

The CONDOR



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

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2011



END ZONE IN SIGHT

*40th CAB's OND Deployment
Reaches 4th Quarter*

OPERATION CLEAN SWEEP

640th ASB clean-up efforts save \$12 million

A FIRST RESPONSE

His R&R turns into a rescue mission

GOODBYE IRAQ

1-140th AHB says hello to California



The CONDOR

AUG/SEP
'11

ISSUE #4



ON THE COVER
AH-64 Apache
Photographer:
1st Sgt. Christopher Johnson
C Co. 8-229th ARB



ON THE BACK
OH-58D Kiowa
Photographer:
B Co. 6-17 CAV

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Commander's letter



Soldiers,

Football season has just kicked off and we here in the 40th CAB are entering the fourth quarter of our deployment.

Nearly every day, a new milestone is reached and each success is the result of a team effort. Recently, the Soldiers of the 640th ASB pumped their millionth gallon of fuel—an achievement that highlights our high operations tempo and the intensity of the mission schedule our aircraft are operating under. The performance of our mechanics rivals that of any professional organization and we are achieving aircraft readiness rates higher than those in Afghanistan. Our flight crews are flying a tremendous number of flight hours, providing safe transport and security operations to soldiers on the ground during this critical

time in Iraq.

As we head into the final quarter, we are witnessing a historic time in Iraq as our forces vacate bases which have been occupied for years. The transition of these bases to our Iraqi partners and their assumption of responsibility for the security of their nation will hopefully lead to an enduring and mutually beneficial partnership between our two nations.

The pace of change is about to accelerate. Base closures are underway. The Soldiers of the 6-17th CAV are closing up shop in the north and have moved aircraft and personnel to Camp Taji, while remaining fully mission capable under fast-changing conditions. Soldiers from the 8-229 AHB have headed home. The roar of C-17s has filled the skies here at Camp Taji as units depart. We have welcomed new members to the team. The 1-151st ARB from South Carolina has taken over for the 8-229.

In football, the fourth quarter is when a team is often tired and finds its mettle tested. While we are feeling mentally and physically exhausted and digging deep inside ourselves to finish, we also feel a sense of exhilaration based on our performance. Like any winning organization, we must maintain that laser focus until the final seconds have elapsed. Stay sharp. Now is not the time for complacency. Stay flexible, positive and professional and be ready to adapt and improvise. We will be tenacious and finish this mission with honor and success.

The Soldiers that came before us made great sacrifices to get us to this point. I can't stress enough how important it is to dignify their contributions by completing our mission with success and honor. Let's all stay motivated and maintain our military bearing until end of mission. Wings of the sun!

Sincerely,

Col. Mitchell K. Medigovich
Commander, 40th CAB

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Command Sgt. Maj.'s letter

Soldiers,

It's hard to believe that we're in our tenth month of the deployment. What comes to mind is a list of clichés: It's the bottom of the ninth and the home team is at bat. It's the fourth quarter and we're driving to the end zone. Or, we can say we're finally in the home stretch.

I personally relate to all of these statements, but I prefer to look at it as a light at the end of the tunnel that is finally visible.

I feel it's safe to say that for the majority us, the light at the end of the tunnel is our families, loved ones, and friends at home. We will soon be home with them.

The 40th CAB has seen many changes in the month of September. We've had units relocate, we've had to make adjustments to our mission, and the 8-229th Flying Tigers completed their deployment and returned home. I know that the outstanding Soldiers of the 8-229 are eagerly awaiting the chance to see their families and we wish them all safe travels and our sincere gratitude for a job well done!

For the remainder of our time here in theater, staying fully engaged with the mission should be our primary focus. Staying safe and vigilant is key to going home without personal injury. It is every leader's job to make sure our Soldiers make it home accident free. A timeline is in place for getting home and there is no need for shortcuts. Continue to practice the standards that have been in place for the last 10 months until the deployment is complete.

To repeat one of those clichés, we are now in the home stretch. It's in the home stretch where you must apply your full measure to make it across the finish line. We're almost there. We can do this!

Our Soldiers earn honor every day in their actions and deeds. Continue the great work for the next couple of months. Soon we will all be home!

Sincerely,



CSM David McFerrin
Command Sergeant Major, 40th CAB

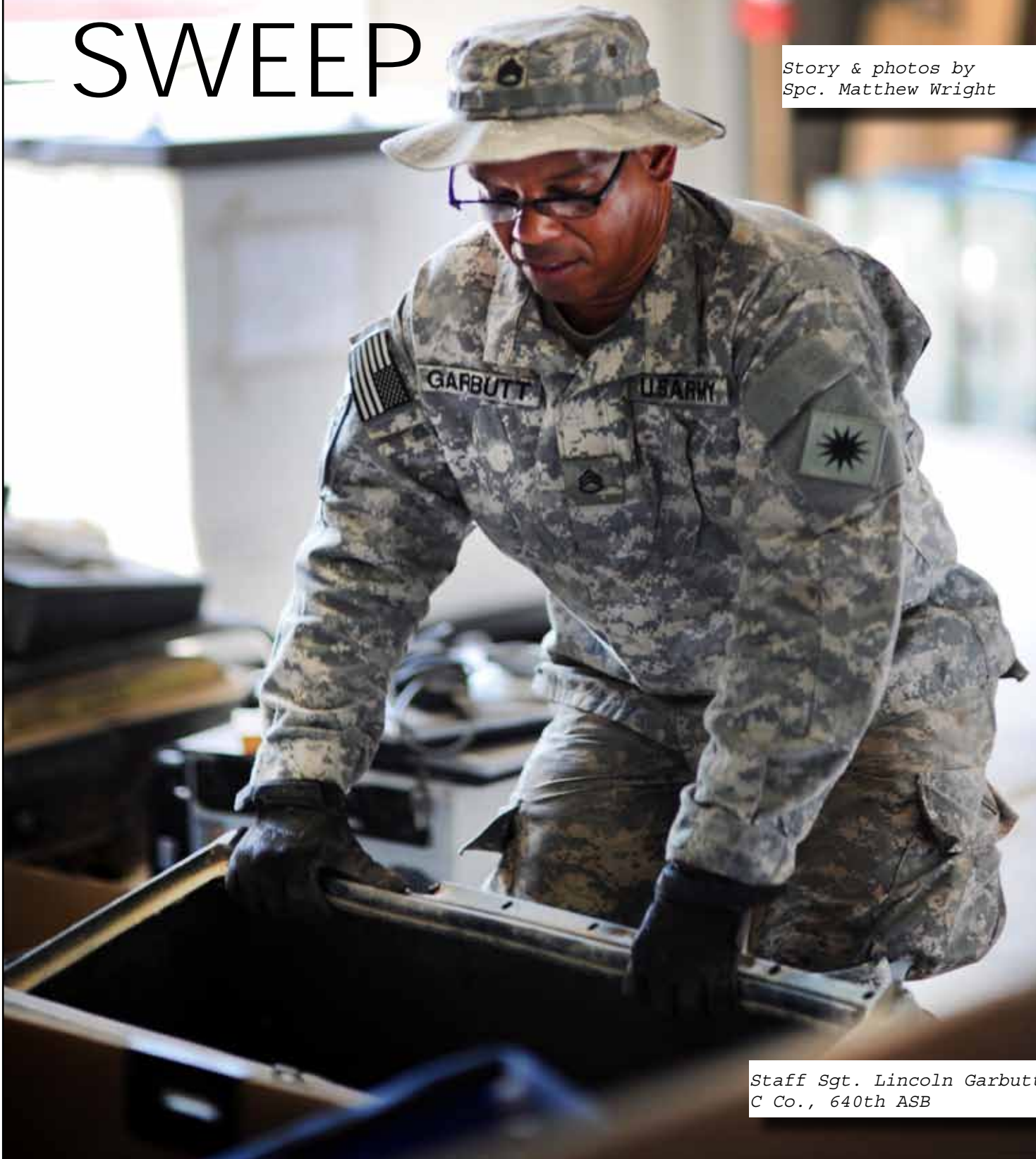


Condor 7



OPERATION CLEAN SWEEP

*Story & photos by
Spc. Matthew Wright*



*Staff Sgt. Lincoln Garbutt
C Co., 640th ASB*



Pfc. Evanlindle Elias
C Co., 640th ASB

Pfc. Josh Katocs
549th QM Co.

Spc. Jose Martinez
B Co., 640th ASB

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – As the drawdown of U.S. forces in Iraq approaches, the 640th Aviation Support Battalion is collecting and itemizing unused and misplaced military equipment that has accumulated over the eight years the Army has been at Camp Taji. The effort is called Operation Clean Sweep.

The equipment found on the post that is serviceable includes automotive parts, such as tires, Gator utility vehicle parts and Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle parts, to other items the military can make use of, said Capt. Joseph Adams, a planning officer with the 640th.

The idea behind Operation Clean Sweep is to salvage the equipment and save the taxpayers money.

The 640th is assisting a team from the 549th Quartermaster Company by gathering all the equipment and property on Camp Taji that is not on unit property books and putting it back on those books or sending it back to the United States.

What is the amount saved from this effort?

“We saved up to \$12 million,” Adams, a Carson, Calif. native, said.

Capt. Pedro Alvarez, officer in charge of the unit’s logistics section, and a native of Lynnwood, Calif., explained that another big part of Operation Clean Sweep is to make the U.S. military’s footprint on Camp Taji smaller by getting rid of all equipment that is not being used.

Adams pointed out that it is like an amnesty period for the units to turn in all new and used property to be either reused or recycled.

The 640th and the 549th teams came up with a plan to have all the units on base bring in all unused and broken equipment to a yard on the post to organize and classify the items as serviceable or non-serviceable items.

“What I did with the plan was coordinate and organize our people from the 640th to provide a couple of Soldiers from each company to assist with classifying the stuff,” Adams said.

“Some of the items are put back into the system,” he said. “It is reissued to the units that can make some use out of it.”

The reissued equipment does not go to just the units here on Camp Taji.

“It is going to either here in Iraq, Afghanistan or other locations where we have military forces,” Adams said.

The unserviceable or broken equipment that is collected is disposed of by the team.

“It goes to either to the Defense Reutilization and Management Office or it goes through recycling,” Adams said. “There they refurbish or fix it to be used later on.”

He added that the recyclables collected included copper wire and scrap metal, much of which can be sent back to the United States and recycled.

The 640th ASB is a California Army National Guard unit of from Los Alamitos, Calif. Several hundred Soldiers from the battalion are in theater providing aviation support to the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, which is on a yearlong deployment in Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn. ★

Spc. Michael Coyle
B Co., 640th ASB



Spc. Jose Martinez
B Co., 640th ASB



FLYING THE SCAN EAGLE



Story and photos by Spc. Darriel Swatts

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – A small, raptor-like unmanned aerial system called the ScanEagle is providing Soldiers in Iraq with an ever-vigilant eye in the sky.

ScanEagles launched from Camp Taji are proving their worth by identifying possible threats and providing overwatch security for troops on the ground.

“When you are on the ground, you don’t know what is coming up 10 miles ahead of you. You’re just not going to see that far with the naked eye,” said Sgt. Michael Diamondson, an Arlington, Texas native and the mission commander for ScanEagle Operations at Camp Taji. “But, when you have a bird up (high in the sky) zooming in on what’s going on ahead of you, he’s going to be able to identify things that are going on and notify you immediately if something is out of the ordinary, giving you plenty of time to take the proper course of action to handle the upcoming situation.”

The ScanEagle Operations team is attached to the 8th Assault Reconnaissance Battalion, 229th Aviation Regiment, which is part of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, currently deployed to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn. The ScanEagle team is made up of a squad of Soldiers from the 8-229 ARB and the 6th Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, as well as several civilian contractors.

“Some of the things we do with the ScanEagle are survey areas for our supporting units. We scan routes to make sure they are clear, and point out anything suspicious,” said Spc. Jonathan Bogasky, a ScanEagle operator from Nashville, Tenn. “It’s a nice way to keep eyes on what’s going on without having to have our guys out there patrolling the ground. Plus, we can see a lot more than the guys on the ground.”

Each ScanEagle weighs about 40 pounds and has a 10-foot wingspan.

They are launched off a catapult, and instead of landing on a runway, they fly toward a device called a SkyHook which snatches them out of the air. Built by Boeing subsidiary Insitu, Inc., they were originally designed to be launched off fishing boats to spot schools of fish.

“Recently, we were called to help identify a possible threat. Sure enough, when we got there, there was a vehicle full of bombs and there was a guy wiring up a bunch of IEDs (improvised explosive devices) at a choke-point in the road,” Diamondson said. “We were able to fly to the location, identify what was going on, were able to see how many people were involved and what they were doing at that time. Seeing all of that allowed us to warn an upcoming convoy of the threat and get our guys out there to take care of that threat.”

Steve Lister, an Easton, Md., native, is a civilian contractor for ISR Group, Inc. and the site lead for the ScanEagle on Camp Taji.

“Flying the Scan Eagle is a lot like flying in a video game, but you, as an operator, can’t forget that there is an actual plane out there,” Lister said. “If something goes wrong, there’s not a reset button. There is going to be expensive damage, and depending on where it lands, there could be loss of life too. You’ve just got to remember it’s real, despite how much it may seem like a game.”

The ScanEagle has been flown in Iraq since 2004. But there is no military occupational specialty dedicated to ScanEagle operations.

“I’m an 11B (infantryman). I came across this job by my battalion asking for volunteers who knew the terrain and have experience here in Iraq,” Diamondson said. “Since I’ve been deployed here before as an infantryman on the ground, I have experience and know what to look for, so they asked me to come along and here I am. ... Now I’m

the eye in the sky and have been here since early February.”

The ScanEagle is fairly quiet in flight and stealthy at low altitudes, with low personnel requirements and longer flight times, which gives it some major advantages over rotary wing aircraft and other UASs when it comes to surveillance.

“Another nice thing about the Scan Eagle is that any uniformed service member can recover this airframe. It is light and easily assembled and disassembled,” Diamondson said. “We can deploy from anywhere; we don’t require a runway like the Shadow, Gray Eagle or

// Flying
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but you, as an
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forget that there
is an actual
plane out
there. //

Predator. We can pick up and move anywhere we are needed. We need hardly any space to launch and recover this aircraft. ... If bad weather comes in, the other UASs have to land, but we stay out there and provide ... eyes on surveillance for the folks on the ground.” ★

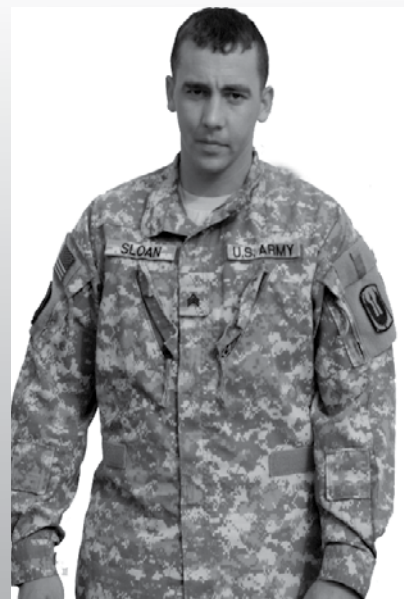






A First Response

Story by Capt. R.L. Edwards



CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, Iraq— The National Guard is one of the first groups of emergency responders called up in the case of a natural disaster. But what if your unit is deployed to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn and you are home on rest and relaxation (R&R) leave?

If you are Sgt. Brandon Sloan, a Guardsman from Amory, Miss. and a member of the 1st Assault Helicopter Battalion, 185th Aviation Regiment, you kiss your wife Jamey, hug your children Haley and Brley, jump in the truck with your dad and go help the rescue efforts in any way you can.

This is exactly what the flight operations sergeant for the 1-185 AHB, Task Force Griffin, did on April 30. Sloan was home from Iraq for his two weeks of R&R listening to his radio scanner as a massive line of thunderstorms rolled in. He heard reports that a deadly tornado had ripped through nearby Smithville.

The former firefighter, turned bass boat builder at Nautic Star Boats, heard from a friend that his best friend Derek Nick's house had been in the path of the deadly twister as it plowed through Mississippi on its way to Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Sloan and his father made their way to the friends' home and saw first hand the incredible destruction wrought by the tornado. Trees uprooted and pushed down like bent blades of grass, and power lines down across the roadways made ingress impossible. Sloan and his father, after trying several different routes, decided they would have to walk in.

God smiled on Sgt. Sloan's friend Derek that

day. Sloan found his friend Derek's family in the half of the house that was still standing.

Sloan grew quiet when he spoke of the destruction. "This was the worst destruction that I've ever seen, that even includes here (Iraq), Kosovo; even being a fireman."

Sloan said he spent three days helping search for people in the rubble of homes. "I helped rescue at least 10 people and several animals. ... There were people everywhere. The tornado just threw them into fields. It threw trees on top of them; there were several people with lacerations, broken bones, and other bumps and bruises, but glad to be alive."

// This is the worst destruction that I've ever seen... //

Sloan also helped his friend Derek move what was left of his belongings out of the ruins of his house. "I only had a few days of R&R leave left, but what are you going to do? You can't just not help. These are your neighbors, your friends."

Sloan served previously in Kosovo and is now serving his country in Iraq. His unit, the 1-185 AHB, is currently attached to the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, which is on a yearlong deployment to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn. ★





EARNING THE RANK

Story & photo by
Spc. Darriel Swatts

8-229th ARB Soldier receives the much honored battlefield promotion

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Marija Zink, with the 8th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 229th Aviation Regiment, Flying Tigers, received a battlefield promotion from specialist to sergeant on June 11 for her outstanding ability to work above her pay grade while stationed in Iraq.

Zink is trained as a chemical operations specialist, explained Command Sgt. Major Sammy Sablan, the top non-commissioned officer for the 8-229th ARB. “Yet with no previous aviation maintenance experience, her ability to prioritize and manage made her the perfect choice early on for the position of PC (production control) clerk.”

The PC office is responsible for managing all aspects of maintenance for more than 50 aircraft and five types of airframes from four battalions. As the PC clerk, Zink, a Scottsburg, Ind., native, was noticed for perform-

ing outstanding work and was handpicked by her leadership for the battlefield promotion.

“Zink has progressed in her abilities so rapidly and flawlessly that she now finds herself operating in the capacity of PC NCOIC (non-commissioned officer in charge); a sergeant first class position. She exhibits leadership qualities that never fail to impress the senior maintainers and maintenance officers in and out of the battalion,” Sablan said. “Her quick thinking and ability to handle crisis management in the PC office make her the perfect Soldier for this very demanding senior NCO position.”

Battlefield promotions were discontinued by the Army after the Vietnam War, but were brought back in 2009 and are available only to enlisted Soldiers. The promotions are used to promote an individual Soldier one grade, up to the rank of staff sergeant. Battlefield promotions do not

involve a promotion board and do not require the Soldier to meet time-in-service or time-in-grade requirements.

“Back home, I work at a hospital doing admin and clerical work, so I had some experience with this kind of work,” said Zink, who has been in the Army for more than five years and was a specialist for eight months.

“At first, I was doing what I could to help. Then as I learned more, I did more. Then when people started recognizing me for my work, it motivated me to do better. One thing led to another and I got my promotion.”

Zink is deployed to Iraq with her husband, Spc. Michael Zink, and her brother-in-law, Spc. Matthew Zink.

“I love being deployed here with my wife,” said Michael Zink, a crewchief with A Company, 8-229. “And the fact that she got recognized for her work by getting a battlefield

promotion is amazing. She has less than one year of aviation experience and is doing this well. She’s earned it 100 percent.”

Marija Zink was recognized for her work prior to receiving her battlefield promotion by receiving the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade’s Soldier of the Week award during the second week of May.

“She has stepped up and proven herself time and time again,” said Sablan. “She is, without a doubt, the most talented specialist (now sergeant) I have seen in my 24 years of military service.”

The 8-229 is an Army Reserve attack reconnaissance helicopter battalion from Fort Knox, Ky. The battalion is currently attached to the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, which is on a yearlong deployment to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn. ★





Gennie Training

Story and photos by Spc. Matthew Wright

California Guardsmen train Iraqis on generator maintenance

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – The 640th Aviation Support Battalion is working with the U.S. Air Force Base Transition Team (BTT) to train the Iraqis to maintain and operate backup generators for the airfield on Camp Taji.

The Headquarters Support Company (HSC) of the 640th ASB currently maintains and operates the flightline generators on the Iraqi side of the airfield. It is working with the BTT and the Iraqi Air Aviation Command (IqAAC) to eventually have Iraqis maintain the generators themselves. The generators provide backup power to the airfield's main power grid in case of an outage.

"As we begin to transition, eventually it will be the sole responsibility of IqAAC to maintain the generators," said Master Sgt. Lydia Crouse, from Langley Air Force Base, and a member of the 321st Expeditionary Mission Support Advisory Group of the 1st Detachment, part of the BTT at Camp Taji.

Sgt. Salvador Lopez, HSC, 640th, a generator mechanic from Moreno Valley, Calif., assists in training the Iraqis to operate the equipment.

"Our main job is to train the Iraqis on how to properly maintain the equipment on the airfield," Lopez said.

The 640th's generator mechanics drive to the Iraqi side of the airfield each week. They meet with Iraqi mechanics as well as Iraqi trainees who come to learn how the generators work.

Crouse explained, "The 640th has identified this as a long term issue for the IqAAC and has set up weekly maintenance training."

The purpose of the training is to ensure that the IqAAC personnel have the skills to properly instruct their own soldiers on the equipment to help maintain the airfield and the base.

"The level of previous training received by the IqAAC was limited," Crouse said.

But now the Iraqis are taught the basic preventative maintenance checks and services (PMCS) and a basic level of maintenance the Army uses, Lopez added.

Warrant Officer Rashid from the IqAAC said, "I am looking forward to what we (the Iraqi soldiers) can learn from this cooperation," Rashid said.

Rashid observed and asked many questions and seemed pleased with the training he was getting from the 640th.

The Iraqis said they are very happy with this cross training from the U.S. military and the BTT, and HSC in particular.

"We have received very positive feedback," Crouse said.

The cooperation with the generator training has been positive for both sides. "We are building a good relationship with them," Lopez said.

The Iraqis are expected to inherit the equipment, providing the incentive for the training.

The 640th is a California Army National Guard aviation support battalion from Los Alamitos, Calif. The battalion is attached to the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, which has been deployed to Iraq since February in support of Operation New Dawn in Iraq. ★



READY FOR CHANGE

MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS READY TO GO
"TACTICAL" FOR IRAQ DRAWDOWN

Story & photos by Spc. Matthew Wright

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – In preparation for the expected pullout of U.S. troops from Iraq at the conclusion of Operation New Dawn, Charlie Company, 640th Aviation Support Battalion, will provide tactical signal support for the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade.

Charlie Company's primary role is to ensure that tactical communications, whether internet, radio or telephones, are constantly up and running.

"They are the backbone of the tactical communications network for the combat aviation brigade," said Capt. David Rosales, Charlie Company commander.

Tactical communications use line of site dishes and mobile relay systems which occupy a small footprint. Charlie Company maintains and operates the tactical systems for the brigade and subordinate units.

It has detachments at both Contingency Operating Base (COB) Warrior in Kirkuk and COB Speicher in Tikrit in northern Iraq. In Kirkuk, the communications team provides backup tactical communications for the Headquarters and Headquarters Troop (HTT) of the 6-17th Cavalry Squadron. They transmit to and from a Joint Network Node (JNN) at COB Speicher which relays data to other locations throughout the Iraq Joint Operations Area.

"We are here to support 6-17 Cavalry on communications, from telephone to laptops and regular Internet," Sgt. Ruben Cruz from Charlie Company, and a resident of Buena Park, Calif., explained.



The tactical network system runs through a Command Post Node (CPN) which is a mobile unit that connects to a Satellite Transportable Terminal (STT) to uplink data to communication satellites. Communications specialists are responsible for monitoring the communication feed to make sure there are no disruptions with the feed.

40th CAB units currently rely on a combination of strategic and tactical communications systems. Strategic communications, which include contractor-provided internet, cables and telephones, are permanently built on operating base infrastructure. Strategic systems are maintained by contractor personnel and tactical communications augment and serve as a backup to the strategic network.

At some point, the strategic networks at bases will be withdrawn from the post, leaving the tactical networks



SPC. LUTHOR ALTON AND SPC. MARIO PEREZ PRESURE WASH A SATELLITE TRANSPORTABLE TERMINAL (STT) AT COB WARRIOR.

as the primary means of communications.

Sgt. Cruz explained what discontinuing the strategic network and relying solely on the tactical network would mean to the HHT.

"Right now, the bandwidth we have could be compared to the size of a one-inch wire rope, that's really thick and big," Cruz said. "If we were to go down to tactical, it will be less than a shoestring."

"When the civilian contractor-provided Internet goes down, we put our equipment into play so Soldiers can still have communications," Cruz explained.

Cruz and his team have been in Kirkuk since February and will be there throughout the summer. Spc. Mario Perez, from Charlie Company, and a native of Freedom, Calif., is part of

the team as a CPN operator. His duties include establishing and monitoring the tactical network system.

"We set up voice, meaning telephone systems, and data for the Internet as well as other types of communication. We then monitor the connections to the router switches and to the users, in addition to the connections to the STT and hubs, and make sure that there is no break in service," Perez said.

Members of Charlie Company continue to back up the strategic communications on a daily basis throughout central and northern Iraq and are ready for the tactical network to become the primary means of communications as the bases prepare to close in conjunction with the drawdown. They have been anticipating the drawdown all year and are ready to put their tactical network in motion as the mission posture in Iraq changes. ★

Goodbye IRAQ! Hello CALIFORNIA!!!



Story and Photos by 1st Lt. Jason Sweeney

JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq – The California Army National Guardsmen of the 1st Assault Helicopter Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment have left the blistering heat of Iraq behind and are en route to the cool ocean breezes of the California coast.

The battalion wrapped up its yearlong tour in Iraq in late July and is expected to arrive at its home station of Los Alamitos, Calif. around Aug. 1.

"I'm happy to say, we're all going home, coming home safe," said Headquarters and Headquarters Company 1st Sgt. Robert Garrido, who is returning to Lakewood, Calif., and his civilian job as a Culver City police officer.

"I'm not going to miss this heat," said Command Sgt. Maj. Troy Eck, a resident of Mentone, Calif., and the top enlisted Soldier in the battalion. Temperatures reached upwards of 120 degrees Fahrenheit as the battalion prepared to leave its headquarters building on Joint Base Balad.

The California Army National Guard's 1-140th AHB, known as Task Force Long Knife, arrived in Iraq in October 2010. Over the course of the year, the battalion's pilots logged about 14,000 hours of flight time in support of Operation New Dawn. Its approximately 350 Soldiers, 30 UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters and 20 fixed-wing aircraft performed a variety of missions in theater.

The unit conducted air assault missions to detain high value targets. It was responsible for air transportation for United States Forces—Iraq command staff and flew distinguished visitors around the country. Visitors included Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullen, Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and his successor Leon Panetta, among several others. It also operated two Forward Arming and Refueling Points that supplied fuel for Army aviation assets in theater.

Eck said that over the past year he watched his Soldiers adapt to adversity and grow into leadership roles. "Everybody's done a phenomenal job," he said.

"As a unit, we became more cohesive, more experienced—we became a better unit," said battalion commander Lt. Col. Jeffrey Holliday, of Sacramento, Calif. "These guys did things they didn't think they could do."

Holliday recalled one incident where a UH-60 Black Hawk flew to Joint Base Balad late one night

with a damaged engine in need of replacement. The mechanics of Delta Company went right to work starting around midnight and finishing the job by 6 a.m. "It was an incredible piece of work," he said.

When the battalion arrived in theater, it fell under the command of the active-duty Army's Combat Aviation Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, from Fort Riley, Kan. In March, the 1st CAB was replaced by the California Army National Guard's 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, led by Col. Mitch Medigovich.

On July 19, Medigovich, a Sacramento native, arrived on Joint Base Balad to say his goodbyes to the battalion. "You came and brought your A-game," he said to a gathering of 1-140th Soldiers. "You are the quintessential example of California Guardsmen."

The Soldiers told Medigovich about the many ups and downs they faced over the year. One challenge was sharing a base with the Air Force and learning that branch's way of doing business, they said. They spoke of long hours and a high operations tempo that could often get stressful. They also said that transitioning from being a one-weekend-a-month Guardsman to a full-time Soldier in a deployed environment was challenging, especially when it came to living and working with the same people day in and day out.

They spoke of the camaraderie and the strong bonds of friendship that were forged on the job and at





barbecues after work and pool parties at the base's two swimming pools.

Maj. Jeff Sibley, a San Clemente, Calif., native, and the officer in charge of the battalion's operations section, said the most difficult aspect of the deployment was the separation from family. "I'm not going to lie to you. I'm ready to go home," he said. But, he added that the challenges of the deployment gave him the opportunity to grow, both personally and professionally.

1st Lt. Aaron Montes of Ontario, Calif., said as soon as he arrives home he is going straight back to work at his civilian job as a Skechers logistics manager. During the deployment, he said his job as the officer in charge of the battalion's communications and automation section was high pace and high stress. He

said when they first arrived in country, the base was often hit with mortar and rocket attacks. Then there was the constant deafening roar of Air Force jets taking off and landing.

"My job back home is easy compared to this," he said.

Medigovich told the Guardsmen to be proud of their service in Iraq, adding that their experiences here have prepared them for leadership roles back home.

While the 1-140th is headed home, the remainder of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade has several months to go in Iraq, Medigovich reminded them. "Have a few cold beers and fish tacos when you get back home and think of us still here," he said. ★



TASK FORCE MARAUDER TAKES THE REINS



Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Tracci Dorgan

CAMP TAJI, Iraq - After more than 18 months of preparation, South Carolina Army National Guard, 1-151st Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, Task Force Marauder, officially took command of the task force Sept. 29, 2011 as the 8-229th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion finished their honorable service under the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade and made room for the 1-151st to move in. More than 400 Soldiers strong, 1-151st ARB is ready for their mission of offering convoy security and reconnaissance in support of the draw down of U.S. troops in Iraq.

After a three-week transition period, the transfer of authority ceremony was held at the QRC 1-R2 Gray Eagle hangar on Camp Taji, Iraq. Outgoing command, Lt. Col. James Posey and Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Sammy Sablan with the 8-229th ARB cased up their colors while incoming command, Lt. Col. Ray Davis and Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Lonnie Grif-

fin with the 1-151st ARB proudly unveiled their battalion colors.

Members from the 40th CAB, the 1-151st ARB, the 8-229th ARB, and other guests attended the event to say good-bye to the outgoing command and to welcome in the new.

Master Sgt. Michael Uswa, S3 operations non-commissioned officer in-charge for HHC 1-151st, said "Finally our time was starting for us do to our mission of providing security for convoys leaving theater, the local area, and the nearby contingency operation stations."

1st Sgt. Terrence Powell, E. Co. 1-151st, said "We may be one of the last units to take a command here in Iraq. I'm very proud to be a member of the South Carolina Army National Guard and this unit, which I have been in for 29 years. We are here making history." Powell added, "Seeing

the colors unveiled was a moment full of emotion I will never forget.”

The 1-151st has served in several operations in the past decade. The experience of the past operations this unit and the Soldiers bring with them will ensure their success and adaptability to any situations that arise.

Currently, Task Force Marauder is commanding split base operations with A. Co. 1-151st in COS Warrior, and also working with a five-team operation on Camp Taji with A Co. 1/185th Air Assault, 617th CAV Task Force Sabre, QRC 1-R2 Gray Eagle, and Task Force 171 MEDEVAC. According to Maj. John McElveen, S3 operations for HHC 1-151st, “It is going to broaden our scope of air operations. It is not what we are used to. We are going to have to get out of our comfort zone and learn other skills, but I know we have the right people to do it.” ★





Reintegration Preparation

Story & photos by Spc. Matthew Wright

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Pierre Saint-Fleur, of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, hosted an all-day chaplains' seminar at the Tigris River Chapel earlier this month to discuss techniques for supporting Soldier reintegration following deployment to Iraq for Operation New Dawn.

The attending chaplains were from different units that are scattered throughout Iraq, as well from 40th CAB units at Camp Taji. Among the attendees were United States Forces-Iraq Chaplain (Col.) Chester Egert and Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Scott Hammond from United States Division-Center.

The chaplains provide religious services for their Soldiers, counseling and other spiritual and emotional support. In theater, they are the key support for the troops in times of need, and help them cope with the environment and the pressures of being in a war zone.

The seminar focused on preparing Soldiers and their families for resuming life when Soldiers arrive back at their homes. Participants discussed programs to help the Soldiers reintegrate back into their civilian lives as well as help their families adjust to their return.

Chaplain (Capt.) Andrew Parker, from the 1st General Support Aviation Battalion, 171st Aviation Regiment, and a Jacksonville, Fla. native, briefed the group on the merits of a reintegration program for Soldiers and what problems could be expected for Soldiers returning from a yearlong deployment.

"The big thing about reintegration is expectations," Parker said. "In our minds, we take a snapshot of what it was like when we left and we are anticipating it to be like that when we get back."

Parker continued by discussing the problems Soldiers may experience once they get home and after all the celebrations and the "Hollywood scenes" have ended.

He talked about three areas of concern that Soldiers have to cope with: family, friends and work.

"First thing, with the family...I encourage Soldiers to ease back into it slowly," he said.

The families, Parker said, have learned to pay bills, take the kids to school and learned to live without their Soldier, and it takes time for the families to adjust to their Soldier's return.

He suggested the Soldiers take a few months to slowly pick up where they left off.



Parker suggested Soldiers resume communication with their children to let them know that things are different, but gradually ease back into the parental role. If a Soldier were to jump in and take the reigns as if he or she never left it could cause additional stress on the family.

"Having time to reconnect with each of them individually, over the course of time—that's a helpful way to reacclimate with each one of your children," Parker said. "And it is certainly true as well for your spouse."

He recommended the same thing regarding friends; to slowly reconnect with friends and to gradually reestablish communications with them. Those friends, like family, had to continue on for a year without the Soldier.

The chaplains next discussed problems that could arise with the Soldiers returning to their civilian jobs. They discussed ways the Soldiers could ease back into the work routine because the change from military to civilian employment could be a shock to the Soldiers.

The chaplains discussed how an after-action review of the deployment could be helpful for the Soldiers' readjustment to civilian life. They felt that if the Soldiers evaluated their time overseas, reviewed the positives and negatives of the deployment, after a few

months of being back home, it would help them to gain perspective on their reintegration.

Hammond provided additional thoughts on the reintegration course that Parker had briefed earlier and how it could be presented to the Soldiers, explaining that the course should be given to small groups to make it more personal.

"I just bring people into my office, even if they outrank me, because they don't feel intimidated," Hammond said.

Reconnecting with families and friends, work, churches and communities could be a challenging experience. With the deployment to Iraq winding down for most of Soldiers here, the chaplains said they want to make sure that reintegration back into the civilian world is as smooth as possible.

Chaplain Saint-Fleur summarized what was covered during the chaplains' seminar: "The participating chaplains and assistants reflected how to best provide support to Soldiers and their families after the excitement of the welcome home ceremonies fade away, the flags are put away, the bands stop playing and the news media moves on to other stories." ★





CAV MOVES TO TAJI

Story and photos by Spc. Darriel Swatts

CAMP TAJI, Iraq — Soldiers of the 6th Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, an Assault-Reconnaissance Squadron flying of OH-58 Kiowa Warriors, based out of Fort Wainwright, Alaska, took the lead as the first aviation unit in Iraq to close a Forward Operating Base (FOB).

The 6-17 CAV, in conjunction with 4th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, closed FOB Diamondback in the northern city of Mosul, in October as part of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade's reposturing of forces in preparation for the drawdown of U.S. forces in Iraq.

"The reposturing of forces in Iraq requires large formations and thousands of man hours for each battalion or squadron to move to a new location," said Col. Mitchell Medigovich, commander of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB).

The 6-17 CAV is one of five aviation battalions that fall under the 40th CAB's command.

"The 6-17th's ability to maintain a positive attitude, agile mindset and a commitment to mission success allowed them to move from Mosul to Camp Taji and Kirkuk," Medigovich said. "They did so in a manner that they were able to mitigate the risk and eliminate friction and still provide first class mission support to their customers."

The 6-17 CAV faced a momentous challenge when its Sol-

diers closed FOB Diamondback and moved out. The unit not only had to move its personnel, maintenance equipment, communication packages and aircraft; but also ensure there was no drop in aerial coverage to the ground force commanders and make sure everything was in order to hand off to the Iraqis.

The handover of Diamondback, at the Mosul International Airport, had special significance due to it being an international airport, said Lt. Col. Michael McCurry, commander of the 6-17. "We had to make sure it was secure and operational for civilian flights when we repostured the American presence and handed it over to the Iraqi Ministry of Transportation."

While the 6-17 was moving out of Mosul, it also closed a base at Tal Afar, constructed new landing pads on Camp Taji, made upgrades to its aircraft, all while maintaining and conducting missions throughout United States Division—Center and North. The unit operated, at one point, out of five locations.

"The whole move went very smoothly," said Capt. Peter Thomas, F Troop commander. "The Soldiers worked very hard to get everything prepared for the move. Our Soldiers are extremely flexible. They've done a great job as we repostured south. These guys have been living out of their rucksacks for the majority of the deployment





because of all the changes and movements they've had to endure."

One important aspect of the 6-17th's move was to make sure they had areas to park their aircraft before moving to a new location. The 6-17 created a whole new parking area on Camp Taji's airfield, and that didn't go without its challenges.

"It was very dusty when we first started," said Chief Warrant Officer Matthew Paddock, squadron safety officer for the 6-17. Paddock said an OH-58 Kiowa scout helicopter came in off a mission and caused a brown out where visibility fell to nearly zero due to dust. "Now we're leveling the ground and putting down a nice layer of gravel, two to four inches deep. Then we're going to flatten it out to cut down on the dust, making a better environment for landing."

As the U.S. prepares to draw down out of Iraq, maintaining mission capability is essential for all, whether it be air or ground units, Medigovich said.

"Consolidating forces allows us to generate more combat power. One and one equals three; that's the synergy that takes place when you combine and bring aviation forces together—the sum of those parts is greater than the whole," Medigovich said. "The 6-17 consolidation from five sites to two allows us to generate significantly more combat power, which in turn allows them to operate more safely

and be in a position in which we can defeat the violent extremists that are operating in the area."

The 40th CAB, units have vacated several major posts, to include: Cobra, Sykes, Tal Afar and Mosul; removed or handed over several Forward Arming and Refueling Points, and continue to move aircraft and personnel in support of the drawdown. But, missions in those areas have not ceased or decreased.

"Even though we are reposturing, our mission has not changed. We're still flying the same scout weapons team coverage as before. We're just flying out of different locations," said McCurry. "We still are able to provide aerial coverage to help maintain security for the people of Iraq."

The 40th CAB is still providing air support for Soldiers on the ground and providing security for the citizens of Iraq as the drawdown of U.S. forces progresses.

"We're getting ready to fully hand over security to the Iraqis and transition to them while we leave the country," said McCurry. "I think that's a really positive step and something that we need to make sure the world recognizes, because there are not too many forces around the world that do what we did and hand things back over to the parent nation with dignity and honor." ★



AIR MEDAL



USFI-I, DCG-O, CSM Earl L. Rice, SSG Richard Flach and USF-I, DCO, LTG Frank Helmick

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – An “all pro” medical evacuation crew from the 1st General Support Aviation Battalion, 171st Aviation Regiment received Air Medals for conducting two air evacuations on a single day during “red weather” conditions that had grounded aircraft across Iraq.

The Air Medal is awarded for meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight.

Lt. Gen. Frank Helmick, deputy commanding general for US Forces-Iraq, flew into Camp Taji on Aug. 11 to personally present the Air Medals to the pilots: Chief Warrant Officer 2 Alex Engleson and Chief Warrant Officer 4 John Labbe; the crew chiefs: Staff Sgt. Richard Flach and Pfc. Corey Davis; and flight medic Sgt. Cassandra Kennedy.

On a blistering afternoon, Helmick stood on the Camp Taji flight line in front of the crew’s HH60M Black Hawk helicopter as a gathering of Soldiers from the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade looked on. Helmick dubbed the crew a “Super Crew” and an “All Pro” team and lauded them for their skill and wealth of experience, and for successfully performing their mission under difficult conditions.

The flight crew belongs to Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 126th Aviation Regiment (Air Ambulance), an Army National Guard unit base in Westfield, Mass. and Burlington, Vt. Charlie Company deployed to Iraq with the 1-171 GSAB, which is currently attached to the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB). The 40th CAB is conducting full-spectrum aviation operations in Iraq in 2011 in support of Operation New Dawn.

On June 30, a dust storm blew into central Iraq, turning the sky a steel gray and sharply reducing visibility. Meanwhile, a Soldier at Joint Security Station Liberty in Baghdad was suffering from shrapnel wounds in his leg. The Soldier needed urgent care and immediate evacuation to a medical clinic. The 3-126 “super crew” was on standby at Camp Taji and ready to go.

“We had the best crew available for that day in that aircraft,” said 1-171 commander, Lt. Col. Richard Wilson.



USF-I, DCO, LTG Frank Helmick and CW2 Alex Engleson

The decision to launch fell to brigade commander, Col. Mitch Medigovich, who evaluated the situation and gave the thumbs up “based on the experience of the crew, the urgency of the mission, the confidence in their ability and in their aircraft,” Medigovich explained.

The crew launched without hesitation in their HH60M Black Hawk.

“It was bad weather, but the guy needed help,” Flach said.

The aircraft, nicknamed the Mike Model, is an advanced version of the Black Hawk. It has a digital cockpit with such extras as a rolling map display and satellite imagery that



USF-I, DCO, LTG Frank Helmick and PFC Corey Davis

HONORS

Story by 1st Lt. Jason Sweeney
Photos by Spc. Darriel Swatts



USF-I, DCO, LTG Frank Helmick and CW4 John Labbe

give it an advantage over standard Black Hawks in low visibility conditions.

"This aircraft makes it a lot easier," said Labbe, who was flying the aircraft that day with fellow pilot Engleson. "Nobody had any issues about going out. Nobody second guessed it."

// It was bad weather,
but the guy needed
help. //

The crew flew into Liberty and picked up the wounded Soldier and headed across Baghdad to a medical clinic at Sather Air Force Base.

"He had shrapnel in him and was in a lot of pain," said Kennedy, the flight medic. "I assessed the Soldier, took care of his injuries and kept him comfortable."

Equipment problems at Sather meant the Soldier could not be treated there. The pilots turned their aircraft



USF-I, DCO, LTG Frank Helmick and SGT Cassandra Kennedy

north and headed for Joint Base Balad, which is about 40 miles north of Baghdad.

The aircraft followed the Tigris River as it wound through Baghdad, Flach recalled. "The weather continued to deteriorate," he said, explaining that visibility fell to less than a quarter mile, so the pilots climbed to 5,000 feet and flew under instrument flight rules to avoid the many obstacles in Baghdad, such as radio towers, smokestacks and aerostat balloons.

They arrived safely at Balad where the Soldier was handed over to medics and treated for his wounds.

The crew was then grounded at Balad because of the duststorm, but soon received another urgent call. A Soldier at Camp Taji needed immediate evacuation due to appendicitis. Again, the decision to launch fell to Medigovich and he gave the OK. The crew flew to back to Camp Taji, picked up the patient and delivered her to Balad without incident.

Kennedy said although the weather was bad, multiple missions in a single day are not out of the ordinary. She said the crew's accomplishments were one part of a larger effort. "This is for all you guys," she said to the gathering of Soldiers on the Camp Taji airfield after Helmick pinned her with the Air Medal.

"It's a really good feeling," Engleson said after receiving his medal. He attributed the award to the constant training and battle drilling conducted by his unit.

"It's been an honor being over here with all of you guys," Labbe said to the crowd.

"Helicopter pilots across the board in this country do extraordinary things every day," Helmick said. "I admire the professionals in this organization. To this super crew, well done." ★

SOLDIER SAFETY

By Chief Warrant Officer 5
Christopher Trautwein

Accidents we've experienced since we deployed have been divided between environmental and human factors. Simple things, such as asking for help, taking that extra step to secure some Personal Protective Equipment, or slowing down, to not cutting corners, go a long way to reducing accidents.

Sports injuries have been a significant contributor to the number of accidents or injuries incurred with knee and ankle injuries leading the way. Sporting events are incredibly important to the morale of an organization. I encourage each of you to participate and take part in the activity of your choice. However, remember to play to your own ability and be cognizant of the conditions around you. Conditions here are not always favorable to your normal level of play. HEAT CAT 5 is the norm here so pace yourself, keep hydrated and drink water even if you think you're not thirsty.

Lastly, don't add to the accident rate by doing something you shouldn't be doing in the first place. Unnecessary acts have had an impact on our formation. These are truly unfortunate because they are completely preventable. It is important to note that any personal injury can be made more serious given the level of care needed. Remember, transportation to follow-on medical facilities could be delayed depending upon the weather.

Take care of yourselves and look after your battle buddy. Although we can start to see the light at the end of the tunnel, remember, you are not mission complete until you're at the front door of your home, where your family and loved ones can see your smiling face.



editor's letter



This issue of The CONDOR is our best yet. Over the last few weeks, we've seen battalions pack up and go home and we've welcomed the 1st Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 151st Aviation Regiment from South Carolina, which joined our Brigade as we head into our last few weeks here. We've seen the Brigade's units in action in a high tempo operations environment, and we've done our best to keep up.

Spc. Darriel Swatts and Spc. Matthew Wright have been traveling up and down Iraq and all over Camp Taji taking notes and shooting photos to bring you the stories for this issue. Staff Sgt. Yvonne Najera has once again done a beautiful job on the magazine layout. We've also had photo submissions from a few of you out there that we've used in the magazine, most notably our spectacular cover photo taken by 1st Sgt. Christopher Johnson from the 8th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 229th Aviation Regiment.

Putting out a magazine in a combat theater has had its moments. Each article passes through several hands before it is approved for release. Then there are numerous memos that need to be written and signed before our magazine makes it from CD to printer and back to Camp Taji in printed form.

Several weeks ago, we waited at Castle Gate as the search dogs and guards went through the vehicle owned by our printer, an Iraqi businesswoman named "Rose," who was delivering the printed magazines to us. During the search, we stood in the heat and got a chance to chat.

Rose, wearing her hijab, told us in lively English about her growing printing business and her optimism for the future. She told us how she admires the U.S. Army and watches Hollywood movies to better understand us—Tom Cruise movies mostly, she said, such as "The Impossible Mission." (Better known as "Mission Impossible.") Rose is currently watching "Army Wives" on Iraqi television, which, come to think of it, may not be painting the best picture of us. But it did give us a lot to talk about before we were finally cleared to unload the boxes containing The CONDOR from the trunk of her car.

Rose has done a great job printing our magazine and we've been happy to work with her. We hope that the work and the sacrifices that American Soldiers have made here have helped to bring about an Iraq that is a better place for all the Iraqi Roses out there.

In these last few weeks, feel free to contact us with story ideas from your unit, and keep sending those photos. Thanks for your support, and we hope you enjoy this issue of The CONDOR!

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

