



The Force

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The Public Affairs Detachment

Vol. 2

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'Mad Adders' report the final days of eight-year conflict

For this very unique deployment to Iraq, the 362nd Mobile Public Affairs detachment was forced to split into a number of groups sent around the country in order to complete the mission we were tasked. While many of our Soldiers were sent up north to Baghdad, one group remained in the south.

The team was originally deployed to Forward Operating Base Basra in support of the 36th Infantry Division and their redeployment needs. This included print and video stories, media marketing, and media escort for the change of command ceremony.

As part of the military's consolidation efforts as troops departed, the redeployment of the 36th ID also meant the end of what was known as United States Division - South. The USD-S was combined with USD-Center which was under control of the 25th Infantry Division. This meant the Basra team packed their bags to move to Contingency Operating Base Adder where their mission would continue for the 25th ID.

Staff Sgt. Jeremy Fowler served as the acting first-sergeant, flawlessly executing tasks well above his paygrade. He planned the move from Basra to Adder and trained his fellow non-commissioned officers in command information and layout.

Staff Sgt. Deane Barnhardt managed the command information team while serving as the managing editor of the 25th ID's print publication 'Lighting Strikes,' as well as print and broadcast editor for the unit's material.

Sergeant Lisa Soule produced many popular radio and video broadcasts which were aired on the Armed Forces Network - Iraq as well as several civilian outlets through posting on the United States Forces - Iraq Facebook page.

Specialist Anthony Zane wrote several stories which received a significant amount of splash in the mainstream media market to include the Department of Defense and Central Command web sites.

Private Andrew Slovensky also made



Photo Illustration by Staff Sgt. Jeremy Fowler
Members of the 362nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment deployed to Contingency Operating Base Adder, dubbed the 'Mad Adders,' pose for a photo while touring the Ziggurat.

a significant splash with his stories and photos and even spent some time traveling to Um Qusar to spend time with the U.S. and Iraqi navies to help tell their story.

Specialist David Matquis transferred from the Media Operations Center once his mission was complete to assist with broadcast material for the final weeks of Operation New Dawn.

It has truly been an honor to serve

as the commander of this professional organization. Even though at one time we were in five different locations in a warzone, and that we have had to endure a constantly changing mission and for many of us, locations, the 362nd has surpassed expectations and excelled at the public affairs mission. I wish each and every one of our unit members only the best in their future endeavours. ■

Back in the Good Ole' U.S.A

Iraq might not be the place you would expect to find a civilian writing a song about the truth of war and the longing to return home, but with guitar in hand, that is exactly what David Eli Grimes did.

Grimes arrived in Iraq in early March after falling under financial strain back home. He was offered a contract to provide his expertise as a master electrician on Contingency Operating Base Basra for the U.S. Army. He journeyed all the way from his peaceful, river-front home in St. Augustine, leaving the Florida heat behind to head into another kind of heat altogether.

In the last five years he had been laid off three times. Down on his luck, the Army offered him a contract with consistent pay.

It was a chance for him to get back on his feet, so he took the opportunity.

Grimes felt he had little to be concerned about in terms of his safety.

"You hear that this is a war zone, but when you're home reading about it, you kind of say, 'Well, they wouldn't invite us over there if it was dangerous,'" he said.

Then, within the first few hours he arrived, he heard rockets impact in the distance. This was an eye-opening experience for him.

"Now, there is nothing in the world that

makes it real like running to a bunker and hearing mortars or rockets explode around you," he said. The experience made him question his decision to come to Iraq and whether or not he should stay, he added.

He began shifting his focus to take his mind off the danger around him and to look at the positive aspects of his situation.

"I started noticing that if you do stay, if you focus on something other than the incoming, or other than the idea that you might die any minute, it makes it easier to accept where you're at and what's going



David Eli Grimes sits in his containerized housing unit on Contingency Operating Base Basra, where he wrote his song "Back to the Good Ole USA."

on," he said.

He saw a flyer advertising that there was going to be a jam session and guitar lesson every Friday night at the United Services Organization building, he said. Since Grimes has been playing guitar and writing songs for the last 25 years, he saw this as a chance to distract himself from the dangers around him and put his musical talents to good use.

That Friday night, after a long day's work of setting up electrical systems in the desert heat, he walked over to the USO.

Grimes found a small group of soldiers there that night. Since he did not have his own guitar with him, a soldier in the group loaned him one. As the soldier handed the guitar to Grimes, he told him that he had bought it from another soldier who did not make it home. He felt the hair on the back of my neck stand up, he said. That had a profound effect on Grimes and gave him the idea for a song.

Each member in the group took turns playing songs they knew. When it came time for Grimes to play, he shared his song idea with the group.

He told the soldiers, "My main objective right now is to write a song. And what I want to do is write the song from the service men and the service women's perspective." He asked them, "If you had one wish and only one wish right now, what would that one wish be?"

After some light-hearted jokes from the soldiers who lived day-to-day with the threat of death, it became apparent to Grimes that the universal answer was simple; most soldiers just want to go home and be with their loved ones again.

At that moment, I wanted to write a song that would be motivational, a morale booster for service members, one that "makes you feel good about what you're doing and that you know you're going to see the light at the end of the tunnel, that you're gonna go home," he said.

He took the guitar back to the silence of his room. It was his 14th wedding anniversary and he was missing his wife, Cinda. He began to write 'Back to the Good Ole USA'.

That night had a significant impact on Grimes, and was reflected in the beginning of his song:

"Sitting in Iraq at the USO, picking with some service men I don't really know. Playing the guitar of a soldier I

never knew who gave his life for the red, white and blue. This song was written for all of you, in Iraq, in my CHU. Soon you'll all be on your way, back to the good ole USA. Back to the loved ones left behind laying so heavy on your mind."

Grimes' musical style has been influenced by his favorite musicians.

There is no one who comes close to Hank Williams in terms of song writers, and I've always liked Kris Kristofferson as well, he said. But as far as singers, I've been told by many people that I sound a lot like Elvis or Roy Orbison. Elements of such influences are reflected in the "Phantom Ferry of the St. Johns" album he produced in 2006.

This isn't the first time Grimes has written a song about soldiers at war and away from home. As the result of an experience he had one night in 2006, he wrote a song titled "Red, White and Blue."

"I was in a nightclub in Nashville Tennessee," said Grimes. "And on the news, it said that four or five soldiers were killed in Iraq today. I noticed that everybody around me kind of turned away, like they didn't want to really know that. The lady behind the bar pointed to a picture [on the wall] of a young man and she said to me, 'That's my son. He's over there right now.' And she continued, 'I'm waiting for him to get back. I can't sleep at night. I just don't know how to express it.' And I replied, 'It's kind of like you have the red, white and blues.'"

That was the moment when it hit him to write the song "Red, White and Blue."

"I wrote it to recognize that war is real and people get killed," he said. "And in that song, I start off with taps, because I wanted people to realize, by God, that the price for freedom is not free," he added.

Even when you watch the news, you feel proud, but you can't help but get the blues, he said. Because you know the odds are high somebody will get killed and that's the downside to war. If everyone who served made it home, then we could say we fought for freedom and didn't lose anything, but we can't say that. So that's the reason I wrote "Red, White and Blue."

From his experience in the nightclub witnessing people turn away from the news about the conflict overseas, to the mother of the soldier who missed her son, to putting his own two feet on the very sand where that conflict exists, he felt the

reality of war and expressed that through the lyrics in "Back to the Good Ole USA": "Can't ever measure the cost of everything you have lost. I was on the outside looking in. You paid the price from within. Pray you all make it home safe, back to the good ole USA."

You can see what is happening in Iraq through the media, he said. But until you come over here and experience it yourself, you can't realize how big a sacrifice these service members are making.

When you get over here, you can feel war is real, he said. And I hope the song makes it real; the appreciation that everybody should feel ... for what everybody has done over here.

"I like writing songs that lift you up and touch your heart," he said. "I'm paying tribute to all the service men and women over here and what they've done. 'Back to the Good Ole USA' has to do with the war and I feel like if this song gets out there, it's got to pick some of these guys up and make them realize that we do appreciate what they've done."

Grimes went home for a two-week vacation and recorded "Back to the Good Ole USA" in the studio, turned it into a video and brought it back to share with the soldiers in Iraq. With the help of one soldier, Grimes was able to upload the song to YouTube.

It took a couple of hours to get the video uploaded due to difficulties with the Internet connection here, but we finally got it, he added.

"It is great that Mr. Grimes has used his creative talents to show his appreciation for us as soldiers," said Spc. Paul Goebel, USO night manager, 36th Infantry Division, from Sour Lake, Texas. "The song accurately depicts our willingness to give up many of the freedoms that we enjoy stateside, so that we can support the mission at hand."

Through his journey from St. Augustine to Iraq, Grimes provided more than just his electrician skills. He felt the reality of war, the cost of freedom, and wrote a song that captured the essence of deployment that speaks to service members and their loved ones.

With a smile on his face and a new-found appreciation in his heart, the singer-songwriter looks forward to returning to his wife Cinda and his place by the river, back to the good ole USA. ■

36th ID transfers authority to 25th ID

Maj. Gen. Eddy M. Spurgin, commander, 36th Infantry Division, and Command Sgt.Maj. Wilson Early, 36th Infantry Division, cased the colors Sept. 7 during a ceremony at Contingency Operating Base Basra signifying the completion of their division's mission and the transfer of authority to the 25th Infantry Division

The transfer of authority from the 36th Infantry Division Texas Army National Guard unit to the 25th Infantry Division active-duty unit out of Hawaii was the last event held by United States Division-South, which will now be considered United States Division-Central.

Attending the transfer of authority ceremony were U.S. ambassador to Iraq James Jeffrey, Basrah Consul Gen. Piper A. W. Campbell, members of the Iraqi parliament, government of Iraq leaders, Iraqi general officers and soldiers from the 36th and 25th divisions. Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, U.S. Forces - Iraq commander, spoke during the ceremony about the 36th division's success since arriving to COB Basra in December.

"The accomplishments of United States Division South, under the able leadership of the 36th Infantry Division and Maj. Gen. Eddy Spurgin, have set the conditions for continued progress in southern Iraq; progress that can lead to Iraq overcoming challenges and indeed seizing opportunities," said Austin.

During Spurgin's remarks, he expressed pride for commanding USD-South for nine months as they "managed over 740 civil-support projects revitalizing Iraq's economy, improving



Maj. Gen. Eddy M. Spurgin, commander 36th Infantry Division, and Command Sgt. Maj. Wilson Early, 36th Infantry Division, case the colors Sept. 7 during a ceremony at Contingency Operating Base Basra signifying the completion of the 36th Division's mission as command and control headquarters for U.S. Division-South.

its infrastructure, as well as improving its judicial system and its rule of law."

The 36th Infantry Division helped Basrah establish one of the largest consulates in the world, which will continue to help in the civilian-led effort in Iraq, said Spurgin.

The 36th Infantry Division also set the conditions to reposture U.S. Forces in Iraq and closed 18 bases and nine Provincial Reconstruction Teams, said Spurgin. Working hand-in-hand with Iraqi security forces to help train and advise their military operations have led to great successes as the Iraqi forces skills significantly improved, he said.

"I truly believe this team made historically significant contributions that will help create a brighter future for the people of Iraq; improving the environment so democracy can flourish and the people can prosper," said Spurgin.

Spurgin and Austin both expressed confidence and trust in Maj. Gen. Bernie Champoux, commander, 25th Infantry Division, during their speeches.

"The U.S. forces' mission in southern Iraq is not ended," said Spurgin. "Finishing the mission will be Maj. Gen. Bernie Champoux and the great Tropic Lightning Division, a division as well-known and

highly regarded both throughout the United States and the country of Iraq."

The transfer of authority to the 25th Infantry Division not only signifies the completion of the 36th Infantry Division's mission, it is also another sign that Operation New Dawn is coming to an end, said Austin.

"You know, normally when we farewell one division we welcome another into Iraq," said Austin, "but today's ceremony marks a significant milestone as Operation New Dawn begins to draw to a close in honor of our commitment to the security agreement. And thanks to the tireless efforts of our teammates across Iraq, the plan for our departure remains on track."

During his speech, Champoux thanked the 36th division for their tireless commitment and professionalism and expressed his intent for what is no longer U.S. Division-South, but is now U.S. Division-Central.

"As we press forward together, the U.S. mission will transition to an increasing focus on civilian-led efforts that continue our deep commitment to Iraq and to its people," said Champoux.

Spurgin and approximately 700 soldiers mobilized with the 36th Infantry Division served in Iraq through their redeployment in September as they returned to Texas. ■

I truly believe this team made historically significant contributions that will help create a brighter future for the people of Iraq...

~Maj. Gen. Eddy M. Spurgin

New Life for Trenchard Lines



A handler with security personnel for the U.S. Consulate in Basrah plays fetch with a K-9 on Contingency Operating Base Basra, Oct. 9. The military support element turned the soccer field on Trenchard Lines, a living sustainment area, into a fenced in area for the dogs to get exercise.

Many U.S. soldiers and civilians serving in Iraq have inhabited Trenchard Lines, a living sustainment area on Contingency Operating Base Basra since British forces left the camp in 2009. Earlier this year, it was vacated.

The camp's namesake, British officer Hugh Trenchard, lost a lung and was partially paralyzed after sustaining a gunshot wound to his chest during a battle in South Africa in 1900. In a bobsledding accident during his recovery in Switzerland, Trenchard regained the ability to walk unaided and went on to become Marshal of the Royal Air Force. Today, he is known as the father of the Royal Air Force.

To properly house security personnel for the U.S. Consulate in Basrah, Trenchard Lines needed its own miraculous recovery to make it livable once again. Army Reserve soldiers with the 414th Civil Affairs Battalion, 352nd Civil Affairs Command, worked with contractors to bring new life to the formerly vacant camp.

"We needed to figure out a way to resuscitate it and to have it operational as a safe environment for ... people who are providing crucial services to the consulate," said Piper Campbell, consul general for the U.S. Consulate General in Basrah. "We wouldn't have been able to stand that camp up, to have people move in there and live in conditions of security and safety and all the necessary sanitation ... if it hadn't been for the work of the military support element."

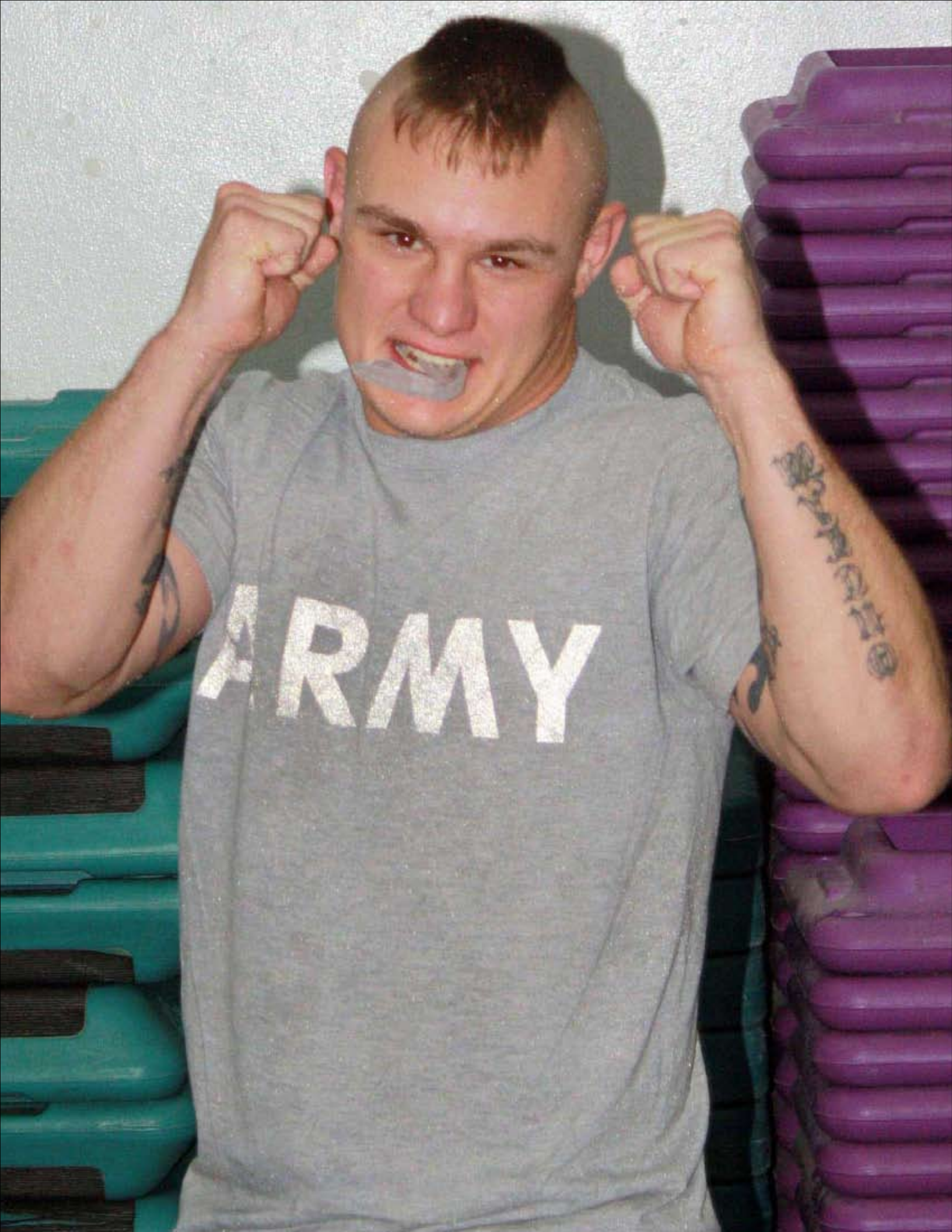
The offices and containerized housing units, or CHUs,

of Trenchard were missing air conditioners and furniture, or didn't have power, said 1st Lt. Raymond Bixler, officer in charge for the military support element for the consulate.

"We were able to ... start sweeping the trash out and hauling it off," said Bixler. "We would clean the CHUs out and install [air conditioners]. We fixed the lights and put in new smoke alarms, doing anything we could do to make the camp livable."

The soldiers and contractors installed new latrine and shower facilities, found equipment for the gym, turned empty offices into an Internet café and recreation room for camp residents, and installed outdoor lighting. They turned the soccer field into a fenced in playground so the handlers of working dogs could give their furry companions proper exercise.

"Whatever needed doing, that's what we did to get this camp stood up," said Staff Sgt. Carl Pascocello, camp manager for Trenchard Lines. "When we came here, Trenchard was literally falling apart. It took some sweat and some love, but we put it back together again." ■



The
BOOGEYMAN
has the heart of a warrior:

From the fighting ring to third tour in Iraq, Soldier never quits



Sgt. Cody McCollom, personal security officer with 36th Infantry Division, from Dallas, Texas, trains with a battle buddy at the gym on Contingency Operating Base Basra.

The Iraqi desert heats up to scorching temperatures, as the boogeyman ties his bootlaces and prepares for another day of classified movements through the sand. He is ready for whatever opponents he may encounter in this barren land he currently calls home.

On Contingency Operating Base Basra, the days are long and demanding for Sgt. Cody McCollom, personal security officer, 36th Infantry Division, from Dallas, Texas. McCollom, who is on his third deployment to Iraq, but that doesn't stop him from continuing to pursue his dream of becoming a professional world-class champion fighter one day.

The only path to acquiring that dream is "training hard and never losing sight of that goal," he said.

At five feet, seven inches and weighing 170 pounds, McCollom is nicknamed "El Cucui," or boogeyman by his Army buddies, because a guy he fought, at one point had nightmares about him after the fight, said McCollom. After that, the name just stuck, he added.

His extensive fighting skills and infantry background contributed to his qualifications for his position as a personal

security officer for Maj. Gen. Eddy M. Spurgin, commanding general of the 36th Infantry Division, during this deployment.

As a member of Spurgin's personal security team, McCollom's position is similar to that of a secret service agent back in the states. It is his job to put the safety of the general before his own, and he must be ready at any moment to take whatever action necessary to ensure the safety of his boss. That kind of responsibility is not for the faint of heart, which is why McCollom fits into the role so well.

He was to the world of fighting at age six when his father took him to the boxing gym for the first time and he has been fighting competitively ever since, he said.

"From that first day, I fell in love with the fight game, the competition that is so much more than you versus your opponent, but you versus yourself," he said. "Since then, I have always done my best to be the best. Now, after 127 amateur boxing matches, including eight state golden gloves, one national title, a bronze medal in the under 19 world championships, 23 amateur kickboxing matches, six amateur grappling matches, I have worked my way up to turning pro," he said.

But the fighting ring is just one challenge this 23-year-old has

THE BOOGEYMAN HAS THE HEART OF A WARRIOR

taken on to test his limits; in 2006 he added another level to his inner warrior by joining the Army National Guard, and following in the footsteps of his forefathers.

"I've always wanted to join the Army," said McCollom. "Every male on my dad's side of the family, who's full-blood Sioux, have fought in every American war. I've had six great-uncles in World War II at the same time. My grandfather was in the Korean War. My uncle was in Vietnam. My dad served in the Marine Corp. My little brother is in Afghanistan right now on his first deployment. That's how we are as a family; you fight. Every aspect of my life revolves around some type of fighting, whether it's in a cage, in a boxing ring, or on the battlefield."

But there is a time and a place to fight, and the privilege is not to be abused, according to McCollom.

"I was always raised never to fight outside of the gym or outside the ring," he said. "That's wrong. Growing up as a kid, you get into the schoolyard fights... but if I did, I was always in trouble. It's always been; 'you pass your grades or you don't fight.' It's more of an extracurricular thing," he said.

But the way the Native American side ties into it is you don't quit, he said.

"And I've never quit in a fight, ever. That's just how I was raised. You never quit," he said.

His Native American bloodline has been a significant influence in his upbringing and plays an important role in how he lives his life both as a man, and a fighter.

"Every aspect of my life is like fighting, and it's all because of my Native American side," he said. "It's a big part of my life," he added.

"People look at fighting like it's a very violent sport and it's really not," he said. "There are a lot of rules and regulations that are put into place to make it safe. And people on the outside look in and say, 'Man, these dudes are beating the hell out of each other.' But honestly, it's a test of who has more heart or will, and who has more skill," he said.

"You might have two fighters that are the same skill and it comes down to who has more heart, who's going to want it more," he said. "I go [into a fight] and I see 'Am I better than this man?' Let's see who's the better man."

Native Americans are very spiritual and peaceful people, and the culture is deep-rooted, he explained. But there is another side of the culture just as important as the spiritual side that carries great responsibility. That is pushing yourself, and testing your mental and physical strength.

Your whole life is a series of tests, he said. How you live your life, and how you handle these tests, reflects directly on you as a man, he added.

"You can live your whole life as a man, go through all of these tests, take care of your family, and do all of these things as a man, but if you die as a coward, then to us, you didn't become a man," he said. "That's the ultimate test. It's just a part of me that I've lived with my whole life; you never quit and you go out on your shield."

When McCollom first started fighting he would get butterflies in his stomach just before a fight, he said. But as he got older and gained more experience, he learned how to channel that nervous energy and use it to prepare him for the fight engagement.

"That's one of the reasons I like to fight ... that feeling you get right before you walk into the ring, knowing that you've done everything you could to prepare for the fight," he said. "And you know that man on the other side of the cage has done the exact same thing, and you're about to test to see if you're a better fighter and your skills are better than his."

He has worked with relentless effort to get to where he is today, but his journey to go pro has not been one he has taken alone. McCollom has found support from his family and friends throughout his life, but his greatest support system has been his best friend and battle buddy, Spc. John Jones.

Jones is a personal security officer and driver for Command Sgt. Maj. Wilson L. Early, 36th Infantry Division, and spent his last tour to Iraq with McCollom.

Jones has been training with McCollom and keeping him on track for the last four years, said McCollom.

Apart from being training partners and having multiple deployments together, McCollom says, "We're brothers to the core."

Jones describes their bond as, "something that most people will never have."

We've been through so much together that I trust him with my life, and I have trusted him with my life countless times, said Jones.

At home or on deployment, Jones pushes McCollom to stick to his rigorous workout regiment, especially when he may want to skip a day.

As far as him working out, he's a beast, said Jones. He never quits.

McCollom has developed an extensive variety of mixed martial arts that includes wrestling, kickboxing, Muay Thai, Jiu-jitsu, and Aikido.

In or out of the ring, no matter what challenges McCollom has faced through his life, he just keeps going.

"I rode bulls since I was 14 ... it was really a bad idea," he said nonchalantly.

When he was 17 he was stepped on by a bull, he said. He ended up in the hospital with a collapsed lung and broken ribs.

"It took me out of the fighting game for a little while, and that's when I ended my bull-riding career," he said. "I rode once or twice after that, but I wasn't as good on the back of a bull as I was in the ring," he said with a grin.

For McCollom, it is about the journey of the fight that draws him in and keeps him going, not the end result.

"It's a huge rush," he said. "And win or lose, it doesn't matter. As long as you come out of the ring knowing that you did your best, and that you put everything you had out there in the ring. And that's why I fight. It's that feeling that keeps me going."

He has survived having bones crushed by a bull, he has volunteered for deployments and come back for more, his wins outweigh his losses in the ring, and his fighting performance has even given his opponent nightmares. Every test he has been faced with in life, he has met with the heart of a true warrior.

This boogeyman doesn't hide under a bed waiting to attack. He has been on the battlefield and in the fighting ring, and nothing will divert him from his path to becoming a world champion. But keep a light on just in case, because the boogeyman is coming. ■



Caroline Cutbirth, singer for the country group Stealing Angels, performs for U.S. Division-South soldiers July 14 at the old Post Exchange on Contingency Operating Base Basra during the last morale, welfare and recreation event here.

NEWS | Story and photo by Spc. Brittany Gardner

Two steppin' toward home

In another sign that 36th Infantry Division soldiers will return home soon, the morale, welfare and recreation team conducted the last MWR concert here, July 14. The concert featured the country group Stealing Angels and rock group Toy.

1st Lt. Joshua Mixon, U.S. Division-South programs manager officer-in-charge, plans and coordinates the MWR events and concerts for COB Basra. He and his team have planned and executed more than 50 events since he arrived here with the 36th Inf. Div. in December 2010. Mixon said executing the last MWR tour is another sign the soldiers here are preparing to return home.

"It's the last tour," said Mixon, "which sounds like a bad thing, but it's certainly not because it means that (our mission) in Iraq is ending. It's coming to a close."

Members of Stealing Angels and Toy said they felt honored to have the opportunity to perform for the troops in Iraq and Kuwait.

"It's cool," said Tayla Lynn, singer for Stealing Angels. "I mean, everybody's going home so it's sort of neat to be one of the sending-

off concerts. So we just feel blessed to be here and be a part of it."

Soldiers were excited to see the bands perform, Lynn said. Before the concert began, Soldiers and civilians kept their cameras handy to get photos with the group members and capture each moment of the last concert held here.

"The soldiers are so welcoming and their energy's so fired up," said Lynn. "We played a show last night and tonight where everybody's just clapping and jumping up and down, and we feel like people are really grateful that we're here. So, it's been so much fun, and we feel so welcomed."

Mixon said it's sad to know he won't plan anymore MWR tours on this deployment, but it lets him know he and the other soldiers are one step closer to home.

"Soldiers are wrapping up in more ways than one," said Mixon, "and this is just another way for soldiers to have some closure on their tour here." ■



Navy Lt. Joseph Fitzgerald, a pilot with the 2515th Naval Air Ambulance Detachment, carries pizzas while wearing a chicken suit on Contingency Operating Base Basra. Pilots and crewmen with the 2515th NAAD wear the suit after they perform their first medical evacuation mission.

A fowl way to spend the day

“When the crew tried to catch the chicken, it resisted,” said Navy Lt. Joseph Fitzgerald. “It wanted to stay in the bird.”

That was the scene in late 2005 when a chicken had escaped its coop and sought refuge inside of a Navy Knighthawk helicopter during a medical evacuation mission in Iraq.

In honor of this fowl, the 2515th Naval Air Ambulance Detachment has a unique way to mark an important milestone for its pilots and crewmen. After they complete their first MEDEVAC mission, they don a fuzzy, yellow chicken suit.

They try to prove that some chickens can fly; at least the ones that pilot helicopters.

The 2515th NAAD is currently deployed to Contingency Operating Base Basra with U.S. Division- South. In late 2005 the unit supported the U.S. Army medical mission from Kuwait.

The costume carries with it a tradition, and sweat stains, that date back to when the 2515th first flew missions over the border from Kuwait into Iraq.

Fitzgerald, a pilot with the 2515th, is no stranger to wearing the noticeable costume. He had the honor to wear it around COB Basra, June 21, with a sign attached that proudly read “1st MEDEVAC”.

“It was gratifying,” he said. “Wearing that suit means you’ve at least contributed something to the good fight, so there’s no

embarrassment involved.”

Fitzgerald retold the story of the 2005 MEDEVAC mission that started it all.

He said that on this mission, two Knighthawk helicopters landed in a village in southern Iraq. Nearby there was a local man’s hut, and in his back yard was his chicken coop.

The dust and wind from the helicopters landing created chaos enough to disturb the chicken’s home. A single one got loose from the coop, ran underneath the helicopter’s rotors, and boarded the aircraft, said Fitzgerald.

The fowl that sought refuge in the helicopter took up position in the rear with the medical equipment. The chicken had embraced its freedom. When the crew tried to catch and remove the chicken, it fought back.

Due to its relentless effort to stay free and hitch a ride to Kuwait, the chicken, which later died of natural causes, became the unofficial symbol for the 2515th.

Pilots wear patches that depict the poultry, a rubber chicken hangs in their office, and the chicken costume has gathered some use since it was acquired from an unknown source.

“It has six years of use under its belt and growing,” said Fitzgerald. “One size fits all.” ■

Soldiers escape to magical world through role-playing game

The proverb “All work and no play makes jack a dull boy” was immortalized in the 1980 Stanley Kubrick film *The Shining* and seems fitting when applied to a deployed environment where Soldiers work long hours, often with no days off.

A small group of soldiers know how to play when they meet twice a week at the Resiliency Center on Contingency Operating Base Adder to escape the long days of their deployment and play an imaginary, role-playing game; complete with vampires, werewolves, elves, dragons, and a variety of other magical creatures.

“I enjoy hanging out with the group and playing because it allows me an outlet for whatever has been going on, and lets

me just be me,” said Spc. Cody Leonhardt, team leader, 1729th Field Support Maintenance Company, from Baltimore, Md. “It helps me calm myself and have fun.”

The game takes place in a supernatural world and each soldier plays a character with different skills, abilities and magical powers.

“For me, it’s the chance to go to a different world,” said Pvt. Douglas A. Anderson, computer detection systems

repairer, 1729th FSMC, from Hebron, Md.

“I look forward to my nights of play so I can get that time away from the grind of the day-to-day Army life,” said Anderson. “The fact that I get to share that time and that adventure with close friends only makes it better.”

Through role-playing, these soldiers transport their imaginations into a fictional world that allows them to battle undead creatures, fly over treetops, and cast magical spells.



A group of soldiers gather around a billiard table to play an adventure role-playing game at the Resiliency Center on Contingency Operating Base Adder, Oct. 15.

SOLDIERS ESCAPE TO MAGICAL WORLD



Soldiers give a high five after their characters defeat an enemy in the fantasy role-playing game on Contingency Operating Base Adder, Oct. 15.

“Adventure is fun,” said Spc. Dorothy Gray, information technologies specialist, Company B, 3rd Brigade, Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, from Las Vegas, Nev. “We don’t get a lot of it in our daily lives here when you are in a support role. Being confined to a small area with very few amenities offered tends to bring a person’s morale down. Until you meet some people who like to do the same things you do, and you enjoy their company immensely. When you find those people who accept you for you, and everyone can be themselves, it is an awesome thing.”

The adventures these soldiers experience together, through their characters, creates a comradeship that is unique to the role-playing world.

“What I get out of playing the game is camaraderie, and a chance to relax and have fun with wonderfully imaginative and eclectic people,” said Gray.

Members of the group also enjoy using the time to play as a break from the rank structure they live with during the day.

“Everyday I walk around post as Pvt. Anderson, but a few times a week I get to be Zander, the magic-user, and fight on the various quests he is on,” said Anderson. “For those few precious hours I get to forget the day-to-day worries of a soldier

and be somebody else; and at least in my head, be somewhere else.”

The game is organized by one person who acts as the narrator of the character’s journey, and a referee for the players.

“My role in the game is to create the game-board and play the bad guys that the characters encounter throughout their adventure,” said Capt. Donald Larsen,



A set of role-playing dice sit on top of a page from the narrator’s rulebook on Contingency Operating Base Adder, Oct. 15.

commander, 362nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, from Butler, Mo.

The game is played the old-fashioned way, without the use of technology such as the Internet or electronic devices. Instead, players use role-playing dice, diagrams on a whiteboard, and their imaginations.

“That is where the adventure comes in,” said Gray. “Since we are limited in our real lives here, it is nice to get together and do fantastical things with our imaginations.”

“Our group will bring their game items, snacks, drinks and smiles for all,” said Gray. “We joke, and laugh, and talk, all the while we play a game that lets us work together and still be ourselves.”

For some members of the group, this is not their first experience with a role-playing game.

“I have been playing these role-playing games for years,” said Sgt. Phaedra Clements, information technology specialist, Company B, 3BSTD, 1st Cav. Div., from Malden, Mass. “To me, it is a way to have a good time, blow off steam, and meet like-minded geeks. There is no judgment, just people having a good time.”

It may be all work in the day for these soldiers, but they certainly find time for play, making them anything but dull. ■





The Universal Language of *MUSIC*

**Story and Photos
by Spc. Brittany Gardner**



Sgt. Charles R. Fricker, 36th Infantry Division band percussion section leader from Angleton, Texas, teaches Basrah University faculty and students the proper way to hold drum sticks during a class held on Contingency Operating Base Basra July 28.

Soldiers deployed to Iraq often find it difficult to communicate with local nationals without the use of an interpreter.

But there are many communication tools that are easily understood worldwide such as body language, hand gestures and even music.

One group of Texas National Guardsmen with the 36th Infantry Division deployed to Contingency Operating Base Basra since December learned how to break down the language barrier by speaking in the universal language of music.

"We're having classes for faculty and students from the University of Basrah from the fine arts department there," said Chief Warrant Officer Jeff Lightsey, 36th

Infantry Division band commander.

"We've had classes our entire deployment here. It's basically music classes, music enrichment classes, on Western music. They performed for us on their native instruments and native music. But they are seeking information, background and education on Western music and Western history."

Lightsey, and the two soldiers who have been teaching these classes since they arrived, serve their country in more ways than one. Back home, these men teach music to students in the public high schools. Lightsey said it's been almost impossible to compare the Basrah University students to his students in Texas.

"It's a very different background," said

Lightsey, "and of course they're used to some different sounds. And they use some different instruments as well. They're string oriented. They don't have any brass instruments and very little percussion except for their native percussion. Their skill level is actually very low just because they haven't had the training."

Although the language barrier is apparent during each class, Lightsey said they've accomplished a lot.

"The music is the same. We say that music is an international language, and I think that this has been a real education and a confirmation of that," he said.

Staff Sgt. Maurice E. Kelly, 36th Infantry Division band member, also knows the frustrations of communication when it comes to teaching the Iraqi



Basrah University students and faculty play along while 36th Infantry Division band members teach the basics of Western music July 28. The 36th Infantry Division band has been teaching these classes throughout their entire deployment to Contingency Operating Base Basra.



A Basrah University student takes notes while Staff Sgt. Maurice E. Kelly, 36th Infantry Division band member, teaches a class on Western music.



Sgt. Charles R. Fricker, 36th Infantry Division band percussion section leader from Angleton, Texas, teaches Basrah University faculty and students proper drumming techniques and exercises during a class held on Contingency Operating Base Basra July 28.

students.

During one session, Kelley taught a lesson on string instruments with no interpreter and no instruments for the students. Regardless of the lack of oral communication or equipment, Kelley said this instance still stands out as one of the best classes he's taught while deployed here.

"We had some words that we all knew," Kelley said, "so we were able to talk about some of the things that were specific to playing those instruments. But everybody was laughing and having a good time."

Communication hasn't been the only thing standing between these students and learning.

The budget for Basrah University's music program has also made it difficult.

Having seen this first hand during a visit to the university, Kelley, a public school teacher in Kansas City, Kan., said it has changed his mindset about his job as a teacher when he returns to the States.

"I mean, they've got standing water in the hallway and their annual budget for their department," said Kelley, "which includes office supplies and anything like that, from what they're telling me is less than what I make as a teacher in a month. Being able to work with what I have will certainly be much easier for me to do and not even think about."

Sgt. Charles R. Fricker, 36th Infantry Division band percussion section leader from Angleton, Texas, said he also has learned a new appreciation for his teaching job back home.

"You know, being here in Iraq, seeing a different culture that is very much struggling after many years of war, you realize that we take so many things for granted, especially in the public education sector in the United States. I'm just thankful for every resource that I have," said Fricker.

These citizen-soldiers began teaching classes to help Iraqis learn the basics of Western music, but Fricker said he feels like each student will leave with a better understanding.

"For the Iraqis, the big take away is music is a universal language," Fricker said. "So that's a really cool take away. No matter where you go in the world, music is like a constant." ■

Bringing medicine into the digital era

Capt. Tyler Carruth remembers being introduced to computers at a young age when his parents bought him a Commodore 64, one of the first home computers. He tinkered on it, marveling at what today seems primitive.

Carruth grew up inspired by his experiences going to work with his father, a doctor and family practitioner. A love of computers combined with his experience in the medical field helped determine Carruth's mission to make computers work to improve health care.

After graduating high school, Carruth jumped into college at Louisiana State University, but he was missing something.

"After a year of college, I needed maturity, discipline, and a means to pay for it," said Carruth.

The Baton Rouge native joined the Louisiana Army National Guard in 1993 as a combat medic. When he graduated from the LSU Health and Science Center's physician assistant program in 2000, he was commissioned as an officer in the Army.

"It gave me great direction, and I got to do great things," said Carruth.

While looking for a job in Texas, Carruth was offered the opportunity to work for NASA at the Johnson Space Center, training astronauts and cosmonauts bound for the International Space Station. Carruth said there at JSC, he trained shuttle crews, who were mostly engineers and pilots, in labs, hospitals, and parabola



Capt. Tyler Carruth, medical provider for the Texas Medical Command at Contingency Operating Base Basra, coaches Russian cosmonaut Sergei K. Krikalev at the Johnson Space Center in medical training.



Capt. Tyler Carruth, medical provider for the Texas Medical Command at Contingency Operating Base Basra, coaches Russian cosmonaut Sergei K. Krikalev at the Johnson Space Center in medical training.

flights, which are meant to mimic the effects of the weightlessness in space.

“My job was to train astronauts and cosmonauts and help them with basics; everything from CPR, all the way up to how to suture in space, how to do pretty invasive medical procedures,” he said. “All with a caveat: you are teaching them to do it in microgravity, where there’s no such thing as placing something on the table.”

“Trying to improve healthcare and outcomes for the crews was very important,” added Carruth.

While working for NASA, Carruth was invited by his mentor, Sriram Iyengar, to come to the graduate program at the University of Texas.

“I was working in medicine with my eye on technology,” said Carruth. “The more I thought about it the more I started to get into programming.”

Carruth worked with Iyengar at UT to help develop Guideviews, a program that works on almost any computer platform including smart phones, designed to guide a person through a medical procedure; for instance, how to treat decompression sickness, a common medical emergency aboard the ISS.

“What Guideviews would do is take a procedure and encode it fully in multimedia,” said Carruth. “And really that kind of cemented this passion of mine

for using technology and data analytics and decision-support tools to improve health care.”

“My interest is data analytics,” he said. “It’s using massive amounts of future medical outcomes data and current claims data and mining this information to be able to recognize patterns, and then to develop programs that can assist in improving health care.”

Carruth returned home to Baton Rouge to work for the Department of Health and Hospitals for the state of Louisiana as the health information technology projects lead. There he was responsible for helping create a financial incentives program to get medical providers in the state to adopt electronic health record systems to replace their old paper files.

“If everybody starts adopting electronic health records and using them in a meaningful way, you can improve health by being able to track and report diseases, and better manage patient care,” said Carruth. “It makes health information portable and starts to cut down on costs by getting rid of redundant tests and medical error.”

When the Telemedicine Advanced Technology Research Center in Fort Detrick, Md. offered a grant to military medical officers for research projects to improve health care for service members, Carruth applied for and was awarded the

grant of more than \$241,000.

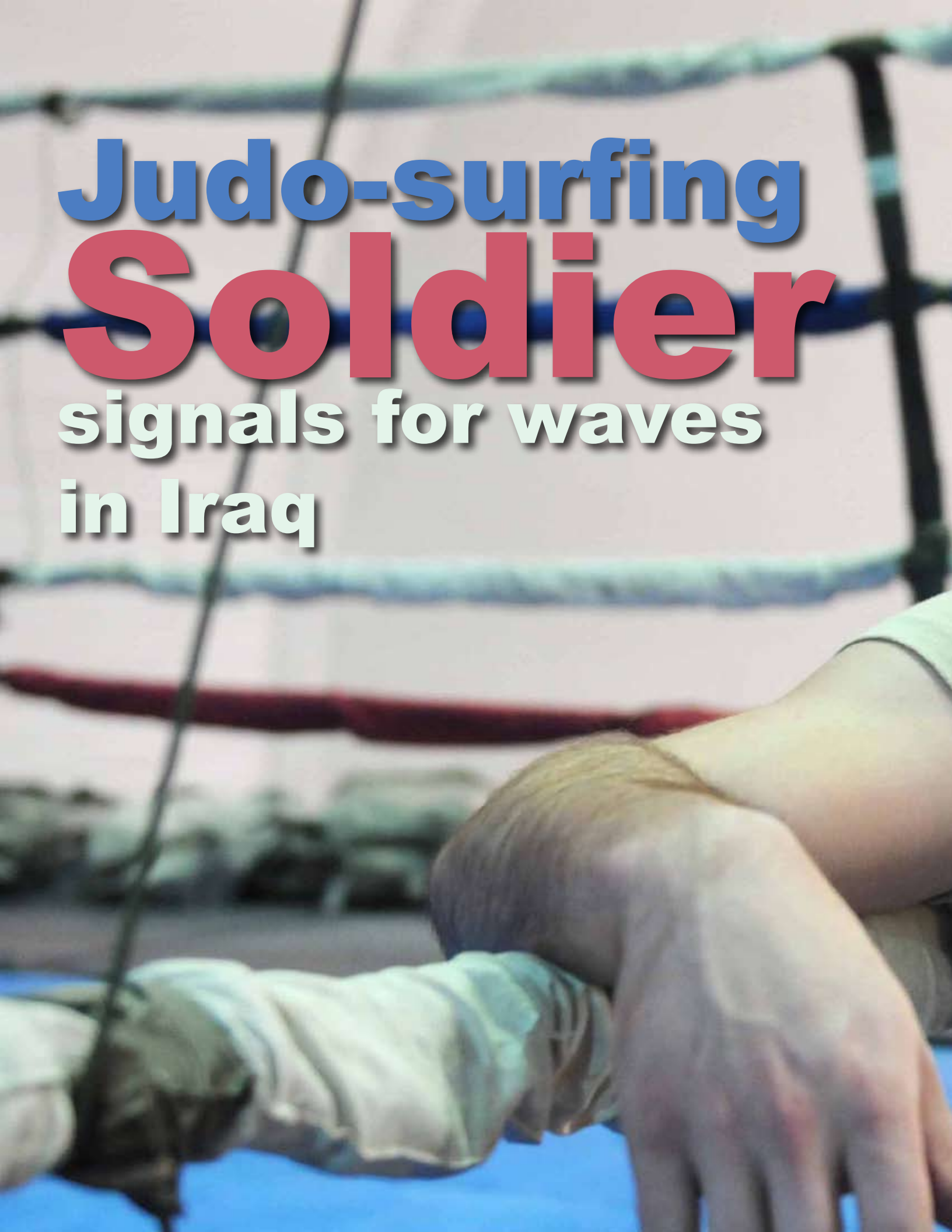
Sponsored by Brooke Army Medical Center, Carruth plans to use the grant to build software for the Guideviews program on nine tactical combat medical care procedures, based on courses medical personnel in the military must take before deploying to a combat zone.

Carruth, a father of three sons, deployed to Iraq with the Texas Medical Command in December 2010 in support of Operation New Dawn as a medical care provider. There he was responsible for testing a blue-tooth enabled electrocardiogram for Blackhawk helicopters.

The device was designed to wirelessly transmit vital medical data about a casualty during a medical evacuation.

He spent nights on his deployment playing chess with fellow service members and Iraqi locals, doing what he called “Kung-Fu of the mind.” He even plans to start a non-profit organization when he returns home to introduce disadvantaged children to chess in schools.

Carruth has made a career of getting a foothold for programming in health care. He has come a long way since tinkering with his Commodore 64, to training NASA astronauts, serving in Iraq, and helping create software and programs to help save lives. ■

A person in a green tank top is performing a judo move on a blue mat. The person's arm is extended, and they are holding another person's arm. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a fence and some greenery.

Judo-surfing **Soldier** signals for waves in Iraq



**Story and Photos
by Spc. Anthony T. Zane**



Pfc. Marshall O. Hughes, satellite communications operator and maintainer, Signal Company, Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, 25th Infantry Division from Asheboro, N.C., competes in the Modern Army Combatives Program competition on Contingency Operating Base Adder.

Waves of Soldiers have moved in and out of Iraq since the U.S. first arrived in 2003, their uniforms creating a contrasting flow across the desert sand.

Surfing within that constant current is Pfc. Marshall Hughes, satellite communications operator and maintainer, with Signal Company, Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, 25th Infantry Division.

Growing up in Asheboro, N.C., Hughes' interest to join the Army was inspired by his grandfather.

"My grandfather was prior military. And, after hearing about his war stories, I wanted to experience what it was like to be a soldier," said Hughes. "I try to follow in his footsteps."

"He was a cook," said Hughes. "I decided to go a different path because being a cook didn't sound too interesting to me, so I went with signal. I was hoping with my military occupational specialty, I could go outside the wire and have a little bit of fun."

Looking for a soldier's life, the 21-year-old is serving his first tour on Contingency Operating Base Adder.

Hughes has yet to venture off base to go on missions, he said. But he is still

grateful for his experience so far. As long as he is doing his part as a soldier, he takes pride in his work and being an integral part of Operation New Dawn, he said.

Working for the Signal Company, Hughes has been cross-trained to perform a variety of tasks that includes working with satellite communication and transmission systems.

A soldier's life is just what he found: his team works long hours with no days off. Still, he finds time to stay physically fit, something he has actively pursued through his two favorite passions in life: martial arts and surfing.

"It all started back when I was in the fifth grade; I signed up for wrestling, said Hughes.

Hughes was briefly drawn to football, but decided to focus on wrestling.

"I preferred wrestling over football because it was a more physical, aggressive sport and it was a lot more fun," said Hughes. "There was a lot more to it, dealing with stamina than anything. With football, I didn't even get tired, so I didn't care much for it."

In his junior year, he started researching wrestling and its origins, he said. He found out that wrestling is generally considered the oldest sport, and he liked the idea of being part of that

history and participating in a sport with deep roots, he said.

It was his experience on the wrestling mat that brought Hughes to the world of martial arts.

"One of my friends was the nephew of a Judo Sensei," said Hughes. "He told me Judo would help me out with wrestling. I asked him if he could hook me up with some classes."

The fundamental principle of Judo focuses on disrupting an opponent's balance by using throws and takedown techniques. Grappling maneuvers and chokeholds are then used to immobilize or subdue the opponent.

He would later realize the importance of balance through his surfing hobby.

His first Judo experience tested his stamina and brought him to his physical limit, he said. He was used to grappling on the ground, but introducing a combative stance to it, and being thrown down to the ground over and over was a new experience for him.

"I liked it because it was competitive, but what I liked more, was when I walked into the environment," he said.

"The name Judo actually means 'the gentle way' in Japanese," he explained.

Even after the beating his body endured in his first Judo class, he was ready to



Pfc. Marshall O. Hughes, satellite communications operator and maintainer, Signal Company, Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, 25th Infantry Division from Asheboro, N.C., practices for the Modern Army Combatives Program competition on Contingency Operating Base Adder.

learn more. For him, it was a whole new competitive experience, and he learned a different way of perceiving his opponent.

Hughes began to research the history of Judo to learn more about its origins, but also increased his interest in the culture behind the art.

Judo was just the beginning and opened the door to the world of martial arts for him. His desire to branch out led him to study other styles, including Muay Thai, Ju-Jitsu and Aikido.

His martial art practices have earned Hughes a brown belt in both Judo and Muay Thai, as well as a blue belt in Ju-Jitsu. Studying different styles of martial arts broadens your understanding of the arts and sharpens your techniques, he said.

For Hughes, taking the time to research the physical and cultural aspects of the fighting styles he practices is essential to create a complete picture.

If you understand its origins, and you understand the purpose of it from its history, you will excel in it, he explains. This understanding will help you out in the long run, he said.

During his deployment to Iraq, temporarily replacing ocean waves with desert sands, Hughes is able to stay active with one of his passions, through the Modern Army Combatives Program, an Army program with martial arts origins.

He participated in a MACP tournament, held at COB Adder. At 5 feet 6 inches, and weighing in at 155 pounds, Hughes was able to compete in the welterweight class.

After practicing moves with his fellow soldiers, Hughes entered the ring with determination. He cautiously moved with speed and agility; postured as a worthy opponent.

The match concluded with his opponent making the final conquering move, forcing Hughes off balance and finishing the match. But Hughes walked away with a smile on his face and his head held high.

He quickly analyzed his bout: "He got me with an Uchi Mata slam," he explained, referring to one of the original Judo throws; a move known for its difficulty to defend against. "I was too focused on one choke, and that's what got me."

His unwaveringly positive attitude about the outcome of the match comes from his understanding of competition on a basic level.



Pfc. Marshall O. Hughes, satellite communications operator and maintainer, Signal Company, Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, 25th Infantry Division from Asheboro, N.C., waits in the holding area for his match in the Modern Army Combatives Program in on Contingency Operating Base Adder.

"It doesn't matter how good you are, and it doesn't matter how long you've done it," he said. "You will always lose at least once to somebody. That's part of the process, and it only helps you improve your technique. You learn from your mistakes and from your losses."

His outlook with his martial arts parallels that of his surfing experiences. When a wave throws him off his board, he gets right back on the board ready to conquer the next wave.

"It doesn't come down to who wins and who loses," said Hughes. "It's what you learn from it. That's what my Sensei always taught me. He said, 'never be upset at the end of a match. Unless you broke

your arm, you can get right back in there, and you can win. Learn from it.'"

"Every time I would lose, I would go off to the side with the person that beat me and have him teach me how to counter what happened," he said. "I would do the same with whoever I beat."

Hughes may endure Uchi Mata takedowns in the ring and the unforgiving waves of the ocean surf throwing him from his board, but one thing never changes: He always gets back up; smarter and stronger.

His durability and resiliency mixed with his humble, optimistic attitude keeps Hughes in the fight, making him a worthy opponent and a well-rounded soldier. ■

Four NFL coaches visit Soldiers

When Jim E. Mora picked up the phone and made a call to the National Football League earlier this year his plan was to make it on the next trip to the Middle East. "In January, I called the NFL and asked if they had any tours going to Iraq or Afghanistan," said Mora. "I've always had an interest in it."

The NFL and United Services Organization have been sending professional and retired football coaches to the Persian Gulf since 2009 as part of the USO Coaches Tour.

Service members with U.S. Division-South had the opportunity to meet these coaches on Contingency Operating Base Basra, July 4.

Even though he hadn't coached in more than ten years, Mora said he was excited about the USO Coaches Tour, and wished he had the opportunity before retiring.

Mora, former head coach of the New Orleans Saints and Indianapolis Colts, joined Gary Kubiak, head coach of the Houston Texans; Ken Whisenhunt, head coach of the Arizona Cardinals; and Mora's

son, Jim L. Mora, former head coach of the Seattle Seahawks and Atlanta Falcons, on a trip to U.S. military bases in Kuwait and Iraq.

Whisenhunt said he couldn't make the trip in 2010 due to scheduling conflicts, but felt determined to make it this year.

"My father and brother both served," said Whisenhunt. "When I was asked to come again this year, it was an easy decision."

The group had a rocky start with schedule changes and delayed flights before they could make it into Kuwait, July 2.

After spending the day visiting service members in Kuwait, they flew into Tikrit, Iraq, by C-130. The next day they traveled by Blackhawk into Baghdad and toured Al-Faw Palace. The coaches arrived at COB Basra on July 4 and met with Command Sgt. Maj. Wilson L. Early, 36th Infantry Division, before flying to Umm Qasr and visiting troops stationed there.

After enjoying an Independence Day barbecue at Umm Qasr, the coaches made their way back to COB Basra and had a

meet-and-greet with more than 50 service members and civilians of USD-S, which included a one-on-one discussion and autograph session for each person in line.

One hour, several permanent markers, and more than a few questions about the NFL lockout debate later, the last of the crowd had dissipated and the coaches could prepare for their trip home the next day.

Kubiak said that if they left with anything, it would be an enlightened experience of the work being done by service members in theater.

"It's really an education," said Whisenhunt. "You can't come away anything but impressed. We appreciate people coming together to accomplish a common goal."

Amidst the jabs at each other or the favorite teams of present troops, the coaches seemed to be more honored to make the visit than the fans they were visiting.

"When given the opportunity, I couldn't wait to come," said Kubiak. "I hope to do it again one day." ■



Command Sgt. Maj. Wilson L. Early, 36th Infantry Division, poses with professional football head coaches (left to right) Jim L. Mora, Jim E. Mora, Ken Whisenhunt and Gary Kubiak during their visit to Contingency Operating Base Basra, July 4. COB Basra was the last stop of a tour of military bases in Kuwait and Iraq sponsored by the National Football League and the United Services Organization.



Specialist Brett Pittsley, command post node operator, Brave Company, 3rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, from Gasport N.Y., casts his fishing line into Z Pond on Contingency Operating Base Adder, Nov. 6.

Soldiers enjoy desert fishing during deployment

When soldiers in Iraq get some down time, fishing may not come to mind while considering a list of things to do, but the recreational activity is alive and well on Contingency Operating Base Adder, Iraq.

Thanks to one soldier's efforts, service members on COB Adder have been able to cast lines in the middle of the desert, in hopes of catching some fish.

Specialist Kenneth J. Russell, III, multi-channels transmission systems operator and maintainer, Bravo Company, 3rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, from Fountain, Mich., made it possible for soldiers to enjoy some fishing on deployment.

Russell has been involved in building soldier's morale since before his deployment to Iraq. He has been involved with Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers, a program designed by the U.S. Army dedicated to boosting the morale and well being of single soldiers.

"I'm the Bravo company BOSS rep," said Russell. "I did a lot of stuff back at Fort Hood for the soldiers. And I was trying to figure out what I could do to boost morale here."

"I Googled the top 100 fishing companies in the United States," said Russell.

He contacted several of the companies through email explaining that some of the soldiers here enjoy fishing, and asked if they were willing to donate some equipment.

The response Russell received to his emails was a success; one company donated eleven fishing poles, another sent 15, and he received three-and-a-half cases of lures, he said.

But in order for soldiers to fish there needs to be a water source, and that water source is an artificial pond located a short distance from the soldier's living area.

"It's a man-made pond," said Russell. "It's called Z Pond, named after the Ziggurat."

While fishing at Z Pond, soldiers have a view of the Ziggurat

DESERT FISHING



Specialist Kenneth J. Russell, III, multi-channels transmission systems operator and maintainer ties a lure to his fishing line on COB Adder, Nov. 6.



Specialist Kenneth J. Russell, III, multi-channels transmission systems operator and maintainer ties a lure to his fishing line on COB Adder, Nov. 6.



Z Lake: a local fishing hole near COB Adder. The lake is named Z Lake due to its location near the Ziggurat, an ancient building near the COB,

of Ur located just outside the COB Adder perimeter.

“There are a lot of weeds in the lake too, that makes it a good fishing hole,” said Russell. “There’s a sign out there that says, ‘No swimming. No diving. No rafts,’ basically nothing but fishing.”

Soldiers fish for the sport, but they do not eat the fish from Z Pond.

“They’re like a weird version of bass,” said Russell. “I think they’re called Gar. They look like a combination between a Karp and Bass. And then there’s another type of fish. It’s called a Mangar. Those can get pretty big.”

Although Russell hasn’t caught any fish himself, some of his fellow soldiers have, and that has made it worth his efforts, he said.

“I enjoy knowing that the soldiers can go out there and have a little bit of down time,” he said. “They’ve enjoyed it a lot, and the greatest thing is it’s free.”

Russell’s unit is getting ready to go home soon and he already has plans for all the fishing equipment he received in theater.

“They’re heading back to Fort Hood right now in a ‘conex’ for a 3BSTB fishing competition when we get back,” he said. “We’re going to try to organize... a family fishing day for the soldiers when we get back.”

Fishing spots in Iraq are scarce, but Z Pond has served as a relaxing place for soldiers and allowed them to enjoy the sport in the middle of the desert, giving them a taste of home, during their deployment. ■

Adder demuralized



Specialist Richard Koke, mechanic for the 25th Infantry Division, paints over a mural on Contingency Operating Base Adder, Oct. 3.

The murals on Contingency Operating Base Adder are disappearing. Almost overnight, many of the tall, concrete barriers featuring graffiti artwork received a fresh coat of white paint.

Deployed service members have often designed murals on the walls around U.S. bases in Iraq. The paintings illustrated everything from unit affiliations, military vehicles and equipment, mythological and historic figures, ranks, names, and anything else that flowed from the creative minds of the artists.

In preparation for the departure of U.S. troops from Iraq, soldiers have been asked to paint over the murals, said Sgt. Maj. Charles Rosado, 25th Infantry Division Tactical Command Post non-commissioned officer in charge. "Painting over the murals is part of giving the installation back to Iraq."

A project called the Graffiti of War is an effort to document the murals and artistic efforts of service members left behind in Iraq, Kuwait, and Afghanistan.

"The project came to life as an idea within my platoon," said Jaeson Parsons, an original collaborator and director of operations for Graffiti of War. Parsons, who

deployed to Iraq as a combat medic in early 2006, said he and his fellow soldiers were discussing the graffiti they saw during a long mission in Al-Taqaddum Airbase, Iraq.

"Many of these murals are historical markers, a sort of 'who's who' of units and divisions that were deployed in this war," said Parsons, who made a return trip to Iraq this summer in order to document as many of the murals and expressions left behind.

The Graffiti of War project has collected an anthology of art left by deployed

service members, and will be part of an art exhibit tour around the nation. The exhibit features more than 400 pieces ranging in size, and is expected to start on Veteran's Day, Nov. 11, in Pottsville, Pa.

The exhibit's purpose is to share the art with a public audience in order to help them better understand the struggles and accomplishments of service members deployed to combat zones.

Parsons, who said he suffered his own battle with post-traumatic stress disorder, wants to raise awareness for PTSD and other "invisible wounds" that service members suffer in combat that are not always evident.

"These murals and artistic creations represent a glimpse of a moment in time when this unit was there, an unconventional record of the decade of war our nation and her warfighters struggled through," said Parsons.

As U.S. troops leave Iraq, they will not be creating new murals.

Although new coats of paint will obscure the murals on COB Adder and other installations in Iraq, they will be remembered through photography, and shared with the people who supported the efforts from home. ■



Specialist Richard Koke, mechanic with the 25th Infantry Division, runs a paint roller through white paint on COB Adder Oct. 3. Koke painted over over one of many murals around COB Adder to prepare the base for the departure of U.S. troops from Iraq.

Leavin' on a jetplane

Service members in Iraq on their way home from deployment have bags packed, flights booked, and high spirits as they prepare to go home and reunite with their loved ones.

Before flying out of country, all military personnel and civilian contractors are processed through the air terminal on Contingency Operating Base Adder that is managed by the 407th Expeditionary Support Squadron stationed at Ali Air Base in Tallil, Iraq.

"Our mission here at Tallil is to move the passengers and cargo from here, in direct support of the drawdown... from Iraq," said Master Sgt. Jessica Coombs, aerial port flight chief, 407th ESS, from Rochester Hills, Mich.

While many troops have already left Iraq, the thousands remaining are slated to leave by the end of the year.

"Watching everybody leave and all their equipment leave, and watching the base just basically become empty is very rewarding in the sense that the mission is being accomplished," said Coombs.

"We are turning over to the Iraqi air force and Iraqi people what they need in order to sustain within their own country, by themselves, for themselves, and we as Americans are doing a great service for this theater," she said.

The 407th ESS has proven that they are just as efficient with their roles on the ground as they are in the air.

Once roll call is finished, we build three to five baggage pallets for large troop movements, get them all built up, strapped down and loaded onto the planes, said Airman 1st Class Nicholas Bernard, passenger service agent, 407th ESS, from Milwaukee, Wis.

"We have to weigh each baggage pallet so that the crews can have an accurate baggage weight to level the aircraft, to keep it level in the air for safety and flight," said Bernard.

Customers that come through Ali Air Base include military personnel, civilian contractors and foreign nationals.

"Every baggage pallet we build is one baggage pallet closer for us to get out of here and everyone to be going home," said Bernard.

But for the members of the 407th ESS the mission goes beyond processing troops and their equipment.

"For most of us, our personal mission is to get all the Soldiers home to their families for Christmas," said Bernard. "It's a big deal for a lot of us. It's very rewarding and the rest of us, we're just happy to be out of Iraq, cleaning the place out, packing up and going home."

"Between the start when we got here, and now, there's a huge drive-up in morale," said Bernard.

The heightened morale of service members is motivating for troops as they anticipate a safe return stateside.

"It's been amazing because we moved a lot of passengers and a lot of cargo, either redistributing it through the theater or back to home station in the States, which is what we really like to see because people are going home," said Coombs.

With every flight leaving Ali Air Base, the exit of U.S. forces from Iraq and the conclusion of Operation New Dawn is becoming a reality, and many more service members will be back home with their families for the holidays. ■



A line of service members and civilian contractors walk to a C-130 aircraft to board their final flight out of Iraq at Ali Air Base on Contingency Operating Base Adder Nov. 18.



Customs inspections keeping **HOMELAND** **SECURE**



Story and Photos
by Spc. Anthony T. Zane



Soldiers from Company A, 3-8th Cavalry Regiment, from Fort Hood, Texas, pack their gear into a container after a mandatory customs inspection on Contingency Operating Base Adder, Oct. 15.

The number of military units packing up equipment and personal belongings is increasing as the U.S. continues to prepare its exit from Iraq, as part of Operation New Dawn. But before anything crosses over U.S. borders, everything that is shipped back to the states must go through a thorough customs inspection.

All customs inspections for Contingency Operating Base Adder go through Sgt. Thomas Vice, II, COB Adder customs project manager, 239th Military Police Company, from Alexandria, La.

“Anything that’s going home has to go through customs,” said Vice. “To start, the units have to send in a customs request form. The standard operating procedure is to get the request in at least 10 days prior to the inspection, that way I’ve got time to make sure everything is right. I make sure that the date for inspection is clear and that we have a stamp reserved for that date.”

After the inspection is completed, the paperwork is signed and stamped with an official customs stamp that certifies the cargo in the container has been properly

inspected.

“Because we only have a certain amount of stamps, we can only have so many inspections per day,” said Vice.

All Soldiers prepare their equipment and personal gear prior to the inspection by placing it on the ground in organized sections.

The customs inspector then briefs soldiers on the inspection process and goes over the list of items that are not allowed to ship. All items to be inspected are laid out in front of the large metal storage containers used to ship equipment and gear, known as a Conex, short for container express.

“It’s a 100 percent inspection,” said Vice. “You might have a 20-foot Conex with 80 duffle bags and 60 foot lockers, all with personal gear, and everything has to be dumped out, sifted through and inspected.”

While the average inspection takes about three to four hours for the more seasoned inspector, said Vice, the time it takes to complete an inspection varies on how much equipment or gear the unit has

to be inspected.

“One of the main things that we look for is cleanliness, because any kind of organic matter; dirt, sand, grass, plants, anything like that, is an absolute no-go,” said Vice. “We don’t want anything messing with the ecosystem back home, and we’re trying to prevent that from happening.”

Many soldiers may not understand the environmental concern that is involved with the inspection process.

“It’s really important, especially at the port cities, because when containers are opened and something bad is in there like animal products or soil that could have time to culture, you could get bacteria that can be harmful back in the states,” said Sgt. Julian A. McKinnon, customs border control pre-clearance agent, 1st Cavalry Division, from San Antonio.

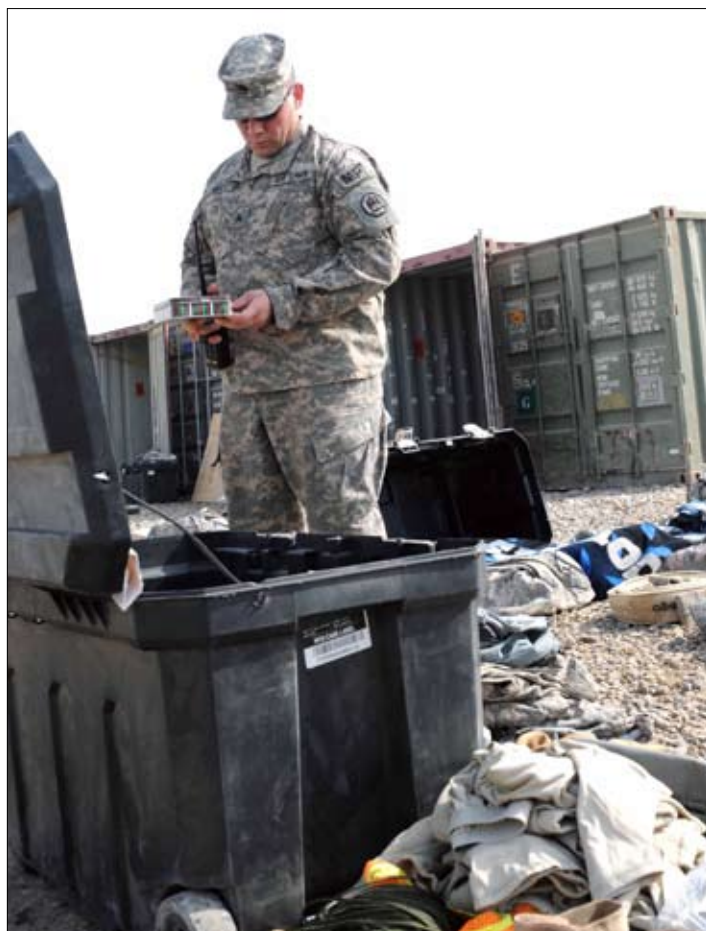
The other concern customs inspectors are on the lookout for is any illegal items.

“Another thing we look for is any kind of contraband,” said Vice.

“You can’t have pornography, alcohol, drugs, or illegal weapons.”



Sergeant Julian A. McKinnon, customs border control preclearance agent, 1st Cavalry Division, from San Antonio Texas, seals a container with a bolt seal after a mandatory customs inspection on COB Adder, Oct. 15.



Sergeant Thomas Vice, II, customs program manager, 239th Military Police Company, from Alexandria, La., inspects Soldiers' equipment and gear during a mandatory customs inspection on COB Adder, Oct. 15.

The inspection protocol used in theater comes from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, said Vice.

"People try to bring their protein powder or work-out supplements with them," said Vice. "Well, if the seal has been broken, they can't bring it."

The most effective way to find an illegal substance is to use K-9's, and the decision to use the dogs is left to Vice's discretion.

"Sometimes we bring dogs," said Vice. "The K-9 unit works with us a lot being that we're the provost marshal's office, but the decision to use them is nothing in particular. It's just random."

There have been no significant violations so far on COB Adder, but the risk is always present.

"Not that I've seen," said McKinnon, "but you hear of a few who try to smuggle drugs, alcohol or a certain type of knife that is not allowed to go back to the states."

Beyond illegal drugs, weapons and organic materials, there is another concern that has developed since the beginning of the U.S. presence in the Middle East.

Soldiers will buy a lot of DVD's from the Iraqi vendors over here and ship them home, said Vice. But the rules have become more strict about that.

Now soldiers are limited to one DVD title or one box set.

"There's not much room for leniency," said McKinnon. "We go by the book."

But the inspection process is not complete once all equipment and gear is loaded into the containers and sealed.

Once containers are inspected, signed off on and sealed here, then they go to Kuwait where they are then shipped back to the states, said Vice. At that point, all containers in Kuwait are subject to another customs inspection. That inspection is done randomly to at least 10 percent of the containers there.

"If they get 500 Conexes in that day,

they're going through 50 of them, said Vice. "That's more or less making sure that we're doing our job; that we don't miss things."

"It's important for people to know that if the customs inspector is doing his job properly, they are not going to get anything past him," said McKinnon.

For the most part, soldiers understand the importance of the inspections process.

"It's helping to safeguard the U.S. economy," said Vice.

"Agriculturally, it helps the farmers from losing money due to bacteria or plant diseases that could be transported from here to the states," said Vice. "It also helps to keep untraced and unmarked weapons off the streets."

The customs inspection process is vital to homeland security.

"We're not out to get people," said McKinnon. "It's not about that. It's about doing the right thing and the safety of the soldiers." ■

A Soldiers' poet



Spc. Kunta K. Mackin, a medevac operations specialist for the 36th Infantry Division surgeon section, reads his poetry to soldiers every two weeks at the poetry jam. Mackin was raised in Harrisburg, N.C., but currently lives in Texas.

A warrior is defined as a person who shows great vigor, courage, or aggressiveness. These words are not typically associated with poetry, but Spc. Kunta K. Mackin brings them all together in a way that illustrates the true definition of a poet.

He is a soldier with the gift of thought, imagination, creation, and the eloquence of expression.

Mackin, a Harrisburg, N.C., native, said he's been writing poetry as an outlet for his thoughts and frustrations for almost 23 years.

"I was in the fourth grade and we were having a Christmas party," Mackin said with a grin. "Everybody had their different kinds of music that they listened to. Me and my best friend were the only black kids in our class. So, you know, we didn't listen to AC/DC, White Snake, or stuff like that. So we went to the back of the class and were like, 'Man, we're going to write a rap.' I was like, 'A rap? I don't know how to write a rap'. He said 'All you got to do is write a line and make sure that they both have rhyming words at the end. Okay, cool.' So, we did that."

The boys' fourth grade teacher enjoyed their performance so much that she made them do it for every class on their hall and at every holiday party, Mackin explained.

"I just started doing poetry from there," Mackin said. "I like rap music, but at the same time, you know, that wasn't really my thing. I like poetry. I came up in a household where my dad was a soft-hearted person. You know, my dad was like 6'4" and about 290 pounds. He was a gentle giant and I inherited that from him."

Mackin, a medevac operations specialist for the 36th Infantry Division surgeon section, had never read his poems aloud until he deployed here. He now reads his poetry about typically uncomfortable topics every two weeks at the poetry jam here, which was put together by Soldiers with many different talents.

"Every time I go up there I have butterflies in my stomach," Mackin said.

A SOLDIERS' POET



Spc. Kunta K. Mackin writes down his thoughts throughout the day in hopes of creating a poem later.



Spc. Kunta K. Mackin, , writes down his thoughts throughout the day in hopes of creating a poem later.



Spc. Kunta K. Mackin, a medevac operations specialist for the 36th Infantry Division surgeon section, laughs with his co-workers.

"I write about issues that come up in society nowadays and issues that people really don't want to talk about or they like to side-step. People don't like to talk about religion, politics and they don't like to talk about themselves. And I talk about all of those things."

Mackin now reads his poetry to evoke emotion from his listeners. He wants to help soldiers, which is why he joined the Texas Army National Guard in the first place, he said.

"If I get a reaction," said Mackin, "no matter if it's positive or negative, I've done my job. That's another form of healing."

"Letter to the Pedophile" is a poem Mackin wrote about his feelings on sexual abuse. He wrote it after learning that someone close to him had gone through it. Mackin wrote the poem in the form of a letter addressed to the person who hurt his loved one. Before performing it at the poetry jam, Mackin read it to his friend and mentor, Capt. James A. Johnson, 36th Inf. Div. operations research systems analyst.

Johnson said the way the poem was written hit a nerve within him because he too knew someone who had been through the pain of sexual abuse.

"He not only acknowledged what that person did," said Johnson, "but then he went on to challenge that person to even be better. He was actually, in the end, showing love toward that person because he wanted them to be better and learn from it so nobody else has to go through these things."

Mackin derives inspiration for his poetry from the other performers at the poetry jam, every aspect of his life, and the observations he makes of other's lives, he said. He has been working as a director of operations for a substance abuse center in Texas since 2008.

"That's also where I get a lot of my inspiration," said Mackin. "Some people grew up on the rough side of town and didn't have certain things in life that a lot of people take for granted. Then you have some people that grew up with everything but they just made poor decisions and had some bad luck along the way. No matter

if you're up here or down here, a few bad choices will put y'all at the same level."

Helping people is the motivation for everything Mackin does, whether at his civilian job, as a soldier, or writing poetry, he said. His wife of almost five years, Jennifer, likes his poems but thinks he should write more about God, Mackin said.

"I'm like, you know what," Mackin said with a laugh, "God is in everything. God is in every single poem that I do, whether it's a positive poem or a negative poem."

Johnson said Mackin is a kind spirit with the gift to write poetry that moves and touches people. No matter the day or time, Mackin always wears a smile on his face, he said.

"When you see him," Johnson said, "you never know what's really going on with him because some days he may be having a bad day. But he knows that God calls us to smile and be a light to other people. So you can't sit there and feel sorry for yourself. Man, Mackin is always smiling. If he can do it, I can do it." ■

Adder Celebrates THANKSGIVING



Soldiers with the 2nd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, check the temperature of a smoked turkey on Contingency Operating Base Adder, Nov. 24.

HUMAN INTEREST | Story and photos by Pvt. Andrew C. Slovensky

Service members on Contingency Operating Base Adder found creative ways to celebrate Thanksgiving this year.

Soldiers with the 25th Infantry Division enjoyed a day of camaraderie and prepackaged Meals Ready-to-Eat accompanied by Tropic Breeze, the jazz formation of the 25th Infantry Division band. It was a far cry from the homecooked turkey, but the soldiers were grateful to know this would be their last holiday season in Iraq.

"When you're away from home, away from family ... you can come together and take your mind off the work for a minute, and be thankful of the people that are here and around you," said Sgt. Maj. Cyrus Netter, judge advocate non-commissioned officer in charge for the 25th Infantry

Division. "Soldiers are always a unit, the biggest thing to a soldier when it comes to serving is really about the people they serve with, to their left and right."

Netter, who grew up in a large family with 11 siblings, said he preferred enjoying a big meal at home, but still had plenty to be thankful for.

"Being here and having an MRE, I'm thankful to have something," he said. "It's fitting that this is our last holiday here ... it's fitting that we get to spend it with our military family. We're leaving here as a team, as a family."

Service members also gathered to the sounds of patriotic tunes and classic holiday music for a Thanksgiving service at COB Adder's chapel to give thanks, led by Lt. Col. Scott Hammond, U.S. Division – Center and 25th Infantry Division

chaplain.

"Sometimes we look at things we wish we had and we forget about all that we really do have," said Hammond. "Even though I'm away from my loved ones, I'm grateful that I have loved ones."

After feasting on MREs and each other's company, soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division celebrated with more traditional Thanksgiving fare: smoked turkey and duck.

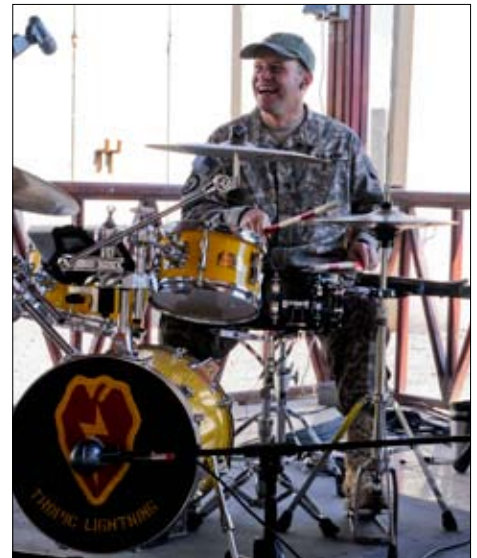
Different service members chose different ways to carve up their last turkey day celebration before closing out their mission. As U.S. troops withdraw and bases are turned over to the Iraqi security forces, soldiers on COB Adder are thankful to be going home. ■



Sgt. Tobias Jaegger, saxophonist with the 25th Infantry Division band, performs during Thanksgiving celebrations on Contingency Operating Base Adder, Nov. 24.



Staff Sgt. Lawrence Henry, trumpet player in the 25th Infantry Division band, performs at a Thanksgiving Day service on Contingency Operating Base Adder, Nov. 24.



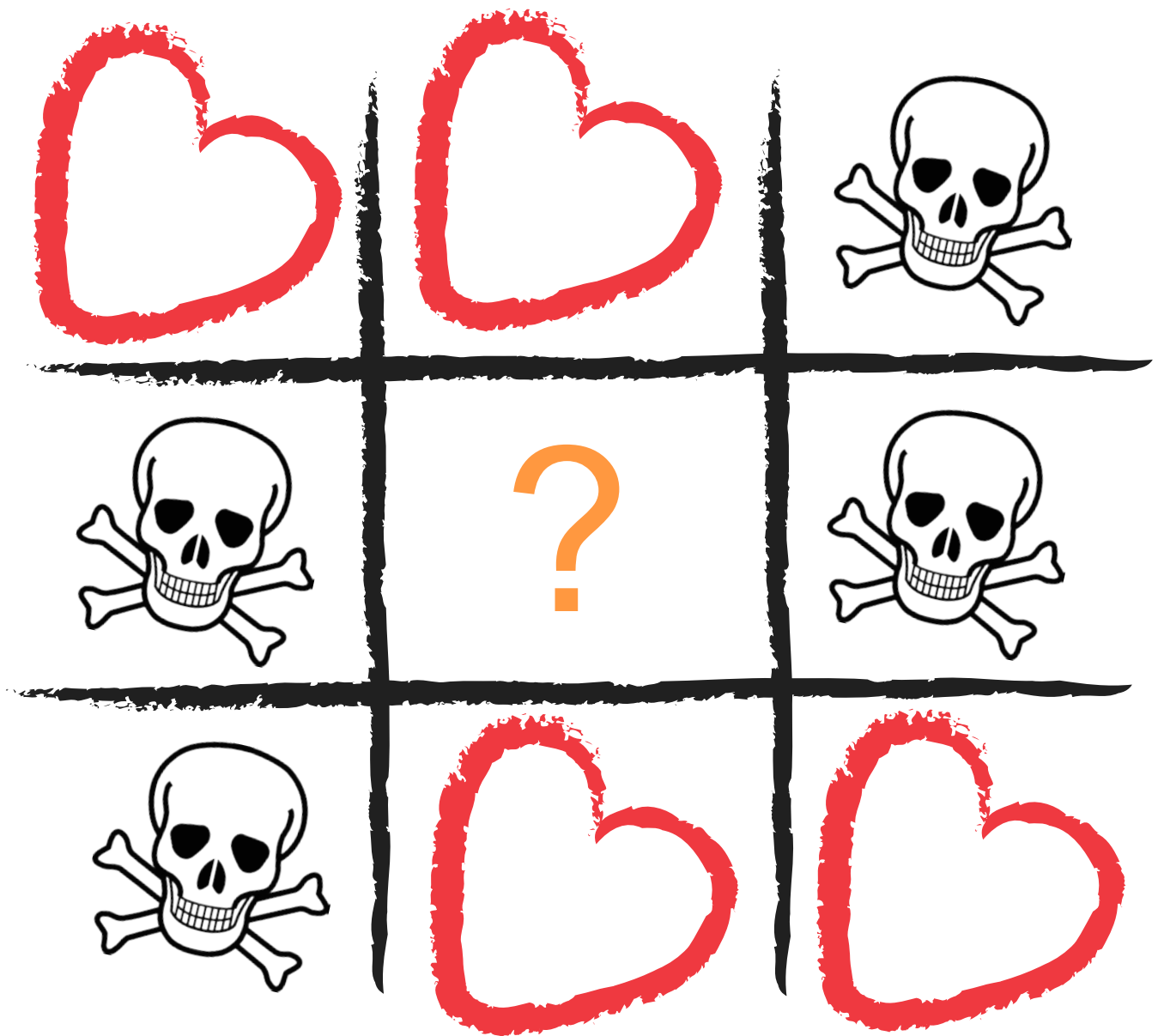
Staff Sgt. Ronald Strayhorn, percussionist with the 25th Infantry Division band, performs during Thanksgiving celebrations on Contingency Operating Base Adder, Nov. 24.



Maj. Jeffrey Schmidt, 25th Infantry Division Headquarters Battalion executive officer, and Lt. Col. Paul Romagnoli, 25th Infantry Division Headquarters Battalion commander, eat prepackaged Meals Ready-to-Eat on Contingency Operating Base Adder, Nov. 24.



Capt. Joanne Gordan, 25th Infantry Division Military Justice chief, and Capt. Steven Schnurr, 25th Infantry Division operations company commander, prepare prepackaged Meals Ready-to-Eat on Contingency Operating Base Adder, Nov. 24.



Life is not a game

CHOOSE LIFE

If you, or a battle buddy are showing signs of depression, don't hesitate, take action. Talk to a chaplain or behavioral health specialist and promise to never leave a fallen comrade.