

# The North Star

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



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## Summer camp offers hope, opportunity

By Pfc. Adrian Muehe  
3rd SBCT, 2nd Inf Div PAO

It's summertime in Diyala province, Iraq. School is out, and so is the sun, along with many children playing all over the province. For a few, their summer experience will be quite different this year as they are attending a Summer Camp for Kids.

This program is organized by the Red Crescent, the Middle East's equivalent to the Red Cross, and designed for orphans and special-needs children of Diyala province from June 1 to July 31.

There are camps set up throughout the province in the cities of Baqubah, Muqadiyah, Balad Ruz, and Al-Abarra. To assist the Red Crescent and to show their support, Soldiers from 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, delivered soccer balls and school supplies to the children at the Baqubah camp, June 9.

"We mixed students from all five qadas [cities]," said Hazim Sarraj, Red Crescent director for Diyala province. "We mix different ethnicities, different sects, different colors, Kurdish, Arabic,

Sunni, Shia - we bring all these people here to Baqubah."

The program is designed for orphans, but camp administrators invite children who are talented in arts, or who excel in class, to the camp to enhance their skills. While attending, young ones participate in many activities and classes such as drawing, music, drama, and English.

Attendees also take time out of their academic studies to play sports and mingle with other children in the camp every afternoon. The premises include a courtyard complete with soccer goals, a basketball hoop, volleyball court, and there are ping pong tables in the class-

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Photos by Pfc. Adrian Muehe, 3rd SBCT, 2nd Inf. Div. PAO

**Above:** Lieutenant Colonel Mitch Rambin, commander of 5/20th Inf. Regt., 3rd SBCT, 2nd ID, gives colored pencils to a girl at the Summer Camp for Kids in Baqubah, June 9. Soldiers from 5/20 Inf. Regt., were at the camp delivering soccer balls and school supplies donated from elementary school kids in America.

**Right:** Two girls perform a skit during a drama class at Summer Camp for Kids, a program designed for orphans and special needs children in Baqubah, June 9.





# Forecasting success

## Squadron 'operationalizes' weather for TF Wings' aviation mission

By Staff Sgt. Mike Alberts  
25th CAB, 25th Inf. Div PAO

Imagine a blinding, gusting wall of sand and dust five-thousand to eight-thousand feet high, spanning 60 to 90 miles, moving at a rate of 35 to 60 kilometers an hour.

That describes a "haboob," an Arabic word for a type of intense sandstorm, common to Iraq, that can have a devastating impact on aviation operations.

Now imagine a pilot's relief in receiving a tactical instant message from a staff weather officer miles away that advises of an approaching haboob in time to avoid it.

That is what is referred to as "operationalizing" weather -- mitigating the impact of weather on Army aviation operations by forecasting and interpreting weather systems and data in real time -- and that is what Task Force Wings' staff weather team does 24/7 from Contingency Operating Base Speicher, near Tikrit, Iraq.

According to Capt. Erica Haas, staff weather officer, or SWO, 22nd Expeditionary Weather Squadron supporting TF Wings, her core team of six Airmen conduct 'round-the-clock' operations in order to do more than simply forecast weather.

"While our job includes forecasting weather, we don't simply provide data," explained Capt. Haas, a native of Wheaton, Ill. "We take data and transform it into usable information so that the Brigade Commander can accomplish his mission. In fact, being integrated into tactical aviation operations is really where we add the most value to the task force."

"We know how weather affects operations. As a result, we are able to assist those who make operational decisions mitigate those effects. We reduce the frequency that pilots fly into dangerous weather conditions. In that sense, we provide an awareness



Photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Alberts, 25th CAB, 25th Inf. Div. PAO  
**Senior Airman Deonta Brooks, weather forecaster, staff weather team, 22nd EWS, supporting TF Wings, checks weather observation data from the handheld display device of a TMQ-53, at COB Speicher, June 4.**

that enables missions to be conducted more safely and effectively."

The weather team accomplishes their mission by relying on field observations, and by using computer generated models and satellite images.

In addition, they employ a variety of tactical equipment to include Blue Force Tracker and a Tactical Meteorological Observing System (also known as the TMQ-53). The TMQ-53 is used to obtain pressure, wind speed and direction, temperature, dew point, relative humidity, precipitation, surface visibility, cloud height and lightning detection. Captain Haas' weather team also conducts Forward Area Limited Observer Program training.

FALOP training uses Airmen to teach Soldiers how to perform weather observations and relay pertinent data to the SWO from strategic locations in northern Iraq. According to Capt. Haas, having qualified weather observers in strategic locations is paramount

as U.S. forces drawdown and reduce their numbers throughout Iraq.

Major Jeffrey Poquette is Task Force Wings' chief of operations in charge of synchronizing all brigade-level tactical operations, to include, intelligence, lethal and non-lethal fire support and effects, and all manned and unmanned flight operations. He provides situational awareness for the brigade commander of all aviation assets in USD-North. As a 10-year Veteran on his second combat deployment to Iraq and a UH-60 Black Hawk pilot, Maj. Poquette knows first-hand the value that the SWO team adds to aviation operations.

"Weather is one of our biggest threats, the thing that can place us in dangerous situations," explained Maj. Poquette, a native of Long Island, N.Y. "For that reason, the weather team's presence in our tactical operations

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rooms.

"We have new developments every day," said Mr. Hazim. "We meet every week to come up with new activities for the kids."

This is the first year a summer camp was offered to the children, and the Red Crescent is taking action to work with the Ministry of Education to implement this as a permanent program led by the Government of Iraq in the future.

"We [the Red Crescent] are a social organization, not an education organization," said Mr. Hazim. "We were chosen to organize it this year because of our reputation with other programs around Diyala."

A guest speaker visits the students each week to speak of their own personal experience in overcoming specific challenges to help foster a sense of optimism within these young children.

"Today they had a doctor come speak

to them who grew up as an orphan," said Lt. Col. Mitch Rambin, commander of 5/20 Inf. Regt., and a native of Shreveport, La. "This is a way to show them that even being an orphan, there is still a future for them."

According to Mr. Hazim, the future of this program, although uncertain, does look hopeful. So far they have received recognition for their curriculum from the Education Directorate of Diyala as well as Diyala University.

The Soldiers of 5/20 Inf., 3rd SBCT, 2nd ID played no role in establishing or running the camp, but assisted the Red Crescent by delivering gifts from another group of kids.

"The soccer balls and school supplies were sent to us from schools all across the United States," said Lt. Col. Rambin. "It's a way for kids back home to show their appreciation for the challenges these kids have had to go through

... being in a war torn country and losing parents to sectarian violence. It's not fair, no kid should ever have to go through that."

After the Soldiers delivered the gifts they took a guided tour of the facilities. Many children performed demonstrations to show what they've learned. A few of the Soldiers stated that the curriculum seemed more fun than summer camps they went to as children.

"If I was a kid growing up in Baqubah, I would definitely want to come here," exclaimed Capt. Brett Sim, of Buffalo, N.Y., and the fire support officer for 5/20 Inf. Regt.

The Summer Camp for Kids not only encourages children to be creative, learn new skills and participate in fun activities, it also enables young boys and girls to walk away with something they may have not had in their lives before - hope.

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center is absolutely invaluable.

"They provide their analysis to us and to our pilots in real-time. I can tell you as an aviator that having real-time access to weather information removes the concern that our pilots and air crews are receiving inaccurate or incomplete weather information, which can put them in dangerous situations."

According to Maj. Poquette, TF Wings' weather team is the best he has ever worked with. For Capt. Haas, her team's success is due to the high quality of her noncommissioned officers and junior Airmen.

Two of those Airmen are Master Sgt. Paul Rogers, weather forecaster and staff weather team noncommissioned officer in charge, 22nd EWXS, and Senior Airman Cassandra Napolitano-Romero, weather forecaster, 22nd EWXS. Both take pride in the value that they add to Army aviation

operations.

Master Sergeant Rogers, a native of Belleville, Ill., is a 20-year veteran on his third combat deployment, all in support of the 25th Combat Aviation Brigade. He recalled how weather first intrigued him as a young Airman.

"Early in my career, an officer showed me a clear picture of the sky and explained to me that while there appears to be nothing

happening, a dynamic existed beyond what I could see that was always changing the atmosphere. The 'unseen' and [the ability to] predict, with a good degree of accuracy, changes in the atmosphere instilled in me the desire to be a forecaster," he said. He has worked as a weather forecaster ever since.

"I especially love working tactical operations," he further explained. "There

are instances where I have been relied upon by a commander to identify a very brief window of opportunity in the weather for that unit to deliver resources to troops in need.

With weather operations you get those opportunities to help Soldiers in dire situations. That's when you know you add value. That's why I do this job."

Master Sergeant Rogers' love of his work is shared by Senior Airman Napolitano-Romero, a native of Lynchburg, Va., on her first combat deployment.

"I have never experienced job satisfaction like I have experienced it with [Task Force Wings]," said Senior Airman Napolitano-Romero.

"Out here, you know that the work you are doing is being relied upon by pilots and staff. You also know they appreciate that work and that you are making a difference every day. That's rewarding."



Photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Alberts, 25th CAB, 25th Inf. Div. PAO

**Air Force Master Sergeant Paul Rogers, weather forecaster and staff weather team NCOIC, 22nd EWS, supporting TF Wings, teaches Soldiers how to perform certain field weather checks and observations during training at COB Speicher, June 5.**

## Task Force Marne Heroes of the North



Sergeant Allan Matibag, of Manila, Philippines, is with 296th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division. He serves as a water purification specialist in the fuel and water platoon. He's continuously proven himself an asset to his unit, successfully completing numerous missions both related and unrelated to his trained duties. All but one of his five Soldiers are promotable, largely due to his preparation and leadership. His squad excels in all things, as evidenced by their Army Physical Fitness Test average of 255 points and his personal score of 295. Sergeant Matibag serves as a vehicle driver, gunner and a vehicle commander and completes three missions, totaling more than 300 miles each week. His missions are always accident free and his elements are always fully prepared for any contingency. Sergeant Matibag contributed to the Task Force Muleskinner's program by preparing the water equipment and providing the tasking brief for his station. His dedication to his Soldiers and the unit mission makes him most deserving of being selected as today's Task Force Marne Hero of the North.



Specialist Jeremy LaBoone, of Orangeburg, S.C., is with Troop A, 3rd Battalion, 7th Cavalry, 2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division. He currently serves as the gunner for his platoon sergeant, performing his duties flawlessly. Specialist LaBoone spends many hours teaching his fellow Soldiers and assisting them in maintaining their equipment and vehicles. He has shown his leaders and peers he is never too busy to help someone else. Specialist LaBoone's attitude has been contagious for his unit's Soldiers. Specialist LaBoone constantly volunteers to go on missions so other Soldiers may get a break and take care of personal matters. Specialist LaBoone has shown he is a true professional, whether it be on mission or conducting training with the 3rd Iraqi Army on Joint Service Station Al Kisik. He can always be counted on to take the hard right over the easy wrong and encourages others to do the same. His exemplary qualities make him deserving of being recognized as today's Task Force Marne Hero of the North.

## Independence Day Facts

- The Pennsylvania Evening Post was the first publication to publish the Declaration of Independence, July 6, 1776.
- The Massachusetts General Court became the first state legislature to recognize the Fourth of July as a state celebration, in 1781.
- The Bristol Fourth of July Parade in Bristol, R.I., is the oldest, continuous Independence Day celebration in the United States. It was started in 1785.
- The Fourth of July became an unpaid federal holiday in 1870. In 1938, it became a paid federal holiday.
- Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest in Coney Island, Brooklyn, New York, started as a way to settle a dispute among four immigrants as to who was the most patriotic, according to legend, in 1916. The event is held every July 4.
- Since 1959, the International Freedom Festival is jointly held in Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, during the last week of June each year as a mutual celebration of Independence Day and Canada Day, July 1. It culminates in a large fireworks display over the Detroit River.
- In 2009, New York City's Independence Day celebration exploded more than 22 tons of pyrotechnics.



## REGIONAL HEADLINES

### Washington organic farmer using 'beetle banks'

Seattle Times

CONNELL, Wash. - Organic farmer Brad Bailie is a believer in bugs. Strips of blooming plants in a maze of colors — from blue bachelor buttons to white yarrow — dot his 600-acre farm north of Connell.

They border fields of potatoes, onions, shallots, primitive heritage wheat varieties spelt and einkorn, and camelina.

In each strip, insects from wasps to flies and lady bugs search for plant-damaging insects or larvae to eat.

Next to one strip is a long patch with green timothy and orchard grass and fescue jutting out from tufts of dead grass — a "beetle bank" that provides yearround protection for ground beetles that dine on other insects and weed seeds.

Bailie is among a few row-crop and vegetable farmers in Washington and Oregon who have created habitat for beetle banks, which originated in England and have been widely used in New Zealand.

While the practice is not widespread in this country, researchers say beetle banks show promise as another tool in the growing sustainable-farming movement to control crop-damaging bug pests and weeds through integrated pest management.

That can include ecological and biological controls, such as the use

of such so-called beneficial insects as ground beetles, wasps, lacewings, parasitoid tachinid flies and damsel bugs.

Tree-fruit farmers have tapped biological controls for years. Researchers in the 1960s discovered a predatory mite that was effective in controlling mites, said Vince Jones, professor and entomologist at Washington State University's Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center.

Beetle banks, essentially berms of soil anchored by the roots of grasses, protect beetles from plows and other farm equipment and provide shelter to survive the winter.

The beetles will eat some weed seeds, said Rick Boydston, an agronomist with the USDA's Vegetable and Forage Crop Research Unit in Prosser, Benton County, who's involved with research on weed control through use of beneficial insects.

But scientists don't yet know specifics about beetle behavior and their exact diet. So last week in Bailie's fields, plastic cups marked by yellow flags were scattered at varying distances from the beetle bank by Terry Miller, an entomologist with Aggrobiotic Ecological Consulting of Moscow, Idaho.

"We're measuring how far some got out and what they're feeding on," Miller said.

Bailie, a WSU crop-sciences graduate, said he can't quantify yet how effective the beetle bank and

other beneficial insects have been on the land that's been in his family since 1915.

"I do know I have not had any serious pest outbreaks," he said.

### Gorilla attacks barrier at Zoo Atlanta, prompting evacuation

Atlanta Journal Constitution

ATLANTA - An upset gorilla rammed a glass barrier at Zoo Atlanta June 13, cracking it and prompting an evacuation of the viewing area.

"Gorillas often associate their veterinarians as the ones giving vaccinations and can react nervously — much like many people do with a visit to the doctor or dentist," Dr. Hayley Murphy, director of veterinary services, said in a written statement issued June 14.

The incident occurred at the Willie B. Conservation Center.

The exhibit includes a moat barrier with electric wire between the yard and the public.

Zoo patron Elaine Hudson said the gorilla was calmly eating orange slices one moment, then charging at the glass with his fists the next.

Officials from the zoo appeared quickly and ushered the 30 to 40 visitors out of the center, Hudson said. She and the others walked out calmly. Officials also stated that neither guests nor staff was in any danger.

However the zoo did not say when they would complete repairs and reopen the gorilla center.

### THE North Star

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