

The CONDOR



Official Magazine of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, Camp Taji, Iraq

May/June 2011



AVIATION OPERATIONS

*Operation New Dawn
40th CAB hits its stride*

FAMILY AFFAIR

Apache pilots share same DNA

FARP OPERATIONS

Pumpin' fuel for the CAB

KIOWA SCOUTS

*CAV pilots keep Iraqi roads
clear from the sky*

The CONDOR

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ISSUE #2

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Commander's letter



Col. Mitch Medigovich
40th Combat Aviation Brigade

April began with the awarding of Combat Patches to all of our Soldiers on the symbolic 40th day of the deployment. Less than a month later, these patches proved themselves well earned.

This month has been a time of challenge, growth and resolve. We awarded the Task Force's first Purple Heart to a Soldier hit by shrapnel while working on the airfield, and quite a few other Soldiers will likely be awarded for their exemplary performance in the face of enemy fire. It has been a somber reminder for all of us here that we are in a combat zone, and that there is still an enemy out there who wishes us harm.

Nonetheless, the response of our Soldiers has been outstanding. We are taking the fight to the enemy and continue to support our Iraqi partners in security operations.

Over the last few weeks, several high-level guests have visited us, providing an ever present reminder of the important work we are doing to support the fight throughout the Iraq Joint Operations Area (IJOA). Gen. Lloyd Austin, the Commanding General of U.S. Forces-Iraq (USF-I) and Lt. Gen Frank Helmick, the Deputy Commanding General for USF-I, both conducted command visits and recognized some of our Soldiers for the outstanding work they are doing.

We also had visitors from the Army Reserve, National Guard Bureau and Army Materiel Command who came from the States to offer their support.

In addition, our Brigade supported a number of Distinguished Visitor (DV) movements in theater. Both the Honorable Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense; and Adm. Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made stops in Iraq this month to meet with Iraqi leaders, U.S. military commanders and service members.

But perhaps the most anticipated DV was someone who holds no official position in our government or military: it was country

music singer Toby Keith, who spent a day and a half here at Camp Taji visiting with Soldiers and treating us to a very well received concert.

The Command Sergeant Major, the Chief Warrant Officer of the Brigade and I continue to circulate throughout Iraq every week. During our travels this month, we visited our Soldiers as far north as Mosul, and as far south as Tallil, as well as everywhere in between. That covers most of the populated regions of Iraq, which gives you an idea how much ground our Brigade is responsible for. Making these visits is vital to ensure that lessons learned at any of our posts can be passed on, enabling us to take full advantage of the diversity of experiences our Soldiers are having. Additionally, we always enjoy seeing and congratulating our Soldiers for the incredible work they are doing daily.

Spring has brought us generally pleasant weather, but temperatures have been steadily increasing, adding to the challenge of day-to-day operations. As the drawdown progresses and we continue to turn operations and equipment over to the Iraqi Security Forces and Government of Iraq, we will learn to do more with less.

We look forward to a continually changing operating environment. We are three months into our mission here and not quite halfway through our deployment. Though it hasn't been easy, every one of the Soldiers of Task Force Condor is more than up to the challenge, and I assure you that we are making a difference each and every day.

Mitch Medigovich
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CSM David McFerrin
40th Combat Aviation Brigade



Command Sgt. Maj.'s letter

We are now six months into the mobilization. As I said in last month's issue, traveling to visit our Soldiers is one of the better parts of my job. I have now visited each site in theater where our Soldiers are stationed, seeing for myself the awesome work they are accomplishing in both austere conditions and on the more developed bases.

Our Soldiers are performing the mission without missing a beat. Being one of the few fortunate enough to travel, I get the chance to say thanks and sometimes award them for their great work.

The heat of the summer is now upon us. It will be one of the challenges we will face as we head into the next few months. Be aware of the heat and be sure to hydrate, and keep an eye on your battle buddy when working outdoors. We haven't hit the full heat yet, which should range into the 120s and above.

Our Soldiers have worked through several challenges over the last month. Many have changed location to better meet the theater operational needs of the missions. They've increased and streamlined such areas as our maintenance capabilities on the aircraft, flying hour requirements, aircraft supply and ordering systems, and even how we report the status of aircraft as partially mission capable versus fully mission capable.

These were some of the major adjustments in how we do business. We thought we were doing quite well prior to the changes—we were, and since then the team has come together and we have gelled.

With more than 200 aircraft and 3,000 personnel it's a big and complicated team with many moving parts. Despite its size, complexity and our challenging mission, the system is working like a finely tuned machine. Batteries not included.

I don't have to remind a single member of Task Force Condor, including our families back home, how this team came together for the deployment. I'm sure the Soldiers are staying in touch with their loved ones through phone calls, e-mail and video chatting, informing those back home about the great work the Condors are doing during this important and historic deployment.

Just a reminder, Task Force Condor is quite possibly the largest aviation brigade ever deployed to Iraq, with eight subordinate battalions under its command. The Brigade was formed from units from 22 states, and from all three compositions of the Army—National Guard, Army Reserve and active duty Army—so we were bound to have some differences in how we do business, and possibly even friction. But with the right leadership at every level—from the private up to the commander—all bound and determined to perform the mission to the highest standards, and with the cooperation of all, we've met and we are surpassing expectations.

Every day that we don the Army uniform stands as a reminder that we are members of the greatest nation on Earth. Stay safe and God bless!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'David McFerrin'.

Condor 7





Story by Capt. Isaac Yancey
Photos by Spc. Daniel Flood



TEAM SCOUT

KIRKUK, Iraq – The actions taken by Kiowa Warrior pilots prevented a triggerman from detonating an improvised explosive device (IED) on a highway used by Americans and Iraqis.

Four pilots in two OH-58 Kiowa Warrior helicopters were conducting an aerial reconnaissance mission in northern Iraq on March 11 in conjunction with U.S. and Iraqi ground forces when they observed and engaged an IED emplacer along a major route frequently used by Iraqi civilians and U.S. forces.

The pilots were part of a Scout Weapons Team from the 6th Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment based out of Fort Wainwright, Alaska. The 6-17 CAV is attached to the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, which is deployed to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn.

Chief Warrant Officer Khristian Kitselman of Fairbanks, Alaska, and Chief Warrant Officer Cory Burggraaf, also of Fairbanks were conducting reconnaissance in the lead aircraft of the flight. The air mission commander, Chief Warrant Officer Abimael Hernandez of Fort Wainwright, and Platoon Leader 1st Lt. Brian Borkowski of Fairbanks, were in the second aircraft.

The Scout Weapons Team's primary mission is to ensure the safety and freedom of movement for Iraqi civilians along major Iraqi roadways.

Recently, terrorist attacks on U.S. forces have declined as Iraqi military and police forces have increased their numbers and

taken over security missions.

"We've shifted our focus from fighting a war to assisting the Iraqis as they protect civilians and infrastructure," Kitselman said. "Now that the Iraqis are protecting themselves, we contribute in a more indirect fashion. We try to make it easier for them to take care of themselves."

After receiving an initial report of hostile activity from the ground force commander, Kitselman and his team observed a suspicious male along a major Iraqi highway in the vicinity of Iraqi Security Forces and a small element of U.S. forces. Reconnaissance from the air in conjunction with U.S. ground forces confirmed the suspicious male was a triggerman for a nearby IED that endangered the lives of military forces and Iraqi civilians alike.

Once the Scout Weapons Team received positive identification on the target and clearance of fires, Kitselman maneuvered his aircraft to a safe position and engaged the triggerman.

"I decided to make my engagement from south to north to avoid any possibility of collateral damage along the route," Kitselman said.

Kitselman's initial volley of rockets was followed by an engagement by Hernandez with his .50 caliber machine gun.

The triggerman survived the engagement and was taken into custody. Further intelligence gathered by U.S. and Iraqi forces confirmed he was an IED cell leader from a nearby town responsible for supplying and

directing several previous IED attacks on both U.S. forces and Iraqi civilians.

"The actions taken by these four pilots are a direct contribution to ensuring a peaceful transition of authority for the security of Iraq from U.S. forces to Iraqi Security Forces," said Task Force Saber Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. Michael C. McCurry. "Their actions support the protection of Iraqi civilians in the northern provinces of the country."

"As a part of Task Force Saber, Alpha Troop, 6-17 CAV provides the primary Scout Weapons Team support for operations there to help bring peace and security to the region and enable the Government of Iraq's development into a stable and enduring strategic partner," McCurry said. ★





Chief Warrant Officer Khristian Kitselman (left) and Chief Warrant Officer Cory Burggraff, of Fairbanks, are OH-58 Kiowa Warrior pilots assigned to the 6th Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment from Fort Wainwright, Alaska.



Finding a Treasure

Story and photos by
SpC. Matthew Wright

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – With the discovery of thousands of helicopter parts, ranging from tires all the way up to transmissions and rotary blades, the technical supply section of the 640th Aviation Support Battalion has identified and inventoried millions of dollars worth of unused parts, returning them to the supply system for use.

After eight years of war, numerous units and massive amounts of military hardware have cycled through Iraq. With preparations underway for the combat theater to close down in December, the 640th ASB is playing a critical role in tracking and moving tons of Army aviation hardware out of the country.

More than \$10 million in unused and unaccounted for parts have been processed since the 640th ASB arrived in country a little over two months ago, some of those parts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars apiece, said Maj. Jeremy Johnson, the support operations officer for the 640th ASB, and a native of Brea, Calif. Parts have been found in cardboard boxes and in storage containers, primarily on Camp Taji's airfield, Johnson said.

The 640th is a California Army National Guard aviation support battalion from Los

Alamitos, Calif. It is attached to the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB), which is deployed to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn. One of the battalion's missions is maintaining the CAB's helicopters to keep them flying.

On March 7, the 640th ASB took over the support mission in Iraq from the 601st Aviation Support Battalion. The 640th is currently the only aviation support battalion operating in theater.

Over the past month and a half, the technical supply section of the 640th's Bravo Company, led by Staff Sgt. Adan Reyes of Apple Valley, Calif., inventoried parts that have been recovered from storage containers at Camp Taji. Reyes had the equipment transported to his warehouse and organized what his unit could use, and sent the rest of the equipment to Kuwait or the United States to be used by other units in the future.

"We had it all trucked over to a consolidated location and we inventoried the lion's share of it," Johnson said. "The things that we could use, we went ahead and pulled out and put on our shelves."

Reyes and his staff took time out of their already busy work schedule and logged the equipment back into the Army's supply system, Johnson said.



SpC. John Millan helped inventory parts that were discovered.



Staff Sgt. Adan Reyes receives a coin from Maj. Gen. Harold G. Bunch, for his work in locating and inventorying helicopter parts.

"We started off with six Soldiers—three during the day and three during the night," said SpC. John Millan, of Los Angeles, a technical specialist with Bravo Company. "With soldiers on R and R (rest and recuperation leave) and on reset (days off) days, we borrowed some staff from Alpha Company, so we probably had around 10 people for both shifts."

"We found Chinook transmissions," Johnson said. "The cheap ones are \$650,000." Chinook engines were also found, which cost about \$800,000 or more a piece, he estimated.

During a visit to Camp Taji on April 26, Maj. Gen. Harold G. Bunch, Assistant Deputy Commanding General for Reserve Affairs, Army Materiel Command out of Fort Belvoir, Va., presented Reyes with a coin in recognition of his commitment to the general's motto, "Accountability, Visibility and Velocity."

With the parts found at Camp Taji logged and inventoried, the next job is to recover parts throughout Iraq. Parts are already arriving from other bases.

Plans are being made to search for even more caches of parts, Johnson said. There is still more equipment worth millions to be shipped and processed by the 640th's tech supply staff, he said. ★



A Family That Plays Together, Stays Together

Story by 1st Lt. Jason Sweeney, Photos by Spc. Matthew Wright

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Having an AH-64 Apache attack helicopter pilot as your dad is pretty cool. Even cooler is being an Apache pilot and having two of your children follow in your footsteps to become pilots, too.

"Without a doubt, I'm the proudest man on Earth," said Capt. Dennis McNamara, an AH-64 Apache Longbow attack helicopter pilot for the 8th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 229th Aviation Regiment, an Army Reserve unit based at Fort Knox, Ky.

Capt. Dennis McNamara is currently stationed at Camp Taji, Iraq where he flies Apaches alongside his daughter, Capt. Elizabeth McNamara, 28, and his son, Chief Warrant Officer Brendon McNamara, 24.

The AH-64 Apache is a mean machine, heavily armed with Hellfire missiles, 2.75-inch rockets and a 30-millimeter M230 Chain Gun. The aircraft is a for-

midable force in the skies of Iraq, performing such tasks as reconnaissance, convoy protection and air support for ground units.

The 8-229 ARB Flying Tigers and its Apaches are currently attached to the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, which is on a yearlong deployment to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn. The brigade is performing full-spectrum aviation operations in the country, and the 8-229 is its attack arm.

Capt. Dennis McNamara served 12 years in the active-duty Army before taking a full-time position at Fort Knox with the 8-229. After 11 years with the unit, he moved to California to take a job with the Boeing Corporation, while switching over to a Reserve unit based out of Los Alamitos, Calif.

Dennis was at home in Helendale, Calif. when he learned that his son and daughter were deploying



to Iraq with his old unit.

"I couldn't see both my children deploying and leaving me at home," he said. He called the unit's commander, Lt. Col. James Posey, and asked to rejoin the 8-229 for the deployment.

"Dennis McNamara and I have worked together for several years, so I considered it an honor to have his children serving in my command, and I welcomed his return to the unit," Posey said. "When the chance presented itself for him to deploy with us, I was a little concerned with having over half the family in my unit, in a combat zone, and all flying the same aircraft! We quickly decided they could not fly together while here, but at least they could all serve in the same area together."

Capt. Dennis McNamara has been flying Apaches for over 20 years now. He served in Operation Desert Storm and in Operation Iraqi Freedom. But for his two kids, this deployment was their first.

Elizabeth and Brendon, who both call Louisville, Ky. home, said having their father with them has its advantages, giving them an extra "support element" while here.

Elizabeth is a platoon leader in her battalion. She said her father knows a thing or two about leadership. Her father had been a warrant officer in the 8-229 when he was made a company commander due to a vacancy. He did such a good job of it that at age 44 he was offered a direct commission and became a 2nd lieutenant right at the time Elizabeth was completing ROTC at the University of Kentucky.

With Elizabeth now in a command position, her father offers her advice and gives her critiques on her leadership style. They often talk while eating together at the dining facility or while hanging out when off duty.

Brendon, as a warrant officer, is an aviation technical expert and he and his father often discuss tactics. His father is serving as an instructor pilot for the unit so talking about

flying comes with the territory. Their containerized housing units (CHUs) are close to each other and they often hit the gym together, so despite being on different schedules, there are plenty of chances for Brendon to talk to Dad, not to mention salute him, and his big sister, too.

Army Brats

Capt. Dennis McNamara said his children were "Army brats" who spent much of their childhoods around airfields, aircraft and helicopter pilots.

"Elizabeth, at four years old, told me that she would fly Apaches when she grew up," he said. "At the time, women weren't allowed to fly Apaches, so I encouraged her but didn't really think that would happen. Most four year olds don't pick their career. But she stuck with it and here we are."

Elizabeth said some of her earliest memories are of Apaches and the

// At the time, women weren't allowed to fly Apaches, so I encouraged her but didn't really think that would happen. Most four year olds don't pick their career. //

pilots who fly them. "I remember going out to the airfield, guys playing volleyball, watching the parties at the gazebos. I knew for a long time that I was going to join the Army, but the one thing I wanted to do with it was fly attack helicopters. If we were going to go to



combat, I wanted to be the one in the sky with the gun."

Brendon, on the other hand, didn't know until his late teens that the Army was for him. Shortly after graduating from high school, he sat down with his father and they discussed his future. After some fatherly advice, Brendon decided to enlist in the Army Reserves, and became an Apache crew chief. He did that for a few years before he submitted a flight packet and was accepted into flight school at Fort Rucker, Ala. He completed flight training in September just in time to make it onto the deployment to Iraq.

What does he like about flying the Apache? "It's nice having big guns in the sky," he said.

Brendon said many find it amusing to have a father, daughter and son in the same unit, but he said he feels lucky to have family here to fall back on.

In the Blood

Brendon McNamara was born at Fort Rucker so in a sense he was born to fly. As for Elizabeth, not only is she a pilot from a family of pilots, she married a pilot, too.

"My dad always told me to stay away from Apache pilots," she said. But she didn't listen to that bit of advice and married Capt. Brian Schlesier, who is currently flying Apaches in Afghanistan.

Elizabeth said she doesn't think it's that big a deal to be deployed with family members. "The 8-229 is like a big family, anyway," she said.

All three said the real story about their deployment is wife and mom Cindy back home. "My wife



// We have the fun of flying. I tease her all the time because she used to complain that I would deploy and leave her with all the kids, so now I say I took the kids with me. //



is the one who has all the stress," Dennis said. "We have the fun of flying. I tease her all the time because she used to complain that I would deploy and leave her with all the kids, so now I say I took the kids with me."

For Dad, nearing the end of his Army career and getting the chance to deploy with his children, has been a great privilege. "I can't stop being a father, but I try to be a mentor and give advice. But sometimes as a father, you have to step back and it's hard. I'm definitely honored that they followed me into this so I'm conscious of always trying to set the right example. ... I have tremendous faith in both of them. They are very good at what they do. They are very professional and they get the job done."

Posey agrees. "They are top notch Soldiers," he said. "Runs in the family." ★

READY FOR TOP-OFF

Story and Photos by
Spc. Darriel Swatts



Cpl. Jose Valencia prepares to refuel an Iraqi Bell 407 helicopter.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – One thing the pilots of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade don't have to worry about when executing a plan is fuel, thanks to the Soldiers who operate Camp Taji's Forward Arming and Refueling Point (FARP).

"We are like the NASCAR pit crew of aviation," said 1st Lt. Marcellus Richardson, FARP officer in charge, and a native of Los Angeles. "Pilots fly in for a quick pit stop and we fuel them, arm them, and send them on their way."

Pilots are able to fly into the FARP at any time to receive fuel. The FARP is run by Soldiers of the 640th Aviation Support Battalion, from Los Alamitos, Calif. who are deployed to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn.

"We run 24-hour operations here," said Richardson. "So far on this deployment I have overseen (the pumping of) more than 200,000 gallons of fuel into more than 1,500 aircraft."

On an average day, the FARP pumps more than 7,000 gallons of jet fuel and up to 40,000 gallons a week, said Spc. Susana



Lopez, a resident of San Jose, Calif. and fuel accountant at the FARP.

"When we fuel the aircraft, we've got to do it fast," said Sgt. Michael Hamlett, an aircraft refueler from El Cajon, Calif. "The pilots have a mission to do, so we get them out as quickly and safely as possible."

When dealing with helicopters, safety is of the utmost of importance, commented Staff Sgt. Maritza Marquez, non-commissioned officer in charge of the FARP.

"The Soldiers here take their job very seriously," said Marquez, who is from Riverside, Calif. "They love what they do and it shows in their work. They're safe, fast, professional and get the job done." ★



Pfc. John Martin adjusts a fuel line after refueling a HH-60M Black Hawk.



Sgt. Jerry James gives a hand signal to the fuel pump operator to start the flow of JP-8 to a UH-60 Black Hawk .

LIFE

Story and Photos by Spc. Darriel Swatts

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – “MEDEVAC, MEDEVAC, MEDEVAC!”

It's a cry for medical assistance that is enough to make even the most combat-hardened Soldiers cringe when they hear it cross the radio waves. For the Soldiers of Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 126th Aviation Regiment (Air Ambulance), Army National Guard, the call starts a race to respond in 15 minutes or less.

The 3-126 is attached to the Georgia National Guard's 1st General Support Aviation Battalion, 171st Aviation Regiment, which falls under the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade.

Charlie Company, based out of both Westfield, Mass. and Burlington, Vt., is deployed to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn. The company has a big role to play in Iraq, providing medical evacuation (medevac) services to all troops on the ground. For medical emergencies, its aircraft must be in the air and on the way within 15 minutes.

“Even though the Army standard for being ‘wheels up’ is 15 minutes for a medical emergency,” said Staff Sgt. Richard Flach, 4th Platoon, Charlie Company, 3-126th Aviation, “we beat that with an average between 7-8 minutes during the day, with our best time being around four minutes, and at night we average just less than 10 minutes, because each minute we shave off our response time is a minute gained for the patient.”

The medevac crew operates and lives slightly differently from your traditional unit.

“We typically live and work in the same area as our aircraft because we can get called anytime in a 24-hour period to respond to a medical emergency,” said Maj. Robert Anderson, commander of Charlie Company. “If we get called in the middle of the night, it is much easier for us to respond quickly if we live nearby than it would be if we lived with everybody else; where our people would have to run to the office causing us to possibly miss our 15 minute window.”

Because the Soldiers of the medevac crew live and operate in such close quarters, unit cohesiveness is imperative, said 1st Sgt. Kris Sample, Charlie Company.



SAVERS



"Our unit operates like a family, a very close knit family," Sample said. "We have our moments when the stress is high and we get cranky with each other; but, like any family, we are always there for each other when we need one another, and we love to have fun together whenever possible."

When the 3-126th responds to a medical emergency, for them, it's like treating an extended family member.

"We are all brothers and sisters in arms," said Sgt. Cassandra Kennedy, flight medic for 4th Platoon, Charlie Company, 3-126th Aviation. "When I have to treat a Soldier that has been injured in whatever type of incident, I treat them as I would my own family; with the best care that I can possibly provide."

Kennedy said the care and treatment the flight medics are able to provide while in transit to the nearest treatment facility is far superior to what it used to be.

"We used to go by the 'Golden Hour' rule, where you had one hour to effectively save a person's life, limb, or eyesight," Kennedy said. "Now it is pushed in upwards of two hours because we are able to provide better care and treatment to the patient. But we always strive to make it within that Golden Hour."

To get the patient to a treatment facility inside the Golden Hour timeframe, the pilots must be able to make it from their base to the patient and to the treatment facility in an expeditious manner.

"Once I hear 'Medevac, medevac, medevac!' come over the radio, I drop whatever I am doing, gear up and head out to the aircraft to start her up," said Capt. Joseph Strassner, medical evacuation pilot for 4th Platoon, Charlie Company. "Once everybody is on board and ready to go, I'll fly to either an HLZ (helicopter landing zone) or POI (point of injury) to pick up the patient. As soon as the patient is secured in the helicopter, we're off to the best treatment facility for the wounds the patient has suffered. After that, we fly back to base. Mission complete."★





Third, Time's the Charm

Story and Photos by Capt. R.L. "Ed" Edwards

// Back then there was almost no electricity in Iraq. We would land next to a HEMTT, fill up the bird and take off again. When we got tired, we would stop, sleep in the dirt, get up and do it again. //

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, Iraq – You can see the twinkle in his eye as he sits down. Chief Warrant Officer Wayne Wade—father, husband and pilot—would rather spend this interview talking about his 18-month-old twins, Ross and Sydney; or his wife Samantha, and how he

is going on two weeks of rest and recuperation leave tomorrow.

When asked what he has planned, his simple answer, "I'm going back to Fulton, Miss., spending time with my wife and kids. I think we are getting a family portrait done, but that is it."

Chief Wade is a soft-spoken man, but don't let that fool you. He is a true Citizen Sol-

dier, and on his third tour to Iraq—this time with the Mississippi National Guard's 1st Assault Helicopter Battalion, 185th Aviation Regiment. The battalion is attached to the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, which is deployed to Iraq in 2011 in support of Operation New Dawn.

The interesting thing is that Wade has flown a different type of helicopter on each of his tours. On his first tour of duty, he flew OH-58 Kiowa, Warrior scout helicopters. He then moved over to AH-64 Apache attack helicopters. Now he finds himself flying UH-60 Black Hawk utility helicopters.

Wade first enlisted in the Army Reserve in 1987, spending five years as a crew member and crewchief onboard UH-1s (Hueys). This was enough to start him down "the road to ruin" to becoming an accomplished helicopter pilot, he said.

He flew as a UH-1 medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) pilot while in the Reserve in Mississippi, followed by specialized

training on the OH-58. After moving from the Reserve to the Mississippi National Guard, he was cross-trained on the AH-64 Apache.

Chief Wade finished his training on Apaches just in time for the buildup before the start of the Iraq invasion in 2003. Of course, the needs of the Army being what they are, the Army saw he was an Apache pilot and said, "That's nice. You are going to be an individual augmentee with 3rd Infantry Division flying 58s," Wade explained.

Spending 10 months boots on the ground and in the air as a scout for tanks, Wade said that experience was very different from today. "Back then there was almost no electricity in Iraq. We would land next to a HEMTT (heavy expanded mobility tactical truck), fill up the bird and take off again. When we got tired, we would stop, sleep in the dirt, get up and do it again."

Wade said he was part of the invasion all the way to Baghdad. "I looked at one of my journals from that time a while back and saw that it was several weeks into flying missions before there was an entry of, 'Didn't get shot at today.'"

In 2006, he was deployed as an Apache pilot with the 36th Combat Aviation Brigade at the height of the surge. His flight company was based in Balad, but as a core asset they were moved around a lot. Wade said he worked everywhere, from Contingency Operating Base (COB) Speicher and south.

He also spent some time in Basra supporting the British. "In 06-07, there were aircraft and people everywhere. There were so many

aircraft in the air, you had to be careful that you didn't run into each other."

Following his second tour of duty, Wade attended the Black Hawk transition course at Fort Rucker, Ala., eventually becoming an instructor pilot at a flight facility in Tupelo, Miss.

He flew a civilian Life Flight helicopter ambulance for a while out of Oxford, Miss., "but I decided that with the little ones on the way, the Army made better sense for us as a family," he said.

This third tour has been spent at the controls of a Black Hawk utility helicopter. As a senior aviator with more than 3,400 hours, Wade likes the fact that Black Hawks are being used to move assets

around the country, instead of ground convoys.

Chief Wade became reflective when asked the differences between now and the beginning of the Iraq War. "Now it seems that there is really a much greater sense of normalcy throughout the entire country. The people in the country seem to be moving forward. Now it seems like the land is lush and there is farming, whereas before when there was no electricity, all of the irrigation was gravity-fed and there was a lot less farming going on."

Spoken like a true Mississippi native, most of our observations are based on farming and one's ability to grow things. ★

// There were so many aircraft in the air, you had to be careful that you didn't run into each other. //



TASK FORCE LONG- KNIFE

Story
and
Photos
by
Spc.
Darriel
Swatts



JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq – The Soldiers of the 1st Assault Helicopter Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment based out of Los Alamitos, Calif. are nearing the end of a busy, yearlong deployment to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn.

The approximately 350 Soldiers of the 1-140 AHB, are in the final stretch of their tour in Iraq and are gearing up to head home mid-summer.

"Each and every one of my Soldiers, I'm proud of them," said Troy Eck, the command sergeant major for the 1-140, and a native of Mentone, Calif. "They are all Citizen Soldiers from all walks of life and all different backgrounds, coming together as a task force and completing the mission."

The battalion is part of the California Army National Guard, and is known as Task Force Long Knife. It falls under the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB). Most of the battalion's Soldiers are from California, augmented by a company from the Alaska National Guard's 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment.

The Soldiers of the 1-140 arrived in Iraq late October of 2010. The unit controls about 30 UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters and about 20 fixed wing aircraft. Its Soldiers have been



tasked to fly the command staff of United States Forces-Iraq, operate two Forward Arming and Refueling Points and provide direct support to the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force, as well as other tasks. The battalion performs its mission while operating from three bases from Baghdad to as far north as Mosul.

One company in the battalion is responsible for flying distinguished visitors who have visited the country over the last year, including Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullen and Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, among others.

"As soon as we arrived in country we hit the ground running," said Maj. Jeff Sibley, operations officer for the 1-140, and a native of San Clemente, Calif. "It was a seamless transition between us and our predecessors and we often get compliments from outside sources praising us for how well we operate."

When the 1-140th first came into theater, it fell under the command of the active duty Army's 1st Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB, 1st Infantry Division), out of Ft. Riley, Kan. About halfway through the 1-140th's deployment, the 1st CAB returned home and the battalion fell under the 40th CAB, which is headquartered in Fresno, Calif. not far from the 1-140th's home in



Los Alamitos.

"Having the 40th CAB come in and take the reins was a nice familiarity," said Sibley. "We already knew them from back home and we already have such a rich history of working together. It was a great morale boost."

Despite having to shift gears mid-deployment with the introduction of a new command group, the 1-140th hasn't missed a beat in their operations.

"The Soldiers of this task force have been absolutely phenomenal in getting this mission done," said Lt. Col. Jeffery Holliday, battalion commander for the 1-140th, and a Milpitas, Calif. native. "They are working extremely long hours, often 12 to 14 hours a day, and they come back and do it the next day with the same great mindset of getting the mission done."

"My Soldiers give it their all," said Sgt. 1st Class Shawn Winstead, maintenance platoon sergeant for Echo Company, 1-140th, and a Canyon Lake, Calif. native. "We support a larger element than we are designed to take care of. We're taking care of more than a battalion; we take care of an entire task force and we're extremely proficient at it."

The pilots of the 1-140th are knocking

on the door of 20,000 hours of total flight time during the mobilization and are averaging more than 2,000 hours of flight time a month. And, with this amount of flying, keeping the helicopters in the air requires plenty of fuel.

"So far we have distributed more than 2 million gallons of fuel," said 1st Lt. Jacob White, distribution platoon leader for Echo Co., 1-140th, and a Fresno, Calif. native. "And since the pilots' missions happen at all time of the day and night, my Soldiers sustain 24-hour operations and are always ready to accomplish the mission. These Soldiers are some of the best people I've ever worked with."

With all the Soldiers of the 1-140th working seamlessly together, they have never dropped a mission since they arrived in theater, Holliday said.

"These Soldiers have taken the National Guard mentality of one weekend a month, two weeks a year and have turned it into a full-time job," said Eck. "They have rocked the entire time we have been mobilized, and now that we are nearing the completion of our mission, I know for a fact that all of our Soldiers can't wait to get home and be with the ones they love." ★





KEEPING IT SAFE

Story and Photos by Spc. Matthew Wright

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – The maintenance test pilots of the 640th Aviation Support Battalion thoroughly check the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade's helicopters after maintenance has been performed, ensuring that the aircraft are airworthy and safe to fly in the skies of Iraq.

"Our mantra is: It is broken," said Chief Warrant Officer David Clark of Bravo Company, 640th ASB, and a native of Fresno, Calif. "We want it (the helicopter) to break on our flight, not on a real mission."

The 640th ASB from Los Alamitos, Calif. is a National Guard unit that falls under the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB), which is on a yearlong deployment in Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn.

The 640th is tasked to support more than 200 helicopters in theater that belong to seven battalions in the CAB. Its test pilots work long hours, striving to ensure that the brigade's helicopters will return to base safely after each mission.

Chief Warrant Officer Bill Vanek, a Helena, Mont.

native, experienced an engine failure during a test flying mission during pre-mobilization training at Fort Hood, Texas. As he flew a UH-60 Black Hawk on a test flight, he pulled back on the throttle during a maximum power check on the engine, and suddenly the engine died. With quick thinking, he restarted the engine still in flight and was able to continue his mission. The experience is not common, but comes with the territory, he said.

Flying test flights isn't the only thing that the test



Chief Warrant Officer David Clark performs a maximum engine throttle test on a UH-60 Black Hawk.

Chief Warrant Officer Bill Vanek performs a system check on a UH-60 Black Hawk.



pilots do. They get involved when maintenance or repairs being done on the aircraft are near complete. The test pilots review the repairs that the mechanics have made by following a step-by-step process.

"We look at all the entries made by the mechanics," said Chief Warrant Officer Andrew Gaudette from Bravo Company, 640th ASB, and a Canterbury, Conn. native. "We verify that TI's (technical inspectors) have looked at all the work" and have signed off on all of it, he explained.

After that, the pilots inspect the helicopter before taking it up for a flight.

"We do a preflight (check)," Gaudette said, "which is a lot more in-depth than an average pilot's preflight."

A normal preflight check before a mission takes about 20 minutes, but for test pilots, they go over every section of the helicopter, inside and outside, for up to an hour or more.

Once the preflight check is done, the test pilots perform engine and electrical systems checks and look for any possible malfunctions. They turn on and off the sys-

tems to ensure that they are working properly, Vanek said.

Finally, when all the checks are done, the pilot takes the helicopter up for a flight. The pilots run through a detailed checklist while in flight, checking the rotors, the engines and the controls to make sure that the helicopter is performing up to standard.

When a test pilot takes responsibility for an aircraft, the whole process of getting it through the test flight process can take some time. "From start to finish, if things are moving along relatively smoothly, it takes about two days," said Gaudette.

The test pilots are ensuring readiness of each helicopter. "Maintenance test pilots are the ones who certify the airworthiness of each aircraft," Clark said.

The test pilots of the 640th explained that they always want to be as accurate in their work as possible. They do the paperwork and take the risks in the air so that the helicopter pilots of the 40th CAB can fly their missions with confidence that they are going to make it back to base safely. ★

A Soldier's Legacy

Story and Photos by Spc. Darriel Swatts

VICTORY BASE COMPLEX, Iraq – Soldiers from the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, (CAB) stationed at Camp Taji, Iraq, were rewarded for their hard work with a guided tour of historic sites on Victory Base Complex (VBC), the Baghdad headquarters of U.S. Forces-Iraq (USF-I).

"We were trying to find a way to recognize the Soldiers for all of their hard work," said 2nd Lt. Sarah Cooley, 40th CAB adjutant and a resident of San Luis Obispo, Calif. "All too often, Soldiers who come to Iraq never get to see anything outside of their office, so we figured this would be a good way to reward them and let them see a little bit of the history of the war, too."

Once the plans to reward the troops were set, the decision on who to send was left up to the Soldiers' command, said Lt. Col. Raymond Watts, a native of San Jose, Calif. and the 40th CAB liaison officer to USF-I.

Eighteen Soldiers were selected for the trip. They woke up early the morning of May 4 and loaded up onto two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters. For many, it was their first time leaving Camp Taji since arriving in February.

"I haven't had the chance to leave the base and actually see what Iraq looks like because I arrived at Taji at night," said Pfc. Rolando Zapata, an aviation operations specialist for the 40th CAB from Sacramento, Calif. "I enjoyed the flight a lot. We were lucky enough to fly with the doors open on a clear day. I could see for miles all around."

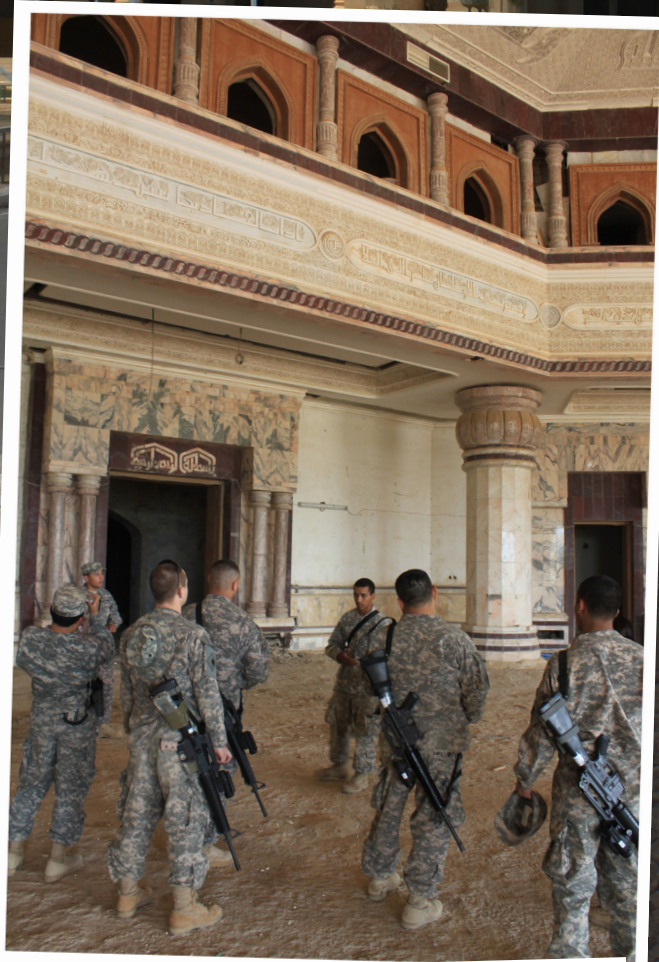
Upon arriving at VBC, the Soldiers were bused to Saddam Hussein's Victory over America Palace where they were given a guided tour by USF-I personnel. The palace was still under construction when it was hit by a bomb in the opening stages of the war.

"It was awesome to see where the bomb hit the building," said Zapata. "The tour guide was very knowledgeable, and walked us all around the building explaining everything as we went along."

They next toured the Ba'ath Party House where Saddam is known to have murdered people, sometimes allegedly for his amusement. Also on the tour was the largest palace on VBC, the Al-Faw Palace, which Sad-



Pvt. Claudia Marquez stands in a room inside Saddam Hussein's "Victory Over America" palace.



Soldiers from the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade take a tour of Saddam Hussein's "Victory Over America" palace.

dam intended to use as a site for major meetings with foreign delegates after its completion in 2000. It was taken over by American forces in April 2003.

"When I walked into the Ba'ath Party House, I got shivers down my spine," said Sgt. Maria Rosario Chua, brigade paralegal noncommissioned officer in charge for the 40th CAB, and a native of Hacienda Heights, Calif. "Just being in a place like that, where so many innocent people were killed by Saddam and his people... It just feels weird."

"When we toured Saddam's palace (Al-Faw Palace) I was in awe with all the attention to detail in the stonework," said Spc. Alfonso Contreras, air mission request processor for the 40th CAB, and a native of Fresno, Calif. "There was marble everywhere."

With the trial run of the 40th CAB reward program being a success, it is hoped that a trip like this will happen every quarter for those Soldiers who stand out due to their hard work and dedication, said Cooley.

"My favorite part of the whole experience was getting to spend the day with my fellow 40th CAB Soldiers," said Watts. "Having them here and getting to share in this experience with them, it makes me happy to see them happy."

The 40th CAB is a National Guard aviation brigade, with attached Army Reserve and active-duty Army units. With more than 3,000 personnel and 250 aircraft, the brigade is providing full-spectrum aviation operations in Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn. ★



Spc. Andrew Goodall takes a picture of the impact site where a JDAM (Joint Direct Attack Munition) hit Saddam Hussein's "Victory Over America" palace.



Spc. Andrew Goodall, Spc. Ryan Stevens and Spc. Andrew Gaspar pose for a picture prior to starting their tour.





Spc. Adrian Baek, command team driver for the 640th Aviation Support Battalion.



Spc. Marcos Verduzco, supply specialist for HHC, 40th Combat Aviation Brigade.



Spc. Lowelly Santos, Apache mechanic for the 8-229th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Soldiers of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade are adding a little color to the monochromatic landscape of Camp Taji, Iraq.

"It's nice to be able to add some color and personality out here," said Spc. Melody MacMurray, an administrative assistant for the 40th CAB's 640th Aviation Support Battalion. "It helps make you feel better about everything when everything is not of the same color."

Soldiers from the various units that make up the CAB are not only identifying who they are as a unit through art, but are adding a little personality to their work space as well.

"The unit logo I'm painting right now is definitely unique," said Spc. Michael Kelley, flight medic for 4th Platoon, Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 126th Aviation Regiment (Air Ambulance), 40th CAB. "I created the design originally for our unit t-shirt, and since ev-

erybody liked it so much, we decided to paint it, making it our unit logo while we're here."

Some of the artists in the 40th CAB have professional experience to offer, making them stand out amongst others when being chosen to do their unit's artwork.

"Back home I work for Sony Pictures as a concept artist and an assistant art director," said Spc. Adriano Baek, command team driver for the 640th ASB. Baek worked on the drawings of Dr. Otto Octavius' mechanical arms for the movie "Spiderman 2."

Others just enjoy doing it because it reminds them a little bit of their family back home.

"I've been doing artwork as far back as I can remember," said Spc. Glen Agcaoili, Apache crew chief for Bravo Company, 8th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 229th Aviation Regiment. "I was originally inspired by my grandfather, who was also an artist."

The artists said their paintings and murals that are scattered around Camp Taji are having an effect.

"It's nice to see how having these paintings up helps boost morale amongst the soldiers," said Staff Sgt. Josua Glover, future operations and plans non-commissioned officer.

Whether it's for unit, personal or professional satisfaction, the artists within the 40th CAB are adding color and personality to Camp Taji. ★

Bringing

Story and Photos by Spc. D.



Spc. Melody MacMurray, administrative assistant for the 640th Aviation Support Battalion.

ing the ART

Darriel Swatts

Spc. Glen Agcaoili, Apache crew chief for Bravo Company, 8-229th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion.



Spc. Michael Kelley, flight medic for 4th Platoon, Charlie Company, 3-126th Aviation (Air Ambulance).



Staff Sgt. Josua Glover, Future Operations and Plans NCO for HHC, 40th Combat Aviation Brigade.



JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq – When thinking about Army aviation, green-suiters flying helicopters usually come to mind. However, the Army National Guard's 40th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB), currently deployed to Iraq, has its share of fixed-wing aircraft, operated by crews from almost every branch of the U.S. military.

About 20 fixed-wing airplanes are attached to the 40th CAB's 1st Assault Helicopter Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment. The Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and Marines who fly these aircraft are said to be in a "purple unit" because of the mixture of their uniform colors.

The active-duty Army's F Company, 52nd Aviation Regiment, based out of Weisenbaden, Germany, fly the brigade's C-12 Huron airplanes and UC-35 Citation jets.

"This is one of the few units where you have a full complement of all the services, except the Coast Guard," said Navy Lt. Cmdr. Stephen Bird. Bird, from Charlotte, N.C., is a C-12 plane commander.

"We have Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine pilots flying together, oftentimes in the same cockpit," Bird said. "It's been a great experience."

Also controlling fixed-wing assets for the 40th CAB is the Army National Guard's A Company, 641st Aviation Regiment, from Portland, Ore. The unit flies the C-23 Sherpa airplane, nicknamed the flying boxcar. The Sherpa is used to transport troops and equipment throughout the combat theater.

A detachment from the Army Reserve's 2nd Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment, Detachment 48, from Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., commands the operations cell for the brigade's fixed-wing aircraft.

Unit cohesion is an important factor in any unit, but it is paramount in multiservice, or "purple" units, explained Maj. Braddley Parsons, from Meridian, Miss., and a UC-35 Marine Corps pilot for F Company.

"The integration of the four branches of service is phenomenal," said Army Chief Warrant Officer Daniel Kelley, of West Jordan, Utah, and an F Company pilot of UC-35 jets and C-12 airplanes. "The camaraderie and the joking back and forth between the services is great."

Each unit has their own unique role: F Company is in charge of transporting United States Forces– Iraq (USF-I) command staff and distinguished visitors; members of the 2-228th detachment are in charge of receiving, assigning and tracking the missions; A Company is in charge of transporting personnel and supplies around the country and providing direct support to special forces units from the Combined Joint Special Forces Command, explained Army Reserve Lt. Col. William Maguire, from Jackson, N.J., and the commander of the 2-228th detachment.

"In the past four months we have moved more than 2,900 passengers and more than 828,000 pounds of equipment," said Army National Guard Capt. Adam McCarthy, from Salem, Ore., commander of A Company.

"I hope we get to work with the other service branches more often, further down the road," said Parsons. "It has been a great learning experience and it should be done more often." ★



C-12 Huron

Their wings are purple

Story & photos
by Spc. Darriel Swatts



C-23B Sherpa



UC-35 Citation

Maj. Braddley Parsons, USMC, and Chief Warrant Officer Daniel Kelley, Army.



editor's letter



1st Lt. Jason Sweeney
Editor-in-Chief
The CONDOR Magazine

It's been one of those months that many of us with Task Force Condor will always remember.

On May 2, we awoke to the news that Osama bin Laden had been shot and killed by the Navy SEALs, marking the end of an era and hopefully a new beginning.

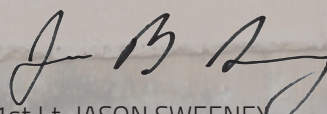
For myself, and I know for quite a few others on this deployment, Osama bin Laden and the attacks on our nation on Sept. 11, 2001 are why we signed up for military service and why we are here today.

Two nights after we heard the news, Camp Taji was hit with a major indirect fire attack, reminding us that although the United States had just scored an important victory in the battle against extremism, the fight continues and the mission goes on.

In the month of May, the Soldiers of the Task Force Condor have been working hard doing their jobs keeping those helicopters in the air. We here in the Public Affairs Office have been doing our best to tell your stories.

This month, we had the privilege of meeting and spending some time with the remarkable McNamara family from the 8-229 Attack Reconnaissance Battalion. Father, daughter and son are all high-speed Apache attack helicopter pilots serving their country together while flying some pretty cool aircraft. We also had the chance to bring you stories from our Soldiers from across the combat theater—from Contingency Operating Base Speicher to Forward Operating Base Warrior to Joint Base Balad to the Victory Base Complex.

The summer months are approaching and we're definitely feeling the heat of that blazing Middle Eastern sun. The mission has hit full stride. We know there are plenty of stories out there that need to be told. If you've got a story about your Soldiers or your unit that you want told, we here in the 40th CAB Public Affairs Office want to hear from you. Drop us a line.


1st Lt. JASON SWEENEY

