right there I needed to get to know this girl," said Sean.

The two have been married for 16 years and have two children; Cole, 12, and Quinn, 10. One of the issues they are working through is how best to care for the children during this stressful time of flux.

Sean said communication and compromise must be a part of the equation. In this case, Sean will become the primary caregiver when he returns home so Kathleen can focus on her duties as an officer.

Though these stresses for dual military couples can be great, Sean said the rewards can be even greater and suggests couples should not feel like one should have to leave the service.

"I'm all for it," Sean said. "If both feel that desire to serve, they should, but [they should] also go in it with eyes wide open."

Staff Sgt. April Mota, 101st Eng. Bn., understands the challenges and rewards of being a dual-military couple. She is currently deployed to Iraq with her husband.

"The military is a whole different lifestyle which most people don't understand," said Mota. "We understand each other; we know where each other is coming from, understanding the reasons we do what we do."

The Keegans and the Motas, like so many dual military couples, use their strengths as Soldiers to overcome hardships, having to adapt to ever-changing schedules.

One bit of advice has helped Sean over the years: "Try not to be selfish," he said. "Remember, your spouse is not only doing their job, but also doing yours." ▲



Staff Sgt. April Mota and her husband, Spc. Elijah Mota, from Manchester, N.H., are one of five dual military couples in the 101st Engineer Battalion. They are deployed together on their first tour, stationed at Camp Liberty.

Public affairs guidance on interacting with the media

- Prior to the interview learn the media organization's reputation, affiliations and what their interest in you is.
- Check your personal appearance, be in appropriate attire for the interview including any Personal Protective Equipment that should be worn at the location the interview will take place.
- Ask for the reporter's credentials. If they have none, direct them to the nearest public affairs representative.
- Remember everything is on the record, only talk

about what you know to be a fact and correct any false or misunderstood statements the reporter makes.

- Answer questions honestly.
- Make sure your answers do not violate operation security.
- Do not be afraid of answering a question with "I don't know." If the question is not within your area of expertise, it is okay to not have an answer.
- Clarify any unclear points that may have been cov-

ered during interview.

- Offer to assist in future interviews.
- Notify your chain of command after interview and provide a brief synopsis of what the interview covered.

Remember, if we don't tell the story, the media will and they will tell it without our input. Tell your story and be proud to tell it. Family and friends will be proud to hear it.



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'Old Hickory' hands off OE to 'Falcons'



Prominent local area shaykhs observe transfer of authority ceremony.



Iraqi Policemen and U.S. Soldiers observe transfer of authority ceremony.

*Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Kristina Scott,
366th MPAD, USD - C*



Col. Gregory Lusk, commander of 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, together with the brigade senior enlisted noncommissioned officer, Command Sgt. Maj. John Swart, roll the brigade colors for casing during a transfer of authority ceremony Jan. 25 between 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team and 1st Brigade Combat Team – Augmented, 3rd Infantry Division.



Col. Roger Cloutier, commander of 1st Brigade Combat Team – Augmented, 3rd Infantry Division, untangles streamers as Command Sgt. Maj. Edd Watson unrolls the brigade colors, signifying the assumption of responsibility during a transfer of authority ceremony.

Engineers at war

Story by 1st Lt. Aaron Testa
16th Eng. Bde. PAO, USD-C

BAGHDAD – As U.S. military involvement in Iraq draws to a close, partnership with Iraqi Security Forces is becoming the lead focus.

Through partnership, U.S. forces are concentrating much of their efforts on advising and assisting their Iraqi Army counterparts. Two units in Baghdad responsible for some of the most critical counter-improvised explosive device and engineering training are working to ensure Iraqi soldiers can execute their own missions as the landscape evolves and Iraqis take the lead.

In order to provide Iraqi Army partners with the tools needed to succeed, Soldiers from 16th Engineer Brigade and 79th Explosive Ordnance Disposal Battalion hosted a conference at Adnon Palace Jan. 19 to discuss the future. Organizers said the main thrust of the conference was to provide insight into what the transition should look like.

“This conference was a great opportunity for face-to-face discussion of the challenges U.S. and Iraqi Army engineers and EOD are dealing with, the work-arounds, and the way ahead to the departure of significant numbers of U.S. engineers,” said Brig. Gen. Glenn C. Hammond, III, commander of 16th Engineer Brigade.

Leaders from 16th and 79th stressed the need for taking advantage of all the training currently available because the current amount of U.S. Soldiers and training resources may not be available in a few months.

“We have a window of opportunity to continue with the training we are doing before we have to transition to a new format,” said Lt. Col.

Geoffrey Stevens, of Fort Hood, Texas, commander of 79th EOD Battalion.

According to Stevens, the number of U.S. ordnance disposal teams in the Baghdad area is expected to be reduced by the end of next summer, which will provide less training opportunities for more Iraqi units.

Meanwhile, some Iraqi Army units are facing tough challenges innate to developing an effective system of supply and logistics. In response to these issues, organizers

addressed the need for the Iraqi Army to be fielded with the necessary equipment and parts to properly conduct their missions.

The partnership is

not just about ongoing operations and training but also about sustainment operations, said Maj. Hal Kendrick, of Amherst, Ohio, logistics officer for 16th Engineer Brigade.

“This is a top down approach with about 60-70 percent (of it) complete at this time,” said Kendrick. “If you don’t have what you need, you can’t do your mission.”

The conference provided a valuable forum to openly and honestly discuss concerns related to training and equipping the Iraqi Army engineer and EOD units, which will be at the fulcrum of future operations.

“This is not a combat war anymore; it is an engineer war,” said Brig. Gen. Saleh Kadoori Salman, deputy director of Iraqi Field Engineer Directorate. “We are dealing with roadside bombs and terrorists.”

Although the Iraqi forces are nearly ready to take charge of the operations, U.S. forces will continue to work to move the Iraqis forward toward self-sustainability.

“I look forward to the next conference to be held at the Iraqi Army Engineer School at Taji to compare our progress with the remaining challenges,” Hammond said.

As their partnership continues to evolve, U.S. leaders admit they may have achieved something greater than helping Iraqis rebuild their nation—they may have forged an enduring partnership for years to come. ▲

“This conference was a great opportunity for face-to-face discussion of the challenges U.S. and Iraqi Army engineers and EOD are dealing with, the work-arounds, and the way ahead to the departure of significant numbers of U.S. engineers.”

– Brig. Gen. Glenn C. Hammond, III

Air Cav, Iraqi Air Force conduct joint mission

Story & photo by Sgt. Travis Zielinski
1st ACB PAO, 1st Cav. Div., USD-C

TAJI, Iraq – Military leaders are hoping the presence of an Iraqi aircraft and a U.S. aircraft flying side-by-side will send a positive message to the Iraqi population, again.

AH-64 Apache helicopter pilots from 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, U.S. Division – Center, flew a second joint mission Jan. 20, with UH-1 Iroquois helicopter pilots from 2nd Squadron of the Iraqi Air Force.

“We have taken the lessons learned from the first flight and used them to start building more complex missions,” said Capt. Kevin Britt, from Las Vegas, assistant operations officer and Apache pilot assigned to the 1st 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cav. Bde, 1st Cav. Div.

On the first mission, Iraqi squadron commanders piloted the helicop-

ters. This time, the younger pilots had the opportunity to step in and gain experience. One of the components of the mission was trust, and teaching that trust to the rest of the formations of both military forces, said Britt.

“There are some small differences from the way we do things, to the way the Iraqis fly,” said Britt.

He said the two nations’ pilots can learn from one another; the missions provide them the opportunity to see how the Iraqis handle situations so together they can look for ways for to improve.

The first mission was considered a foundation in trust in partnership, said Britt; this one had a more deliberate objective.

“This is a recon mission to observe areas in and around Baghdad that can be used as landing zones for future operations,” Britt said. “There were some big steps made from the first mission. This time, the Iraqis had more of the lead.”



An AH-64D Apache attack helicopter (foreground) flies alongside an Iraqi UH-1 Huey during a joint mission between 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, U.S. Division – Center, and 2nd Squadron of the Iraqi Air Force Jan. 20.

Referring to the Iraqi pilots as true professionals, Capt. Brian Haas, from Ashley, N.D., an Apache pilot and commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-227th, said he believes training missions like the one on Jan. 20, truly make him love his job.

“Even though we are not shooting, missions like this still make a difference,” said Haas. “Our presence in the air, with the Iraqis, makes

a statement.”

Getting positive feedback from a mission is always welcomed, said Britt; getting positive feedback from civilians on the ground shows how far the Iraqi Air Force has come.

“The Iraqi pilots have received good praise from the Baghdad populace for the first mission,” said Britt. “We (Americans) don’t get to hear that stuff, so it is nice to know that the flights have a positive effect.” ▲



Iraqi Air Force control aircraft traffic alongside U.S. counterparts

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

Spc. Manuel Suarez (left), from New York City, an air traffic controller assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, U.S. Division – Center, receives details of an incoming flight as 2nd Lt. Taha Khaleel, an air traffic controller for the Iraqi Air Force, watches the flight-line for signs of activity in the air traffic control tower, here. The IqAF has been working in the tower alongside the 1st ACB since November, directing their aircraft.

Story by Sgt. Alun Thomas
1st ACB PAO, 1st Cav. Div., USD-C

TAJI, Iraq – As aircraft pour in and out of the Taji flight line, a flurry of Iraqi and American accents can be heard directing the flow of traffic over the airwaves.

Since November, the Iraqi Air Force has maintained a presence alongside 1st Air Cavalry Brigade in the air traffic control tower here, ensuring a safe passage of flight for their aircraft.

It is considered another step forward for the IqAF as they prepare to take over operations from the U.S. Army and one, at which they are excelling, said Spc. Dennis Dickerson, from Dallas, an air traffic controller in Company F, 2nd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st ACB, 1st Cavalry Division, U.S. Division – Center.

“It’s been good working with the Iraqis in the tower; they understand everything that’s going on up here,” Dickerson said. “You can see they’re getting better each time they’re in here.”

Dickerson said he has been working alongside the Iraqis for two months and the knowledge they have displayed is nearing that of their American counterparts.

“A few of their controllers have progressed to the local control position, which shows they’ve

learned well,” he said. “The only problem is the language barrier, which can sometimes be difficult when we communicate together.”

This barrier usually presents itself during radio communications, he said.

“One of the problems we have is the Iraqis’ (radio calls) coming in broken; and it’s hard to understand what their pilots are saying – but it’s usually worked out with the Iraqis up here,” Dickerson said.

The Iraqis show a good regard for safety and discipline in their performance and are easy to work with, Dickerson added.

“They’re very friendly; some are quieter than others, but they’re always respectful towards everyone,” he said.

Working with 1st ACB in the tower is 2nd Lt. Taha Khaleel, an air traffic controller with the IqAF, who said the experience is helping him improve his skills for the future.

“We’ve been assisting in the tower for many hours now and I’m becoming better and better,” Khaleel said. “I’ve learned how to work and assist with the flights and how to coordinate them.”

Khaleel said his responsibilities in the tower include receiving calls from incoming pilots and determining the order of flights both leaving and returning.

“I have to get the helicopters from point one to point two and coordinate them all,” he said.

In the two months Khaleel said he has been working in the tower, his abilities directing air traffic have increased considerably.

“I feel I’m doing a lot better because of everything I’ve been taught ... [the 1st ACB] have given me good training,” he continued. “With more hours and days here, I will be even better.”

As Khaleel adapts to his daily duties in the tower, 2nd Lt. Mushtaq Tariq, an air traffic controller trainee for the IqAF, is still in the early stages of training, but said he hopes to take a position in the tower soon.

“I’m still in the training phase studying basic aviation, but I’ve been in the tower observing to get more experience,” Tariq said. “I want to work in the tower myself and serve my country.”

Tariq said he is learning about air traffic reports, how to properly sequence flights, and he hopes to be efficient in all facets of air traffic control before he enters the tower.

“I know about the characteristics of all our aircraft and everything on the airfield,” Tariq said. “I think in six months I’ll be in the tower.”

Gaining insights from the experience of the 1st ACB controllers has been an invaluable resource, Tariq said.

“It’s been very helpful for me to assist the controllers ... the first time I went into the tower I insisted on helping, to learn more,” he said. “They are all my friends up there.” ▲

Iraqi Federal Police lead the way

ISF led patrols builds confidence for future operations

Story by Spc. Rebecca Schwab
2nd BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div., USD-C

BAGHDAD – Only a few years ago, it might have been hard to believe a quiet, peaceful patrol on the streets of Baghdad where U.S. Soldiers work together with Iraqi authorities could be possible.

Today, seeing is believing as Soldiers of 2nd Battalion, 15th Field Artillery, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, regularly carry out presence patrols in Baghdad mahalas, or residential neighborhoods, with Iraqi Federal Police planning and leading the missions.

Army leaders say the ultimate goal is to turn those operations entirely over to their Iraqi counterparts.

“The main reason why we are here is to train the [Iraqi Federal Police], and the armed forces, and to turn it over to them so they will be able to take care of their people,” said Sgt. Christian Aleman, from Miami, Fla., a team

leader with Btry. B, 2nd Bn., 15th FA.

The U.S. Soldiers are minimizing a potentially negative effect on Iraqi civilians by following the lead of the FP.

“It’s pretty quiet,” said Spc. Joseph Hambleton, from Long Grove, Iowa, a forward observer assigned to 3rd Platoon. “Some of the locals that we do see, we stop and communicate with them a little bit. They know we are there for them [and that] we aren’t there to harm them.”

One of the main purposes of their patrols is to help build the confidence of Iraqi citizens in their own army and police forces.

“It allows the people to see us working hand-in-hand, to see the [Iraqi] Soldiers on the ground leading us,” said 2nd Lt. Gordon Rutledge, from Madison, Wis., platoon leader for 3rd plt.

Warrant Officer Imad Jabbar Diham, with the 1-1 Iraqi Federal Police Bde., works with 2-15 at their Joint Tactical Operations Center and said the patrols have been part of an im-

portant learning process for the FP.

“We are doing partnership patrols with the coalition forces and they are helping [us],” he said. “If we make a mistake on the patrol, the coalition forces will tell us about that mistake, [so it won’t] be done again in the future.”

As U.S. forces continue to transfer responsibility of patrols and other operations over to the Iraqi Security Forces, they simultaneously are preparing for U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. Rutledge said the improvements the FP officers have made in just the last two months alone gives him confidence in the U.S. withdrawal timeline.

“We really are making progress with the federal policemen here. Their lower level leadership that I work with on a [regular] basis have definitely improved [and moved] toward intelligence-driven operations instead of waiting for something to happen and reacting,” he said. “In the two short months I’ve been here, that’s a great leap.” ▲



BAGHDAD – Cpl. Charles Ham of 1192nd Engineer Company, 101st Engineer Battalion, from Corpus Christi, Texas, hauls dirt Jan. 8 in a 2 ½-yard loader to level an area for a new road to the detention facility on Forward Operating Base Taji. The road will be complete before the facility is turned over to the Iraqi Army.

Soldiers build new road to detention facility

Photo by Sgt. Tracy Knowles, 101st Eng. Bn. UPAR, 16th Eng. Bde, USD-C

Power to the people, to the courthouse



Influential Iraqi leaders from the local areas and U.S. military members gather at a ribbon-cutting ceremony for solar power at the courthouse Jan. 18.

Story & photos by Spc. Luisito Brooks
4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div., USD-C

ABU GHRAIB, Iraq - A courthouse should be a place where the law is upheld and enforced at all times, but with only a few hours of electricity to last the entire work day, the judicial system in Iraq has been rather limited.

Local and Iraqi Army leaders joined U.S. Army officials from 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division Jan. 25, to pass judgment on the issue when they cut the ribbon for a new solar-powered battery system at the Abu Ghraib Supreme Court Justice Center Courthouse.

With power conservation being a major challenge for the area, officials say the solar-powered courthouse won't be restricted to the limits of the national power grid.

"The use of electricity in this area is very frugal," said Capt. Cynthia Ling, a San Sebastian, Puerto Rico, native, and project purchasing officer for the Raider brigade. "Now that the building is using solar energy, the courthouse's hours of operation will be extended, which will provide help for the people with legal issues."

This project, identified by courthouse officials, took more than six months and \$372,900 to finish, completed by Iraqi contractors who employed 60 local workers.

"Everyone working together [creates] better results," said the qada chair-



Iraqi Army officials, local tribal leaders and U.S. military leaders conduct a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new solar-powered courthouse in Abu Ghraib.



Col. John Norris, the 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division commander, Staff Col. Bakr Khatat, the 3rd Battalion, 24th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division commander, and Shaykh Husayn Khames al-Tamimi render respect during the Iraqi National Anthem.

man Kamal Abbas Thahi. "The solar power project will cover the services for the people of Abu Ghraib."

The added electricity also powers lighting at night, improving security for the building and the surrounding area.

In addition to the solar panels, other improvements to courthouse facilities were made.

"We are helping this community with a vital resource," said Ling. "Part of this project was also to provide supplies, such as copy machines and the completion of a driveway that would lead up to the courthouse."

The ribbon cutting was a mark for the beginning of the solar-powered courthouse but also a symbol for renewed partnership, said Iraqi leaders.

"I appreciate the shaykhs of Abu Ghraib, who coordinated continuously with Mr. Kamal Abbas to help succeed the project of solar power," said Shaykh Husayn Khames al-Tamimi, the tribal council leader for Abu Ghraib.

With the cleaner, safer and renewable power source in place, U.S. leaders say judges will no longer be blinded by power outages but will now be able to serve all Abu Ghraib Iraqis equitably.

"This is a great benefit to the people of Iraq," said Col. John Norris, 4th Bde., 2nd Inf. Div. commander. "I am proud to see that we came together on this project because this will allow the government to provide full support to these citizens." 🇮🇶

Camp Liberty first responders conduct drill to ensure proficiency

*Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Kristina Scott,
366th MPAD, USD-C*

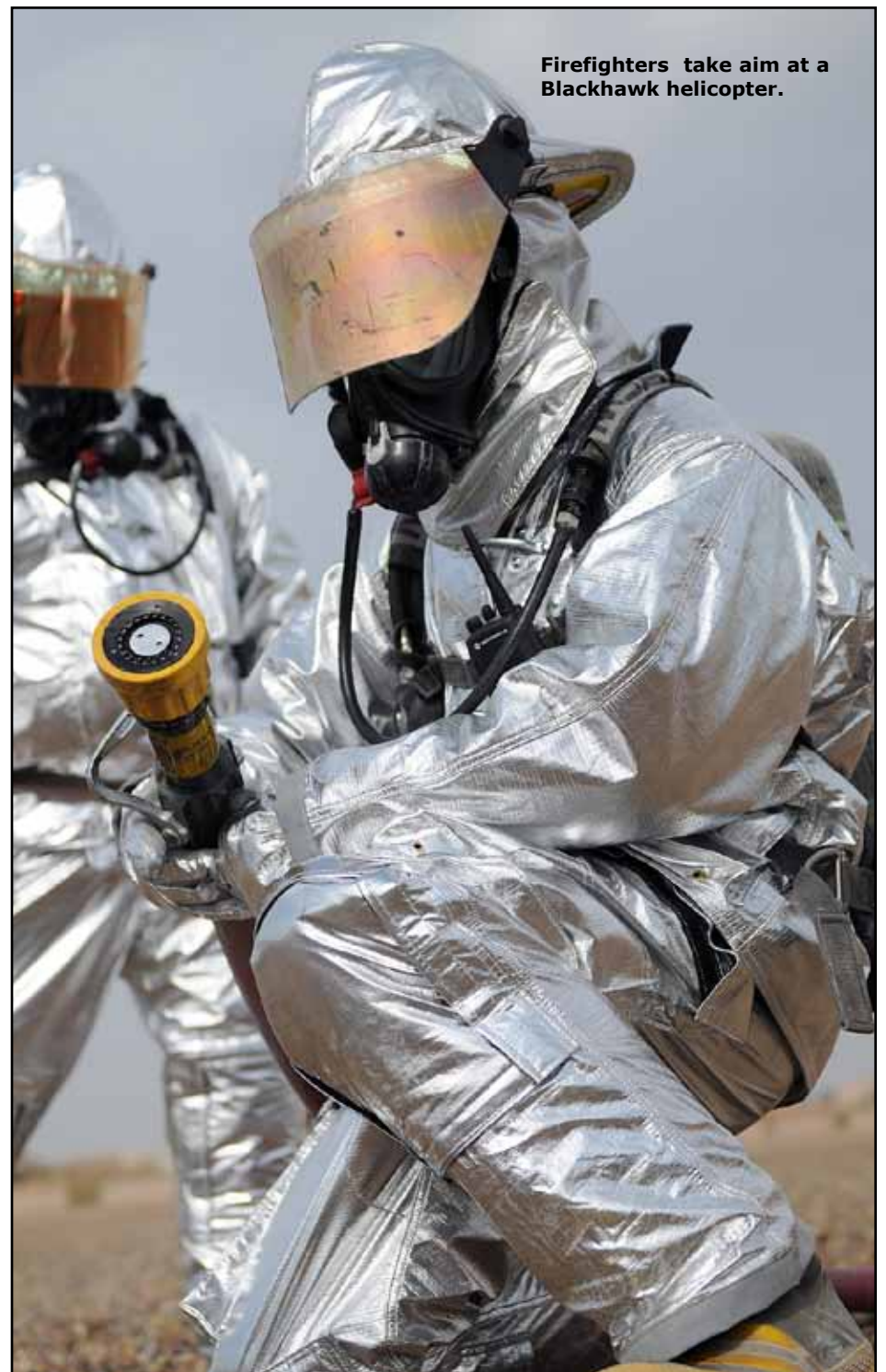


Firefighters work quickly and diligently to extract Chief Warrant Officer 2 Brandon Olsen from a Blackhawk helicopter. Olsen is a Blackhawk pilot assigned to 3rd Sqdn., 158th Avn. Regt.

BAGHDAD – Firefighters assigned to Fire Station 1 carefully extract Spc. Brandon Kennedy, a Blackhawk crew chief assigned to 3rd Squadron, 158th Aviation Regiment, during a simulated emergency exercise conducted Jan. 31 at Camp Liberty, Iraq. The exercise, which included air crews from 3rd Sqdn., 158th Avn. Regt., firefighters, military police, medics, air traffic controllers and Department of State personnel, was conducted to ensure first responders are prepared to handle worst-case scenarios.



Firefighters cautiously approach a Blackhawk helicopter.



Firefighters take aim at a Blackhawk helicopter.

Soldiers help train elite Iraqi recruits

Story by 1st Lt. Matthew Buchanan

1st Bn., 38th Inf. Regt., 4th SBCT, 2nd Inf. Div., USD-C

JOINT SECURITY STATION MUTHANA, Iraq – Members of a highly-trained fighting force called the Strike Team, an elite direct action force for Karkh Area Command, are always seeking self improvement and training opportunities with new recruits to add to their numbers.

Since December 2009, 2nd Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, has been closely partnered with the Strike Team, advising them and providing support for training and operations.

“It’s different from what we’re used to doing as infantrymen, but it’s the most important part of the U.S. effort in Iraq right now,” said Staff Sgt. Evan Grusofski, of Pittsburgh.

The Strike Team lives and trains at the KAC headquarters compound on JSS Muthana in Baghdad.

The team began with an initial

pool of 70 Iraqi Army Soldiers, many of whom have been fighting the insurgency since 2003, trained by U.S. Special Operations forces in advanced techniques in an urban environment.

From there, the Strike Team took over training the new recruits.

The best and brightest from the team were selected as instructors and, with help from 2nd Platoon, Strike Force members developed a five-week selection and assessment course designed to prepare their prospective new members.

Many of the new students didn’t arrive with the same wealth of knowledge and experience as their predecessors had, said Sgt. Christopher McNear, of San Bernardino, Calif.

“They were a little rough at first,” remarked McNear, on graduation day.

However, they finished the training fully capable, he said; the Strike Team

ensured it.

At the end of the training, Strike Team put the recruits’ skills to the test, conducting a raid in a western Baghdad neighborhood with 2nd Platoon in support.

“It was the first time we had been in the true advisory role in an operational environment, so it was hard for me to sit back and advise the Iraqi squad leaders,” said Staff Sgt. Keith Cabanas of Mililani, Hawaii. “My instinct was to be the squad leader, but the Strike Team leadership is strong enough.”

Members of the platoon said Strike Team is eager to learn from them, and 2nd Platoon in turn benefits from them because of the Strike Team instructors’ wealth of knowledge and experience.

While giving the students a water break on the Close Quarters Marksmanship range, Strike Team instructors gave the advisor team a class on advanced pistol marksmanship.

“The learning goes both ways with

these guys,” said Sgt. Jason Taylor of Hamlet, Ind. “Because of all the diverse training they’ve received over the years, the instructors’ kit bags are huge.”

2nd Platoon advisors said this back-and-forth training has allowed both teams to grow into a very close-knit group.

“I’d have no problem going directly into a live-fire with these guys, with only one or two dry-run rehearsals,” said Sgt. 1st Class Joe Huffman of Batesburg, S.C. “I trust them and their abilities that much.”

The two teams are only required to train, plan, and execute missions together, but they often eat, work out, and having fun together between training and missions.

“I’m going to miss my American friends when they go home,” said Sgt. Saif Anan, the Strike Team head instructor. “I hope one day, we can visit each other just to hang out.”

The Soldiers of 2nd Platoon said that day might not be too far off. ▲

Training that can save lives

Story & photo by Spc. Luisito Brooks

4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div., USD-C

NASIR WA SALAM, Iraq – The clock is crucial when treating serious injuries.

Knowing this, the 24th Brigade, 6th Division Iraqi Army conducted a mass casualty evacuation training exercise Jan. 29 with assistance from 24th Bde., 6th Div. Military Transition Team and 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 4th SBCT, 2nd Infantry Div.

“This training will only use Iraqi Army assets,” said Sgt. 1st Class Juan Olivarez, the 24th Bde., medical non-commissioned officer in charge from Brownsville, Texas. “It will show what needs improvement with the current casualty evacuation system, and then we can address them.”

Before the actual training could begin, some of the Iraqi Soldiers encountered a real-world situation that underscored the importance of the exercise.

“One of the battalions was missing a medic because he was out on a mission,” said Lt. Ali, the 24th Bde., surgeon. “Another soldier was called to step in and cover his duties.”

An alarm sounded at the start of

the exercise, signaling that a simulated mortar had just hit. Each battalion had to quickly evaluate and treat the injured, evacuating those who needed additional care. U.S. medics expressed satisfaction with response times.

“They worked fast with the initial treatment,” said Sgt. James Grady, a combat medic with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th Bn., 9th Inf., 4th SBCT, 2nd Inf. Div. “On-site treatment is most important when it comes to saving the lives of seriously injured because of blood loss.”

The route to the aid station was designed to assist each battalion in quickly transporting the injured to the aid station with less chance of causing traffic jams or accidents.

Upon arrival at the aid station, the brigade surgeon quickly examined the injured.

“My guys did well getting the injured to the aid station, so all of the injured were saved,” said Ali, acknowledging that because it was an exercise, not everything was completely realistic. “One of the injuries was a head injury, and for this exercise we [simulated] that he was airlifted to the local hospital.”

After the training was complete, the



Sgt. James Grady, a combat medic with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, from Neenah, Wis., shows Iraqi medics from 1st Battalion, 24th Brigade, 6th Division, the proper way to transport a patient with a particular injury during a mass casualty training exercise Jan. 29.

U.S. and Iraqi leaders were able to sit down, drink some chai tea and discuss their performances.

“This training is something that all

Iraqi Soldiers should know,” said Ali. “The Americans won’t be here forever, and this is something that we need to work on for our Soldiers.” ▲

U.S., Iraqi surgeons share knowledge

Medical conference helps build sustainable medical capacity for Iraqi hospitals

Story & photos by Spc. Daniel Schneider
366th MPAD, USD-C

BAGHDAD – Iraqi and U.S. military surgeons attended a joint medical conference at Muthana Military Hospital Jan. 18 that was designed to enhance Iraqi medical skills.

The Iraqi-led conference allowed U.S. military surgeons of different specialties the opportunity to teach their Iraqi counterparts how to better treat combat trauma, while also teaching them other life-saving skills. It was the third such conference in an ongoing series.

The conferences, named the Iraqi Security Forces Grand Rounds, began in September 2009 with 15 participants, said Col. Bernard DeKoning, the U.S. senior medical advisor to the Iraqi Ministries of Defense and Interior. The second conference, held two months later, saw nearly 30 Iraqis in attendance.

This latest conference drew approximately 50 participants, which included 15 U.S. military



Col. Alex Stojadinovic, chief surgeon assigned to Medical Task Force 28, explains to Iraqi surgeons how to treat an internal abdominal injury during a medical conference held at Muthana Military Hospital Jan. 18.

surgeons and medical specialists, relationship with Iraqi surgeons,” said Lt. Col. Vincent Barnhart, the U.S. Division – Center surgeon. Iraq will receive long-term medical benefits from these conferences, said Barnhart, a native of Edenville, Pa.

“We are hoping to establish a sustainable increase in Iraqi medical capacity through this program so that it can grow even after we leave.”

– Lt. Col. Vincent Barnhart

“I’m looking forward to establishing a medical benefits from these con-

ferences, said Barnhart, a native of Edenville, Pa.

“We are hoping to establish a sustainable increase in Iraqi medical capacity through this program so that it can grow even after we leave.”

“I am happy with the cooperation we share with U.S. forces,” said Lt. Col. Qaisar Alshami, a rheumatologist specializing in medical rehabilitation. “[Iraqis] are learning a lot from the U.S. that can help us take care of our people.”

Qaisar spoke about Ankylosing Spondylitis, a condition that affects the joints and spine with a tendency of causing inflammatory arthritis. The condition gets even worse with rest and inactivity.

Following Qaisar’s lecture, Col. Alex Stojadinovic, the chief of surgery assigned to Medical Task Force 28, discussed various forms and treatments of abdominal trauma including internal hemorrhaging and blunt trauma.

Attendees of the event included prominent members of both the Iraqi Army and U.S. forces.

Among them were Staff Maj. Gen. Samir, the surgeon general of the Ministry of Defense, Col. Ibrahim, command surgeon for the Ministry of the Interior, and Staff Brig. Nadhum, the commander of Taji Air Base, which is one of the primary hubs supplying air evacuation to Iraqi casualties.

Samir said he was thankful for the U.S. presence and knowledge they shared at the conference and how it helps Iraqi medical professionals provide better care for their patients.

After exchanging information, Barnhart met with Col. Amir, the commander of Muthana Military Hospital, and presented him with two footlockers full of medical journals and texts donated by various medical publishers in the United States. The donation will double the size of the hospital’s current medical library, said Barnhart.

The next conference is scheduled to take place sometime in March. ▲



Lt. Col. Vincent Barnhart, surgeon of U.S. Division – Center, meets with Col. Amir, the commander of Muthana Military Hospital, to donate medical journals and texts.



Pfc. Keith LaBarre prepares to install a half-shaft into the rear differential of a humvee Jan. 21. La-Barre is a mechanic assigned to Company B, Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Armored Division.

DSTB mechanics stay busy

*Photos by Staff Sgt. Jeff Hansen,
366th MPAD, USD-C*



BAGHDAD – Spc. Joshua Gemienhardt, a mechanic assigned to Company B Division Special Troops Battalion, 1st Armored Division, returns a section of air hose to its wheel after use Jan. 21. Gemienhardt, a native of Columbus, Ohio, said the air compressor installed in the main motor pool bay is extremely important as it controls every air-powered tool inside of the bay.



In preparation for a soldering project, Sgt. Cesar Villanueva, a mechanic assigned to Company B, heats up a soldering gun. Villanueva says he specializes in wiring projects, which involve very precise measurements and calculated actions.



Sgt. Christopher Noguera, a mechanic assigned to Company B, puts additional wire into a welder in preparation for a welding project.



During an annual servicing, Pfc. Zachery Padon, a mechanic assigned to Company B, checks the integrity of the steering linkage on a humvee Jan. 21.



Photo by Sgt. Tracy Knowles, 101st Eng. Bn., USD-C

BAGHDAD — Sgt. Paul Ring, of Marion, Mich., assigned to 1434th Engineer Company, cuts insulation to size for the new barracks at Contingency Operating Station Deason Jan. 16. Eventually, the buildings will be turned over to 17th Iraqi Army as U.S. forces relocate to other bases.



Courtesy photo

BAGHDAD — Three Soldiers with 1434th Engineer Company install a roof truss on a building at Contingency Operating Station Deason Jan 16. The standard eight-room building, called a b-hut, will hold 32 additional personnel when complete.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Kirk Liljestrum, 317th Eng. Co., USD-C

BAGHDAD — Spc. Chris Forrest, a Downs, Ill., native, operates a Hyex Jan. 25, to fill a Hesco box that will re-inforce a test fire control pit at an entry control point at Victory Base Complex.

‘Electricity 101’ for 9th Iraqi Army

Story Sgt. Tracy Knowles

101st Eng. Bn., 16th Eng. Bde., USD-C

BAGHDAD – The odds seemed stacked against them from the start.

Flights were cancelled, more than once. The two 101st Engineer Battalion Soldiers weren’t able to carry all their training aids on a Black Hawk, so Spc. Danny Rockett was forced to stay behind with the remaining gear.

When Maj. Ralph Pickett arrived at Contingency Operating Location Rasheed the third week of January, he discovered that the building he would teach his classes in had no power, no running water, and offered little in the way of natural lighting.

Undaunted, the Easthampton, Mass., native, who works as a civilian mechanical contractor back home, jumped in with both feet to set up a 40-hour class on electricity, determined to teach his 9th Iraqi Army Field Regiment students how to safely work with power.

Pickett started with a quick practical lesson on the 3-kilowatt generator. His intention was to teach the IA troops how to properly start it and attach wires to it so they get power to the second floor classroom.

The students listened quietly at first but after a few jokes and questions from Pickett and encouragement from their senior noncommissioned officer, they loosened up.

“Focus and learn. This electrical class is not only about this army, but it is about you,” said 9th Iraqi Army Field Regiment, Command Sgt. Maj. Kadhim Malih Jabbr “You will be able to go home and help your family by being able to fix your homes correctly. Focus and learn.”

On the second day of class, Rockett, of Kingston, Mass., arrived at Rasheed with the rest of the training aids needed to assist in the hands-on portion of the class.

Once the class began, both instructors taught the Iraqi Soldiers how to splice wires with tools specific to the trade. Using wire nuts, Rockett explained the differences between the colored wires.

“The instructors have much knowledge; I am happy to be here working with Rockett,” said Cpl. Adnan Mohammad Hassan. “He has taught us how to be safe around electricity. Now, I can fix my own home.”

The instructors stressed safety throughout; a message that resonated by the end of the course.

“I am so happy; I have learned many important skills here,” said Sgt. Ali Twoman Shamran, a generator mechanic for the 9th IA. “For example, I learned that grounding our equipment is for our safety.”



Medics teach Iraqi Soldiers lifesaving techniques



Photo by Col. Mark Travovich, HHC 16th Engineer Brigade, USD-C

Soldiers from the 11th Iraqi Army Field Engineer Regiment practice splinting a broken leg as part of a basic medical training class Jan. 25 at the Old Ministry of Defense Building. The training, which was conducted by a medical team from the 16th Engineer Brigade, helped to teach the Iraqi Soldiers basic first aid.

Story Spc. Brian Johnson

1434th Eng. Co., 16th Eng. Bde., USD-C

BAGHDAD – Medics from 16th Engineer Brigade taught Iraqi counterparts some basic medical skills at the Iraqi Old Ministry of Defense building Jan. 25.

At the request of an Iraqi military commander, the medics agreed to teach 11th Iraqi Army Field Engineer Regiment Soldiers how to splint broken bones, control bleeding, and move patients without adding to their injuries.

“The idea for the medical training did not come from the U.S. Army, but at a request from the Iraqi Army,” said Master Sgt. Cheryl Clark from Lancaster, Ohio, the brigade partnership noncommissioned officer. “When the general and his staff met with the local Iraqi commander, they asked him what kind of training he would like or need for his Soldiers. The need for basic medical training was expressed.”

After the training was developed, the brigade sent members of its medical staff out to help conduct the training.

Spc. Donald Pigg from Mogadore, Ohio, a health care specialist with 16th Eng. Bde., helped instruct the class. Pigg said the training was a different experience.

“I have taught classes before,” said Pigg. “But here, I had to talk, and then wait for the translator to explain what I just said, and then continue teaching.”

Pigg provided many training aids to help the Iraqis better understand what they were taught, including bandages, and splints and training slides in both Arabic and English. Pigg noticed that the language barrier seemed to fall away during many of the hands-on exercises.

“There was a universal understanding for what was being trained when I was showing the Iraqi Soldiers how to splint a broken bone, or how to help control bleeding,” said Pigg.

Col. Brett Call, from Amanda, Ohio, helped supervise the medical training. Call works as an emergency room physician at Berger Hospital when back home in Circleville, Ohio.

“Of the 19 Soldiers in the class, there were four who had basic medical training,” said Call. “We wanted to make sure that with the techniques that we taught to the Iraqis, they would be able to treat themselves with items that they had readily available.”

Call noted that the Iraqi Soldiers may not always have U.S. medical supplies available.

“We had to make sure that there was an acceptable Iraqi substitute to everything, from splints to tourniquets to pressure dressings,” said Call.

Pigg observed the success that the training had achieved. “The Iraqi Soldiers really understood that this training could save their life or help them to save the life of their buddy.”





Hovering 75 feet above the ground, 1st Lt. Dennis Edwards, from Baton Rouge, La., the forward support medevac team leader in Company C, uses his feet to push away from a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter as he is lowered.

Story by Sgt. Alun Thomas: Photos by Sgt. Travis Zielinski

1st ACB PAO, 1st Cav. Div., USD-C

From the ground, it appears a daunting prospect – being hoisted 75 feet in the air to a hovering UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter.

In the face of an emergency medical situation, especially when there is no clear area for aircraft to land, the task becomes a necessity.

These were some of the conditions medevac crew chiefs from 1st Air Cavalry Brigade faced when they undertook hoist training at Jan. 21 Camp Taji.

Training with hoists is not common in Iraq due to mostly flat surfaces, which makes the opportunity to use the hoist valuable, said Chief Warrant Officer Brian Rinck, from Hillsboro, Ore., a standardizations pilot for 1st ACB, 1st Cavalry Division, U.S. Division – Center.

“This training will help us get prepared for an Afghanistan rotation or something like Hurricane Katrina where they commonly use hoists,” Rinck said. “It’s the last resort we have for getting injured Soldiers and people out of an urban or hilly area where we can’t land our aircraft.”

For Rinck, keeping the aircraft steady while the victim is hoisted into the aircraft is essential in ensuring safety.

“As far as a pilot’s concerned, it’s finessing the aircraft and doing your best to hold it at a stable hover without changing the altitude of the aircraft,” Rinck explained. “That way, a medic can go down on the hoist, perform any first aid or rescue that’s needed and hoist that patient back up into the aircraft.”

Rinck said finding accurate terrain to train on is important in maintaining a stable platform, with varying heights used for different scenarios.

“We’ll train with a block at 50 feet to 100 feet, and we’ll train with a live hoist at 25 and 75 feet,” Rinck said. “Once you’re at the 75-foot level, the aerodynamic conditions of the aircraft improve and make it more stable.”

Having not been in an emergency situation where the hoist is required, Rinck said

‘No room for error’ Air Cav hoists lives



A Soldier dangles from a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter as he is lowered to the ground during a training exercise conducted Jan. 21 by Company C, 2nd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, U.S. Division – Center.

attention to detail during the training was vital.

“It goes through your mind that not only do you have to keep the aircraft level, but there’s also a live person out there going down that hoist,” he said. “Everyone has to know what is going on in the aircraft, both front and back.”

Overseeing the training was Staff Sgt. Luis Torres, from Las Cruces, N.M., a Black Hawk crew chief from Co. C, 2-227th, 1st ACB – the same company as Rinck – who said he wanted to ensure the correct standards were met for using the hoist.

“The hoist is one of our missions as a medevac unit, so you need to be able to train people to use it in case we have to extract someone in an area we can’t land the aircraft,” Torres said. “It’s a crucial part of our job so I have to make sure everyone’s capable of not just riding the hoist, but operating it.”

As part of the training, Torres said he would be responsible for lowering the medic down to the site and recovering both medic and patient.

“With the wind changing, there will be a lot of drifting left to right, so we have to call in the corrections of which way the pilot has to move the aircraft,” Torres said.

If called upon to administer hoist training, there is no room for error. Timing is of the essence.

“It can’t be prolonged and has to be done as fast as possible,” Torres said. “At the same time, you don’t want to rush in and get anyone hurt, so it’s a balance you have to find. It’s all about keeping things fast, but keeping them safe.”

for error ...' e-saving training



Sitting on the edge of a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, Staff Sgt. Luis Torres (right), from Las Cruces, N.M., a Black Hawk crew chief in Company C, observes 1st Lt. Dennis Edwards (back ground), from Baton Rouge, La., the forward support medevac team leader, being lowered to the ground.

During a hoist training exercise, Staff Sgt. John Presas (left), from San Antonio, a flight medic, and Staff Sgt. Luis Torres (right), from Las Cruces, N.M., a Black Hawk crew chief, both of whom are in Company C, lower a Soldier to the ground from a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter.



New Iraqi tanker unit takes the lead

Story by Capt. David Franklin
4th Bde., 2nd Inf. Div., USD-C

TAJI, Iraq – Just before dawn, an Iraqi officer approached Soldiers from 2nd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, and began pointing at the nearest U.S. vehicle.

Using a simple gesture and stating one Arabic word, “Mutarjim,” meaning interpreter, the Iraqi officer asked if the U.S. forces had brought one and if they were ready to begin the mission.

The Iraqi officer from 5th Iraqi Tank Battalion needed the interpreter so he could communicate with his counterpart, 1st Lt. Erich

Roush, a native of Milwaukee, who is a platoon leader in C Troop. Roush and his Soldiers had been ordered to conduct a combined search with the Iraqi tankers for weapons in a small area along the Tigris River.

Roush said this was the first time

he and his platoon had worked with the Iraqi tank battalion on a mission. For many of the Iraqis, this was their first time on a combat patrol.

“They’re really raw,” said Roush. “It’s their first time out.”

What some of the Iraqi Soldiers lacked in experience, however,

they made up for in enthusiasm, eagerly taking the lead as their American counterparts remained a short distance behind in a supporting role.

“We’ve got to let them lead from the front.”

– 1st Lt. Erich Roush

The Iraqi Soldiers searched homes in the area and as the patrol progressed,

it became apparent to Roush and his troops that the Iraqis were executing the mission as planned.

“They maintained good organization,” said Roush. “They have good leadership.”

Very few issues surfaced as the combined forces moved from house to house.

After searching the home of one local man, the Iraqi Soldiers continued down the road to another gate only to be greeted by the same man; a second entrance to his property.

They then continued to the next home, where they were welcomed with food and chai tea. Shortly after, both units turned and began to head back to where they started, the Iraqis again taking the lead.

Though no weapons were found by the end of the patrol, Roush declared the mission a success because the Iraqi tankers had remained enthusiastic and had completed the mission with a sense of confidence.

“We’ve got to let them lead from the front.” ▲



Vice President Joe Biden cuts a cake depicting the 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division's motto, "To the objective," at the Raider Inn dining facility Jan. 23. The cake was a way to welcome Biden to the Raider Brigade's operational area during his visit to Iraq.

Vice President Joe Biden visits 4-2 SBCT

Story & photo by Sgt. Bryce Dubee
4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div., USD-C

BAGHDAD – Vice President Joe Biden met with members of 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, “Raiders” and other deployed service members and civilians Jan. 23, as part of his visit to Iraq.

Taking time out of his busy schedule of meeting with Iraqi government officials and U.S. military leaders, Biden made a stop at the Raider Inn dining facility during dinner to chat with troops and pose for photos.

Biden was swarmed by service members and civilians eager to meet him as he was escorted through the bustling facility by Col. John Norris, the 4th SBCT, 2nd Inf. Div. commander.

Expressing his appreciation for the hard work done by Soldiers, the vice president worked through the crowd, shaking hands with the troops and often pausing to hear from many of the Soldiers.

Biden said he hopes the American people understand the amount of hard work done by service members while deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. He is the father

of a Soldier.

“You go out and saddle up every day,” he said, during a conversation with members of the 4th SBCT, 2nd Inf. Div., command staff and Lt. Gen. Charles Jacoby, deputy commanding general for operations and I Corps commanding general, U.S. Forces-Iraq.

The vice president said that even in the face of great adversity, such as the loss of a fellow Soldier, service members still “saddle back up” and head out the next day.

Norris expressed his appreciation for Biden’s visit to the brigade and for his strong support of his troops in the past.

“I thanked him for going to Fort Lewis for the [5th SBCT, 2nd Inf. Div.] ceremony,” he said.

The Stryker brigade’s sister unit, 5th SBCT, 2nd Inf. Div., has taken heavy losses during its deployment to Afghanistan and in November 2009, the vice president travelled to Fort Lewis, Wash., for a ceremony memorializing seven brigade Soldiers killed by a roadside bomb.

Norris reminded Biden about that visit. “It’s really important to all of us that somebody of your stature recognizes those troops that have fallen.” ▲

Army unit partnership soars on Taji flight line

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

TAJI, Iraq – A sea of unit patches hovered around a Shadow unmanned aerial system, readying it for flight.

“LAUNCH! LAUNCH! LAUNCH!” barked a Soldier on a headset.

A button was pushed and the UAS took off from its launcher in a blur.

Behind all the action were Soldiers from several different units who had come together here to make the mission in Iraq a success with shared workloads, equipment, responsibilities, and experience.

“The ‘one team, one fight’ concept really takes place here,” said Sgt. Carlos Salamanca, the maintenance noncommissioned officer-in-charge and shift leader for 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 10th Mountain Division, and native of San Antonio. “I don’t know many other places where this takes place.”

Salamanca works with Sgt. Michael Heimdale, a crew chief with D Troop, 2nd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division. Heimdale recently arrived at his unit and said he felt welcomed into the combined force, made up of mostly sergeants and above.

“We respect rank but work together as equals,” said Heimdale, a Cushing, Okla., native.

Both sergeants agree that with all the units combined, the workload isn’t as hard on the Soldiers and allows them more personal time to recover from a work day.

Another benefit of sharing a work space is the consolidated assets like the Shadow, they said. Sharing equipment allows the units to replace parts if needed to support the mission.

Each unit takes care of its equipment, but all units share responsibility for upkeep on the site, explained Salamanca.

The NCOs in charge at the site verify that all standards, such as cleanliness of the workspace and maintenance of equipment, are the same for all the units. The units combined the standards some time ago in order to keep them the same; considered necessary for learning in a combined environment.

Salamanca, who has been working with UASs since 2004, said every time he deploys overseas, he learns new things from different people.

“We share experiences, which helps the learning process for new Soldiers,” said Salamanca.

It’s these common experiences that promote common purpose, according to Heimdale. “We all wear the same uniform. It’s all about unit cohesion; we’re all the same Army.”

Iraqi Security Forces train to secure election polling sites

Story & photo by Spc. Luisito Brooks
4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div., USD-C

NASIR WA SALAM, Iraq – The future of Iraq will be decided when Iraqi voters head to the polls March 7, and the Iraqi Security Forces are training to ensure those polling stations are safe.

The 24th Brigade, 6th Division Military Transition Team, along with Soldiers from Company B, 4th Stryker Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, conducted polling center security training Jan. 28 for members of the Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police.

“This training is important because the safety of the voters and the voting centers is our number one priority,” said Sgt. 1st Class Aaron Mattherly, a San Antonio native and the 24th Bde., 6th Div. MiTT team noncommissioned officer in charge of training.

The three-day training brought together the IA and the IP and instructed them on ethics while working the polling site, searching vehicles and people. The people searches included special considerations when searching female voters.

“First, the ethics portion of the training addressed situations that we hope never occurs at the voting sites, but we

still had to discuss them,” said Mattherly. “We talked [about] how not to bribe the voters, accept bribes, and the consequences of those actions.”

Many of the Soldiers and police officers gained a better comprehension of the moral obligations they have to the Iraqi citizens.

“The ethics training was very important for our people,” said Sgt. Hider, an IA Soldier. “I learned a lot, and it was just as important as searching people and vehicles.”

At some polling sites, roads that lead up to voting centers may be closed to add an extra level of security during voting, but the training still covered the proper procedures on searching a vehicle.

“I knew how to search vehicles before this, so this was a refresher for me,” said Muhammad Siad, an Iraqi policeman.

To simulate how voters will be searched and how the day should flow,

a mock voting center was created for the training, with Soldiers playing the role of eager voters.

“Before the ‘voters’ could go inside the area to vote, the Iraqi Soldiers and police officers searched them for possible hidden weapons,” said Mattherly. “Most of the voters that went through the checkpoint were clean, but we planted a weapon on one voter to see if they would find it, and they did.”

The U.S. Soldiers said they were extremely confident in their Iraqi counterparts’ abilities to protect voters on election day.

“The Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police came together, took this training and ran with it,” said Mattherly.

“The ethics training was very important for our people. I learned a lot, and it was just as important as searching people and vehicles.”

– Sgt. Hider



At a simulated checkpoint, Pfc. Andrew Kuhn, a Company B, 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment infantryman from Brentwood, Calif., gets searched for hidden weapons in a practical training exercise Jan. 28.

Air Cav flies west



*Photos by Sgt. Travis Zielinski,
1st Air Cavalry Brigade, USD-C*



TAJI, Iraq – Through the green light of night vision goggles, Command Sgt. Maj. Glen Vela, from Dallas, the command sergeant major for 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, U.S. Division – Center, scans the airspace around a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter during a flight from Al Asad Air Base to Camp Taji.

Before the start of an evening flight, Chief Warrant Officer 5 Mike Reese (left), an AH-64D Apache attack helicopter pilot and the senior standardization pilot for 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, U.S. Division – Center, conducts a mission brief Jan. 23 with Chief Warrant Officer 4 Sebastien Cosyns, an Apache pilot for Task Force 227, 1st ACB.



Females excel in male-dominated field

Story & photo by Sgt. Samantha Beuterbaugh
366th MPAD, USD-C

BAGHDAD – Females are becoming more and more prevalent in military flight crews.

Being a woman in a male-dominated field can be an intimidating obstacle for many to overcome. However, Staff Sgt. Katie Replogle and Spc. Bernice Garcia have managed to find a way to fit in with their comrades on the flight line.

“I never thought I could do something like this, and I proved myself wrong,” said Garcia, a Houston native and Chinook door-gunner with Company B, 3rd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division.

Door gunners

have a physically demanding job; and the job makes Garcia feel strong and capable despite her small stature, she said.

When someone boards her aircraft, Garcia can be seen directing passengers, repacking and strapping down baggage, and ensuring the passengers are safely belted in for take off.

Before this deployment, Garcia was serving as a supply clerk. Her command asked for door-gunner volunteers, and she immediately jumped at the opportunity. She admits that she had second thoughts once she was clued in to the labor-intensive job description of a

Chinook door gunner, but decided to do it for the experience.

“I never took the Chinooks seriously,” Garcia said. “Now, I realize how big of a responsibility we have.”

A former member from Garcia’s chain of command, 1st Flight platoon crew chief, also with Company B, Staff Sgt. Christopher Suiters, said, “Honestly, I don’t look at her as a female. I ask everyone, ‘Can you do your job?’ Garcia does her job excellent.”

Although she feels that being a door-gunner is a good experience, Garcia admits to missing her office job sometimes.

As a door-gunner, Garcia is responsible for ensuring the safety of those on the Chinook, includ-

“You have to be self-sufficient and can’t expect anyone to do your job.”

– Staff Sgt. Katie Replogle

ing manning the 240B machine-gun. Replogle is responsible for actually

maintaining her helicopter.

Replogle, a Richland Springs, Texas native, and Blackhawk crew chief standardization instructor with Company C, 3rd Battalion, 227th Avn. Regt., grew up working on cars while living with her father. She has always been interested in vehicle maintenance, so coming into the aviation field as a helicopter maintainer suited her well.

“You have to be self-sufficient and can’t expect anyone to do your job,” Replogle said.

Although Replogle has advanced to crew chief instructor, she is still required to run mis-



Spc. Bernice Garcia, a Houston native and Chinook door-gunner with Company B, 2nd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, tests her radio Jan. 21, before taking her position in the window to scan her sector.



sions and is expected to watch a sector as a gunner, while in flight.

Climbing in and out of the window to get to the gunner’s seat in a Blackhawk can be strenuous, so she has ramped up her physical training and now trains seven days per week.

“If I can’t lift something, I’ll never hear the end of it,” Replogle said. “So the gym is very important to me.”

Replogle said she can bench press more than her first sergeant and out-leg presses every guy in the company.

“Sometimes, I think [the first

sergeant’s] sole purpose for going to the gym is so he can out-lift a girl,” she added, grinning.

While Replogle continuously works to build her physical strength, she hasn’t lost her femininity. The helmet she wears displays Toby Keith’s signature, in pink.

Both women agree that there is not a lot of room for sensitivity in the aviation field. They also agree that they are up to the challenge.

“Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be but a challenge to others.”—Amelia Earhart ▲

ISF uses U.S. dog team for foot patrol in Baghdad

Story & photo by Spc. Jared Eastman
HHC 1BCT-A 3ID, USD-C

BAGHDAD — The ‘Dog Faced Soldiers’ of Apache Troop, 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, added a dog face among their ranks Feb. 1 when they conducted a joint patrol with Iraqi Security Forces.

As the Iraqis led a ground mission through the streets of Muhalla 830, Sgt. 1st Class Xanny followed close behind.

The four-year-old working dog, handled by Staff Sgt. William Morton who also serves as the kennel master at Contingency Operating Station Falcon, joined the search for weapon caches at the request of the Iraqis.

“The dogs are phenomenal,” said Capt. Evan Davies, A Troop commander. “It is the first thing that the Iraqis request.”

The ISF requested the dog team to not only check key locations that have been troublesome in the past but also to aid them in searching for weapons caches.

“We’re handing everything back over to the Iraqis, so we are utilizing the dogs to search for weapons caches, [road-side bombs] and [car bombs] along the routes,” said Morton. “Today, we went out and they pointed out some key places where they have found stuff prior.”

The dogs serve another purpose while they are searching for bomb materials.

“Their presence out there, whether they are searching for something or not, is important,” said Davies. “The ISF understands why those dogs are out there, but the civilians just see an American dog out there and they know it’s going to find something.”

While the ISF and Dog Faced Soldiers worked the streets, sometimes stopping to talk with people, Morton and Xanny “played.”

“This is how [dogs] have fun,” he said. “Every time we start to get our gear on, they know it’s time to go out and do something. The ISF think these dogs are the best thing in the world. They love how trained they are and how they listen very well.”

The Iraqis see Xanny as a useful tool for their patrols; Morton sees Xanny as something more.

“Sometimes he can be hard-headed, but it’s great having him around,” Morton said. “He’s always there whenever you need someone to lean on or anything else. He’s a great tool, a great asset, but a great friend at the same time.”



Desert Cats Roar into FOB Falcon



Photo by Spc. Jared S. Eastman, 1BCT-A 3ID, USD-C

BAGHDAD – First Battalion, 3rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion ‘Desert Cats’ commander Lt. Col. Richard Hansen, and Command Sgt. Maj. Sheryl Lyon uncased the battalion’s colors at Forward Operating Base Falcon, today, signifying their transfer of authority from the 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team.

Six Soldiers earn combat badges



BAGHDAD – Col. Roger Cloutier, 1st Brigade Combat Team-Augmented commander, shakes hands with Pfc. Joshua Norman during a badge ceremony for 3rd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment, 1st BCT-A, USD-C Jan. 25 at Contingency Operating Station Falcon. Other recipients of the Combat Infantry Badge were 1st Lt. Jason Hoop and Pfc. Rick Westmorelan. Recipients of the Combat Action Badge were Sgt. John Plate and Spc. Robert Ratay. Spc. Jesse Sharebono was awarded the Combat Medic Badge.

Falcon soldiers re-enlist to 'stay Army'

Story & photo by Sgt. Mary Katzenberger
HHC, 1BCT-A 3ID, USD-C

BAGHDAD – For 24-year-old Spc. George Webb, the choice to re-enlist for two years was based on a desire to remain with his unit.

"I wanted to stay here to close out this Iraq mission," said the armament repairer assigned to Company G, 3rd Brigade Support Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team-Augmented, 3rd Infantry Division, at the conclusion of a re-enlistment ceremony held at Contingency Operating Station Falcon Jan. 25.

Along with Webb, 45 'Falcon' Soldiers also raised their right hands and committed to continuing their service to the U.S. Army, in the brigade's first deployed mass re-enlistment ceremony.

Maj. Gen. Tony Cucolo III, commander of 3rd Inf. Div., signed the re-enlistment certificates and swore in the Soldiers at the ceremony, which took place before a transfer of authority ceremony from the hands of 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team over to 1st BCT-A.

"Some folks go short and maybe do one enlistment," Cucolo said, addressing the Soldiers, using football analogies in reference to the upcoming Super Bowl. "But for those going long, while we're in this fight, [Command Sgt. Maj. Andrews] and I take our hats off to you."

The 46 re-enlisted Soldiers committed to a total of 181 years of additional service and received bonuses totaling a combined \$127,200. For many of them, though, the choice to re-enlist was not about receiving money; it was about continuing their military careers.

Spc. Julius Macadael was one of those, saying he said he will also continue to take advantage of



Col. Roger Cloutier, commander of 1st Brigade Combat Team-Augmented, congratulates Pfc. Edgar Leal-Ramirez, assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st BCT-A, 3rd ID, on his re-enlistment Jan. 25 at Contingency Operating Station Falcon.

the educational benefits offered by the Army. The 26-year-old automated logistical specialist, assigned to D Troop, 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st BCT-A, extended his contract of service by five years.

For Pfc. Edgar Leal-Ramirez, an infantryman assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st BCT-A, re-enlisting was also a choice he made based on his desire to continue to serve.

The 19-year-old said he re-enlisted to take a permanent change of station move to Fort Bliss, Texas, which he will take advantage of after redeploying from Iraq to Fort Stewart, Ga.

"I love my job as an [infantryman]," Leal-Ramirez said. "I'm hoping that once I get to my new duty station, I can become a noncommissioned officer and train and create a bond with new Soldiers."

"I love the Army. I'm here to do my part." ▲



Iraqi Army mortarmen participate in live-fire exercise

Story & photos Spc. Kayleigh J. Cannon
1st AAB, 82nd Abn. Divi., USD-C

CAMP RAMADI, Iraq – Iraqi troops demonstrated their mortar skills to U.S. counterparts during a live-fire exercise Jan. 27 in eastern Anbar province aimed at moving them closer to self sufficiency.

The mortarmen, from 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division, fired live mortar rounds at the training exercise with paratroopers of 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Advise and Assist Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division it was a hands-on event that many of the Iraqi mortarmen found to be a critical part of the multi-day training event with the Americans.

“This training is very useful,” said Sgt. Safaa Hussein Ali, an IA mortarmen. “It is the first time we have shot live rounds.”

The mortar training was one of several competencies ordered by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, said Staff Brig. Gen. Adel Abbas, commander of the Iraqi brigade. American paratroopers have been training the Iraqi mortarmen since August 2009.

“Our forces are experiencing

change since working with American forces, and the training our soldiers are getting from American Soldiers is very good,” said Adel.

The training included putting the mortar tube into action, correctly aligning the sights and aiming the mortar, using the proper commands associated with mortar use and training the Iraqi mortarmen hadn’t experienced before.

“The partnered live-fire exercise was a great opportunity for our IA counterparts to not only see and participate in a live fire, but also to plan one,” said 1st Lt. Charles F. Sexton, a 2-504 PIR platoon leader.

Sexton said there were some issues they had to iron out to ensure the training even got off the ground.

“A major challenge leading up to the live-fire exercise was the location,” Sexton said. “Luckily, we were able to rely on the IA to find us a location far from any inhabited areas.”

The brigade plans to continue training with the IA for the duration of the deployment.▲



A mortarman with 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division, fires a live mortar round in a training exercise with paratroopers from 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Advise and Assist Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division Jan. 27 at a live-fire range in eastern Anbar. The training included putting the tube into action, correctly aligning the mortar sight, and aiming the mortar, as well as using the proper commands associated with mortar use.

THINK

WEAPONS

RANGE SAFETY

Treat every weapon as if it is loaded.

Handle every weapon with care.

Identify the target before you fire.

Never point the muzzle at anything you don't intend to shoot.

Keeep the weapon on safe, and your finger off the trigger, until you intend to fire.



USF – I commander visits paratroopers

Story & photo by Spc. Kayleigh J. Cannon
1st Bde., 82nd Abn. Div. (AAB), USD-C

CAMP RAMADI, Iraq – Paratroopers from 1st Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division (Advise and Assist Brigade) recently briefed the commanding general of U.S. Forces – Iraq about their mission in Anbar, site of some of the most dramatic insurgent activity since the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Gen. Ray Odierno, commanding general of USF-I, met with Lt. Col. Trevor Bredenkamp, commander of 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Bde., 82nd Abn. Div. (AAB) and other leaders within 2-504 PIR to hear about the battalion's recent activities in support of Iraqi Security Forces in the area.

Battalion leaders highlighted some of the sporadic but dramatic bombings they have faced over the past seven months that have underscored the importance of their mission. Anbar Governor Qasim Fahadawi was injured in one of two blasts at the Provincial Government Center in late December 2009; and a Ramadi bridge on a major road connecting Jordan to Iraq was damaged last October when a five-ton truck wired with explosives detonated.

During the brief, they explained the battalion's responsibilities and how they are accomplishing their mission as part of the first advise-and-assist brigade in Iraq, including specifics on how they have maintained their operational role in Anbar throughout their time here.

Odierno said he was pleased with how the AAB is operating, said Maj. Kyle Reed, executive officer of 2-504 PIR.

"We explained how we train, advise, and enable the security forces in Iraq for their own efforts providing security," said Reed.

Following the brief, Odierno re-enlisted two paratroopers and awarded coins of excellence to others. Sgt. Maj. Francis Debois Jr., noncommissioned officer in charge of operations with 2-504 PIR, said Odierno's visit solidified their belief that they are on the right track.

"Our goal for today was absolutely accomplished," said. "The intelligence was right up the alley of how [Odierno] was thinking." ▲



Gen. Ray Odierno, commanding general of U.S. Forces-Iraq, re-enlists two paratroopers from 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division (Advise and Assist Brigade) at Camp Ramadi Jan. 28.



Brig. Gen. Kenneth Tovo (left), deputy commanding general-west with U.S. Division-Center, presents a diploma to an Iraqi policeman during his graduation from the civil disturbance course Jan. 28. Forty-five policemen graduated from the course, taught by Guardsmen of 585th Military Police Company from Ohio.

Iraqi police graduate civil disturbance course

Story & photo by Spc. Michael J. MacLeod
1st Bde., 82nd Abn. Div. (AAB), USD-C

CAMP RAMADI, Iraq – Top American and Iraqi security officials presided over the Jan. 28 graduation of 45 Iraqi policemen from a civil disturbance course taught by partnered American and Iraqi instructors at the Ramadi Training Center.

Brig. Gen. Kenneth Tovo, deputy commanding general-west for U.S. Division – Center, and Staff Maj. Gen. Baha Husayn Abd Hassan, provincial director of police for Anbar, presented diplomas to Ramadi-area policemen who completed the five-day course.

"Today's graduation event is just another of the many indicators of the continued progress of Iraqi Security Forces," said Tovo, the highest-ranking U.S. military leader in Anbar. "These Iraqi policemen have acquired a new set of critical skills to prepare them to provide security for the local populace and to enforce the rule of law."

Tovo said the training was entirely initiated by Baha, who assessed the force's strengths and weaknesses after becoming the new provincial director of police.

"It's just one of many significant improvements that the new [director] has made in his short tenure, and I think that it bodes well for the increased professionalization of the police forces in Anbar province," said Tovo.

The National Guard instructors who developed the course belong to 585th Military Police Company from Ohio, attached to 151st Military Police Battalion of the West Virginia National Guard.

The Guardsmen trained seven Iraqi policemen, who in turn trained the rest of the policemen, said Sgt. 1st Class Melissa Hillis, noncommissioned officer in charge of operations for the 585th and an instructor at the MP Regional Training

Institute in Ohio.

The course included instruction on the use of shields, riot batons and formations to disperse riots, said Hillis. In addition, 12 students with prior commercial driving experience were selected to be trained to operate fire engine-like anti-riot vehicles recently purchased by the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior.

The 30,000-pound vehicles feature two remotely operated water cannons for pushing back rioters, spotlights, digital cameras, fire-suppression sprinklers, front and rear blades to clear road debris, and tanks for additives such as firefighting foam, paint for marking rioters and CS compound to drive away rioters.

Lacking a manual for the vehicle, the Guardsmen assembled a team of three firefighters, a commercial driving license instructor and Hillis, already an accomplished instructor, to learn how to use it before teaching it to the Iraqi instructors.

"That's the beauty of the Guard," said Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Lovell, one of the firefighters.

Sgt. Chris Smith, the CDL instructor who taught much of the driving skills, said that high motivation among the Iraqi students allowed him to teach an eight-day driving course in just two. Students were taught vehicle maintenance, water pump operations, targeting, and driving skills, such as backing and negotiating obstacles, said Smith.

"The students were very intelligent and highly motivated," he said.

Baha was very pleased with the training and looked forward to doing more with the Guardsmen, as were the Iraqi police officers, according to 2nd Lt. John Bibler, platoon leader of the instructors.

1st Lt. Mohammed Abdulla Jasim, a Ramadi-area police officer of five years, said he and his men are now fully capable of responding to civil disturbances.

"With this powerful vehicle and the training, we can disperse violence," said Mohammed. "I am ready to give a training course like this to my own students."

Although riots are uncommon in Iraq, newly-won freedoms of expression and the right to assemble could change all that, said Sgt. Mike Barnes, a military policeman with the Guard.

"In the Saddam era, there was no backtalk," said Barnes. "Now, they have the right to assemble. [The police may] have to use these new skills." ▲

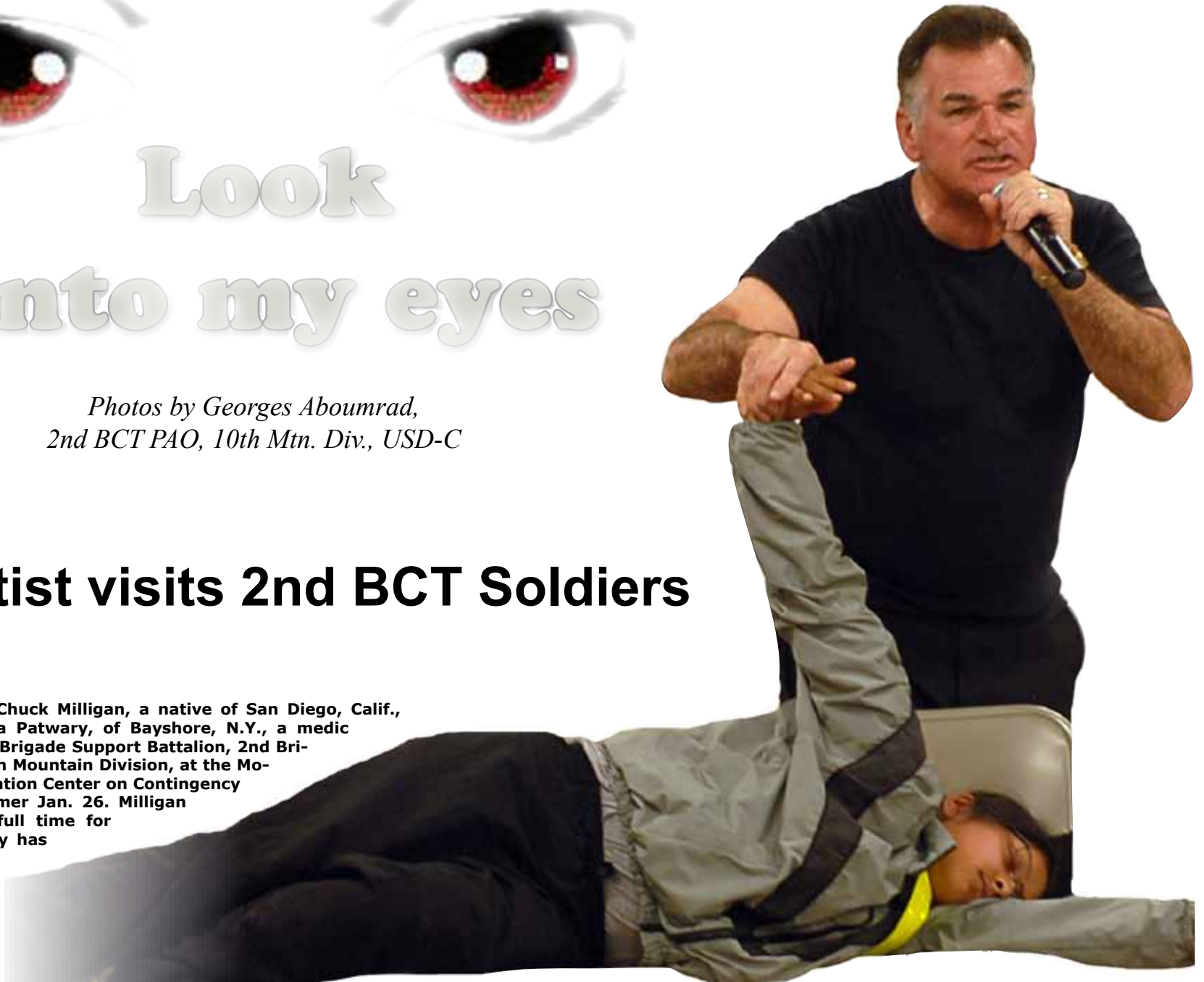


Look
into my eyes

*Photos by Georges Aboumrar,
2nd BCT PAO, 10th Mtn. Div., USD-C*

Hypnotist visits 2nd BCT Soldiers

BAGHDAD – Hypnotist Chuck Milligan, a native of San Diego, Calif., hypnotizes Pfc. Rebecca Patwary, of Bayshore, N.Y., a medic with Company C, 210th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, at the Morale, Welfare and Recreation Center on Contingency Operating Station Hammer Jan. 26. Milligan has been hypnotizing full time for 18 years, and his hobby has taken him around the world 23 times.



Soldiers at Contingency Operating Station Hammer and Department of Defense employees are put to sleep by hypnotist Chuck Milligan during his show at the Morale, Welfare and Recreation Center Jan. 26. Milligan said it was his privilege and honor to be in Iraq spending time with Soldiers.

Soldiers gain closure through Operation Proper Exit

Story by Sgt. Bryce Dubee
4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div., USD-C

BAGHDAD – The last time they were here, they lost a piece of themselves. Years, and numerous surgeries later, they’ve returned to get a small piece back.

Six Soldiers, each severely wounded during combat operations in Iraq, returned to the battlefields where they were injured to gain a sense of closure as part of the Army’s Operation Proper Exit.

Arriving in Baghdad on Sunday, the six men, all retired from the Army, visited and shared their stories with Soldiers from the 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division at the Warrior Chapel here Monday.

A hush fell over the crowd as the six Soldiers, many with noticeable limps from their prosthetic limbs, and two military mentors, also wounded in Iraq, entered the chapel.

The uncomfortable silence hung in the air, but only for a few seconds, as the crowd quickly realized that the men seated in front of them were their brothers in arms.

“This is all about bringing them back to the team,” explained Command Sgt. Maj. Jeffrey Huggins, the 4th SBCT, 2nd Inf. Div., command sergeant major, to brigade Soldiers before the event. “We’re helping them to get some closure.”

The afternoon began with heartfelt discussion, the wounded warriors sharing their stories of getting injured and their time spent in recovery.

“That was the most frustrating part was not being in the fight, not knowing where my guys were,” said Sgt. Omar Avila, who, while serving with 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division was struck by a 200-pound improvised explosive device on May 14, 2007, suffering burns to over 75 percent of his body and had part of his foot amputated.

Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Olson, an active duty military mentor for the six Soldiers and making his third return trip to Iraq since being wounded, echoed Avila’s sentiment.

“I was with my boys for nine straight months, 24-7, and then I woke up in a hospital and they weren’t there,” he said. “That was



Photo by Sgt. Phillip Valentine, 366th MPAD, USD-C

Wounded warriors participating in Operation Proper Exit unload gear from a UH-60 Blackhawk at Camp Liberty Feb. 3. The program, sponsored by the Troops First Foundation and supported by the United Service Organizations, allows veterans who have sustained combat injuries the opportunity to return to the area in which they were injured in an attempt to find closure and see the progress made in the stabilization of the country.

the most frustrating part of the transition for me.”

Letters from their buddies back on the line, even just simple email updates were helpful in keeping them informed and keeping their spirits up while they healed, they said.

“We didn’t come back to flags waving – we didn’t have any real reintegration period,” said Sgt. Jay Fain. “We still felt like we were in the fight.”

They also stressed to the Soldiers in the audience, most of whom were infantrymen, the importance of seeking out help in dealing with combat stress.

“It does not hurt to get help,” said Fain, who, also while serving with 1st Bat. 26th Inf. Reg., was struck by a roadside bomb roughly a month after Avila, resulting in the loss of his right leg. “Don’t let that pride swallow you.”

However, it wasn’t long before inhibitions broke down and the serious and somber tone of the conversation transformed into one more commonly heard around infantrymen.

“The best part about being injured is you can really mess with people,” laughed Sgt. 1st Class Michael Schlitz, the other military mentor travelling with the group, who suffered burns to 85 percent of his body and lost both hands after being hit by an IED in 2007.

The wounded Soldier teased one another about their injuries, the burn victims saying the amputees only had “paper cuts” while one Soldier who had his leg amputated joked that he now dresses as a pirate with a peg

leg every Halloween.

This levity had a huge impact on many of the Soldiers in the audience, showing them that life goes on after being wounded.

“It was very inspirational,” said Spc. Carlos Perez, a Stryker gunner assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th SBCT, 2nd Inf. Div., who said that he was a little nervous about the experience at first, not knowing the extent of the Soldiers’ injuries.

“They were very outgoing, and handling their situation really well,” he said.

Pfc. Adam McHenry, also with HHC 4th SBCT, 2nd Inf. Div., agreed.

“It’s reassuring knowing that if you do get injured you will be taken care of,” he said.

Schlitz, who is on his second visit to Iraq in nearly a month, said that for him, meeting with the Soldier currently serving in Iraq is the most important part of the Operation Proper Exit mission.

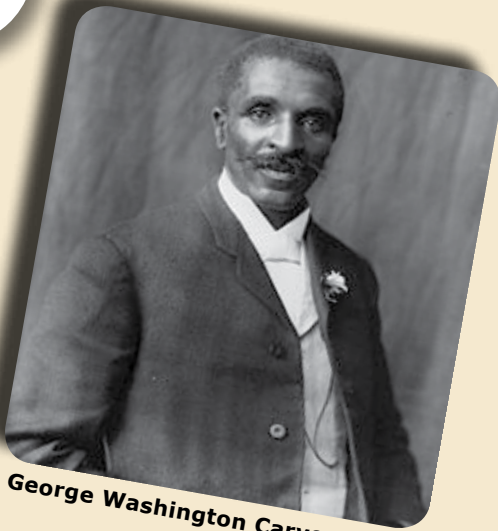
“We get to support you guys,” he said. “You guys are the ones bringing the fight to a close.”



Photo by Sgt. Bryce Dubee 4th SBCT PAO, 2nd Inf. Div., USD-C

Col. John Norris, commander of 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, places a coin in the pocket of Sgt. 1st Class Michael Schlitz, a military mentor travelling with a group of wounded warriors returning to Iraq for the first time since being injured as part of Operation Proper Exit. Schlitz who suffered burns on 85 percent of his body and lost both hands after being hit by an IED in 2007, is on his second tour with the operation.

African-American History Month Facts



George Washington Carver



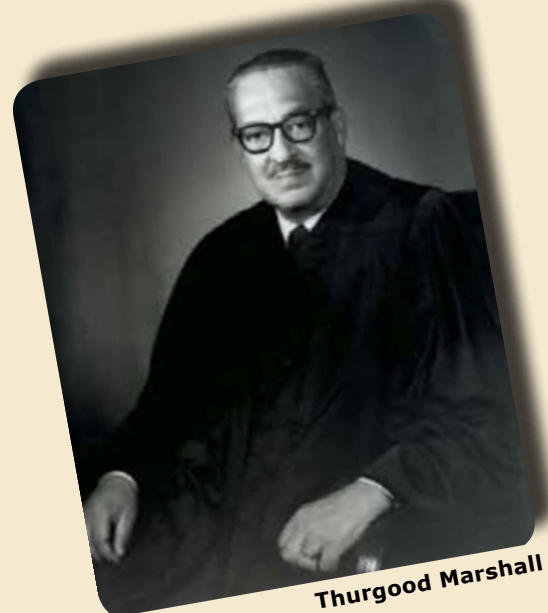
John Mercer Langston



Jack Johnson



Shirley Chisholm



Thurgood Marshall



Dr. Mae Jemison



Hiram Rhodes Revels



Hattie McDaniel

- Black History Month began as “Negro History Week,” created in 1926 by Carter G. Woodson. Woodson was a noted African-American historian, scholar, educator and publisher. The Week became a month-long celebration in 1976. The month of February was chosen to coincide with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln.

- On Feb. 12, 2009, the NAACP will mark its 100th anniversary. Spurred by growing racial violence in the early 20th century, and by race riots in Springfield Illinois in 1908, a group of African-American leaders joined together to form a new permanent civil rights organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Feb. 12, 1909 was chosen because it was the centennial anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln.

- Jack Johnson became the first African-American man to hold the World Heavyweight Champion boxing title in 1908. He held on to the belt until 1915.

- John Mercer Langston was the first black man to become a lawyer in Ohio when he passed the Bar exam in 1854. Langston was also the great-uncle of Langston Hughes, famed poet of the Harlem Renaissance.

- Thurgood Marshall was the first African-American ever appointed to the United States Supreme Court. He was appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, and served on the Supreme Court from 1967 to 1991.

- George Washington Carver developed 300 derivative products from peanuts among them cheese, milk, coffee, flour, ink, dyes, plastics, wood stains, soap, linoleum, medicinal oils and cosmetics.

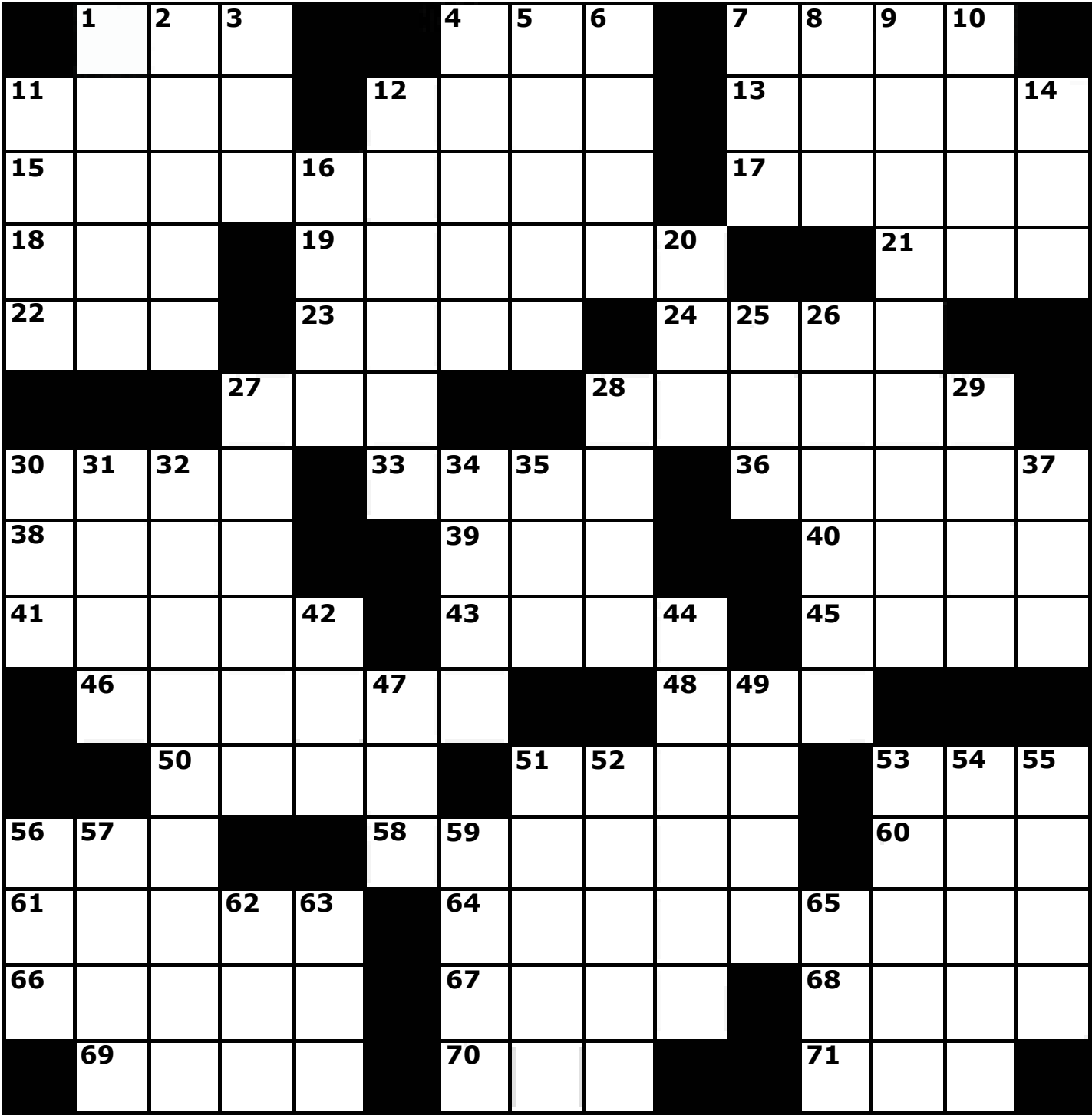
- Hiram Rhodes Revels was the first African-American ever elected to the United States Senate. He represented the state of Mississippi from February 1870 to March 1871.

- Shirley Chisholm was the first African-American woman elected to the House of Representatives. She was elected in 1968 and represented the state of New York. She broke ground again four years later when she was the first major party African-American candidate and the first female candidate for president of the United States.

- In 1940, Hattie McDaniel was the first African-American performer to win an Academy Award for her portrayal of a loyal slave governess in *Gone With the Wind*.

- In 1992, Dr. Mae Jemison became the first African-American woman to go into space aboard the space shuttle Endeavor. During her eight-day mission she worked with U.S. and Japanese researchers, and was a co-investigator on a bone cell experiment.

CROSSWORD



67. Defamation
68. Shade of blue
69. Pack tightly
70. Medieval land worker
71. Hinge joint
72. Conifer

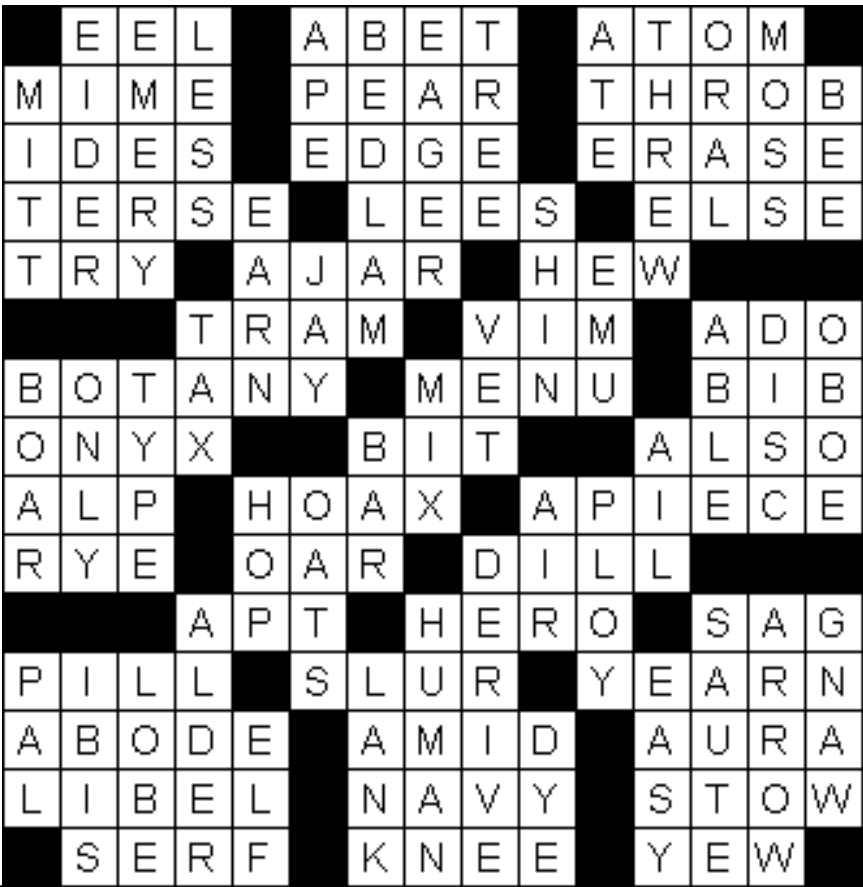
Down

1. Blended food
2. Type of window
3. Grade in judo or karate
4. Student
5. By surprise
6. In good health
7. Spoil
8. Mature
9. Acceptable to the taste
10. Petty quarrel
11. Part of a church
12. Noisy insect
14. Optic
16. Make reference to
20. Stray
25. Fuss
26. Examine closely
27. Distant
28. Portent
29. Row
30. Choose, ___ for
31. Prod
32. Pertinence
34. Trial
35. Be indebted to
37. Strike lightly
42. Mesh
44. Objective
47. Sprocket
49. Cry
51. Small boat
52. Not trimmed
53. Uncanny
54. Obviate
55. Let for money
56. Large vase
57. Scorch
59. Small stream
62. Epoch
63. Married
65. Deuce

Across

1. Seed case
4. Animal foot
7. Charts
11. Halo
12. Six-sided figure
13. Wide open
15. Head teacher
17. Pass along
18. Perceive
19. Frozen spear
21. Consumed
22. Long fish
23. Lecture
24. Engrossed
27. Scarlet
28. Severe experience
30. Fiend
33. Particle
36. Ambit
38. Ode
39. Female sheep
40. Arm bone
41. Claw
43. Transmitted
45. Leak slowly
46. Find
48. Wonder
50. Vote against
51. Remedy
53. Armed conflict
56. Country, initially
58. Farm
60. The night before
61. Regenerate
64. Origin
66. Mother-of-pearl
67. Oaf
68. Legal document
69. Scan
70. Allow
71. Uneven
40. Used to control a horse
41. As well
42. High mountain
43. Fraud
45. Each
47. Cereal grass seeds
48. Paddle
49. Aromatic herb
50. Fitting
51. Champion
52. Droop
55. Tablet
58. Aspersion
60. Languish
62. Residence
64. In the middle
66. Halo

Feb. 1 solution





10th Mountain Division

This week in American military history

Division re-activated as a mountain division

In 1939 the Soviet Union invaded Finland. Finnish soldiers on skis annihilated two tank divisions. Charles Minot “Minnie” Dole, the president of the National Ski Patrol, used this incident to emphasize why the U.S. Army needed mountain troops.

Dole spent months lobbying the War Department to train troops in mountain and winter warfare. In 1940, Dole was able to present his case to Gen. George Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff, who caused the Army to take action on Dole’s proposals to create ski units.

In 1941 the Army activated its first mountain unit, the 87th Mountain Infantry Battalion. The unit was dubbed “Minnie’s Ski Troops” in honor of the man who worked so hard for their creation. The National Ski Patrol took on the recruitment for the unit.

Over the years, the unit designation changed four times. On Feb. 13, 1985, at Ft. Drum, N.Y., the 10th Infantry Division was re-activated as the 10th Mountain Division.

The 10th was designed to meet a wide variety of infantry-based operations. Equipment was designed to be lighter and significantly smaller in size, specifically to make the division more mobile, strategically and tactically.

