

The CONDOR



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

JULY 2011



CAB KEEPS FLYING

*Operation New Dawn
40th CAB rules the sky*



TRI-ATHLETE

Soldier continues his training in country

THE SUGAR SHACK

Fueling more than just the aircraft

SHERPA FLYING

*Meet the most unusual looking aircraft
in the Army*



ON THE COVER
C-23 Sherpa
Photographer:
Spc. Darriel Swatts



ON THE BACK
Camp Taji dust storm
Photographer:
Staff Sgt. Yvonne Najera

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Commander's letter



Condors,

This month's edition of *The Condor* Magazine is in large part a tribute to the quality and the uniqueness of the CAB's Soldiers. Each and every day I am struck by the absolute dedication and commitment to mission displayed by Condors across the Iraq Joint Operations Area.

We are saying farewell to one of our battalions this month. The 1-140th Assault Helicopter Battalion, led by Lt. Col Jeffrey Holliday and Command Sgt. Maj. Troy Eck, is headed home to California after a tremendously successful deployment. The 1-140th has done the California National Guard proud and has risen to the challenge of a deployment to a combat theater. They have done amazing work. Army Aviation and Missile Command

(AMCOM) has recognized the battalion as having the best operational readiness rate they have seen for UH-60 A/L helicopters. The flight crews have flown close to 14,000 hours so far with still a little more than a month to go. They have been entrusted with the most difficult missions and have transported the highest ranking commanders and dignitaries. Throughout Iraq, all know when they see the California flag on their tail booms that they are getting the best professional support.

The summer has brought both heat and intensity to our mission here in Iraq. As the temperatures are daily reaching 120 degrees and higher, we are busier than ever, and the coming months promise continuous change and even greater mission loads as units throughout Iraq prepare for the end of the year and the mission here.

The drawdown has already become personal for the Brigade with the closure of Forward Operating Base Sykes. As the drawdown continues, the Condors will be called upon to move significantly higher numbers of personnel and equipment in preparation for departure, in addition to providing security and medical evacuation support. It is not an exaggeration to state that the ground tactical commanders cannot accomplish their missions without our support.

On behalf of all the Soldiers serving in the Brigade, I thank you for your continued support from home. I would also like to extend another heartfelt thank you to Operation Gratitude and their continued support of the Soldiers of the Brigade.

Many of us have had the opportunity to visit our loved ones during our rest and recuperation leave periods. While it was so difficult to leave your sides, we are strengthened each day by your love and friendship.

Sincerely,

Col. Mitchell K. Medigovich
Commander, 40th CAB

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Command Sgt. Maj.'s letter

Soldiers,

As we continue our mission here in Iraq, I would like to thank our Soldiers who have already re-deployed home for their contributions in support of Operation New Dawn. Your service and dedication to our country's continued efforts to stabilize the nation of Iraq is highly valued.

To the families at home, thank you for your continued sacrifices and the role you take in supporting our Soldiers in completing their responsibilities here. You strengthen the core of our service members.

Over the last month, we have instituted a new program to recognize one special Soldier each week for exemplary performance. The battalions have made the competition fierce and selection of one soldier from the outstanding submissions has been really difficult. Expect to read about our "Soldiers of the Week" in upcoming issues.

Our Soldiers' time spent on rest and recuperation leave is very important because it reunites them with thier families, allowing them to rejuvenate themselves during the yearlong deployment.

Soon the theater will begin realigning as units shift out of country. The Brigade will continue to fly the skies of Iraq protecting United States Forces. We will continue with the important mission of transporting, refurbishing and relocating equipment and personnel for Operation New Dawn.

We will continue to document your efforts in *The Condor* magazine until the last days of our operations.

I thank you all for your service, your sacrifices and contributions as we continue to play a vital part in our nation's history.

Sincerely,

CSM David McFerrin
Command Setrgeant Major, 40th CAB

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Ironhorse Strong

Story & Photo by Sgt. Coltin Heller, 109th MPAD, USD-North

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, Iraq – Maintaining security for service members deployed in support of Operation New Dawn requires constant vigilance against threats designed to impair missions and harm U.S. or Iraqi soldiers. Chief Warrant Officer 2 Mikel Smith, an aero scout pilot with Troop A, 6th Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, Task Force Saber, 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, earned the title of “Ironhorse Strong” Soldier of the Week for his actions during counter-indirect fire operations near Contingency Operating Site Warrior, May 18.

While ground forces conducted area security operations near COS Warrior, several rockets hit the base. Smith and a scout weapons team immediately reacted, deploying to the origin of the attacks, locating multiple rocket launching platforms and an improvised explosive device.

“Mr. Smith and his team located a platform used to launch rockets,” said Capt. Philip Vaughn, commander of Troop A. “At this time he and his team performed overwatch, securing the scene for Iraqi Security Forces on the ground.”

After Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) secured the first scene, Smith and his team moved farther up the river, scanning for more possible rocket launching platforms. The scout team found two more locations, one of which had a rocket still on the launch rail.

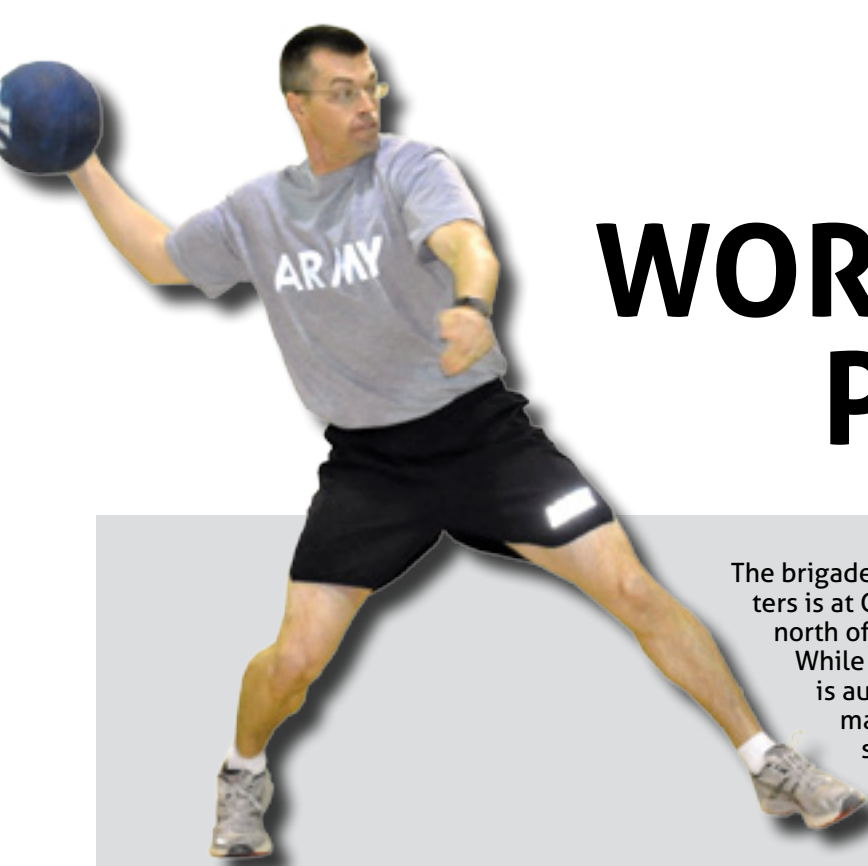
“After finding the second and third platforms, (Smith) was able to (talk) the ground forces to each position within minutes,” said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Dave Rosser, a Kiowa helicopter maintenance test pilot with Troop A. “He also noticed an IED near the base of one of the platforms, which went off, but no one was injured.”

After identifying and securing all the sites, ISF ground forces took control of each site, destroying the launching systems and investigating the area.

Smith’s actions directly resulted in the destruction of enemy threats against the security of all personnel at COS Warrior and exemplified what it means to be a cavalryman, unit leaders said.

“He’s a motivated Soldier,” said Vaughn. “Give him a task you want done and he does not let you down.” ★





SOLDIER'S WORK HARD to PLAY HARD

Story and Photos by Spc. Darriel Swatts

The brigade headquarters is at Camp Taji, north of Baghdad. While Camp Taji is austere in many respects, it does offer Soldiers a variety of sports and

Basketball, soccer, volleyball and softball tournaments have attracted plenty of players and spectators on post, as well as some competitive sports play during the evening hours. Dodgeball and kickball games have also been popular, not to mention ping pong tournaments, weightlifting competitions and water polo matches at the post pool.

"Playing sports is a great way to get your mind off everything happening here," said Spc. Alexis Bell, aviation operations specialist for the CAB, and a Fresno, Calif., native. "Not only is it a great way to de-stress, it's also a great way to build stronger bonds with all your friends and it gives you a chance to meet new people and become friends with them, too."

"We offer a variety of different sporting activities to the Soldiers here at Camp Taji," said Zywia Weinberg, Morale, Welfare and Recreation coordinator and events planner at Camp Taji. "We are always looking for ways to entertain the troops and are constantly taking suggestions for other events too, and we do all of it just to put smiles on the Soldiers' faces."

The sports available to Soldiers are played for fun but oftentimes are coached by people who have coached the sport be-

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Soldiers of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) work tirelessly to accomplish the mission of providing full-spectrum aviation operations throughout the country of Iraq. As hard as they work, they play just as hard during their off hours.

The 40th CAB is a National Guard-led unit deployed to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn.

recreational activities.

"The Soldiers here are giving it their all every day," said Capt. Keegan Smith, a battle major for the 40th CAB, and a native of Carmichael, Calif. "At the end of the day, the sports the Soldiers are playing are helping them with their physical fitness, help them create and strengthen friendships, and help with morale in the unit as a whole."



// Playing sports is a great way to get your mind off everything happening here. //

fore.

"I've been coaching volleyball for more than 16 years," said Smith. "If someone who has never played before wants to learn, people like me can help teach them the basics and sometimes we volunteer to be coaches."

The Soldiers often attend practice during the week to help hone their skills for their upcoming games.

"I've played almost every sport offered here, and it hasn't interfered with work at all," said Bell. "When I get off work, I go



back to my room right away and get ready for practice most days."

"Being the coach of the softball team, I've got to see everybody come together so much better from the beginning of the season to now," said Sgt. William

McFarland, brigade supply sergeant, and a native of Santa Rosa, Calif. "Every time they go out there, you can see their morale increase 100 fold, and that built up morale transfers into the work place, and produces a better work ethic and a better product." ★





The Sugar Shack

Story and Photos by Spc. Matthew Wright

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Pilots who fly long missions here don't usually have time to stop and eat at the base dining facility (DFAC). Camp Taji offers them a pit stop when they come to refuel their helicopters at the base's Forward Arming and Refueling Point, or FARP.

They call this pit stop the Sugar Shack.

The shack is run by the aviation fueling specialists of Alpha Company of the 640th Aviation Support Battalion. Sgt. Richard Sandoval of Alpha Company, a Madera, Calif., native, helps run the shack. Sandoval said the pit stop is a kind of thank you for the job the pilots do in keeping the skies safe.

The Sugar Shack is a small air-conditioned building about the size of a large tool shed. It contains refrigerators with sandwiches, pita bread wraps, water and other assorted drinks, and a small bench.

Sandoval and the other fuel specialists from Alpha Company who work the day shift stock the shack two times a day. The pilots have an opportunity to grab a drink or two, a sandwich or a wrap while waiting for their helicopters to get refueled.

The Sugar Shack provides a benefit for the pilots whose missions can last for hours at a time, explained Lt. Col. Laura Yeager, deputy commanding officer of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, and a Folsom, Calif. native. "When they are out on

missions, they often fly six to seven hours without taking a break," she said.

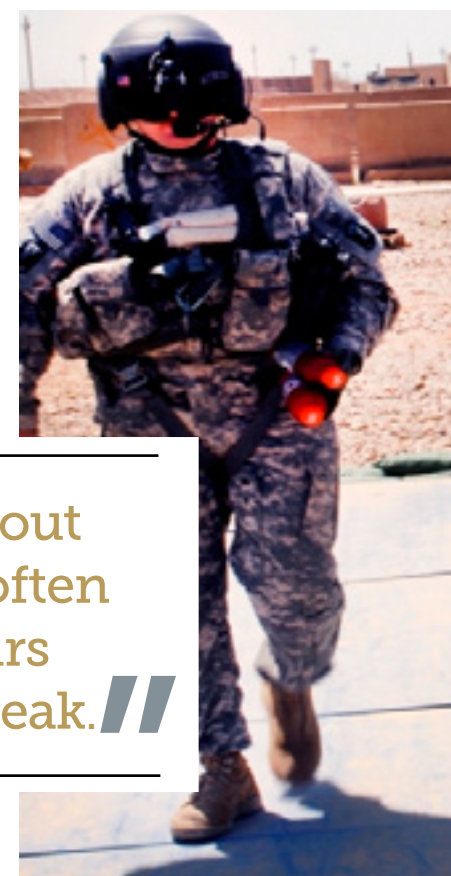
"Seeing how we only have two meals a day, this is like our third meal," said Chief Warrant Officer Tim A. Dailey, an AH-64 Apache helicopter pilot from Lexington, Ky., with Charlie Company, 8th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 229th Aviation Regiment, an Army Reserve unit out of Ft. Knox, Ky.

The shack is popular among pilots throughout Iraq. "We get pilots from the Army, the Navy and sometimes even Iraqi pilots," Sandoval said.

Sandoval said the turkey wraps go fast. Without microwaves or ovens, the pilots find unique ways to heat their wraps. "The wraps are cold so we take them and sit them on the front dash of the Apache for a bit," Dailey said. "The cheese melts and it is delicious."

The workload for the pilots

can be heavy. They fly aviation missions and transport Soldiers from base to base around Iraq day and night. The Sugar Shack may be small and though it doesn't have the facilities to offer a full meal, it still provides a way for the pilots to grab a bite to eat and something to drink, which helps to keep them going on those long missions. ★



// When they are out on missions, they often fly six to seven hours without taking a break. //



In Memoriam



Story and Photos by
Spc. Darriel Swatts

CONTINGENCY OPERATING SITE KALSU, Iraq – Seven years to the day that Spc. Daniel Unger was killed in action here, an American flag was ceremonially flown, lowered and folded in his honor by a friend.

On May 25 at 2:20 p.m., a memorial ceremony was held for Unger, a 19-year-old California Army National Guard Soldier from Exeter, Calif. who died on May 25, 2004 while ushering a group of Iraqi contractors into a bunker during a mortar attack on COS Kalsu.

"The memorial ceremony was very humbling and it serves as a reminder of what can happen while we're here in Iraq," said Command Sgt. Maj. David McFerrin, of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB). "When a significant event like this comes up, we have to stop and make sure that we remember what had happened and pay our respects to those who have come before us."

The 40th CAB is a California Army National Guard-led unit headquartered in Fresno, Calif. The brigade is currently deployed to Iraq where it is performing full-spectrum aviation operations in support of Operation New Dawn.

"I knew Spc. Unger... he and I were friends who worked, trained and deployed together while we were in the 185th (1st Battalion, 185th Infantry Regiment, based in Visalia, Calif.)," said Sgt. Bryce Battershell, driver for the 40th CAB commander. "So when I realized we had the opportunity to honor his memory while in country, I had to do something because this is my third deployment to Iraq. The first time was when we lost Spc. Unger; the second time was during the fall and spring, so I wasn't here for the anniversary of his passing. But, this time we are here during the same timeframe and we were able to take the time to remember him, along with being able to do something for his family and let them know that they and Spc. Unger are not forgotten."

Two weeks prior to the seven-year anniversary of Unger's passing, Battershell asked McFerrin if a memorial ceremony could be held for Unger at Kalsu. McFerrin took action and contacted Command Sgt. Maj. Jonathan Hunt, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, of Ft. Hood, Texas. Hunt's unit is currently stationed at Kalsu.

McFerrin asked Hunt if a flag could be flown at Kalsu in Unger's honor and then presented to Unger's family.

"I told him I would certainly accommodate that request," Hunt said. "I'd do anything for the Soldier's family."

After a little planning and coordination between the two command sergeants major, Battershell, McFerrin, Hunt and a small group of selected Soldiers took part in the memorial ceremony at the exact date and time of Unger's sacrifice.

"We flew our nation's colors, lowered them and then folded the colors in order to present them to the Soldier's family as a memento, in testament to their son who passed away serving his country," Hunt said.

McFerrin said that with the scheduled withdrawal of troops from Iraq at the end of the year, the ceremony carried solemn significance and served as a reminder of the ultimate sacrifice made by Soldiers here in service to their country.

Spc. Daniel Unger was deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom for approximately seven weeks. For his actions on May 25, 2004, he was awarded a Bronze Star Medal with Valor, a Purple Heart, the California Memorial Medal, the Warrior's Medal of Valor from the American Indian Nations of the U.S.A., the Combat Infantryman Badge, and he was posthumously promoted from private first class to specialist. ★



MEDEVAC PARTNERSHIP TRAINING

Story by 1st Lt. Jason Sweeney
photo by Spc. Michael Uribe

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Two U.S. Army UH-60 Black Hawk utility helicopters flew in formation with two Iraqi Air Force helicopters in May on a joint medical evacuation training mission, serving to build rapport and partnerships between the two militaries.

The mission allowed the pilots and crews from the two militaries to better understand each other's way of doing business, explained Capt. Jennifer Sims, a pilot of one of the Black Hawks, and the headquarters company commander for the 1st General Support Aviation Battalion, 171st Aviation Regiment, of the Georgia Army National Guard.

Both American helicopters that took part on the May 18 training mission were from the 1-171 GSAB, which is attached to the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade during the brigade's year-long deployment to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn.

The Black Hawk crews shared hot tea with their Iraqi peers, a traditional gesture of hospitality, before taking flight behind the two Iraqi Air Force helicopters. The Iraqis were flying an American-made UH-1 "Huey" utility helicopter and a Russian-made Mi-17 transport helicopter.

The four helicopters flew together from Camp Taji over Baghdad before landing at the Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) where the crews were met by U.S. Air Force personnel and members of the Iraqi Security Forces. They then conducted ground training.

Sims, from McDonough, Ga., said there are challenges during mixed multi-ship flights, such as this one. The biggest challenge is the language barrier, she explained. Dissimilar equipment, radio systems and flying skills create a different flying environment than when flying with American pilots only. So when the pilots from the two militaries get the chance to fly together, it leads to familiarization and better coordination while in

the air, she said.

"Anytime we work together, it's a gain," said Capt. Andy Parker, a native of Atlanta, Ga., and the chaplain for the 1-171. Parker said he was on the mission to interact with his Iraqi counterparts. He said his interaction was very positive.

"They see we're not here to be the Lone Ranger when we work together as a team. It builds rapport," Parker said.

"They are good pilots and we learn from them many things," said the Iraqi commander who flew the UH-1 Huey during the training flight. "We have a good relationship with the American side. This is not our first flight together."

A 22-year-old Iraqi second lieutenant from Baghdad flew the Iraqi Mi-17. "It's like flying a beast—the power," he said of his large transport aircraft. He said he enjoyed having the opportunity to fly with American pilots. "It shows the cooperation with the two sides."

At BIAP, Spc. Michael Kelley, a native of Bourne, Mass., from the 1-171's 3rd Battalion, 126th Aviation Regiment (Air Ambulance), Charlie Company, briefed Iraqi medics on the equipment used in his specialized medical evacuation helicopter. The Iraqis then briefed the Americans on their equipment before they practiced loading patients onto the aircraft.

"The partnership offers opportunities to share tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs), both Iraqi and American," said Lt. Col. Steven Ballew, Army Aviation Safety and Plans Advisor. "They have the way they do things, we have ours. It's always good to get together and share TTPs."★

The Flying Sherpas

Story & photos by
Spc. Darriel Swatts



go for longer distances, faster.”

The CH-47 Chinook helicopter and the C-23 Sherpa are both used as cargo and troop transports; however, the Sherpa is only operated by the National Guard.

“I used to be a crewchief on a CH-47 Chinook, and now I’m a flight engineer on the C-23 Sherpa” McCoy said. “We have limitations on what we can haul, but we move as much as we can as often as we can. The Chinook can haul four times as much as we can, but we can do it quicker and for longer hauls. But both aircraft perform phenomenally and have their own niches.”

“The Sherpa is a very versatile aircraft; we’re able to move our loads under almost any circumstance. Our only limitations are weight, balance and weather,” said Sgt. Clint Walker, flight engineer for A Company. “The hotter the weather, the less we can carry. ... (that’s) one of the reasons we fly at night. ... But we’ll fly to a location to drop off a single item, like a 15-pound box of blood, or we can load the aircraft to its max and go

from there. We’ve been called the ‘Sure Flight Sherpas,’ because we get the mission done.

The Sherpas maintain a very high tempo of operations.

“They receive a lot of requests for their services, and it definitely keeps me busy. ... they’re out flying every night, moving people and cargo all over the country,” said Spc. Byron Yates, future operations non-commissioned officer-in-charge for the 2-228th. “The amazing thing about the Sherpas is that they move a lot of people and cargo, but they also pick up additional Space Available (Space A) people and cargo, too. I’ll send them out saying they are going to be moving a certain amount of stuff, and they come back with doubled if not tripled numbers because of all of the Space A they moved that night too, and I’m just left wondering how they did it.”

McCarthy summed up the Sherpas’ mission in Iraq with the motto: “Somebody out there is waiting for us and we can’t let them down, we won’t let them down, we will get to them.” ★

JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq – The C-23 Sherpa is a military version of the Shorts 360 civilian airliner.

The aircraft was adopted for military use about 20 years ago, said Capt. Adam McCarthy, commander of A Company, 641st Aviation Regiment, Oregon Army National Guard. “We use it for transporting passengers and cargo, or a (combination) of the two all around Iraq and even down to Kuwait.”

The Soldiers of A Company, who have been stationed on Joint Base Balad, Iraq since October 2010, provide a crucial service in Iraq.

“We supply what is called the ‘last tactical mile.’ The Air Force gets stuff into the country and we get it out to all the smaller bases in country,” McCarthy said. “We are extremely proficient in getting things and people

around the country. We’re like the FedEx of Iraq.”

Since the Sherpas arrival in Iraq, they have left an identifiable mark on operations.

“The service that we provide here has definitely made an impact on this whole war. ... Sherpas have been flying in this war for eight years now, and I think that the whole program has proven itself over and over again,” said 1st Sgt. Scott McCoy, A Company. “We are here to support the field commander, and if what they ask us to do is within our capabilities, we’ll get it done for them. We get the mission done, hands down, day in and day out, to the best of our capabilities.”

Since the arrival of A Company in theater, they have transported more than 2.2 million pounds of equipment

and cargo, 10,000 people, and have logged more than 5,000 hours of flight time.

Sherpa tactics, techniques and procedures have been modified for operations in Iraq.

“Back home we fly during the day; however, here in Iraq, we fly solely at night,” said Chief Warrant Officer Dan McCarron, maintenance officer and C-23 pilot for A Company. “When I was here in 2005, we used to fly during the day at a tactical low level altitude at a high rate of speed; but now, for safety reasons, we fly only at night under night vision goggles. Plus, we’ve had to do several modifications to the airframe and instrument panels in order to make it safer; because, it was originally a civilian aircraft, which the Army adapted for its own usage.”

With the whole drawdown of U.S. Forces from Iraq, there are consistently fewer and fewer assets to move cargo around the theater of operations. The C-23 has been called upon to go that extra mile and move those things that are required to be moved, said McCarron.

“They prove to be a priceless service here, if something is needed somewhere, if they can move it, they’ll get it there,” said Maj. Tom Stackpole, night operations officer-in-charge for Warrior Ops., 2nd Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment. “Even though we are drawing down here, stuff and people still need to be moved all the time; they are able to do so in an expeditious manner. They can carry more than a Black Hawk, but less than a Chinook, but the benefit is that they can





Flying Ol' Glory

Story by Spc. Darriel Swatts

Photo by Capt. Jeffrey Maxwell

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Most people, when thinking of flying a flag, think of a flag majestically waving atop a pole. However, the 8th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 229th Aviation Regiment, flies the flag a bit differently—inside an Apache attack helicopter while patrolling the skies of Iraq.

“The American flag is ... a great symbol of our country; to have a flag that was over in combat, flown on a mission; it’s very powerful to a lot of people,” said 1st Lt. Michael Moran, an Apache pilot for B Company, 8-229th, based at Fort Knox, Ky., deployed to Camp Taji, Iraq, in support of Operation New Dawn. “It’s a way we can give something back to those who have given to us and to show people back home that we appreciate them, by giving a large token of respect.”

The pilots of the 8-229th, deployed with the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, have been flying flags for people back home since their arrival in Iraq. They have logged more than 6,000 hours of flight time flying more than 250 flags.

“We started as soon as we got here; we took over from our predecessors and it has really exploded from there. We’ve flown flags for people from everywhere back home: the VFW, schools, employers, and even individual people,” said Maj. Alan Hardin, executive officer for the 8-229th, known as the Flying Tigers. “I personally have flown a couple flags for people who mean a lot to me. It’s a way to let them know you’re thinking of them and to say thanks for what they do for us back home. Sometimes we forget while we’re forward doing our job, as hard as it may be for us, it’s equally as hard, if

not harder, for them back home.”

The flag flying program is open to any and all Soldiers stationed on Camp Taji.

“I’ve flown tons of flags since we got here in late February, early March,” said Moran. “I enjoy flying the flags because it’s a way of showing respect to the people back home and a way of thanking them for what they have done. When I’m out there flying that flag, I realize the importance of it all.”

Pilots have been flying the flags while in country since the beginning of the war and the tradition has been passed along to each new incoming unit. It’s something that says, ‘Hey, I’m thinking of you and even though we are half the world apart, you are with me in my mind, heart and soul,’” Hardin said.

“We couldn’t do this program without the help and support of our flight ops people,” Hardin said. “People come in and ask us to fly a flag, and they accept the flag, document what needs to be done, hand it off to the pilots before the flight, get it back, and make a certificate of flight and have the pilots sign it to authenticate the cert, then they send it back home and all over the states.”

“For people back home, it’s like, ‘Wow, this flag was flown on an Apache helicopter in Iraq,’” said Staff Sgt. Robert Ethridge, operations noncommissioned officer-in-charge for the 8-229th. “My son, daughter, husband, wife, friend or colleague is there and they were thinking of me when they asked to have this flag flown.’ It’s just a great thank you for everything for whoever is fortunate enough to receive the flag.” ★

BOYKO

Story and photo by Spc. Matthew Wright

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – 1st Lt. Stanislav Boyko’s life has been a journey—from his youth in the Ukraine to immigrating to America, to joining the California Army National Guard, to deploying to Iraq.

Boyko was born in the city of Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine to a family with a long history of military service. “All the males in my family were in the military,” Boyko said. “My great grandparents, my grandparents and my father—they were all in the Soviet Army.”

His father was a combat engineer who spent most of his military career in the Ukraine. However, his father was deployed to Afghanistan in the 1980s during the Soviet Union’s 10-year war there.

“It’s kind of funny, because if I go to Afghanistan, I will be in Afghanistan on the U.S. side, and he was in Afghanistan on the Soviet side,” Boyko said.

Boyko followed his father and family’s tradition by going the military route, attending both a military high school and a military academy. Boyko received a degree in the Ukraine in international relations.

At the military academy, he majored in international relations, and his road to becoming an American citizen began.

He met an American girl in the Ukraine and developed a relationship with her, he explained. They got married and he moved to the United States.

After settling in Sacramento in 2004, he decided that a career in the U.S. Army was the path he wanted to pursue. He signed up with the Califor-

nia Army National Guard, enlisting as a specialist. He received his citizenship four years after coming to the U.S. and then applied for the State of California’s Officer Candidate School.

He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in 2007. Now divorced, he has been on two deployments to Kosovo with the California Army National Guard’s 40th Infantry Division.

He is now deployed to Iraq where he serves as a battle captain for the 640th Aviation Support Battalion. As battle captain, he tracks current operations and makes adjustments to plans based on emerging situations.

“He is high energy,” said Staff Sgt. Obed Jimenez, a Riverside, Calif., native who works with Boyko. “I think he brings experience, and he brings knowledge.”

Jimenez said his co-workers see how Boyko embraces the American way, yet still shows his Eastern European roots and his Ukrainian side still shines through. “He still has his accent, the customs and stuff,” Jimenez said.

“He may be from another country, but he is very dedicated to the United States Army,” Jimenez added. “He talks about how he loves to wear the American uniform.”

Where his military career will go, only the future will tell. But Boyko says he is happy with his job and the people he works with, and he plans to stay in the National Guard. He said he hopes to use his university degree in international relations to the fullest, both in the National Guard and on the civilian side. ★



RACE OF A LIFETIME

Story by
Spc. Matthew Wright
Photos by
Staff Sgt. Michael Appleby



CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Capt. Shaun McIntosh, an Apache helicopter pilot assigned to Bravo Company, 8-229th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, has participated in several triathlons and is preparing for his next challenge, the 2011 Ford Ironman Arizona, set in Tempe.

McIntosh, a Nicholasville, Ky., native, trained and participated in his first triathlon in 2005. He placed second in his age group. That is where he found his calling. “Even though I had the cheapest and slowest bike on the course and almost drowned on the swim, I was hooked,” McIntosh said.

Over the years, he raced in more than 10 triathlons. Even though he continued to train for the short distance triathlons, he wanted more. “I soon became ready for a different challenge,” McIntosh said.

He changed his focus from the three-sport event to the one he found the most compelling, the run. “I dropped the bike and swimming trunks, and started logging miles on my shoes,” he said.

He eventually started competing in 10-mile races. He said he wanted to do more with his personal life and get away from the mundane and everyday lulls and stresses. The 10-mile runs turned to 15, then 20 miles. He kept looking for new challenges as he increased his distance. “I constantly looked forward to the weekends to explore new places and challenges,” McIntosh said. “Eventually I ran into challenges, like being lost in lower Alabama on a 32-mile fun run.”

He competed in more than five marathons, a 50K ultramarathon race and multiple small rac-

es. McIntosh decided to take over as Bravo Company physical fitness officer and use his experience and training to help his soldiers to exercise and improve their Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) scores.

“It’s an awesome feeling to see your Soldiers strive for a goal and achieve it,” McIntosh said.

McIntosh wanted more. He decided to transition back into the triathlon events. While he was racing, he ran into some wounded veterans who were running as well, and this inspired him to race in the biggest triathlon event, the Ironman. Just before his arrival in Iraq, he signed up for the Ford Ironman Arizona. The Ironman race consists of a 2.4-mile swim,

140 degrees in the summer. Yet he uses that to his advantage.

“It (the heat) helps me out,” McIntosh said. “The Ironman is in Arizona, so running in the hot weather acclimatizes me for it.”

McIntosh decided to use his new sport to accomplish some good. While on his deployment, he began to raise money for the Wounded Warrior Project (WWP). The WWP is a charitable organization that “works to raise awareness and enlists the public’s aid for the needs of severely injured service men and women, to help severely injured service members aid and assist each other, and to provide direct programs and services to meet their needs.”

He set up a web site through WWP, so people can donate and help him reach his monetary

“It’s an awesome feeling to see your Soldiers strive for a goal and achieve it.”

112-mile bike race and a 26.2-mile run for a total of 140 miles in one day. He has been training diligently for this event while at Camp Taji. McIntosh works the night shift and as soon as he gets off work, he heads to the pool to swim laps three days a week. He also trains for the bike portion on his stationary bike in his room to keep up his endurance as well as dividing his running between the treadmill and running the roads on base.

The rigid exercise program and diet he follows helps boost his endurance for one of the most extreme competitions for athletes. One issue is the heat of the desert of Iraq and the harsh temperatures which can reach as high as

goal for all his races and the Ironman. “The inspiration I get from the Wounded Warrior Project keeps me on the bike, treadmill and in the pool,” McIntosh said.

What started out as a way to challenge himself will end up helping others as well. McIntosh said he wanted a purpose. Running the triathlons and racing the long distance races for wounded warriors gives him that sense of purpose. ★

If you would like to donate, visit:
http://WWPProudSupporter.kintera.org/shaun_mcintosh148

The *Flying Tigers* Receive PURPLE HEARTS

Story by Chief Warrant Officer 2 John Gaffney, photo by Spc. Darriel Swatts

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Three U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers from Kentucky were presented the Purple Heart medal in a June 9 ceremony for combat injuries they sustained during an insurgent mortar attack here.

The Soldiers, assigned to 8th Battalion, 229th Attack Reconnaissance Regiment, and based at Fort Knox, Ky., deployed to Iraq in February in support of Operation New Dawn under Task Force Condor, headed by the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade of the California National Guard.

The Soldiers honored include:

Spc. Olivia R. Samples of Louisville, Ky., an automated logistics supply specialist with the battalion's aviation maintenance company. Samples is a full-time member of the unit, having joined in March, 2008.

Spc. Mitchell Seekman of Radcliff, Ky., an Apache helicopter crewchief with one of the battalion's flight companies. Seekman joined the battalion in February, 2006 and when not

deployed works full time as an automotive body repair technician.

Spc. Nathaniel Lovewell of Oldham County, Ky., an aircraft hydraulic system repair technician in the battalion's aviation maintenance company joined the battalion in March, 2008 and is a full-time student at Eastern Kentucky University where he is enrolled in the ROTC program.

The Soldiers were performing their regular duties on the airfield flightline just prior to sunrise as part of the overnight shift maintenance team when mortar rounds began impacting the airfield. They immediately took cover, along with other members of the team.

"We could hear the rounds coming closer and closer," Samples said.

One mortar round landed close enough to injure the three Soldiers with shrapnel and blast pressure. Following the attack, they were transported to the base medical clinic for evaluation and treatment of their injuries.

For Lovewell, there was some added drama following the attack. His brother Steven also is a member of the unit, and both brothers were told that the other was unaccounted for after the incident. They ran towards each other's location and were relieved to find each other on the way.

Samples and Lovewell remained at Taji following treatment, but due to his more significant injuries, Seekman was transported to Landstuhl Army Medical Center in Germany for more advanced care.

During the ceremony, Brigade Commander Col. Mitch Medigovich praised the three as great Soldiers who were willing to place themselves in harm's way for the good of their country. He also specifically complimented the Soldiers for their conduct following the incident.

"Their grace and dignity makes us proud and they really are the epitome of the Warrior Ethos," he said.

Battalion Commander Lt. Col. James O. Posey, Jr. summed up the gratitude of all



Spc. Olivia Samples, Spc. Nathaniel Lovewell and Spc. Mitchell Seekman

present that the toll from the attack was not higher. He said, "The enemy controlled what was going on that morning, only God knew what was going to happen."

During the ceremony, Seekman also was awarded the Combat Action Badge. Samples and Lovewell had been presented their badges at an earlier ceremony that occurred while Seekman was in Germany.

Following the cer-

emony, Lovewell said, "This is an honor. You know, I told my mom I wasn't going to get wounded over here."

Seekman added, "I guess I paid my price. I didn't want to earn this medal, but I got it. I thank God for my life."

Samples echoed that sentiment, saying, "We are so lucky; we are blessed in so many ways."

The Soldiers were truly honored by the ceremony,

and to receive the noteworthy medal in front of their peers. However, they also had other things on their minds as Samples and Lovewell were just hours from departing Taji to head back to the United States for regularly scheduled R&R leave, and time with family and friends. They have quite a story to tell. ★

Connecting with Family

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – “Having him deployed is very emotional for me, I’m so used to having him around, and he normally helps with our son (two-year-old Julian Verduzco) and helps around the house,” said Kendy Verduzco, wife of Spc. Rosario Verduzco who is deployed to Camp Taji, Iraq with the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade. “So, having him away, it’s really hard. I know when I see him on the unit’s Facebook page, I always get super emotional and when I see his pictures there, I just tear up.”

When people think of those who serve our country, they often think of Soldiers in uniform; but they seldom think about the spouses, children and other family members that those service members leave behind when they deploy.

“It’s our first deployment together, but we’ve been together ever since he joined the military, so this deployment is kinda like when he has to go away for training every year; it really doesn’t feel like he’s half a world away, except I can’t go and see him when he’s done for the day,” said Brisa Frost, wife of Spc. Jason Frost who is deployed to Camp Taji. “But during those training events he didn’t have Skype and he didn’t have good cell phone reception, so we actually talk more with him there (in Iraq) than we did when he was training back home. The only time it’s really difficult is at night, but that’s mainly because of the baby (newborn Margaret Frost).”

Deployed Soldiers deal with stress on a daily basis; but the families back home go through just as much, if not more, stress than the Soldiers themselves.

“This is my fifth deployment in 20 years; but it’s my first deployment as a married person. There are a lot more stresses that are involved when you are leaving your family behind, and we’re finding those out as we go along,” said Capt. Yusef Parker, a nightshift battle captain who is deployed to Camp Taji with the 40th CAB. “It’s another hurdle we have to overcome as a family, and I think we are doing just fine.”

The families of the 40th CAB are helping themselves and their Soldiers alleviate stress by finding ways to

send a piece of home to their deployed Soldier.

“The family sends me care packages; the first one they sent was very emotional (for me). On the inside flaps of the box, my kids and wife each drew pictures there and colored it. I ended up cutting the pictures out and now have them on the wall along with the picture of (our family) they sent me,” Parker said. “This last one I just received had a bunch of letters from my daughter’s third grade class and she insisted I read hers last. Hers was very emotional because some of the things she said. Also, a lot of her friends said she’s sad some days because her dad’s away, but she can’t wait for me to get home so we can go to Hawaii.”

“Of all the things that my family does to stay in contact, I have to say my favorite thing to receive is the hand-written letters; they are just so personal,” said Spc. Adrienne Thomas, paralegal specialist with the 40th CAB. “It shows that they took the time out of their day to sit down and handwrite that letter; it just means much more to me than an e-mail; because, you can e-mail anybody, including your bank, but a letter shows a level of caring that e-mails don’t.”

The 40th CAB Soldiers have passed the halfway point in their deployment to Iraq. Some of the Soldiers have already gone on their two weeks of R&R leave and others are still looking forward to it.

“He’s already come home for his leave, and while he was here, he got to see the birth of our child (Margaret),” said Brisa. “But when he got home we just picked up and carried on like he never left, the only real big change was that we were in a new apartment and our car broke down. It was exactly like life before, except we now have a baby.”

“There is no way to prepare yourself completely for a deployment, until you’re in that situation,” Kendy said. “You just have to make the best of it and know people change through the experience. I just can’t wait ‘til he comes back home, I’m so proud of him and what he does.” ★

**Story and Photos by
Spc. Darriel Swatts**



// He’s already come home for his leave, and while he was here, he got to see the birth of our child. //

*-Brisa Frost
(her husband Spc. Jason Frost, left)*

// Of all the things my family does to stay in contact, my favorite is the hand-written letters... //

-Spc. Adrienne Thomas





THE BLOOD MOON

Story and photos by
Tech. Sgt. James Stroman

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – The longest total lunar eclipse in 11 years occurred June 15, turning the moon a dusky, blood red that captivated sky watchers around the world.

U.S. troops at Camp Taji, Iraq, sat outside and watched the event unfold, witnessing what has been referred to as a “blood moon.”

The lunar eclipse began at 9 p.m. local time and lasted until 1:02 a.m. The peak of the eclipse occurred at 11:12 p.m. The moon was totally obscured for 100 minutes, making it the longest total lunar eclipse in the decade.

The eclipse was visible from start to finish from eastern Africa, central Asia, the Middle East and western Australia. According to Space.com, only three other eclipses have rivaled the duration of totality of this eclipse in the last 100 years. The last lunar eclipse of similar length occurred on July 16, 2000 and lasted 107 minutes. ★

editor's letter



We've been running *The Condor* for a few months now. Through all our ups and downs and many challenges, we will continue publishing right up to our last days here on Camp Taji.

We are committed to telling your stories and documenting our Brigade's mission during Operation New Dawn. As we travel to different FOBs to capture stories and images of the Brigade, we are reminded that we are one unit and one team connected by the uniform we wear. We will continue to document all the great work our Soldiers are doing and get those stories published in as many news outlets as we can, including video and radio stories broadcasted on AFN.

We also appreciate your photo submissions for the magazine. Keep sending them in. And again, if there is a story you think should be told, just drop us a line. It can be about your battalion, your section or any individual you feel should be highlighted.

When the magazine is distributed, boxes are sent to the different camps to provide a copy to all of the Soldiers in the Brigade, but if there is a place where you think we should send additional copies, just let us know and we'll send them out.

Thank you for all that you do!

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

