

The Deuce

2011

The Official Magazine of the 362nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Vol. 1

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An Iraqi tank crewman from 1st Company, 2nd Regiment, 34th Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army watches one of his the company's platoon's' M1A1 Abrams participate in a live-fire exercise as part of the Maneuver Collective Training Course at the Besmaya Combat Training Center, Sept. 27.

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Soldiers from the 362nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment pose for a photo at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J. during their premobilization training in Feb. 2011. Courtesy Photo

Soldiers from the 362nd MPAD take on the responsibility of closing down Iraq

This deployment to Iraq, which for many of the Soldiers of 362nd "The Deuce" Mobile Public Affairs Detachment was their first, has been somewhat of a roller coaster to say the least. After splitting us up into three locations, two small groups in Baghdad and our guidon in Talil, we have all experienced significant changes as operations in Iraq begin to wind down.

Our teams in the Northland did outstanding work supporting the four-star force level with United States Forces - Iraq. Staff Sgt. David Lankford and Sgt. Jaime Desrosiers split from the main USF-I Public Affairs Office team to support the Joint Operations Center and PAO team at the Al Asad air base.

Lankford helped plan and establish an office for the PAO while Desrosiers manned the JOC and helped provide broadcast support whenever his schedule would allow.

Our Victory Base Complex team did a variety of missions. Sergeant Kellena Leech moved out to Forward Operating Base Kalsu and assembled the "Brave Rifles" legacy documentary. She also did other work in direct support of USF-I writing several stories and working the social media Facebook page "Boots in the Sand."

Specialist Karen Sampson is our newest Soldier in the PA field and did some incredible work writing stories and assisting in the Media Operations Center.

Specialist Timothy Koster also got in the Command Information fight writing stories. He also helped design the Legacy Brief for Gen. Lloyd Austin and this edition of *The Deuce*.

Staff Sgt. Derek Smith, while acting as the non-commissioned officer in charge, also took on the monumental task of clearing the hand receipts of the Armed Forces Network - Baghdad which totaled millions of dollars worth of gear. He received high remarks for excelling at this arduous task.

Sergeant 1st Class Mayra O'Neill-Dalton and 1st Lt. Joseph Larrew lead the MOC located at the New Embassy Compound. They worked long hours keeping the forces informed with timely EXSUMS summarizing both western and Pan Arab news germane to the Soldiers here.

Sergeant Stephen Choice, Sgt. Vanessa Josey, and Spc. David Marquis assisted them in this effort, manning the MOC and doing the leg-work necessary for success. Second Lt. Fernando Ochoa was also on this team assisting in a variety of ways. ■



Iraqi tankers and tank crewmen from 1st Company, 2nd Regiment, 34th Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army take a few moments to rest after a day of M1A1 live-fire training at the Besmaya Combat Training Center, Sept. 27. The live-fire was a culminating exercise of the Maneuver Collective Training Course where the tankers practice platoon movement techniques in their various platoons to increase crew competency.

A New Generation of Iraqi Tanker

Tankers from 1st Company, 2nd Regiment, 34th Brigade, 9th Army are part of the first Iraqi tank company to participate in the M1A1 Maneuver Collective Training Course, which was concluded on Sept. 28 at the Besmaya Combat Training Center.

The 15-day course is designed to train Iraqi Army tank crews to work together at the platoon and company levels by increasing the crew's competency on the vehicle, preparing them for additional arms training and helping create a self-sustaining protection force for their country.

"[The company] takes the M1A1 tank and they start combining themselves into platoons," said Bill Deveraux, an M1A1 Tank trainer and Las Vegas, Nev. native. "In the beginning they'd only been initially trained on the vehicle, and now they are trying to put themselves together to work as a team."

After a few weeks of classroom and hands-on training, the course culminated with a full-speed, all-terrain maneuver and live-fire exercise to demonstrate skills the tankers acquired during their time at the BCTC.

"We learned defense and offense and how to do the formations," said 1st Private Hussaien Faiez, an Iraqi tanker with 1st Platoon of 1st Company. "We also learned how to destroy targets and cover each other."

The final exercise involved each

platoon, consisting of three tanks each, tactically traversing the training center's ranges before approaching and actively engaging decommissioned Soviet-era armored vehicles down range with sabot rounds and M2 machine gun fire.

"Why the M1 tank? It is the best, the fastest, and the most dangerous tank in the world," said Col. Tom Lewis, senior armor advisor for BCTC, at the company graduation, Sept. 28.

"As professional Soldiers it is our job to protect our country. We are the ones who suffer when there is fighting. By having the M1 tank, and now the F-16 fighter jet, the country of Iraq is building its capability to defend itself."

Several of the course's students expressed they wanted the Iraqi Security Forces to be like the U.S. military to their instructors. Having the M1 tank in their arsenal is a step in that direction. Another critical step in that direction is having highly qualified instructors. Each instructor at BCTC is a retired U.S. Army tanker.

"They are the best trainers we have ever had," said 2nd Lt. Allaa Kareen, 2nd Platoon commander. "It was very good training."

Working with people from another nation who have a different mindset and culture has its challenges. However, the instructors have worked around these difficulties to find a rewarding experience.

"It has been very challenging and exciting at the same time," said Matthew Phelps, an M1A1 trainer and Shreveport, La. native. "I think they have a lot of great ideas, and we bring some different ideas to the table."

"They were very receptive to the ideas we brought forward," added Phelps, a retired Army master sergeant. "It was a good combination, a good working environment, for those guys."

The first rendition of the M1A1 Maneuver Collective Training Course finished Sept. 28. 11 more companies are scheduled to go through the advanced training.

"Eleven more companies will follow you and they are going to look to the standard you set over the last 15 days," said Lewis. ■

A NEW GENERATION OF IRAQI TANKER



An Iraqi M1A1 Abrams tank belonging to 1st Company, 2nd Regiment, 34th Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army fires a shot downrange at the Besmaya Combat Training Center, Sept. 27 as part of the M1A1 Maneuver Collective Training Course. This armor company is the first to complete this training which focuses on movement techniques at the platoon level to increase crew competency. This company of tankers is the first company to participate in this specific course which focuses on movement techniques at the platoon level to increase crew competency.



An Iraqi tankerman from 1st Company, 2nd Regiment, 34th Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army assists in aligning an M1A1 Abrams' main cannon with the tank's primary sight system to ensure accurate fire during the M1A1 Maneuver Collective Training Course at the Besmaya Combat Training Center, Sept. 27. The Iraqi army recently purchased several 140 of these modern tanks to help bolster their nation's defenses.



An Iraqi tankerman from 1st Company, 2nd Regiment, 34th Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army unloads a sabot round from a munitions truck to be loaded on one of the company's M1A1 Abrams tanks during the Maneuver Collective Training Course at the Besmaya Combat Training Center, Sept. 27.

Baghdad Police College K9 handler graduation



A graduate of the Baghdad Police College K9 training program demonstrates handler communication July 30.

U.S. and Iraqi soldiers, along with distinguished members of the Iraqi National Police, gathered at the Baghdad Police College at Forward Operating Base Shield for a graduation of 26 canine handlers, July 30.

The 8-week training program was designed to educate Iraqi police in the handling of dogs specifically trained in explosives detection. Bomb detection dogs are universally recognized as the most effective means of detecting explosives, said U.S. Air Force Capt. John W. Jansheski, chief, Canine Advisory Team, Iraq Training and Advisory Mission Police, from Newark, Ohio. The dogs arrive to the college trained in basic obedience and odor recognition of approximately nine basic components of explosives.

"We follow up our handling program with the proper care of working dogs,"

said Jansheski. "We make the new handlers aware of the dogs' need for attention 24/7 with logistic support, medical support and care of the dog's emotional side as well."

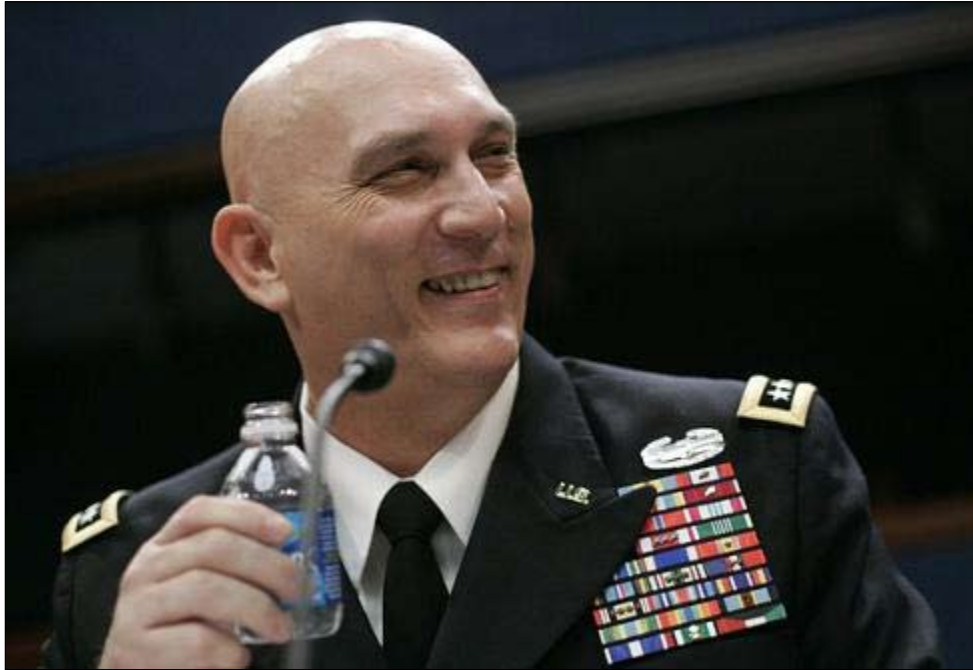
The challenge in Iraq, as in much of the Arab world, is that dogs are considered unclean," said Gen. Mohamed Moshab Hajer, chief, Iraqi National Police K9 Unit, Baghdad Police College. "Very few families in Iraq grow up with dogs," he said.

The ITAM Police - K9 training program, in conjunction with the Baghdad Police College, is working to move beyond these sensitivities. "The program's training mission is to create a successful training team between the canine and

the Iraqi handler," said Mohamed.

"It is also very important that we have proper veterinary care in place in all provinces of Iraq as well," said Mohamed, who is a licensed veterinarian himself. "The success of the explosive detection dogs is creating more demand for them in all provinces."

"The office of the Iraqi prime minister recently requisitioned explosive detection dogs to secure the prime minister's compound," said U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Michael Smith, director, ITAM Police, originally from Randolph, N.J., who attended the graduation. "This shows trust and confidence in the canine training program." ■



Courtesy Photo

Familiar face accepts new role: Gen. Odierno becomes Army Chief of Staff

The future inherently lends itself to uncertainty, doubt and confusion. Service members of Operation New Dawn face the looming question of what is to become of America's mission in Iraq at year's end, compounded with impending budget cuts to the military on the home front. Fortunately, in the opinion of many, a tried and trusted leader has taken on a new role.

The "operational architect" of the surge that "turned the tide" in Iraq accepted a new challenge as Gen. Raymond T. Odierno was sworn in as the Army's 38th chief of staff in a ceremony on Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Va., Sept. 7. Odierno assumed responsibility from outgoing chief of staff, Gen. Martin E. Dempsey.

Odierno said the mission now is to maintain a trained and ready Army to ensure U.S. forces succeed in Iraq and Afghanistan. He emphasized that maintaining the nation's all-volunteer military in the face of budget cuts will be a challenge.

"Today is like no other in our history," the 1976 West Point graduate said during his address. "It is a time of uncertainty and historic change. We face a multitude of security challenges, such as transnational and regional terrorism ... All of that is

underpinned by our own fiscal challenges."

Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta praised Odierno after the ceremony, praising the general's service record over his 35-year career. He referred to the general as the operational architect of the troop surge in Iraq that "turned the tide" of operations in 2007 when he was commander of Multi-National Corp-Iraq.

Odierno then served as commander of Multi-National Force-Iraq from September 2008 to December 2009 during "a very crucial time when our military was trying to make sure we lock in the gains that were made with the surge," said Panetta.

After operations changed, Odierno continued to serve as commander, United States Forces - Iraq, from January 2010 to September 2010.

Odierno maintained during his confirmation hearings that he believes the U.S. should support the Iraqi government in whatever capacity the two countries can come to an agreement on, noting increased Iranian activity in Iraq.

The newly sworn chief also advised careful planning and realistic approaches to the decisions which lie ahead.

"We must avoid our historical pattern

of drawing down too fast and getting too small," the general explained.

"Especially since our record of predicting the future is frankly not a very good one. So as we make difficult resource decisions, we must be thoughtful and understanding of the risk we incur to the future security of this great nation."

During his address, Odierno took pause to reflect on the events which led him to this day and the service members who accompanied him along the way.

"This weekend is the 10th anniversary of 9/11. I would just say that over the last 10 years our Army has proven itself; inarguably in the most difficult environment this nation has ever faced. Our leaders of every level have displayed unparalleled ingenuity, flexibility and adaptability. Our soldiers have displayed mental and physical toughness, but most importantly, courage under fire. They have transformed the Army into the most versatile, agile, rapidly deployable, sustainable, strategic land force the world has ever known. I am proud to be part of that army. And I am proud to have the opportunity to continue to serve with these great men and women - the next greatest generation." ■



HUMAN INTEREST | Story and Illustration by Spc. Timothy R. Koster

It's time to pack up the jars of pickled infant animals, cases of insect specimen, and miniature models, Gil Grissom. A new forensics team is in town.

Insert a witty one-liner, immediately follow it with a video montage of some crime scene investigating, add some lyrics from a Who song, and CBS has its newest installment of its long-running law enforcement program - CSI: Baghdad.

All right, so an Iraq-themed crime scene drama may not be hitting the prime-time television market anytime soon. However, the progress of Iraqi forensic police officers learning evidence testing techniques and procedures is anything but a scripted piece of fiction.

Officers with Iraq's Federal Police have been working with International Narcotic and Law Enforcement contractors in a series of Tool Marking and Firearms, Chemical, and DNA forensics classes at the Baghdad Police College throughout the month of September. The courses are designed to create qualified individuals to operate self-sustaining forensics labs around the country.

To help create the best learning environment, forensic law

enforcement veterans, with several years of specialized lab experience in their respective field, teach each course. While their reasons for coming to Iraq are personal, the expectations of the end-state are unanimous: teach forensic scientists and create a laboratory which allows for adequate and fair processing of evidence to prove guilt or innocence in a court of law.

This country used to be a place where suspects would get beaten until they confessed to a crime, said Chris Binion, a chemical forensics teacher. But now, evidence, judges, and rule of law dominate the judicial system.

"It's not perfect yet, but it's getting better," Binion said, a native of Alexandria, Ky.

These courses are helping improve the system because, unlike what the television program may portray, crime scene scientists are not jacks-of-all-trades, but rather extremely knowledgeable subject matter experts in their particular field, said Shane Gaghan, a firearms and tool marks instructor.

Students of the Chemistry Forensics course learn about chemical compositions and how knowing what something is made of can determine where it came from and who made it.



Photo by Chris Binion

Iraqi chemists participating in a training program at the National Iraqi Forensic Training Laboratory, here, developed their first analytical procedure and resulting Standard Operating Procedure for the determination of alcohols using their new Gas Chromatograph/Mass Spectrometer instrument Sept. 20.

Prominent cases in Iraq involve improvised explosive devices, suicide bombers, and small arms fire attacks. The ability to identify chemical compositions of the various explosive components used in these attacks can help determine where the materials were manufactured, and could potentially provide evidence for a suspect's conviction.

Much like the unique composition of chemicals used to make explosives, the tools used to make them and the weapons used in small arms fire attacks, make unique striation marks on the devices, bullets and shells, respectively.

Students of the Firearms and Tool Marking Forensics course learn how to use scientific instruments to determine if bullets and shells collected at a crime scene or marks on the fragments of an explosive device, match the weapon or tools owned by a suspect.

"Firearms and tool marks is one of the oldest forensic techniques," said Gaghan, a retired 10-year Philadelphia police veteran. "People here have always been doing this. There was just a need to update technology and skill sets."

In contrast, one of the newest forms of crime scene forensics, and arguably one of the most impactful, is that of deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA – the hereditary chemical material found in the nucleus and mitochondria of complex organisms' cells that determines the unique physical and cellular composition of each person, with the exception of biological twins, according to the National Human Genome Research Institute.

Students of the DNA Forensic Course learn how to recover this microscopic material from bodily fluids, such as blood, saliva, and semen, left behind at crime scenes, said Page Bowlus, a DNA forensics instructor. The material is then multiplied, using a chemical process, into a quantifiable amount for a variety of tests to be run.

Aside from teaching students and bringing their skills up to the standards of the international accreditation system, the INL instructors also have the important mission of supplying laboratories around the country with state-of-the-art equipment to maximize the effectiveness of their students' skills once they get to the field.

Binion, Gaghan, Bowlus, and the rest of their team agree that the labs they've helped establish here technologically rival any lab found in the United States. However, one challenge the team and students face is Baghdad's electrical infrastructure, which is unable to consistently handle the intense power requirements of the equipment.

"The infrastructure has been an issue to support the lab equipment," said Dale Price, a DNA Forensic instructor. "It's not easy work, it's a challenge. But, it's a reward to see all the progress we have made."

This setback doesn't stop the student's overwhelming desire to learn and the teachers' ability to adapt to the situation as the city's workers continue to build and increase its infrastructure capabilities. ■

No Longer Rockin' Iraq



Courtesy Photo

Sgt. Adam Prickel announces the death of Osama bin Laden April 16, 2011.

American Forces Network Radio - Iraq will broadcast over the airways Sept. 23 for the last time from Forward Operating Base Prosperity in Baghdad, Iraq.

In the midst of all the turmoil and sacrifices made during operations in Iraq, the U.S. service members and civilians had a voice to give them a piece of home and to tell their stories. Now, after eight years of entertaining the troops, AFN-Iraq is shutting down its transmitters.

AFN-Iraq has been in service since August 2003. "Freedom" by Paul McCartney was the first song played for the service members across Iraq. The song embodied the ultimate reason why Americans volunteer to serve and sacrifice. But, in that moment, it also gave the U.S. troops, here, a welcome connection to home.

"Over the past eight years we provided something for everyone, said Staff Sgt. Jay Townsend, broadcast journalist and quality control for AFN. "We are background noise to all the chaos going on right now. And, if that's what we provided, if that's what we accomplished, then, mission accomplished."

As the remaining U.S. forces begin to redeploy, the 206th Broadcast Operations Detachment is turning off the microphones and locking up the AFN studio for good, making Sept. 23 a historic and bittersweet day.

Although their time here in Iraq will end, the personalities who have broadcasted the news, interviewed key leaders, and

got listeners grooving leave an impact with their many fans over the years.

"It is important to tell the story of the people who support the mission as well as the story of the people who are on the mission," said Sgt. 1st Class Donald Dees, broadcast non-commissioned officer in charge of the 206th BOD.

"American Forces Radio and Television Services has evolved in many ways, always being mindful of how to better serve U.S. personnel serving overseas," he continued.

"No matter what is going on in their day, they can turn on the radio in Iraq, as well as other countries around the



Courtesy Photo

Kansas City cheerleaders take the time to answer questions from the troops, July 6, 2011

world where there is a signal,” Dees said. “Wherever they go, whenever there is a need to put boots on the ground, we’re going to be there to tell their story.”

As the 206th BOD takes down equipment and transfers its broadcast mission over to AFN services in Germany, the members agree that their greatest wish is to have impacted the lives not only of the United States Forces – Iraq services members and civilian personnel, but the Iraqi people as well.

“We’ve reached more than U.S. troops and civilians. We reach out with our radio broadcasts to Iraqi civilians. They hear our radio broadcasts and say how great it is to hear what our culture is about,” said Staff Sgt. Aaron Salinas, technician NCOIC and unit movement officer of the 206th BOD.

Salinas continues, “I think our legacy is that lasting relationship between us and the Iraqi people as we depart and they’ll still have a piece of us because we were here for eight years and they listened to AFN radio for that long. There will be an Iraqi saying, ‘I grew up listening to AFN

Radio’ and maybe it will bring a little more understanding and maybe some peace.”

In the midst of the demanding deadlines to facilitate shutting down AFN, the members want to express their gratitude for the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have shared this time in history with all who have loyally tuned into their daily broadcasts.

AFN-Iraq will be on-air until midnight Sept. 23. Fans are encouraged to call in their music requests or share a personal story with the hosts.

Prior to listening or stopping by to show everyone is encouraged to visit the AFN Iraq – Freedom Radio Facebook page to vote for the song they want to hear as the last song.

Each member of the AFN Radio – Iraq team knows how hard it is to be away from family, friends and home. Because of that each shares a great passion to serve the service members, to touch their lives daily, to give them hope and to tell their story. If we have done that in any way, Townsend said then, “Mission accomplished.” ■



Courtesy Photo

A Kansas City cheerleader takes a call during the visit to Baghdad July 6, 2011.



Courtesy Photo

An AFN-I broadcaster gathers story material for an upcoming broadcast.

Service Members talk to Fox and Friends



Petty Officer 3rd Class Clinton Howell, Senior Airman Terence J. Manson, Spc. Ashley Powell and Lance Cpl. Isreal Schafer stand with Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Buchanan, spokesman for the United States Forces – Iraq during a live interview with Fox News' morning television program "Fox and Friends."

Four service members deployed to Iraq took time out of their busy schedules to conduct a live interview with Clayton Morris on Fox News' morning program, Fox and Friends, on Sept. 5, at 7:20 a.m. Eastern Standard Time.

Senior Airman Terence J. Manson, Spc. Ashley Powell, Petty Officer 3rd Class Clinton Howell, and Lance Cpl. Isreal Schafer were chosen to stand alongside Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Buchanan, spokesman for United States Forces – Iraq, to discuss matters regarding the country's transition during Operation New Dawn.

"We have just under 50,000 very good spokesmen and women in USF-I and they can talk about what is going on here under Operation New Dawn better than anyone. So, I really appreciate the troops who took time out their day to join me in the interview," said Buchanan.

While most of the questions during the short segment were directed toward Buchanan, each of the service members was given the chance to respond to a question about how the country has changed from the perspective of the junior enlisted service members out in the field.

"I couldn't tell you exactly where it was before," said Howell, in response to how the country has progressed. "All I know is that now I have seen the Iraqi Army taking

charge of security checkpoints and they've been doing what they need to do to run their country themselves. I've enjoyed working with them over the past six to seven months."

"There's been a lot of good progress," added Manson, a San Antonio, Texas native.

Continuing down the line, Powell, a finance specialist with the Florida National Guard, offered this insight, "They're a lot more confident and secure with themselves. I think they're ready to take over."

"I think they have complete trust in themselves and we can leave whenever and they will be ready for it," added Schafer, a Lebanon, Ind. native stationed out of Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C.

The first question for Buchanan was about whether or not Iraq, after eight years of war and American-led contingency operations, is ready to be self-sufficient.

"Iraq has made tremendous progress over the last eight years and a number of us who have served here on and off over the years continue to be inspired by the growth economically and certainly in the security forces," said Buchanan.

"I think the Iraqi government, the country and the security forces are all on the right track. They are headed in the right direction. I think there are some obstacles ahead that we don't fully understand, but I think our transitions,

especially this fall, to the leadership at the U.S. Embassy are all on track," he added.

Although the segment only lasted a few minutes, the impression it left on the young service members who were able to take part was lasting.

"It is an honor and a privilege to be able to represent my fellow Soldiers here today. It puts a face to what we do here for the people back home. I think it's an excellent idea to show what we are able to do for our country and to help the Iraqi people come into their own. It's an amazing feeling to be a part of all of this and I feel blessed to experience everything I have over here," said Powell who is from Saint Augustine, FL.

Buchanan was also impressed by the performance of these service members who are on their first tours of duty, and was thankful for the seemingly endless support Americans have given to all the service members who traveled far away from home to make a difference overseas.

"One thing I'd like to add; all these great troops behind me, this is their first tour in Iraq, but I think they clearly represent the best and brightest in America," said Buchanan. "They're motivated every day to make a difference and they are making a difference. And part of their motivation comes from all the great support they get from you." ■

A Furry Threat Below



Service members should be cautious when dealing with groundhogs and mindful of their burrow holes on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. Better yet, leave them alone.

An unconventional adversary methodically infiltrates the post, here. Its docile appearance can mislead, and you may easily overlook and underestimate the ferocity that lay beneath. Right under the unsuspecting noses of service members, this foe finds its way to nearly every facility, entrenching deeper into military operations with each passing day.

As a Pennsylvanian son having spent my early years on a farm, I am certainly no stranger to the unassuming guise of the groundhog. Its natural predators are few in this area, which seemingly emboldens these critters to tread anywhere they please. This rodent tends to shy away from direct contact, but it certainly seems to like to push the limits of man's tolerance.

Everywhere you go on post; there they are - scuttling through the grass, sitting up to observe their surroundings, and poking in and out of random holes. How many ankles have been injured here courtesy of your friendly neighborhood groundhog hole? The world may never know.

We like to humanize these burrowing beasts. We make them weather forecasters with cute names and have them hock lottery tickets to senior citizens. These

animals are also commonly referred to as woodchucks or land beavers though I have yet to see one chuck wood or build a dam.

But, they certainly can dig.

Groundhog burrows can be huge with up to 46 feet of tunnel and buried 5 feet underground. This can pose a serious threat of human and livestock injury, damaged farm machinery and even weakened building foundations.

Confronting this problem can be quite an undertaking as well as time consuming. Though many hunters would not hesitate to stuff a land beaver and proudly put it on display, many of us lack the conviction to maintain long-term operations against the groundhog.

I had a dog on the farm named Reggie. He waged an all-out war on the local groundhog population and was very successful. He would often come back from his missions with fresh scratches on his nose and paws. He celebrated his conquests by parading around the skinless carcasses of his foes and depositing them in the yard.

My father got rid of Reggie before too long.

Cornering a groundhog is difficult because they don't like to venture too far

from their burrow entrance. Sealing the entrance is ineffective because they always dig multiple access ways. They approach their system with a Vietcong cunning. Did I mention they like to dig?

Land beavers are like their aquatic namesake in that they are good swimmers, so they won't be afraid of taking a plunge to make their escape. They are also excellent climbers. Yes, it's true. I've seen it, and could do nothing but stand there in awe. The pudgy little buggers can scamper up a tree as well as any squirrel.

If you are one of the unfortunate few who actually corner the beast, good luck. They are vicious. Growls and hisses should be your first indication that you're in for a fight. If they lunge, get out of Dodge, or be prepared for a rough time. Seriously, leave the groundhog combat to professionals.

"They're known for their aggression, so you're starting from a hard place," according to Doug Schwartz, zookeeper and groundhog trainer at the Staten Island Zookeeper. "(Their) natural impulse is to kill 'em all and let God sort 'em out."

Military members training here will face many challenges and dangers. Be diligent. Be safe. Leave critters alone. ■





WINNING Hearts & Minds

Behind the scenes of the PRT and OPA teams responsible

Story by Spc. Timothy R. Koster



Courtesy Photo

A Provincial Reconstruction Team member hands out school supplies to local children

Shortly after the fall of the Hussein regime and before the new democratic government could be established, an insurgency consisting of opposing Iraqi forces, foreign fighters, and mixed militias quickly grew in support of the anti-Coalition movement in Iraq.

After the initial push into Baghdad to take down Saddam Hussein in 2003, through the troop surge of 2007, and in to its current support role of the Iraqi security forces, the mission of the Office of Provincial Affairs and the Provincial Reconstruction Teams has transitioned from building, rebuilding, and refurbishing provincial amenities such as schools, town halls, water lines, and electrical grids to providing educational and training opportunities for the Iraqi people. All this was part of the United States' unprecedented hearts and minds mission aimed to combat this untraditional, yet not unfamiliar, enemy.

Although it is still uncertain whether or not the Iraqi government will ask for U.S. forces to remain in country beyond Dec. 31, the work of the OPA and the PRTs over the last several years has ensured that the Iraqi provincial governments will be able to sustain themselves no matter what the long-term outcome for U.S. forces in Iraq may be.

At the core of this counter-insurgency mission in Iraq, the OPA, located at the New Embassy Compound, Baghdad, has managed the PRTs responsible for a large contribution to the hearts and minds mission.

"The Office of Provincial Affairs is responsible for managing and guiding the Provincial Reconstruction teams that we have all across Iraq," said Mike Morrow, acting director of the OPA. "We are the link between the PRTs in the field and the ambassador and his front office team here."

What we've been focusing on in recent months is setting up a mechanism where the embassy can continue to engage with the provinces even after the PRTs and OPA have gone away.

~Mike Morrow

PRTs were originally established to use in Afghanistan in 2003. However, after the success of these teams, the concept was quickly adapted to the contingency operations in Iraq and has been active ever since.

The Iraq PRTs consist of civil affairs Soldiers and civilian subject matter experts. Their mission is to help reconstruct and build the provincial governments' capacity so that they can better serve the needs of their people and build popular support for the new government, said Morrow, a Saline Mich., native.

With the transition from Operation Iraqi Freedom to Operation New Dawn, the PRTs are transitioning from providing construction projects to providing more training and education projects to help the provincial governments become self-sufficient.

"The legacy of the PRTs is one we are proud of," said George Sibley, PRT team leader, Ninewa, during a recent Iftar dinner. "Working in conjunction with our Iraqi partners, this legacy encompasses farmers growing vegetables in hoop houses we have provided, children studying in schools we have built, judges issuing sentences in courthouses we have refurbished, and patients being treated in hospitals we have supplied." According to recent reports, the PRTs have provided some

substantial and tangible evidence of their overall success. Since their integration into the counter-insurgency strategy, more than 800 projects have been completed to increase power grid capabilities, more than 600 projects have been completed to increase the country's communication networks, more than 4,000 schools have been built, 8.6 million textbooks have been supplied, more than 33,000 teachers have been trained, the adult literacy rate has improved from 41 percent to 74 percent, 3.2 million children have been vaccinated and more than 48,000 jobs in agriculture have been created - and that just scratches the surface.

In the last two years, more than 23,000 new businesses were registered and the country's unemployment rate dropped from 28 percent to 15 percent. Also, the number of police officers has increased from 60,000 to 410,000, resulting in a 90 percent drop in violence since 2007, and more than 192,000 military personnel have been fielded to help protect the country's borders.

The PRTs have also worked to empower the Iraqi citizens to take charge of their country's future by establishing free and fair provincial elections in 2005, 2009 and 2010.

We have an important role at the provincial level, said Morrow. Under Iraq's new constitution, it is much more of a federalist system than it was before. So, the role of the provincial governments is much more prominent. By empowering the local governments it helps the populace feel more empowered and feel like they have more say in their well-being.

The mission is reaching a critical point because 10 out of the 13 PRTs have already closed as part of the U.S. forces' restructuring efforts. The OPA is scheduled to close at the end of August, and the proposed withdrawal date of Dec. 31 looms in the near future.

"What we've been focusing on in recent months is setting up a mechanism where the embassy can continue to engage with the provinces even after the PRTs and OPA have gone away," said Morrow.

One part of this mechanism uses what Morrow calls virtual provincial officers, or embassy employees, who will continue to provide support to Iraqi provincial leaders without maintaining a physical presence in the provinces.

On the other hand, another part of the mechanism involves a more traditional diplomatic approach. In three provinces, PRTs have been converted into consulates to provide that physical diplomatic presence where it may still be needed.

While many U.S. service members and contractors anxiously await the decision of whether-or-not the Iraqi government will ask them to stay and train their people, the efforts these men and women have put forth over the years to create a self-sustaining country are clearly evident, regardless of the final decision. ■



Courtesy Photo

A Provincial Reconstruction Team Soldier interacts with some local children.

USF-I spokesman keeps Freedom Radio listeners *FIRE*SIDE



Stock Photo

HUMAN INTEREST | Story by Spc. Karen Sampson

Trust can be a challenge for the American public when considering the guidance and actions of key leadership. Quite often, decisions are made that people feel they have no say about the outcome, even when it directly affects their lives. In the 1930's, Franklin Delano Roosevelt changed the peoples' perception of their involvement, simply by sharing information casually via the radio. The evening radio show created by FDR during his presidency, the "Fireside Chat," kept American families informed of U.S. government decisions and addressed public concern.

This started future leaders to begin communicating via radio. Service members here have the advantage of the same access to information on the progress of the mission in Iraq through the Armed Forces Network's Freedom Radio bi-weekly radio chat. The show

broadcasts to all major locations in Iraq and has featured the United States Forces – Iraq spokesmen from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn. Sgt. 1st Class Donald Dees, broadcaster for AFN Freedom Radio, recently had an on-air interview with Maj. Gen. Jeffery Buchanan, spokesman for USF-I, Aug. 29.

After Buchanan's recent trip to the U.S. capital, Dees and Buchanan honestly confronted what is going on with the mission in Iraq and highlighted the recent progress of the Iraq transition mission.

On Jan. 1, 2009, the U.S. and Iraq security agreement went into effect as the key document that sets the terms for the military relationship between the two countries. The agreement requires the withdrawal of all U.S. troops by Dec. 31, 2011.

However, discussions conducted Aug. 2 by political leaders from different factions of the Iraqi government still hint at further

U.S. involvement past the end of the year, Buchanan commented.

"Those discussions have not yet matured to negotiations," Buchanan said frankly. "Any speculation on what might be here beyond the end of the year, other than a very robust U.S. Embassy presence to help Iraq in a civil capacity, would be just that, a speculation."

Buchanan made a proactive decision to engage media outlets and veteran's service organizations in Washington to keep them informed of what may occur in Iraq over the next four or five months.

Veteran's organizations play a key role in service members' reintegration into the U.S. after deployment, and it is essential for them to prepare support, said Dees.

Another topic was Iraq's progression in securing their maritime provinces. As of right now, the Iraqi navy has obtained five 35-meter swift boats and are on track to possibly receive 16 more for the purpose

They will be operating in concert in international waters. We look forward to maintaining a strong relationship with the Iraqi navy.

~Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Buchanan

of maintaining security throughout Iraq's territorial waters, said Buchanan.

"The Iraq navy and marine corps are responsible for the defense of Iraq's two off-shore oil platforms and about 80 percent of Iraq's territorial waters," said Buchanan. "They are on board to achieve 100 percent security by the end of the year."

The U.S. Navy Central Operation command is very active in international waters in the gulf and has a very active partnership with the Iraqi navy. That partnership will continue whether there is a significant U.S. presence in Iraq or not, said Buchanan.

"They will be operating in concert in international waters," said Buchanan. "We look forward to maintaining a strong relationship with the Iraqi navy."

The Iraq transition was a key theme in AFN's chat with Buchanan and included comments on the Kirkush Military Training Base transitioned from U.S. to Iraqi control Aug. 21.

"When we first started operating out of Kirkush in the summer of 2003, it was a case of U.S. trainers and Iraqi soldiers," said Buchanan. "Now, not only are they training themselves, they are training and certifying their own instructors."

Similar to the "Fireside Chat," Buchanan commended particular service members for outstanding service and valor as a traditional end of the radio show.

"I would like to recognize Staff Sgt. Andrea Sheving and Senior Airman David O'Connel, both assigned to the 321st Expeditionary Operations Squadron based out of Kirkuk, they helped transition the upper and mid-level sectors of Kirkuk airspace to the Iraqis Civil Aviation Authority," said Buchanan proudly. "To develop a civilian airspace command and control authority in a comprehensive way is no small endeavor." ■



Photo by Spc. Krista Rayford
Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Buchanan during a "fireside" chat with Sgt. 1st Class Don Dees at the AFN studio on Forward Operation Base Prosperity.



Archive Photo
President Franklin Delano Roosevelt during a fireside chat to the American people during World War II.



Photo by Spc. Timothy R. Koster

Maj. Jeff Reichman (right), a participant in the Marine Powerman Competition at the New Embassy Compound, Aug. 26, checks his time after he completes the three-mile run portion of the competition.

The few, the proud: Marines deployed to Iraq celebrate 95th birthday of Marine Corps Reserve

Roughly 47,000 U.S. troops remain in Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn. A small portion of those are Marines. Among those Marines, there is a select group of men and women who have left their civilian lives behind to join in sustaining daily military operations to closeout the war in Iraq. They are the United States Marine Corps Reserve.

Ninety-five years ago this week, the Marine Corps Reserve took its place in history, as it was established as the eighth component of the U.S. armed forces. Since then, the Reserve has become the largest command in the Marine Corps, and has served in every U.S. foreign conflict since its start in 1916.

"There are only about 90 Marines in Iraq

at this time," said Maj. Jeffery Reichman, a reservist and plans officer with United States Forces-Iraq. "The Marine mission has gone, but we each continue to contribute proudly here to the USF-I mission."

In lieu of the U.S. military drawdown in Iraq, the need for combat troops was replaced with a mission to rebuild and revitalize this country.

"Most reservists are Marines who have completed their time on active duty, but continue to serve," said Reichman. "They've deployed already. They have the experience."

The Marines deployed to Iraq are now lending their expertise to ensure the successful transfer of authority from U.S. to Iraqi military forces.

"The impact and the opportunities the Marine Corps has provided to me are amazing," said Reichman, a native of Keokuk, Iowa. "There is not an organization that I could be more proud to be a member of."

Upon the completion of their tour of duty, most reservists will pack their bags and head home to a civilian life. Unlike their active-duty colleagues, reservists will return and train one weekend a month, two weeks a year to remain combat-ready.

"Being in the Reserve, it's a different set of challenges," says Reichman. But once we're in country, we're all Marines," Reichman said.

The few, the proud; the ready, relevant, and sustainable, Marine Corps Reserve. ■

Welcome to the Skype Show

Messages from home are essential staple for good morale of deployed service members. Seven spouses of deployed soldiers from Fort Leavenworth, Kan., to Camp Cropper, here, found a new way to keep the relationship fires burning.

The spouses participated in a “patriotic pampering” followed by a fashion show broadcast live via Skype to their husbands, Soldiers of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 40th Military Police Internment and Resettlement Battalion, June 30. In turn, the MPs broadcast themselves as an audience.

“We are absolutely excited,” said Sgt. Thomas L. Rincon, whose wife Darcell L. Rincon participated in the show. “We have been here since January 2011. I love to see my wife any chance I can get.”

In anticipation of the show the soldiers wired a 42-inch flat-screen television in a conference room to see the live broadcast.

Back in Fort Leavenworth, after complimentary spa treatments, the wives donned evening gowns and exquisite jewelry.

“She doesn’t get to do that very often because she takes care of four children while I am away,” said Sgt. Tim J.

Gruver, smiling about his wife Dena. “She deserves this.”

‘Pampering the Troops’ is an idea developed four years ago by Jim Potoski, business owner and Nathan Irvin, general manager of Rajeunir Medical Spa. Neighboring businesses joined in to donate their expert services.

Hosting the event a few days before Independence Day is a way to say thank you to the troops and military families for their service to our country, said Potoski.

The enthusiasm seemed high as each wife graced the catwalk. Their husbands traded the front row seat as each wife took the stage. After the show’s conclusion, each couple took a few minutes to talk.

First Sgt. Britt Cogan, on his 2nd deployment, manned the computer desk as his wife Rashell took the stage first in a strapless black jeweled gown. Cogan also had the good fortune to see his 8- year-old son Griffen during the chat phase of the event.

“We give our thanks to our wives, Jim Potoski and his pampering crew for their time and effort in putting this all together,” said Cogan. “We really couldn’t get through this deployment without their support.” ■

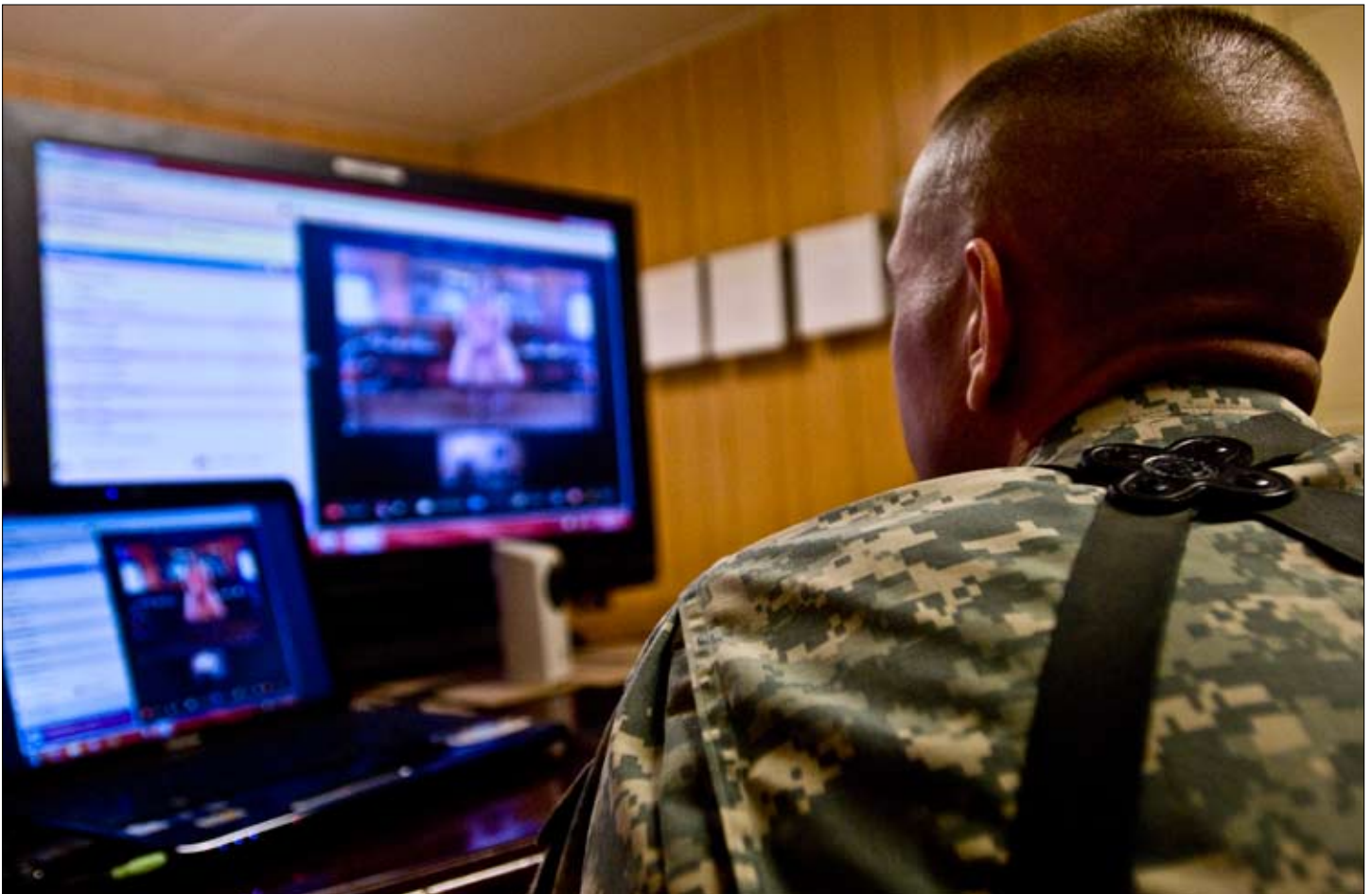


Photo by Spc. Timothy R. Koster
A soldier from the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 40th Military Police Internment and Resettlement Battalion at Camp Cropper watches his wife take to the Catwalk during the Patriotic Pampering held at Fort Leavenworth Kan., June 30. The soldiers were able to watch their wives take part in the event via Skype.

The Honest TRUTH



Photo by John Helms

A student of the polygraph course held at Forward Operating Base Union III practices questioning techniques on a fellow student. Twelve Iraqi students from the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense graduated from this course on July 31.

HUMAN INTEREST | Story by Spc. Timothy R. Koster

A man is escorted in to a small room and is sat down in a cold metal chair. Several beads of sweat are slowly running down his cheeks and the base of his neck. His breathing is constant but heavy. The person who escorted him to the room places a few strategically-placed wires on the ring and pointer fingers of his right hand and quietly takes a seat behind a desk positioned next to him.

For the first few minutes the only sound is that of the ticking clock hanging high on the wall. Tick. Tick. Tick. Sweat begins pooling on the man's brow. His lips are dry, chapped. He hastily runs his tongue across them in a failing effort to moisten the cracked skin.

The wires attached to the man's fingers feed into a small laptop computer on the table beside to him. His escort opens a program and with a soft mechanical purr the computer's hard drive spins to life. On the screen, simulated mechanical arms scribble what appears to be an incoherent black line.

The escort clears his throat and asks the man to say his name. Wearily the man gives his name in full and the virtual needles slow to a less volatile rate. The man's breathing becomes softer, the pool of sweat on his brow breaks free and runs down the inset of his nose and no more accumulates. For the moment, the man is completely calm.

The average heart rate for a male is between 60 to 100 beats per minute. Several factors which can contribute to an increased or decreased heart rate are: physical fitness, physical exertion, anxiety, or perhaps, in some occasions, lying.

Twelve Iraqi students from the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense graduated a polygraph course designed to expose students to various scenarios to test their abilities to differentiate the truth from lies using a polygraph machine July 31.

The course, which was held at Forward Operating Base Union III, was established as part of the U.S. military's reposturing efforts to get Iraqis comfortable enough to not only provide polygraph assistance throughout the country, but also to teach these skills to their own people.

Four of the graduating students are certified polygraph technicians and took the course as a refresher. Under the supervision of American Polygraph Association certified instructors with a minimum of 10 years polygraph service, these graduates will return to FOB Union III and teach the first Iraq-led joint MOI and MOD polygraph course in August.

"We will be like flies on the wall and will pull the instructors aside during breaks if we think there is something they can improve on," said Chip Morgan, program manager of the



Photo by John Helms

Instructors and Students of the polygraph course are able to watch the practical exercises from a remote room elsewhere on the compound. Twelve Iraqi students from the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense graduated from this course on July 31.

polygraph course. "Other than that we are staying completely out of it. It's their class now."

The use of polygraph testing is extremely important to the Iraqi government because it does not have a centralized database which holds information on a person's criminal records or militant activity, said Peter Anthony, directorate general for intelligence and security, Iraqi Training and Advisory Mission, MOD.

In order to graduate, students were required to participate in 320 training hours where they learned about the history and development of the polygraph, test question construction, maintenance and calibration of the machine, ethics, chart analysis, questioning techniques, legal issues, psychology and physiology.

As a culmination of the course, students were required to perform 25 live tests, closely monitored by instructors, on individuals who were in the process of receiving security clearances, said Anthony.

The students were also required to complete a series of practical exercises that put each of them in the hot seat.

"We had a scenario where each student received an envelope," said Morgan, a Boise, Idaho native. "Inside three of the envelopes was \$10." The students were not allowed to tell anyone what they had inside their envelopes and they were not told how many people received the parcels with money.

Throughout the exercise each student was required to examine

another member of the class. Those who had money thought it was silly that they were interrogating someone when they knew they were the guilty ones, he added. They had no idea others had money too, it caught them completely off guard.

Practical exercises like this helped teach the students to trust the tool and not base their opinion on what they think they know.

Despite the fact that polygraph testing is not permissible in the U.S. courts system, studies conducted by the American Polygraph Association have shown that when conducted properly, the polygraph test is between 90% and 93% accurate.

"This should not be the final arbiter of guilt and innocence," said Morgan, a 31-year police veteran, "but rather as an investigative tool."

It is very difficult to beat the test, he added. It is more likely to have an innocent person provide a false positive than a guilty person provide a false negative. In other words it is more likely an innocent person will appear guilty because he is nervous and his heart rate is accelerated than a guilty person to appear innocent because their heart-rate is low and they appear calm. The process is set up like this because it's better to examine a few people more in-depth and find them innocent than have a guilty person slip through the cracks.

While an accelerating heart rate, heavy breathing, and profuse sweating are not absolute indicators of guilt, these 12 graduates are now capable of seeing through the physical signs and are able to ask the appropriate questions to find the honest truth. ■

Service Members in Iraq observe National POW/MIA Day



Courtesy Photo

In every conflict in which our Nation has been involved, selfless American service members have sacrificed their lives for the sake of our country and its principles. Too many have never come home, or have endured unthinkable hardship as prisoners of war. On this day, we echo the creed inscribed on the black and white banners that fly in honor of America's Prisoners of War and Missing in Action, and we renew our promise to our heroes, that "You Are Not Forgotten." – President Barack Obama

As U.S. citizens across the globe observe National Prisoner of War/ Missing in Action Day, we pause to remember the men and women who have served and sacrificed for the sake of our country.

According to the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, the joint task force specifically assigned to account for American POW/MIAs, the U.S. government never stops looking for isolated personnel or those who are missing or killed in action. National POW/MIA Day is symbolic of that promise to those who are missing and their families.

During the observance, the official POW/MIA flag is flown at all U.S. war memorials at the National Mall, U.S. post offices, the official offices of the secretaries of state, defense and veterans affairs, the director of the Selective Service System and the White House.

According to the U.S. public law passed in August 1990, the flag is "a symbol of our nation's concern and commitment to resolving as fully as possible the fates of Americans still prisoner, missing and unaccounted for."

Today, the flag may not fly atop U.S. military bases in Iraq. However, service members like Spc. Shoshana Johnson, captured and rescued during Operation Iraqi Freedom, will be remembered.

Johnson, the first black female in our military's history to be captured as a prisoner of war, deployed in 2003 as a cook with the 507th Maintenance Company of Fort Bliss, Texas.

Johnson, along with five other Soldiers from her unit, spent 22 days in captivity before U.S. Marines rescued them in Nasiriyah, Iraq.

Just one year after Johnson's capture and rescue, Staff Sgt. Matt Maupin of the 724th Transportation Company, was captured by insurgents near Baghdad.

Maupin was missing-in-action until his remains were recovered by the U.S. Army in 2008, just northwest of Baghdad.

Maupin has joined the ranks of the many service members who have given their lives as the ultimate sacrifice. Because of our military's effort to "never leave a fallen comrade," Maupin's family can have closure.

The same effort to find the former POWs in Iraq is being exerted for Staff Sgt. Ahmed Kousay Altaie, currently the lone U.S. service member listed as missing-in-action from Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Altaie, an Iraqi-American, was captured in 2006 in Baghdad. Altaie enlisted in the Army Reserve in 2004 as a linguist, and deployed in November 2005 to work with the provincial reconstruction teams in Iraq.

Altaie was captured the following year, Oct. 23, and has not been recovered.

Although Iraqi insurgents claim Altaie is deceased, until the U.S. finds his remains, the search continues.

As the U.S. military partners with Iraqi Security Forces in Operation New Dawn, the legacy of those who have sacrificed lives on in the efforts to liberate this country.

In a Presidential Proclamation, President Barack Obama renewed the promise to the families of our POW/MIAs.

"We will never give up the search for those who are held as prisoners of war or have gone missing under our country's flag," said Obama.

"We honor their sacrifice, and we must care for their families and pursue the fullest possible accounting for all missing members of our Armed Forces." ■



Ministry of Interior Iraqi Federal Police perform a riot control demonstration in the civil disorder management course at Camp Dublin Aug. 20.

Civil disorder management

One hundred Iraqi police graduated from the civil disorder management course at Camp Dublin, Victory Base Complex Aug. 23.

Instructed by Iraqi police officers and mentored by the NATO Training Mission-Iraq Carabinieri, Italy's paramilitary training unit, the federal police trainees learn methods of crowd and riot control.

"The civil disorder management course is one of the first courses that the Iraqi police arranged themselves," said Col. Sergio Di Rosalia, commander of the NTM-I Italian Carabinieri unit. "The Carabinieri's operational emphasis is on mentoring the training."

In a demonstration of the skills acquired during the four-week training, a troop of police travel tightly as an element - shields held high, batons banging in unison, creating a wall against the mock civil uprising ahead. As the crowd's

demeanor grows more violent, the armed, mounted unit moves forward to provide apprehension and brings the riot to an end.

Out of breath from exertion in the extreme heat of the mid-day sun, the trainees congratulate each other on the well-executed movement.

"We are getting better at reacting together," said one of the trainees, satisfied with the progress of his platoon.



Iraqi Federal Police perform a riot control demonstration in the civil disorder management course.

The police trainees learn how to use riot-control equipment and how to work as an element, said Lt. Augusto Sorvillo, commander of the Italian Carabinieri tactical training platoon.

"Only if there is a violent reaction from a crowd do they practice an escalation of force," said Sorvillo.

The Iraqi police are trained to communicate and negotiate first and determine whether more force is necessary, he said. They are taught ground movement for the purpose of controlling a crowd to prevent a riot from occurring.

During this time of transition the frequency of civil unrest may increase, however, Iraq's effort to maintain stability is increased due to graduates of this course. The civil disorder management course helps Iraqi police protect civilian's lives from being disrupted negatively and will continue to be offered at Camp Dublin. ■





FREEDOM RIDERS

Story and photos by Spc. Timothy R. Koster



Patrons of the fifth annual Armed Forces Freedom Ride show off their bikes prior to the festivities at Doughboy Field, here, May, 15. Proceeds from the event benefit the Marine Corps-Law Enforcement Foundation and the Burlington County Military Affairs Committee.

Despite a weather report which all but guaranteed foul weather, nothing was going to stop approximately 600 motorcyclists from enjoying the fifth annual Armed Forces Freedom Ride, here, Sunday.

The proceeds from the event benefited the Marine Corps-Law Enforcement Foundation and the Burlington County Military Affairs Committee.

The riders began their morning at Barb's Harley-Davidson in Mount Ephraim, N.J., before riding to the base, taking a ride around the McGuire flight line and ending at Doughboy field.

For a \$30 registration fee the riders were able to enjoy a ride around the base, a barbecue and interactive stations by various event sponsors.

"This ride is specifically to thank the military, past and present," said Barbara Borowiec, owner of Barb's Harley-Davidson and one of the organizers of this year's event. "I organize it because that's

what I truly want to do. I want to thank the military for the sacrifices that they make."

Best Buy, one of this year's event sponsors, set up a tent where patrons could test their skills on the Nintendo Wii for a chance to win a copy of the game "Harley-Davidson Road Trip."

Rider Insurance, which specializes in motorcycle insurance, and Hog Caps, a company which creates custom fuel caps for motorcycles, also had tents with products and information for those in attendance.

While the ride was able to raise money to benefit some great organizations and help some families in need, it also helped raise awareness for the outside community of what happens on post.

"All of our military installations have become little fortresses," said Air Force Brig. Gen. Gina M. Grosso, commander of Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, "and so the community that pays the taxes that funds the military doesn't understand what we do. Anytime we have a chance to have

them come on the installation and see just a little bit about where all their taxpayer dollars go, and how we provide combat capability from here, we get a win-win."

Key-note speakers for the event included retired Marine Lt. Gen. Richard C. Zilmer, former Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs at Quantico, Va.; Air Force Brig. Gen. William J. Bender, Commander, U.S. Air Force Expeditionary Center, here, and retired Army 1st Lt. Brian Miles Thacker, Medal of Honor recipient.

Thacker, a Vietnam veteran, said he has the utmost respect for events like this, citing there was nothing similar to this during his time in the Army and that it is important for Americans to support service members during their time of service.

"Yes, we've got guys out front, that's the bad news," said Thacker, "but we've got their back."

For more information about next year's Armed Forces Freedom Ride contact Barb's Harley-Davidson at 856-456-4141. ■

FREEDOM RIDERS



Motorcyclists from all over the country congregated at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in support of the fifth annual Armed Forces Freedom Ride, May 15. Proceeds from the event benefited the Marine Corps-Law Enforcement Foundation and the Burlington County Military Affairs Committee.



Barbara Borowiec, owner of Barb's Harley-Davidson and one of the organizers of the Armed Forces Freedom Ride, talks to the crowd of bikers and patrons of the event, May, 15. The proceeds from the event benefited the Marine Corps-Law Enforcement Foundation and the Burlington County Military Affairs Committee.



After a ride around the joint base, the bikers participating in this year's Armed Forces Freedom Ride were able to enjoy a barbecue at Doughboy Field, May, 15.



Kirsten Sowers, 11, plays the Nintendo Wii game Harley Davidson Road Trip during the fifth annual Armed Forces Freedom Ride, May, 15.

SecDef talks to troops at town hall meeting



Photo by Spc. Timothy R. Koster

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta, secretary of defense, answers questions at a town hall meeting at Camp Victory, Iraq, July 11, as part of his first trip to Iraq.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta held a town hall meeting with troops at Camp Victory, July 11.

Iraq is part of Panetta's tour of U.S. military forces in deployed locations and meeting with defense counterparts in allied and partner nations. "This is my first trip to Iraq as the secretary of defense," said Panetta, the 23rd secretary of defense. A primary reason for this trip was to talk to the troops directly.

Before joining the Department of Defense, Panetta served as director of the Central Intelligence Agency from February 2009 to June 2011. Panetta also served as an army intelligence officer from 1964 to 1966.

"I wanted to meet with the men and women who are putting their lives on the line for our country," said Panetta. "You are the ones I am responsible for. You are the ones I care about. I want to make sure you are protected,

not only for yourself but for your families."

Expressing his deepest thanks Panetta acknowledged the contribution the troops make with their public service of assisting with the Iraqi partnership. U.S. assistance is critical and essential to the success of Iraq's independence, said Panetta.

"As a result of the great sacrifice and work of the United States military this country is on a much better path. You have provided security here while this nation develops," said Panetta.

"One of my great responsibilities is to make sure that I protect those who protect America."

Panetta assured the troops, as they fight here, he intends to fight in Washington to make sure they receive the best support with training and benefits. After Panetta's address, he opened the floor to the troops to answer questions and concerns.

One of the many questions on

the minds of troops was the status of withdrawal of forces in Iraq.

Panetta said we are responsible for assistance in providing a sense of stability.

"This is a region of the world that has a hell of a lot of turmoil," Panetta responded. "Our responsibility is to insure whatever changes are taking place are hopefully headed in the right direction."

Panetta was receptive to the questions of the troops, said Sgt. John M. Lockwood with the Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, 25th Infantry Division. "He was very down to earth, personable and responded realistically to queries," said Lockwood. Panetta intends to hold meetings with Iraqi and American officials and military leadership.

Panetta also met with Gen. Lloyd Austin, commanding general, U.S. Forces – Iraq, and also met with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and President Jalal Talabani. ■



Photo by Spc. Timothy R. Koster
Kirsten Sowers, 11, plays the Wii game Harley-Davidson Road Trip at the Best Buy tent at the Armed Forces Freedom Ride, here, May, 15.

Young Musician Supports Troops through Song

The Fifth Annual Armed Forces Freedom Ride May, 15 to benefit the Marine Corps-Law Enforcement Foundation and the Burlington County Military Affairs Committee launched was not by the engines of its nearly 600 riders, but by the voice of a singer.

Kirsten Sowers, a Blue Bell, Pa. native, performed “God Bless America” during the opening ceremonies. Kirsten is an accomplished singer/songwriter and well-practiced charity organizer . . . and she isn’t even 12 years old.

Kirsten began playing guitar at age 8 and started her song writing career just a few months later. After winning a Miley Cyrus look-a-like contest that same year, Kirsten traveled to New York City to meet Miley on “The Today Show.” It was there she was discovered by a local DJ who encouraged her to pursue her musical career.

“I was really excited that a radio DJ checked up on me,” Kirsten recalled. “It was then I knew I wanted to be a musician.”

At age 9, the aspiring musician began performing covers of popular artists at venues around her area while developing her own song writing. She performed “Alley,” an original song about one of her Golden Retrievers at the World Café Live

in Philadelphia.

Kirsten met Russell Newberry, a deckhand from television’s “Deadliest Catch,” at the Greater Philadelphia Motor sports Show when she was 10. Upon hearing her play, Newberry introduced Kirsten to organizers of Operation Troop Aid who were auctioning off an autographed guitar signed by Charlie Daniels, Loretta Lynn and others. She was asked to perform for the organization and included her signature beside those music legends.

The musician organized a fund raiser at the World Café Live in 2010 to benefit the Lighthouse Christian School in Nashville, Tenn. which was literally washed away during the devastating floods that year. She also headlined her school’s fundraiser and set up a booth to raise money for Operation Troop-Aid.

Kirsten appeared on “The 10! Show” on NBC 10, Philadelphia in June of 2010, marking her television debut by performing her original song

“Absentmindedly.” She then performed as part of the “Freedom Gives Back Tour” at JBMDL, commemorating the ninth anniversary of Sept. 11 with a tribute to U.S. military members. The artist said she felt truly blessed to be part of the event.

In that tradition, Kirsten will perform at the “Freedom Gives Back” concert in Sewell, N.J. July 23. Proceeds from the event will benefit injured and ill service members.

Some might say Kirsten has a busier schedule than most adults but that doesn’t seem to slow her down. In addition to the regular school and home life of the average 6th grader, she continues to perform and is currently working on her first album, following in the footsteps of her greatest musical influence, Taylor Swift.

For information on Kirsten’s charity work, contact the Kirsten Kares Foundation at kirstenkaresfoundation@gmail.com and follow her performances on YouTube at “specialkguitar. ■

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