

Beacon's Light

Editor's Pen

As I sit back and look at the calendar, I'm surprised to see that we've hit the 90 day mark. Surprised for different reasons, depending on the kind of day it's been. Some days it seems like we've been here an eternity; others it seems as though we've only just arrived.

Our Soldiers continue to do impressive things. Hopefully in the following pages you can catch a glimpse of those deeds. However, we're not able to catch everything. Please send me your stories, photos or even a story request to the e-mail below.

If you have a mission coming up and you want to see your Soldiers, friends or story in these pages, let me know and we'll get there.

My guarantee to you, the reader, is this: if you make a request, with at least one day's notice, we'll be there to cover it. Great things are happening all around, we just need to know about it.

Thanks for reading,

Sgt. Zach Mott

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Camp Taji hosts Gospel Extravaganza with many Striker Soldiers in attendance.

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Dean provides solace and comfort to 64th BSB Soldiers in theater.

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Striker 6 addresses Soldiers during Silver Lion and Phoenix-sponsored Prayer Brunch.

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Silver Lions tanks get Tank Urban Survival Kits to meet new environment.

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On the cover

Spc. Albert Merrel, gets eye level with the ground to look underneath an object while searching and clearing a house in Adhamiya. Merrel serves as a driver and gunner with the 1st Platoon, Troop A, 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, attached to 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division.

Photo by Pfc. April Campbell



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HORT REPORT

Strikers, Family and friends of the 3rd Brigade,

The Striker Brigade is approaching 90 days in Iraq now and the progress we're making is bringing us closer to peace and normalcy in Baghdad and the rest of Iraq. Though Iraq still has internal struggles that her leaders and people will need to work through, from our perspective, Al Qaeda and other criminal and extremists groups are in retreat.

The 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division has three maneuver battalions in Baghdad, the Silver Lions of 1-68 AR, the Sabers of 3-7 CAV, and 1-2 Stryker. 2-319 FA of 2nd BCT, 82nd Airborne Division, is also assigned to our area of operations, but have already begun to redeploy to Fort Bragg. Alongside our Iraqi brethren in the Iraqi Army, the Iraqi Police, the National Police and the local citizenry of the Sons of Iraq, our battalions are rooting out the last remnants of the criminals and extremists that have retreated to the outskirts of this city.

Since assuming control of Istiqlal, the Silver Lions have brought in more than 60 criminals and extremists but probably more remarkable is their non-lethal operations like patrolling the streets of Husseinia, Rashadia and Boob al Sham helping to establish essential services and offering micro grants to local businesses to stimulate the economy. Because of their efforts, the economy is growing. Markets are open. Billboards and flyers that are often an eyesore to Americans are a welcomed sign of an improving market society. Soon they will be expanding the Brigade's battle space into Shaab and Ur where the extremist threat is still challenging the sovereignty of the Iraqi people.

The backbone of the brigade continues to be our support elements the Mountaineers of 64th BSB and the Phoenix Battalion, the 3rd STB.

The 64th BSB continues the grueling, yet I believe historical, barrier placement mission across our operational area. Safe roads and secure neighborhoods like mediaeval, walled cities are sprouting up all over our territory denying access to the enemy and their ability to emplace IEDs that target Soldiers and civilians. To date,

the 64th has emplaced more than 1000 concrete barriers throughout the city.

Every thug, criminal, extremist and IED maker we bring in, crossed into the radar of the Phoenix CSI like intelligence collectors and analysts. We've hauled in more than 200 enemy operators since we arrived. A counter insurgency operation like this is intelligence driven and we would be completely in the dark without the remarkable work of the 3rd STB.

Additionally, Phoenix is taking up the security and responsibility of Combat Outpost War Eagle in preparation for the Brigade Headquarters' move there.

Our Blackjack Squadron, 4-10, operating with 2nd BCT, 101st Airborne Division, is in the Ameriyah district of Baghdad. The population there is clearly supportive of their efforts and each day the improvements in security, economy and essential services puts the city of Baghdad and the rest of Iraq that much closer to the Irreversible Momentum that GEN Petraeus talks about.

In the Green Zone, the Pacesetters of 3-29 FA have a three-fold mission that allows the Government of Iraq to govern in a secure environment. They provide radar coverage to the greater Baghdad area to protect against the indirect fire threat. Partnering with the Iraqi Security Forces, they provide the guard force that keeps the International Zone safe and secure. Finally, the Pacesetters are conducting escort missions and combat logistic patrols just to keep everything moving and operational in the area.

Everywhere you turn, this city is on a fast track to stability and the Striker Brigade is a big part of that.

Of course our successes in Baghdad do not come without consequences in other parts of the country. AQI has lost its foothold in most of the country and is literally fighting for its life in places like Mosul where the Fighting Eagles are doing what they do best, eliminating the remaining threat to our Soldiers and the security of Iraq. To date 1-8 Inf has conducted as much as 765 combat patrols and have taken more than 100 terrorists off the streets by detaining or through harsher measures should they have the audacity to

resist the Fighting Eagles.

It's a decisive time for Iraq and our nation, and the mission of our Soldiers, whether it be here in Baghdad, or north in Mosul is a decisive operation. The actions of our Soldiers here now will directly influence whether other brigades have to take over here a year from now.

I want to thank the Families for their support, which is at the heart of the actions and success of our Soldiers. As I said during our last town hall, you are our heroes. I know you have us in your prayers but you are also in ours. I can't even begin to express the gratitude of what all of you are doing day in and day out in order to support your family and your Soldier downrange.

For our Great Striker Soldiers I just want to say stand fast by your training and remain vigilant. Violence is down but their remains a threat out there and you have to stay on your guard to meet that threat whenever it surfaces. I'm looking to our NCOs to troop the line. Make sure we're doing the right thing all the time. Especially focus on weapons handling and risk assessment and mitigation. The success of our Soldiers has greatly reduced the threat from the enemy, so don't allow a slack in our standards to sneak into our ranks and injure one.

I still see the IED as our number one threat. Everyday you go out, know the enemy and where he wants to engage you from. Additionally, we have received several hundred new Soldiers over the last couple of months. Treat them like a son or daughter and ensure they know everything you know about the enemy, the environment, and the culture.

We still have a long road ahead, but we've put nearly three months behind us now and time will run out fast. I ask everyone whether you are holding down the homefront, or holding down security in a Combat Outpost not to look back at what we've done, but to look forward. Victory is ahead of us but requires Steadfast resolve in the coming months.

Keep up the great work!

**Strikers!
Steadfast and Loyal,
Striker 6**

Gospel Extravaganza

by Pfc. April Campbell

Beacon staff writer

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – With much clapping, singing and dancing, more than 250 Soldiers and civilians gathered to celebrate their faith at the Gospel Extravaganza.

Soldiers participated in different performances including several solo artists, singing groups and even a group of praise dancers along with a skit at the event.

Staff Sgt. Derek Eurales, battalion career counselor with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, played the keyboard as part of the One Voice Choir.

“We planned and practiced for the event for weeks,” he said. “We invited our friends and coworkers from the Taji community. We were praying and really hoping for at least 200 folks to come.”

Their expectations for the event were fulfilled, he added.

Participating in an art form he enjoys at home is one way for Eurales to deal with some of the more difficult aspects of being deployed.

“I play for my church choir at home. Sitting down at a piano and just playing the instrument – moving my hands across the keys – is soothing,” he said. “Gospel music is a coping mechanism for me.”

“The energy and emotion of the moment and the room are intense. I can sense people are being moved and inspired by the music.”

In addition to the enjoyment of the perforces, those who participated and attended were able find comfort in worshipping with each other.

“It was nice to be able to have people come together,” said Eurales. “The

fellowship helps to ease the pain of being separated from our families.”

Sgt. 1st Class Robin Watson, attended the service with her husband Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Watson. Robin and Anthony serve, respectively, as the brigade communications chief and the brigade supply noncommissioned-officer-in-charge with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 3rd BCT.

Robin, who was invited by One Voice choir members from the 3rd Special Troops Battalion said she was impressed with how talented the Soldiers who performed were.

“They were very innovative,” she said. “I was really amazed to see the singing group Zion from my own brigade.”

Anthony said he appreciated the



Staff Sgt. Derek Eurales plays the keyboard for the One Voice Choir during the 2008 Camp Taji Gospel Extravaganza at the camp ministry center. Eurales serves as the battalion career counselor with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team.

Photos by Pfc. April Campbell

home-town feeling of the event.

“When we’re deployed overseas, there is a service for every denomination,” he said, “and people from all over Camp Taji attended (this service). The (community atmosphere) makes you feel like home.”



Sgt. 1st Class Rhonda Dow, left, and Staff Sgt. Diane Haynes sing with the One Voice Choir during the 2008 Camp Taji Gospel Extravaganza at the camp ministry center. Dow serves as the supply noncommissioned-officer-in-charge with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team. Haynes serves as an operations sergeant with the 225th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division.

Paratroopers earn awards



Photos by Pfc. April Campbell

Col. John H. Hort, awards a commander's coin of excellence and an Army Commendation Medal to Staff Sgt. Ryan Sasnett, at Combat Outpost Apache for his efforts in capturing a suspected insurgent. Hort serves as the commander of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team. Sasnett serves as the team leader for Electronic Close Target Reconnaissance Team 3, Military Intelligence Company, 2nd Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division.



Col. John H. Hort, awards an Army Commendation Medal along with a commanders excellence coin to Sgt. Joshua Robichaud, at Combat Outpost Apache for his efforts in capturing a suspected insurgent. Hort serves as the commander of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team. Robichaud serves as a gunner for Electronic Close Target Reconnaissance Team 3, Military Intelligence Company, 2nd Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division.



Col. John H. Hort awards a commanders excellence coin and an Army Commendation Medal to Sgt. Daniel Watson at Combat Outpost Apache for his efforts in capturing a suspected insurgent. Hort serves as the commander of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team. Watson serves as the truck commander for Electronic Close Target Reconnaissance Team 3, Military Intelligence Company, 2nd Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division.



Col. John H. Hort awards an Army Commendation Medal along with a commanders excellence coin to Spc. Luke Kane at Combat Outpost Apache for his efforts in capturing a suspected insurgent. Hort serves as the commander of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team. Kane serves as the driver for Electronic Close Target Reconnaissance Team 3, Military Intelligence Company, 2nd Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division.

Canine companion keeps



Photos by Pfc. April Campbell

NEAR RIGHT: Dean, the battalion therapy dog, leans in for a good petting from Capt. Phillip Rittermeyer, the battalion chaplain with the 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, at Camp Taji. Rittermeyer adopted Dean, who is three years old, from a shelter shortly before the Striker Brigade deployed to Iraq in December.

ABOVE: Dean, the 64th Brigade Support Battalion therapy dog, is suited up in his improved body armor system by his caretaker, Capt. Phillip Rittermeyer, battalion chaplain with the 64th BSB, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, at Camp Taji. Rittermeyer adopted Dean, who is three years old, from a shelter shortly before the Striker Brigade deployed to Iraq. This 'Soldier's best friend' is on orders to help boost the Mountaineers' morale during their deployment.

MIDDLE RIGHT: Dean, a therapy dog, stands on his hind legs to reach a treat offered to him by Staff Sgt. Robert Hankins, supply sergeant with Company A, 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, at Camp Taji. Dean is deployed to Iraq with the Mountaineer Battalion to help boost troop morale.

FAR RIGHT: Excited about receiving a treat, Dean, a Black Labrador mix who is deployed with troops in the 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, sticks his tongue out in anticipation at Camp Taji. Dean is on a mission as the chaplain's therapy dog to help boost the morale of Soldiers during their day-to-day activities.



'Mountaineer' spirits high

by Pfc. April Campbell

Beacon staff writer

CAMP TAJI, Iraq –

Hearing a noise in the hallway, the long-nosed creature gets out of his bed on the floor and trots to the door as he searches the cool February air for a clue.

Once he confirms the presence of friendly forces, Dean cocks his long face around to see if his companion wants to go visit the Soldiers in the hallway as much as he does. With all four limbs on the ground, Dean will certainly need the chaplain's help to open the door.

Dean is a three-year-old black-Labrador mix and serves as a therapy dog. He

deployed to Camp Taji with the Soldiers of the 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team.

Capt. Phillip Rittermeyer, battalion chaplain for the 64th BSB, adopted him from a shelter one month prior to the unit's deployment.

Rittermeyer, who works with and cares for the dog, brought Dean with him to Iraq on orders to provide comfort and boost the morale of the Mountaineer Soldiers during their day-to-day activities as they operate in the northern outreaches of Baghdad province.

"I worked with a dog previously in civilian ministry," Rittermeyer said. "They help comfort people as well as lower stress and blood pressure."

Capt. Christi Moreno, brigade mental health officer with 3rd BCT, also sees the benefit animals such as Dean provide to Soldiers in an environment with increased stress.

"Animals are very therapeutic," she said. "They show unconditional love and they're not judgmental."

When Rittermeyer must attend a meeting or preside over church services, other Mountaineer Soldiers, such as Sgt. Tasha Jackson, supply

sergeant with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 64th BSB, spend time taking care of and getting to know Dean. Caring for 'man's best friend' is nothing new to this dog lover.

"Dean reminds me of my very first dog, Raider, who I had from the time I was in second grade until a few years after high school," said Jackson.

The loving canine helps her overcome some of the difficult times during her deployment.

"If I'm having a down day and the chaplain brings Dean over for me to watch," she said, "it usually helps to cheer me up."

Between teaching the playful four-legged creature how to dance and trying not to let the dog walk her when he needs to be taken out, Dean provides her with comfort, which reminds her of home, she added.

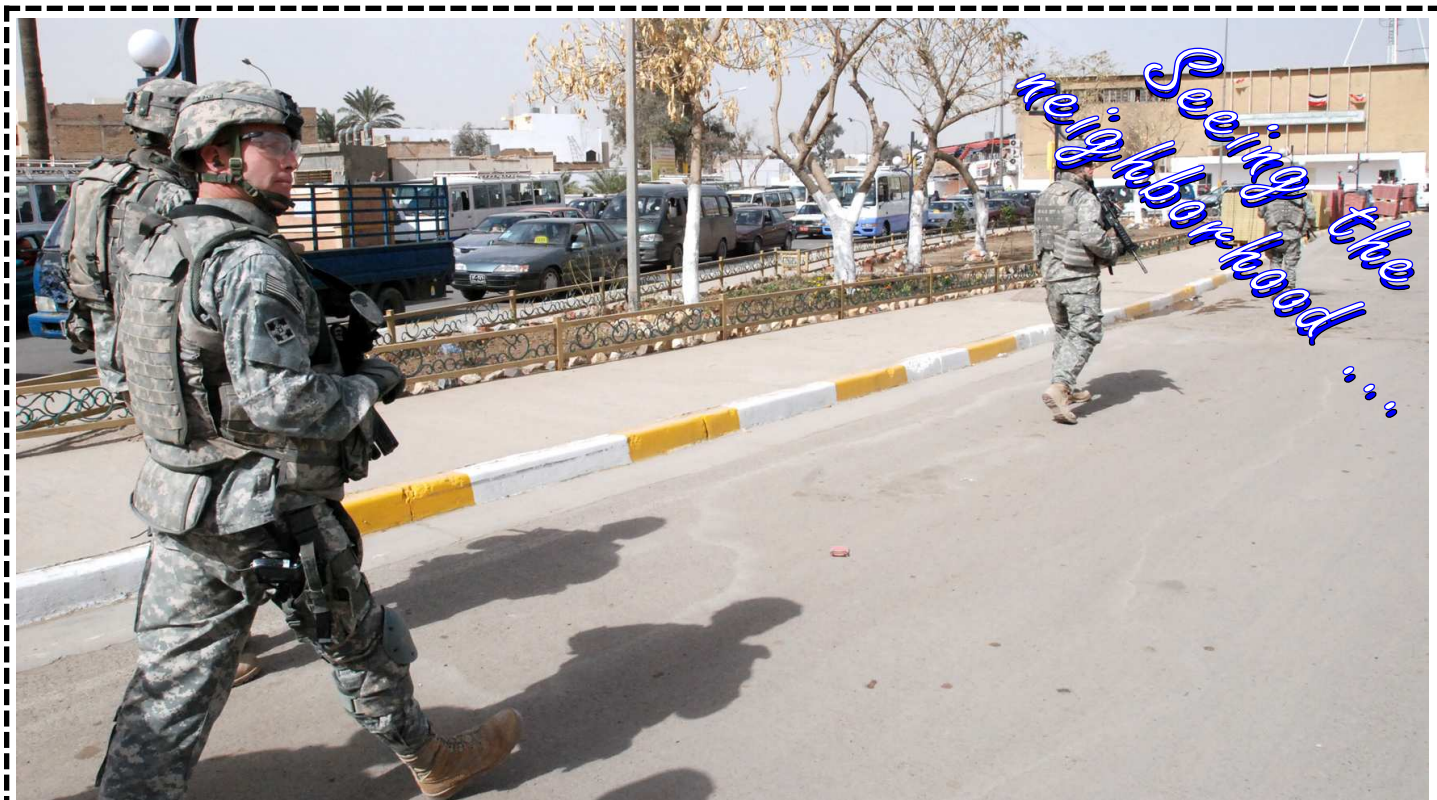
Dean stays connected with the Soldiers by communicating his own needs or wants as well.

"If I'm working, he'll put his head on my lap so I'll pay attention to him," she said.

"(Animals) bring the best out of people," said Moreno. "People tend to have an inherent connection with them."

As their deployment continues, Dean will continue his morale support operations with the Mountaineer Soldiers, often bringing smiles and an eager hand to pet his black and white fur wherever he goes.





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Brunch gathers Strikers in fellowship

Photo by Sgt. Zach Mott

Sgt. Rex McQueen, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, pauses for a moment of silent prayer during a prayer brunch at the Striker Dining Facility. The brunch brought together more than 20 people from the Striker Brigade community to listen to a speech from Col. John Hort, the brigade's commander.

by Sgt. Zach Mott

Beacon editor

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Tactical pause is a term used by combat commanders when conducting training and the scenario is not achieving the objective they want.

A prayer brunch co-hosted by two Multi-National Division – Baghdad battalions served as a spiritual pause for attendees at this sprawling military compound on the northern outskirts of Baghdad province.

“This makes my day,” said Pfc. Danita Griffiths, a human resources specialist from Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. “Things like this (are great) because sometimes I feel a little low and just some type of inspiration from some-

where will motivate me to carry on to the next day with this deployment.”

The Mount Vernon, N.Y., native, has been to other prayer services, but this was her first prayer brunch in Iraq.

Chaplains from the 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, and 3rd Special Troops Battalion, organized the event for members of the Striker Brigade, which is on its third deployment to Iraq in five years.

“We like to have these events because it brings people together in a sense of fellowship. People who normally aren’t together are able to fellowship,” said Capt. Leonard Siems, battalion chaplain for 1-68 AR and helped organize the brunch.

The event featured the Col. John

Hort, the brigade’s commander, who spoke to the assembled crowd about Army Values and how they helped influence the leader he became from a self-described bad boy in his youth.

Hort recanted snippets from his misspent youth that involved various transgressions with the law that continued until he was accepted into the ROTC program at Duke University.

In his early experiences with the Army, he said he learned that through selfless service and personal courage, he could be the man his parents always knew he could.

Hort’s words also echoed with Griffiths, a married mother of four, who is on her first deployment to Iraq.

“Those (messages) really hit home for me because that’s what I try to strive for,” she said.

Modified tanks improve safety, precision

by Pfc. April Campbell

Beacon staff writer

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Technicians are modifying M1-A2 Abrams tanks to make them more effective in the dense, urban Baghdad environment.

For Multi-National Division – Baghdad tankers in the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division these equipment modifications are taking place in the form of the Tank Urban Survival Kit being added to their M1-A2 Abrams tanks.

In each of the Striker Brigade's two previous deployments it operated in more rural areas of Diyala and Salah al-Din provinces.

These TUSK additions include an increase to the Soldiers' safety and the tanks' effectiveness in operations in this area north of Baghdad. They are currently being installed in Abrams tanks throughout MND-B by General Dynamics, a government contractor responsible for fielding, issuing and maintaining of these systems.

The modifications include a new driver's safety seat, improved tank armor and vision enhancements, as well as an attached sniper rifle, said Shawn Safford, a Gatesville, Texas, native, who works as the senior tank systems technician in MND-B for General Dynamics.

Sgt. 1st Class Sean Rinder, platoon sergeant for 2nd Platoon, Company C, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd BCT, operated these tanks during the

unit's previous deployment in the Diyala Province.

"Last time I was here, I had to reload the (.50-cal. machine gun) while I was in contact," he said. "I had to expose myself from the waist up to do that."

With the new commander's cupola armor, Rinder said, he would not be as exposed if he were in the same situation.

While he said he has always been confident in his equipment and crew, the modifications will add to that security blanket.

The increased level of security is echoed outside the tank as well. Tankers are able to more precisely target an enemy with a decreased risk to the surroundings because of the gunner's sniper rifle, being added to the tank.

"We're still lethal at long ranges without destroying everything. It mitigates the collateral damage," said 2nd Lt. Frank Simmons, platoon leader for the 2nd Plt., Co. C, 1-68 AR.

The new visual aids will also help the Soldiers target enemies with more precision. These devices will assist the tankers in positively identifying enemies, said Sgt. Albert Arca, tank gunner with the 2nd Plt., Co. C, 1-68 AR.

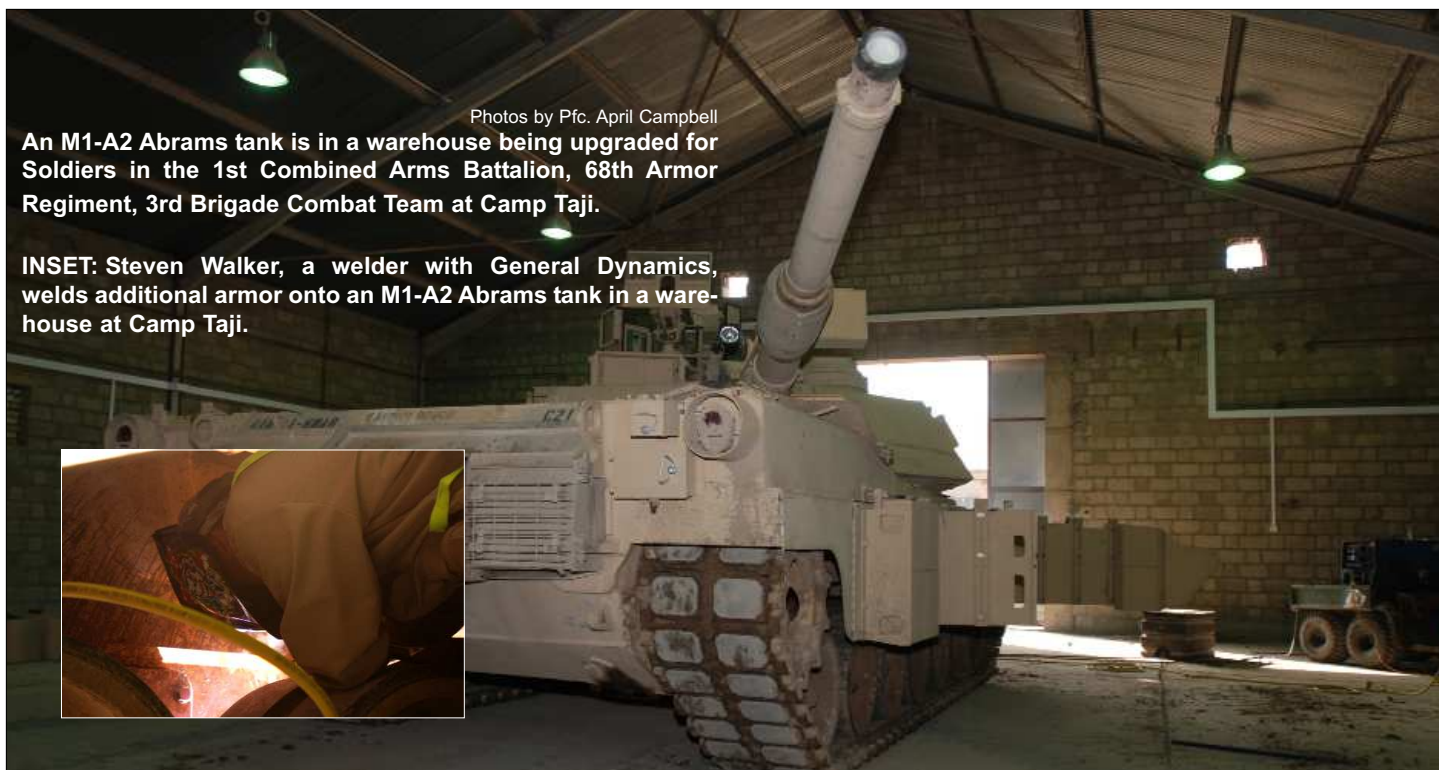
For tankers, such as Arca, the improved safety features will provide a greater piece of mind when conducting missions in sector.

"I'll be able to focus more on the mission," Arca said. "(The new equipment) can save someone's life."

Photos by Pfc. April Campbell

An M1-A2 Abrams tank is in a warehouse being upgraded for Soldiers in the 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 68th Armor Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team at Camp Taji.

INSET: Steven Walker, a welder with General Dynamics, welds additional armor onto an M1-A2 Abrams tank in a warehouse at Camp Taji.



Neighborhood checkpoints keep residents safe

by Pfc. April Campbell

Beacon staff writer

QAHIRA, Iraq – Sons of Iraq in Qahira play a large role in securing their backyard through local checkpoints.

Lt. Col Michael Pemrick, deputy commander for 3rd Brigade Combat Team, said these local forces are one of the key elements in the recent reduction of violence in the area.

“Without the Sons of Iraq, I think we would still have more (al-Qaida in Iraq) and special groups’ activity,” said Pemrick. “There’d be more (improvised-explosive devices); there’d be more Coalition Forces being attacked as well as local civilians being killed or hurt due to the activities of these (groups).”

Pemrick stopped to visit with sever-

al SoIs at their checkpoints in Qahira during a patrol.

“The guys were alert,” he said. “They had weapons; they had ammunition; they understood what their purpose was.”

Pemrick also noted the protection level of the checkpoints as a marked improvement.

Mohamad Imad Shehab, a member of the neighborhood SoI working at one of the checkpoints there, appeared confident his efforts were helping his community.

“I do feel that I am contributing to the neighborhood,” Mohamad said through an interpreter. “I am doing my part to keep this place safe.”

While an effective force at present, ideally, the Sons of Iraq will be incorporated into and trained as official

members of the Iraqi Security Forces.

“The idea is that these guys would eventually transition to become Iraqi Policemen and work in the local communities where they are from to increase, not only the manpower of the Iraqi Police, but also their local presence and credibility since it’ll be local men that are actually policing the communities,” Pemrick said.

Because of the experience he gains as a SoI member, and his prior experience in the Iraqi Army, Mohamad said he is hopeful to be accepted into one of the ISF programs.

Ultimately, the transition of the Sons of Iraq into IPs is the responsibility of the Government of Iraq.

“The Iraqi Police and the Iraqi Government are the ones who are making this happen,” said Pemrick.



Photo by Pfc. April Campbell

A Sons of Iraq member redirects a car while working at a checkpoint in Qahira. Sol are credited with increasing neighborhood safety and security by operating checkpoints throughout the region.

Can't find the *Striker Beacon*? Try looking at the following places:

www.dvidshub.net

To view the *Beacon*, and other Striker Brigade related content, you must create

a log on (anyone is eligible) and click on publications, scroll down to “Striker Beacon” (it’s in alphabetical order) and download a PDF version of the paper.

www.hood.army.mil/4ID/index.html

Information on the 4th ID and 3rd BCT is located in the news section.

www.armyfrg.org

Use your log on infor-

mation obtained at the deployment fair or register for the 3rd BCT, 4th ID FRG and view all the latest information available on the Striker Brigade as well as events available locally.

One day at a time

Commentary by Chaplain (Capt.) Aaron Swartz

3rd Special Troops Battalion

Thomas Carlyle, famed essayist and historian, had finished his tremendous manuscript on the French Revolution. He gave it to his neighbor John Stuart Mill to read.

Several days later, Mill came to Carlyle's home and spilled the bad news - His maid had used the price-less manuscript to start a fire!

Carlyle plunged into depression and anger. Two years of labor was lost. "All that work - for nothing," he raged. The thought of having to write the whole thing over was almost paralyzing.

One day, as Carlyle was walking the streets, he saw a stonemason building a long, high wall. He stood watching for a long time before he was suddenly impressed with the fact that the grand wall was being built one small brick at a time! He took inspiration from that experience and decided, "I'll just write one

page today, and then one page tomorrow. One page at a time - that's all I'll think about."

Peace of Mind

The task was slow and tedious at first, but then picked up momentum. He stayed with it and went on to finish the work. The end result, *The French Revolution, A History* (2 Volumes, 1837), was far better than the first time.

Someone has said, "Yard by yard, life is hard; inch by inch, anything's a cinch."

Our one year deployment has now begun its count down this month. But how do we cope with this when home seems so far away. We can look at it in small one day increments. Each day we need to get up and do our jobs to the best of our abilities. As we focus on completing each day, it will turn into months and the months will turn into that year. 3 BCT's mission is long and important, but always remember what God has promised, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

CAPTION THIS



Photo by Sgt. Zach Mott

Caption This goes as such: I'll write some silly caption here and if you can come up with something better, while still remaining printable in a command information publication, I'll run the best one on the back page of the *Striker Bolt*. Think you're up for the challenge? Send your submissions to zachary.mott@iraq.centcom.mil.

My Submission: Cookies are essential to great looking hair.