

DESERT MONTHLY

MARCH 2015



The challenge of communication

Desert Monthly

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Top: Soldiers from the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division case their brigade colors during a transfer of authority ceremony at Camp Buehring, Kuwait March 4. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Leon Cook)

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TOP LEFT: Iraqi soldiers practice movement drills during a squad live fire exercise March 1, 2015, at Besmaya Range Complex, Iraq. The soldiers received instruction from members of the 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division. The training is part of a six-week program of instruction to better prepare Iraqi security forces to fight the Islamic State and retake lost territory. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Deja Borden)

BOTTOM LEFT: An F/A-18C Super Hornet from the Fighting Stingers of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 113 launches from the flight deck of aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). Carl Vinson is currently deployed to the area supporting maritime security operations, strike operations in Iraq and Syria as directed, and theater security cooperation efforts in the 5th Fleet Area of Operations. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class John Philip Wagner Jr.)



TOP RIGHT: U.S. Navy Diver 2nd Class Manny Velez, assigned to Commander, Task Group 56.1 (CTG 56.1) conducts an anti-terrorism/force protection (ATFP) dive at the Royal Jordanian Naval Base. CTG 56.1 conducts mine countermeasures, explosive ordnance disposal, salvage diving and force protection operations throughout the U.S. 5th Fleet area of responsibility. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Daniel P. Rolston)

CENTER: A U.S. Air Force F-15E Strike Eagle receives fuel from a USAF KC-135 Stratotanker, assigned to the 340th Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron, March 10, 2015, over Iraq. The F-15 will strike ISIL targets in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Perry Aston)

BOTTOM RIGHT: A U.S. Air Force KC-135 Stratotanker crew goes over paperwork with the crew chiefs before starting pre-flight checks, March 10, 2015, at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar. The KC-135 will refuel coalition F-15s and F-16s supporting Operation Inherent Resolve. (U.S. Air Force Photo by Staff Sgt. Perry Aston)





Back to school: Soldiers and Kuwaiti students celebrate liberation

STORY AND PHOTOS BY

Sgt. Cody Quinn

In 1991, 24 years ago, Kuwait was in a state of crisis: the forces of Saddam Hussein had overrun the country. In their hour of need, Kuwait turned to the international community to help repel the invaders.

Kuwaitis celebrate Liberation Day on Feb. 26 to mark the anniversary of the day coalition forces answered that call and drove out Hussein's army during Operation Desert Storm.

Soldiers from Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, were invited to celebrate Liberation Day at the Kuwait University in Kuwait City, Feb. 11, and share in a social and cultural exchange during a ceremony to mark the occasion.

The ceremony included a performance by the 1st Infantry Division rock band and remarks by Dr. Hayat Al-Hajji, dean of the College of the Arts at Kuwait University, the U.S. Ambassador to Kuwait, Douglas Stillman, and Dr. Bader Al-Hajji, Kuwait University Mass Communication Department member and former officer in the Kuwait army during Desert Storm.

"I have been very surprised by the

number of Kuwaitis who've come up to me and said 'thank you' for the role of the United States in liberating Kuwait, even 24 years after it happened," Stillman said.

"I have not been surprised that this shared experience, this trial by fire in which both of our countries participated has cemented a friendship between our two countries, and has deepened the cultural, political, social and economic ties that are the foundation of our relationship today," he said.

Soldiers from Arifjan had the opportunity to tour Kuwait University and interact with students prior to a formal ceremony. Soldiers received a tour of university artifacts and art produced by students.

Speakers during the ceremony shared their experiences during the invasion and reclaiming of Kuwait with the audience, many who were too young to remember the war.

Dr. Bader Al-Hajji was attending college in the U.S. during the initial invasion of Kuwait.

"For me, to be sitting in the United States as American Soldiers are dying for my country was unfair. So I joined the military," recalled Bader.

Iraq, under the rule of Saddam Hussein, invaded Kuwait Aug. 2, 1990. Over 1,000 Kuwaiti civilians were killed during the conflict.

Coalition forces be-

gan driving the Iraq army out of Kuwait Feb. 24, 1991, leading to Hussein withdrawing his troops from Kuwait Feb. 27, 1991.

Bader was one of several speakers to thank coalition members for helping to liberate Kuwait and remind students of the importance of being prepared for future crises.

"People should always be ready. You cannot always depend on the United States, but I know they will always be there," Bader said.

Stillman encouraged students and Soldiers to research how the war affected their country's history and emphasized the importance of the U.S./Kuwait relationship.

"We are here as part of the U.S. military personnel in Kuwait working with our Kuwaiti partners to defend Kuwait and help promote stability in the region," Stillman said. "This is a mission that I think we can all agree is very important in these troubled times."



Top: Spc. Markus Russell, a Soldier with 513th Military Intelligence Brigade, looks on while Dana Alehzi, a graduate of Kuwait University, Kuwait City, completes her painting Feb. 11.

Right: A Kuwait University student films a 1st Infantry Division band performance during the Liberation Day ceremony held at the university in Kuwait City Feb. 11.

Fight against ISIL among top concerns for U.S. troops

STORY AND PHOTO BY

Staff Sgt. Bryan Dominique

U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter has been on the job for less than a week, but is already answering tough questions from Soldiers about the way ahead in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL.

Carter spent his first week traveling the region speaking with Soldiers and meeting with senior military leaders and diplomats.

In what was described as a troop event, Carter conveyed gratitude to a theater full of Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and coalition members, saying that when he was confirmed by the Senate he made it known that his first act as secretary was to visit the region and thank each of them for what they do.

However, Soldiers used the short time they had with the secretary Feb. 23 to ask tough questions about ISIL and the way ahead for the U.S. led coalition assembled to defeat them.

"What will it take, sir, for you to recommend to the president of the United States U.S. military boots on the ground in a direct combat role against Daesh?" asked Maj. Rich Frank of the Combined Joint Task Force, currently leading the nation's efforts to fight ISIL in Iraq and Syria.

Part of Carter's trip was to help answer that very question, but he answered Frank by saying, "We need to be convinced that any use of our forces is necessary, is going to be sufficient, that we thought through not just the first step, but the second step and the third step."

Carter convened a meeting in Kuwait with the region's most senior military leaders and ambassadors to better understand the dimensions surrounding



the fight against ISIL and what it will take to ultimately defeat them.

The meeting was held behind closed doors, but the secretary took about 15 minutes after the summit to speak with the press. He gave no indication he was considering U.S. troops being used in a direct combat role.

Right now current U.S. strategy is to build partner force capabilities on the ground while leveraging U.S. and coalition air power to blunt the terror group's forward momentum.

"It's going to require the building of the capacity of local forces because ultimately they must take the lead and take responsibility, because if we're to have a defeat of ISIL, which we must and will, it must be a lasting defeat," he said. "The way to make it a lasting defeat is to ensure there are those who can take responsibility of their societies and their territories after the campaign against ISIL."

The U.S. military formed Combined

Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve in October 2014 to oversee operations against ISIL inside Iraq and Syria.

More than 20 countries are represented within the CJTF, which is under command of Lt. Gen. James L. Terry.

President Obama has warned against describing the campaign against ISIL as a war against jihadism or radical Islam.

The secretary was asked during his question-and-answer session with Soldiers to describe any efforts being taken to address the characterization of the campaign.

"This requires some reflection on our part," answered the secretary. "I think the president is very sensible to say, 'don't paint with too wide a brush with respect to the world of Islam.'"

U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter speaks with members of the press after a meeting with senior military leaders and diplomats in Southwest Asia, Feb. 23.

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Back in Iraq, the challenge to get a multi-national coalition talking

STORY BY

Staff Sgt. Bryan Dominique

PHOTO BY

1st Lt. Rima K. Tomkunas

335th Signal Command

The group has executed thousands. They've beheaded, burned and enslaved people, all while broadcasting their particular brand of terror to the world via social media.

This is portions of Iraq and Syria today under the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL.

To combat ISIL, the U.S. formed Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve in October 2014.

The United States officially declared an end to Operation New Dawn – the campaign following Operation Iraqi Freedom – Dec. 15, 2011.

The campaign to oust Saddam Hussein, locate and destroy any weapons of mass destruction, and restore security under the new Government of Iraq lasted nearly nine years.

Judging from the political discourse surrounding the Iraq war, most would find it difficult to imagine the United States would be sending Soldiers back to the region while Congress debated granting renewed war powers for military action.

This time, however, the enemy is different. Declaring a self-proclaimed caliphate, ISIL is bent on creating a state mirrored to its distorted interpretation of Islam.

Under the command of Lt. Gen. James L. Terry, the international coalition aims to rely on Iraqi Security and New Syrian Forces ground troops by building its military capacity, while leveraging U.S. and coalition air power to defeat ISIL.

The strategy may limit the risks to coalition military personnel, but it brings in a new problem set.

"We're fighting a war with someone else's troops on the ground," said Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Crespo, command sergeant major



of 335th Signal Command (I) (P) and native of Los Angeles. "To be able to communicate with them, and communicate with the other nations of the coalition, is not easy."

Crespo and his unit have been here since the beginning of Operation Inherent Resolve and have played an integral role in getting the communications infrastructure operational.

Seven Soldiers from the 335th were deployed to Iraq in the infancy of the CJTF-OIR with the mission to build the strategic communications structure that the coalition is currently using today.

The group deployed with 10 other service members, five less than originally planned, with no Status of Forces Agreement yet in effect.

Together, they built the Joint Operations Center that serves as the command hub in Iraq for the coalition.

"We were originally told we were going to send 15 people up, and seven would be communicators. We were told that they had to be cut down to 10, so we were expecting to cut from our original seven, but we didn't," said Crespo. "General Terry said, 'If I can't communicate, I can't fight.'"

335th Signal Command Systems Administrator Chief Warrant Officer Emmanuel Watson mans a centrally located technical control facility near Baghdad, Iraq.

Each country comes with its own security protocols and communication practices.

According to Crespo, no integrated communications structure has ever been built despite the more than 13 years International Security Assistance Forces spent in Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom.

"The permissions weren't there, the security wasn't there, but we're building that now," he said.

Still, lessons can be learned from OEF. Instead of integrated communications, ISAF was able to share information with a combined enterprise regional information exchange.

"I think that we, at this early stage of OIR, have satisfying means of communication, but in the long run we need to establish common means, [like] the I-net we had during OEF, or the CENTRIX we had in ISAF," said Denmark Maj. Kim Michelson, a public affairs officer and member of the coalition.

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Medical conference emphasizes prevention

STORY AND PHOTO BY
Sgt. Deja Borden

Military medics have a reputation for being lifesavers on the battlefield, but their job doesn't end when the bullets stop flying.

Medical care specialists gathered at the Area Support Group-Kuwait headquarters in Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, Feb. 6, for their quarterly Force Health Protection meeting.

Junior-enlisted and senior leaders from the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps discussed various subjects concerning the safety of service members while deployed and in garrison.

"We have to fix the guys serving the commander's intent," said Col. Nelson Rosen, commander, 3rd Medical Command, Operational Command Post (Forward).

Rosen stressed the importance of being as proactive as possible in their career field. Being reactive to illnesses and other issues isn't good enough, Rosen said.

Force health protection is made up of programs including preventive medicine, disease and internal medicine, combat stress control, surgeon's office health care specialties, and veterinary units, said Staff Sgt. Nicholas Domico, preventive medicine non-commissioned officer in charge, 3rd Medical Command.

Col. Mark Burnett, command surgeon of ASG-KU, spoke about the dangers of infectious disease during the brief.

Rabies is something people don't tend to think about in the U.S., but overseas it's a much bigger deal, said Burnett.

"Ninety-five percent of rabies deaths occur in Asia and Africa. That's important because that's where we send troops," he said.

In August 2012, Spc. Kevin Shumaker became the first service member since 1974 to die of rabies. The incident occurred due to a bite from a stray dog in Afghanistan.

"Afghanistan still sees a significant number of rabies cases," said Maj. Danny Dacey, chief of public health.

While briefing by phone from Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan, Dacey mentioned that stray cats and dogs are still a big risk to the health of service members.

The conference also addressed many other health concerns for deployed service members.

Lt. Col. Nicole Chevalier, commander, 72nd Medical Detachment Veterinary Service Support, joined the conference via video from Kabul, Afghanistan to speak on the importance of food safety.

"My primary job is to protect the health of U.S. forces," said Chevalier.

Educating people on food safety and informing them about sanitation and approved source requirements are her main goals, she said.

Chevalier makes it her duty to bring inspections of local facilities like restaurants and dining facilities in line with NATO standards.

Rosen said the number one concern is educating every service member to protect his or her health properly.

"We have to serve those with good information and bad information," he said. "We have to make them understand and educate them."

It can be challenging when individuals are misinformed or listen to rumors rather than fact, Rosen said.

It is the duty of all medical care personnel to be subject matter experts to combat ignorance, he said.

Col. Mark Burnett, command surgeon, Area Support Group-Kuwait, gives a presentation on the threat of rabies during a brief, Feb. 6, at the ASG-KU headquarters in Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.



335TH: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

One such system that CJTF-OIR is putting to use is the Coalition Partner Network. With it, nations are able to share information with one another easily and securely.

"We're able to talk to [coalition partners] and share documents, chat, and that really hasn't been done before," said Crespo. "That's the challenge. [It's] getting everyone to agree that this nation can talk to that nation

through our network and to us."

In addition to establishing a communications infrastructure for Operation Inherent Resolve, the 335th led Operation Drum Beat in Afghanistan.

Operation Drum Beat involved the retrograde of equipment from Afghanistan after combat operations ended.

Some of the equipment that kept international forces communicating in Afghanistan is now in Iraq today

serving the same purpose. However, most was brought back to Kuwait to be refurbished and pushed back out to units within the U.S. Army Central area of responsibility.

"A lot of people had to help. It wasn't just us," said Crespo. "I'm in amazement of what [Soldiers] can do. At the beginning, it was just a network that worked, but they continued to improve the foxhole. It's just ingenuity and motivation; they wanted to make this work."

Grappler Gilliam goes for gold

STORY AND PHOTOS BY

Spc. Jessica Nemec,
34th Combat Aviation Brigade

Gilliam is constantly moving—before, during and after a fight. His opponents usually stand in their corner, maybe move their arms and jump a little bit, but nothing like Gilliam. He paces back and forth in about a five-foot space near his corner. Only when the referee looks at him to begin the fight does he shuffle his feet. After the fight begins, he closes in on his opponent. They exchange a few jabs, some landing while others hit air. Then Gilliam goes in for a takedown. He wrestles his opponent to the ground, focusing more on achieving a good choke position than landing punches. His opponent focuses on punching Gilliam wherever his fist can land. His opponent tries to stand up, but he'll always

land back on the ground. Eventually—whether it is one, two or three rounds in—Gilliam submits his opponent when he's most vulnerable.

Staff Sgt. Cameron Gilliam, a Woodbury, Minnesota, native and information technologist noncommissioned officer with the 34th Combat Aviation Brigade deployed to Camp Buehring, Kuwait, has been training in mixed martial arts for the past four years at Spartan Martial-Arts in Oakdale, Minnesota. Gilliam wrestled at Woodbury High School, but he never planned to start MMA.

"I wanted to keep training because I missed wrestling," Gilliam said.

He was talked into MMA after his trainers saw his potential, he said. Once he started it, he fell in love with it.

It is a lifestyle he enjoys, he said. He's able to take care of his body

and participate in an uncommon sport.

Gilliam is well-known in the amateur MMA arena in Minnesota. He has a 9-1-0 record according to mixedmartialarts.com. He has earned an amateur title and has defended it twice.

His last fight was April 26, 2014, and he defended his title by submission with a triangle choke in the second round.

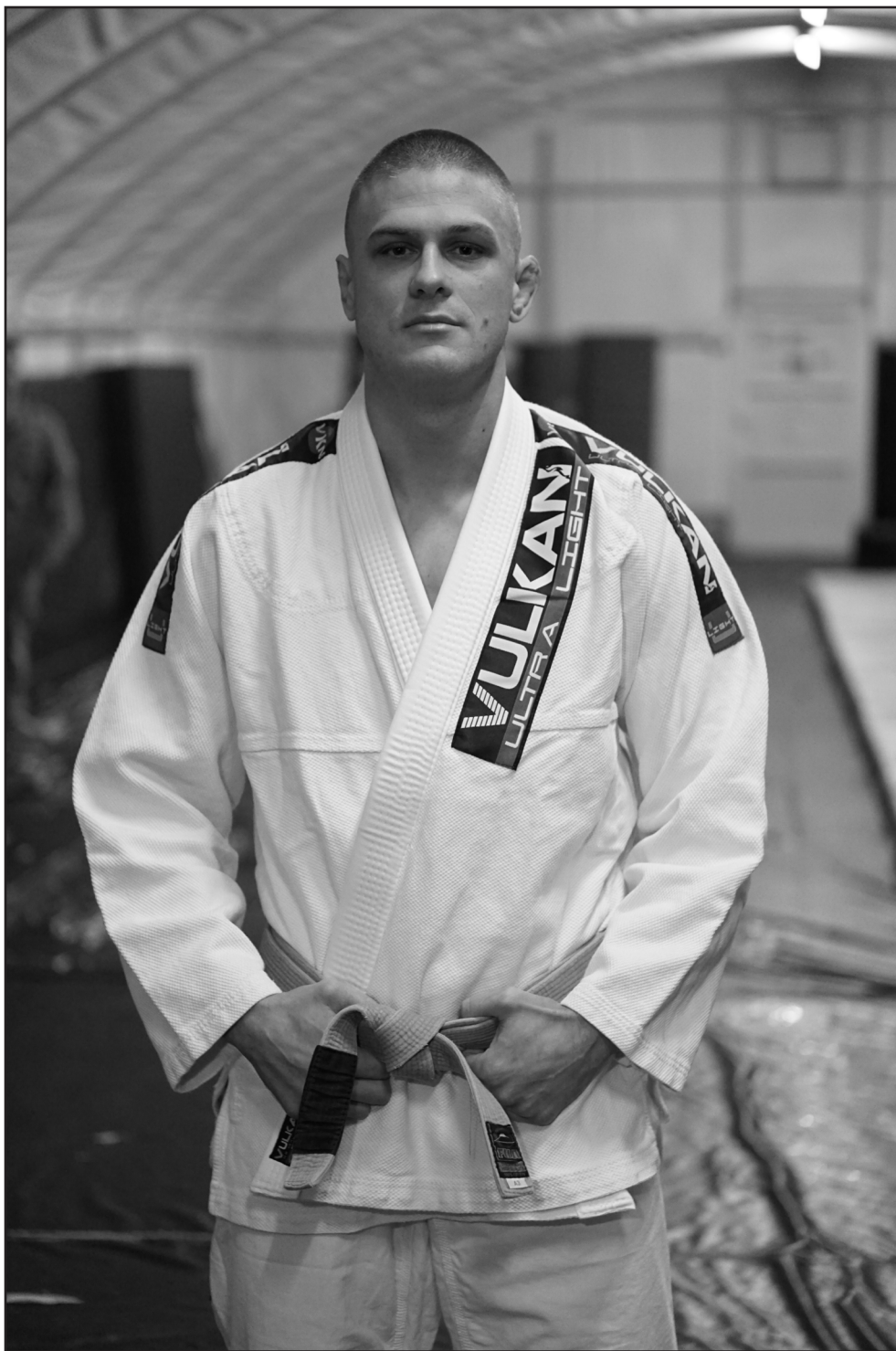
Gilliam vacated his title when he deployed in June 2014 with the 34th Combat Aviation Brigade.

At Camp Buehring, Gilliam keeps up with his MMA training. He teaches boxing and Brazilian jiu-jitsu classes for Soldiers as well.

"The best way to learn something is to teach it," Gilliam said.

Gilliam manages the gym and teaches several classes, said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Sysouk Khot-sombath, a network manager for the





34th CAB and Muay Thai instructor at the gym.

"It's a sanctuary that helps [Soldiers] get away, reset, think, get rid of frustration, and come back ready to work," Khotsombath said about the gym.

Many of the Soldiers who train at the gym look up to Gilliam, Khotsombath said.

"He's a very humble guy," Khotsombath said. "He shares a lot of his wisdom, knowledge and experi-

ence from his time in the ring."

When an opportunity came to compete, Khotsombath encouraged Gilliam and a few other Soldiers to take it.

The Modern Army Combatives Program tournament was held at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, Feb. 15. Soldiers deployed around the Middle East competed.

The MACP trains Soldiers in close quarters combatives to defeat the enemy in hand-to-hand combat.

Many of the moves are similar to Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

The competition used the International Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Association points system, Gilliam said.

"The buildup until you get to a fight is always a lot of fun," Gilliam said.

While waiting for his name to be called for his first bout, he was nervous, Gilliam said. He just wanted to get on the mat. During the fight the nerves go out the window and his training kicks in.

His wrestling background was apparent in his bouts. As with his MMA fights, after a takedown, Gilliam looks for hooks and sets up his position.

Half of Gilliam's MMA fights have been won by submission, either by triangle or rear naked choke.

All but one—his championship—of his bouts at the MACP tournament were won by submission. He won his championship bout by points, making him undefeated in his weight class at the tournament.

Gilliam has a dream of fighting professionally and having his fights on TV one day, he said.

"My eyes are set," he said. "I'd like to go very far with [MMA]."

He is planning on attending a training camp in Thailand when he returns from his deployment, he said. He's more than capable of taking his career as far as his body will allow.

Safety is a big consideration, Gilliam said. His career, along with other MMA fighters, depends on how much his body can physically and mentally handle.

"I just think [MMA] is a good thing in general for society," he said. "It's not just people beating each other up, it's a sport."

But there are other sports a person can do, he said. It's important to learn MMA in a gym if someone does choose to pursue it.

Opposite: Gilliam rolls around with his opponent in an effort to gain a dominant position during a combatives tournament Feb. 15. Gilliam went on to win his weight class.

Top: Gilliam, a martial arts instructor, poses in a martial arts gi.

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