

The North Star

Serving Task Force Marne
U. S. Division- North, Iraq



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Blueprint for exit 779th Engineer Battalion closes up shop

By Pfc. Jennifer Montagna
130th Eng. Bde. PAO

The 779th Engineer Battalion, a Florida National Guard unit, is returning to the U.S. this month.

The battalion was attached to the 130th Engineer Brigade, and spent their 10 months in Iraq clearing roads for safe travel, rebuilding infrastructures and partnering with Iraqi Army Field Engineer Regiments.

"We've been teaching, training and mentoring the Iraqi Army general engineering skills and core Army values," said Lt. Col. R. Dwayne Jarriel, the

779th Eng. Bn. commander.

The 779th Eng. Bn. commander also said after working with and watching the FERs, it is evident that they are fully mission capable.

The engineers embedded two, 10-man teams at Iraqi Army post Al Kindi and Al Kisik to train the 2nd and 3rd FERs.

"It's our turn to head home. I told my Soldiers we would make history during our deployment and make a difference in the lives of the Iraqi people, and I believe we've accomplished that,"

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Photo by U.S. Army

Sergeant First Class Ronald Sandy, with the 779th Eng. Bn., a Florida NG unit, oversees training with an IA FER soldier.

I-BIZ opens new COB Speicher market

By Spc. Jessica Zullig
135th Mobile PA Det.

In very recognizable purple buildings, located on Contingency Operating Base Speicher, there are vendors selling trinkets, coffee and items that can't be found at the Post Exchange.

Iraqi-Based Industrial Zone held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the grand opening of the new market, Speicher Souq, May 15.

The market is near the North Dining Facility, and construction began Sept.

2009, which included more than 50 local Iraqis.

Now that Speicher Souq is open for business, it will employ approximately 25 Iraqis and cater to thou-



Photo by Master Sgt. Marcia Triggs,
TF Marne PAO

Soldiers leave a new souq built on COB Speicher, May 18.

sands of servicemembers and civilians at COB Speicher.

As part of the opening, two leaders from Salah ad-Din's Sons of Iraq were invited to tour the market.

"The souq employs local nationals and provides services for Soldiers," said Capt. Calvin Fisher, I-BIZ officer in charge, Division Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division and a Durham, N.C., native. "It keeps morale high and is something fresh for Soldiers to enjoy."

The market features shops selling DVDs, bicycles, jewelry, office supplies and more. A coffee shop with a large seating area and a hookah lounge will offer Soldiers a new place to meet, talk and unwind.

"It has nice options you don't see at the (Post Exchange)," said Spc. Matthew Gladmon of Fort Mitchell, Ala., a supply specialist for 2101st Transportation Company, 541st Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary).

Soldier creates functional art for 3/7th Cav.

By Master Sgt.
Duff McFadden
2BCT, 3rd Inf. Div. PAO

For Sgt. 1st Class Feliciano, 48, the Force Protection noncommissioned officer in charge for the 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry, 2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, the innate ability to take an ordinary piece of wood and turn it into a beautiful piece of functional art goes beyond description.

Approximately eight hours each day, as long as there are no emergencies demanding his attention, a meeting, or training, you'll find him at the unit's woodworking shop.

An office sign was his initial project. It wasn't long before he was building other signs, poster frames, target trees for the ranges, and even a domino table for their Morale, Welfare and Recreation room.

Once the squadron recognized his immense talent, they benefitted by providing him further opportunities to express his talent.

According to 3/7th Cav. executive officer, Maj. Steve Barry, a Hamilton, N.J., native, Sgt. 1st Class Feliciano's woodworking skills

"enable us to improve our efficiency in command and control.

"He has an amazing attention to detail and a great work ethic," said Maj. Barry. "He's the oldest man in the squadron and he easily works 14 hours a day, doing manual labor with a minimum of help. It's just really impressive."

Sergeant 1st Class Feliciano's father and brother were mechanics, working amid grease all day long, and he would help them during the long Puerto Rican summers. However, working with wood, he discovered, was his true calling.

"I like to be creative. Wood gives me the chance to be creative and to express myself. Wood is a living material, it speaks to you. You have to work it with love," Sgt. 1st Class Feliciano said.

A Puerto Rico National Guard Soldier for 17 years, he joined the active Army in 1998, "to improve the quality of life for my family and to give them a better future."

And now, 12 years later, his youngest son recently graduated from high school, while his oldest son, a fresh-

man at Georgia Southern University, is enrolled in the Reserve Officer Training Corps there.

"I met my goal," said Sgt. 1st Class Feliciano, with quiet satisfaction. "My Fam-

ily has been taken care of and since the third grade, they speak fluent English.

"I thank God every day for the skills I have and the ability to help others enjoy it," he said, with a smile.



Photo by Master Sgt. Duff McFadden, 2HBCT, 3rd Inf. Div. PAO
Sergeant 1st Class Carlos Feliciano, Force Protection NCOIC for the 3/7th Cav., 2nd HBCT, 3rd Inf. Div., works on an award stand for a redeploying Soldier at COS Diamondback, May 13.

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said Lt. Col. Jarriel.

The 779th Eng. Bn., assisted the Iraqi Security Forces and FERs in engineering projects, to include the construction of numerous check points throughout the Ninewa province at the request of the Government of Iraq.

"In total we've accomplished 711 missions in the last 10 months, working night and day. I'm very proud of all the Soldiers in the battalion," said Lt. Col. Jarriel.

Along with check point construction, the 779th Eng. Bn., assisted in the construction of an anti-vehicular ditch

and berm along the Syrian border; kept roads for Soldiers and civilians safe by conducting route clearance patrols and denying access to culverts for criminal activity.

In total, the 1313th Engineering Company, part of the 779th Eng. Bn., wedged grates on more than 119 culverts to curtail the enemy.

"We've had a high operational tempo our entire deployment, and now we're getting ready to head home, there's been a lot of packing and now we just have to wait on the plane," said Lt. Col. Jarriel.



Photo by U.S. Army
Lieutenant Colonel R. Dwayne Jarriel, the 779th Eng. Bn. commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Jefferey Topping case their colors, to end their deployment in support of OIF, May 12, at COS Marez.

New GI Bill benefits Soldiers, Families

By Sgt. Johnathon Jobson
TF Marne PAO

Soldiers receive many benefits in return for service to their country. Housing, low-to-no cost health and life insurance, and the GI Bill are just a few of these benefits.

The GI Bill has gone through many iterations since its inception in 1944, most recent being the Post 9/11 GI Bill, which allows troops to transfer benefits to eligible Family Members.

The Montgomery GI Bill still exists, but servicemembers who qualify for both have to make an irrevocable decision which version of the bill they want to use.

The Task Force Marne Retention Team recently gave briefings to Soldiers on Contingency Operating Base Speicher to give them an in-depth overview of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, and explain how they can get started.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill is only available to Soldiers who have performed at least 90 days on active duty since Sept. 10, 2001.

To receive the maximum benefits, a Soldier must complete a total of 36 months of active-duty service. For Soldiers with less than 36 months, the benefits are prorated.

The ability to transfer the benefits to one's dependents has always been legally possible in the various iterations of the GI Bill, but was never largely publicized and was a lengthy process.

Under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Soldiers may now transfer their GI Bill benefits to any of their qualified Family Members and change those benefits with ease.

“Once a Soldier has reached six years of active duty or selected reserve service, they are eligible to transfer their benefits to any of their Family Members who are enrolled in the Defense Eligibility Enrollment Reporting System,”

-Sergeant 1st Class Curtis Halford, TF Marne Retention Operations NCOIC

“The new GI Bill is transferable to Family Members, spouses or children,” explained Sgt. 1st Class Curtis Halford, the division Retention Operations noncommissioned officer for Task Force Marne.

“The benefits do not have to go to just one person either they can be split amongst multiple Family Members and those amounts can be adjusted at any time.

If I were to split my benefits evenly between my two children and then one of them gets a full-ride scholarship, I can go back and transfer that child's benefits to the other one.”

The transferred benefits are the same as the benefits that the Soldier would receive to include cost of tuition and fees, monthly housing at the sergeant with dependants rate, and a yearly book stipend of up to \$1,000.

There are restrictions on transferring benefits to Family Members based on how long the service member has served in the military.

“Once a Soldier has reached six years of active duty or selected reserve service, they are eligible to transfer their benefits to any of their Family Members who are enrolled in the Defense Eligibility Enrollment Reporting System,” stated Sgt. 1st Class Halford. “His spouse may immediately use the benefits at this time.

However, the Soldier must serve 10 years before his children can make use of the benefits.”

If a Soldier's spouse uses the benefits while the Soldier is still serving on active duty, the spouse will not receive the housing allowance or the book stipend. The Soldier's children will receive these benefits regardless of the Soldier's active-duty status.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill went in to effect Aug. 1, 2009, and Task Force Marne Soldiers are already making use of the ability to transfer benefits. Chief Warrant Officer 3 Sheila Nelson-Felix, a targeting officer for Task Force Marne, transferred her benefits to her son, Blaec.

“I transferred my benefits to my son who is in his second year at the University of Hawaii,” said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Felix. “Hawaii is very expensive; we were struggling to afford his cost of living, tuition and book fees. Even with him working full-time, it still was not enough.

Transferring my benefits to him saves us at least \$1,400 a month and allows him to be more independent.

“My recommendation to Soldiers thinking about transferring their benefits to their children is make sure they are in it for the long haul. Because just like when a Soldier fails a class that was paid for using tuition

assistance, the money provided for the class must be paid back.”

Soldiers can initiate benefit transfers at anytime while on active duty, said Sgt. 1st Class Halford. Once a Soldier leaves active duty they are no longer able to add new Family Members to the list of those eligible to receive benefits, but they can adjust the amount of the benefits that each person gets until the benefits are used, he added.

To initiate the benefits transfer process or make changes to the amount of benefits that are being transferred to Family Members, Soldiers must visit the Transfer of Education Benefits at <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/TEB>.

If initiating benefits transfer, active-duty enlisted Soldiers must notify their career counselor immediately after completing the form on the TEB Web site. Army officers and reserve component Soldiers must contact the appropriate entity as listed below.

Active-duty officers, lieutenant colonels or below: hrcpost911gibill@conus.army.mil

U.S. Army Reserve: mgib.support@conus.army.mil

Army National Guard: gibill@pec.ngb.army.mil

For more information regarding eligibility, remaining entitlements, and other GI Bill information visit <http://www.gibill.va.gov>.

Task Force Marne Heroes of the North



Sergeant Christopher Hall, of Galveston, Texas, is with 6th Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division. He serves as a maintenance shop foreman who was on mission when two tires on the trailer his vehicle was towing caught fire. Sergeant Hall, realizing the threat the fire posed to both the trailer and the tracked vehicle it was carrying, reacted swiftly and with conviction. Fully aware of the danger of explosion from the surrounding tires if they caught fire, he directed all other personnel to move away and to bring him more fire extinguishers. At great personal risk, he fought the fire from close range, expending five fire extinguishers in the process. After extinguishing the fire, his element moved to recover a Mine Resisted Ambush Protected vehicle immersed in mud up to the vehicle commander's door. With his tracked recovery vehicle's winch inoperative, he skillfully employed the boom to recover the MRAP. Sergeant Hall's technical competence, personal bravery, maturity and dedication to mission accomplishment is an inspiration to all, and make him a most worthy selection for today's Task Force Marne Hero of the North.



Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jacob Wilde, of Menominee, Mich., is with Division Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division. He serves as his unit's electronic systems technician, distinguished himself while assisting 25th Combat Aviation Brigade with troubleshooting and repairing an electronic interference problem with a critical air traffic control radio frequency. The interference problem caused a significant hazard to flight and placed aircraft at unnecessary risk. On short notice, CW2 Wilde screened every potential cause of interference, conducted detailed diagnostics, and after hours of work isolated the source of the problem to a new force protection measure recently employed on Contingency Operating Base Speicher. He worked diligently and found a viable solution. As a result of his efforts and technical understanding of electronics, COB Speicher's new force protection measures remain fully operational and the airspace is free from electronic interference. Chief Warrant Officer 2 Wilde's technical assistance was clearly top notch and a combat multiplier that is why he is selected as today's selection for the Task Force Marne Hero of the North.

Yezidis celebrate spring New Year

**Cultural Tidbit
Special to the North Star**

Yezidis are one of the minority ethnic groups in Iraq. Most of them live near Mosul (in Sinjar and Bahsheqa), with smaller communities in Armenia, Georgia, Iran, Russia, Syria, and Turkey. Estimates of their population size vary, partially due to the Yazidi tradition of secrecy about their religious beliefs.

According to their faith; Yezidis worship seven angels, in the form of peacocks, who are subordinate to the supreme god that created the universe.

There is some confusion about their belief, Muslims claim that they worship Satan, but Yezidis claim that they worship God and intentionally don't mention Satan because they fear of his power.

Yezidis like other ethnic groups have their own holidays, but one of

the most important is their New Year, which they celebrate in mid April of each year. It is always on a Wednesday, as they believe God finished creating the world on a Wednesday, and in that day he sent his archangel Gabriel (peacock king) on this day to earth.

"The celebration of the New Year is a very important thing for us and we ask God for peace to spread all over the world," cleric Baba Sheikh commented about their New Year celebration, April 15.

There is some lamentation by women in the cemeteries, to the accompaniment of the music of the Qewals (a Yazidi Village elder), but the festival is generally characterized by joyous events: the music of dehol (drums) and zorna (shawm), communal dancing and meals, the decorating of eggs.

Similarly, in Tawaq village (west of Mosul), a festival for this occasion is held in honor of the patron of the local

shrine, has secular music, dance and meals in addition to the performance of sacred music.

Another important festival is the Tawusgeran (circulation of the peacock) where Qewals and other religious dignitaries visit Yazidi villages, bringing the senjaq, sacred images of a peacock made from brass symbolizing the Peacock King.



Courtesy Photo

Yezidi Qewals celebrate the New Year

REGIONAL HEADLINES

Volunteer group donates 100th container bicycles

Lawrence Journal World

SAMMAMISH, Wash. - Ten years ago a group of Northwest volunteers sent their first container of bicycles to Ghana. Now the Village Bicycle Project is preparing to send its 100th container, having delivered 45,000 bikes and 15,000 tools and trained more than 7,000 people how to use them.

The program was started in Ghana after the country removed import duties on bicycles in the mid-90s. The goal is to improve lives of people in rural areas who would otherwise have to walk hours each day.

The group collects donated bikes from all over the world, but many of its core supporters are in Seattle, including Bike Works. On May 15, the all-volunteer organization will be loading its next container in the Georgetown neighborhood of Seattle and is looking for help to collect bikes, take them apart and pack the container.

Village Bicycle Project pays for the cost of shipping by selling bikes that are in good condition through two partners in Accra, said board member Meg Watson. Those partners set aside one-third of the bikes for the training programs in villages and sell the rest wholesale from their storefront shop. Once bikes are trucked to villages, free training classes are held to maintain and repair bicycles. People

who participate the training can then purchase one of the bikes for about \$20, half the normal price, Watson said.

“Selling bikes is part of a development model that prevents bikes being hoarded by the powerful, and makes them more available to those who can best use it to improve their economic circumstances,” she said.

The ARAS Foundation of Sammamish has collected more than 2,500 bikes for the project and has a bicycle drop-off event on May 15. For more information: www.villagebicycleproject.org

San Antonio city manager wages war on sugar

Bremerton Patriot

SAN ANTONIO — City Manager Sheryl Sculley has declared war on sugar.

Well, at least when it comes packaged in cans and candy bars. Sugary sodas no longer have a home in the city's 250 beverage vending machines and unhealthy foods in the 75 snack machines in city facilities are next.

“I asked the staff to remove the high-calorie soda drinks from our vending machines,” Sculley said. “I’m a fitness person, and I care about our employees, and I want them to be healthy. And I think this is a very small gesture.”

The new city policy is only for vending machines and doesn't ban employees from consuming fatty foods and drinks at work.

“But we don't have to promote it,” Sculley said.

Camille Miller, president and CEO of the Austin-based Texas Health Institute, a public policy think tank, said she's unaware of any other municipality that's adopted similar policies in the state. New York City has similar rules, she added, ‘Just good policy.’

“My hat is off to a government employee saying that a government facility shouldn't make it easy for people to be unhealthy,” Miller said. “We know that whatever people have access to, that's what they're going to get when they're in a hurry.”

Making healthy items easily available is “just good policy,” she said.

The beverage machines now contain water, juices and diet drinks.

Sculley said the policy aligns with the city's wellness program, instituted three years ago.

“We know that statistically that people who are overweight or obese have greater health problems than those who do not,” she said. “We're about educating community and we think we can lead by example.”

Anti-Kidnapping tip:

Constantly ask yourself, What could happen right now? And be alert for that potential event.

THE

North Star

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