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The Desert Raven



81st BCT Monthly Command Information Newsletter

81st BCT Commander visits his troops throughout Iraq



Col. Ronald Kapral, the commander of the 81st Brigade Combat Team, speaks to Soldiers from Bravo Company, 1-184th Infantry on COB Q-West, Iraq, Mar. 27, 2009 during a seven-day trip around Iraq to visit with his Soldiers. See page 3 for more photos of his and 81st BCT's Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Sweeney's trip. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)

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Message from 81st BCT Commander

*By Col. Ronald Kapral
81st BCT commander*

March marked another milestone in the history of the 81st Brigade. It marked the halfway point of our mission. The 81st has logged more than two million miles on the roads of Iraq and established itself as a professional unit that gets the mission accomplished. Everywhere the command sergeant major and I travel, we hear nothing but great things about the Soldiers of this brigade. You have made your mark in the history books and you should be proud of all your accomplishments.

As I reflect back to July 2008 and the training we conducted at Yakima Training Center, I remember how we stressed the importance of pre-combat inspections, pre-combat checks and rehears-



als. It was challenging to ensure everyone performed them to standards. Now they are a regular part of our lives and it has become second nature. We have come a long way. We are very good at what we do, which is where the problem lies.

On a recent visit to one of our units, I was talking with a young sergeant who was complaining about having to conduct lanes training the following day. When I asked him why he was upset about the training, he told me he had been on more than 30 missions and was a well-trained, seasoned Soldier. He felt he did not need the additional training and it was a waste of time. I am sure he is not the only one who feels this way.

The average NFL football season is 16 weeks long, with five weeks

of pre-season. For a great team like the Dallas Cowboys, it usually lasts an additional four weeks. Do you know what they do every week to prepare for games? They practice the same plays over and over again. They do this not only to improve their game, but also to ensure everyone knows their assignments. We need to do the same. Not everyone has called in for a medivac. Sure, we may have the cards in our pockets, but when was the last time you actually filled it out, changed the frequency on the radio and sent the message?

We need to continue to train, reinforce the standards and ensure all our Soldiers are proficient in their jobs. The end is in sight, but we still have many miles to go and missions to accomplish before we travel home. Continue to work on those critical tasks, learn something new every day and watch out for one another. The enemy does.

Thank you for all that you do. Keep up the good work. 🇺🇸

Message from 81st BCT Command Sergeant Major

*By Command Sgt. Maj.
Robert Sweeney
81st BCT command sergeant major*

After six months on the ground in Iraq, we can look back at our accomplishments with pride and honor! We have all grown as people, as Soldiers, as leaders and as a team. Collectively you have all made great contributions to the mission success and I salute you for your efforts! The end of our mission is coming, but I want everyone to understand it is not complete until we all arrive home safely to our families. One of the biggest challenges we must now face is complacency. We have performed our jobs well, completed our missions and settled into routines. When this happens we have a tendency to take shortcuts, which can even-

tually lead to mission failure. We all know "Murphy" is alive and well and will bite us when we let down our guard. Leaders, you must be diligent in executing your duties, enforcing standards, conducting inspections and breaking up the routines of day-to-day operations. Continue to do what you do best, set the example and lead from the front and we will be successful.

Families, I know Spring Fever is hitting you and you are juggling many priorities. These times are stressful for you and your family. Help is there if you need it. I need each of you stay in contact with your respective Family Support Groups. Do not wait for



them to call you; be proactive and give them a call to see what is going on and what activities they have planned. If you need anything, ask them first. Our Family Readiness Groups work for you and have the ability to provide or coordinate a wide variety of support and services to you. All you need to do is

ask.

Everyone - Soldiers and Families - be safe in what you do and before you know it, we will be home safely. Take care. 🇺🇸



Col. Kapral speaks to troops from A Btry, 2-146th FA on COB Marez, Iraq, Mar. 30, 2009.



Col. Ronald Kapral, the commander of the 81st Brigade Combat Team, and Command Sergeant Major Robert Sweeney, the command sergeant major of the 81st BCT, ventured across Iraq to visit with their troops at Contingency Operating Base Speicher in Tikrit, COB Q-West near Qayyarah and COB Marez in Mosul. During their seven-day trip, Kapral and Sweeney had a chance to meet with Soldiers from across the brigade and spend some time with each unit. The pair spoke to their Soldiers about redeployment and awarded the 81st BCT commander's coin to selected Soldiers. (Photos by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)

Visiting the troops



Col. Kapral awards Sgt. Julian Gonzalez of E Co., 1-185th Ar. (CAB) his commander's coin Mar. 27, 2009 on COB Q-West, Iraq, as Sgt. Larry Patino and Sgt. Cecilia Enriquez look on.



Command Sgt. Maj. Sweeney speaks with Sgt. 1st Class Gregory Okubo from Des Moines, Wash., from 81st BSTB Mar. 27, 2009 on COB Q-West, Iraq.



Command Sgt. Maj. Sweeney speaks to Soldiers from A Co., 184th Inf. at COB Q-West, Iraq, Mar. 27, 2009



April's featured NCO: Sgt. Jerriid Barber

By Sgt. Amanda Gauthier
81st BCT Public Affairs

Sgt. Jerriid Barber from Alpha Troop, 1-303rd Cavalry, 81st Brigade Combat Team has held several different positions in the military: scout, chemical specialist, truck driver, recruiter. But the most important job he has held is noncommissioned officer.

"NCOs are an invaluable and essential part of the Army," said Barber, currently serving in Al Asad, Iraq, as a truck commander. "They continually prove their dedication and their willingness to make great sacrifices on behalf of our nation."

His unique personality helps him set the example for lower enlisted and fellow NCOs of A Trp.

"He has a leadership quality about him that is unique to his personality," said Capt. Ian McConnell, the executive officer for A Trp and Barber's former platoon leader. "He is not a loud NCO, but he is not weak. He offers his Soldiers the chance to account for their actions in all cases. He presents any alternative points of view and either praises them for their discernment, work or accomplishments, or, if necessary, disciplines with consistency and with the intent to exhort and rebuild, as opposed to belittling. He is extremely concerned about the future of his Soldiers and their ability to do their jobs."

It is because of other NCOs and officers who have set



Sgt. Jerriid Barber goofs off with his children Samantha and Justice, both 6 years old, at the Woodland Park Zoo prior to deploying to Iraq. (Photo courtesy of Rachle Barber)

the example for Barber that he has been so successful. He has asked not only for advice, but also for criticism from his leaders.

"During pre-deployment, where he was learning many new tasks daily at a fast pace, he would pull me aside and ask advice for various leadership scenarios, as well as ask for my personal insights into his actions as a new NCO in the platoon from my perspective," said McConnell. "I thought this unique because he was seeking a full 360 degrees of insight... Sgt. Barber was seeking the input on his own and embraced the positive, as well as the constructive, negative, feedback. Noticeable changes could be seen in his style based on the feedback, demonstrating his dynamic leadership style."

Barber's leaders set the example and helped him grow into the NCO he is today. It was their willingness to take risks and set examples that helped him to be able to lead

troops in combat.

"1st Sgt. Hale was willing to take a risk with me," said Barber. "He mentored me and provided an emulative leadership style that has had a direct effect on my capabilities used here in theater."

His platoon sergeant Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Edwards helped him to find his place on the team and continues to help Barber grow.

"From the day that Sgt. 1st Class Edwards came over to my barracks to welcome me into his platoon, he has always provided a structured and comfortable, yet challenging, environment to operate in. Any time I have needed him, Sgt. 1st Class Edwards has always made himself available for professional guidance, as well as personal guidance."

The year of the NCO is just what the Army needed said Barber.

"It is because of these mentors that the Year of the NCO is important," he said. "It is because of their professionalism that our Army is recognized for its efforts and accomplishments. The year of the NCO is a time well overdue. NCOs are professionals that set the standard and go the extra mile because it is the right thing to do. I am thinking of the NCO Creed – No one is more professional than I."

In his spare time Barber stays busy. He plays on men's baseball and softball teams at home, and while in Iraq is working on correspondence courses to help broaden his knowledge base and help him be a better NCO. But what he likes to do most of all is spend time with his wife Rachle and children Justice and Samatha, both 6 years old.

"At home I enjoy spending time outdoors with my kids. My wife and I love to get the motorcycle out and go for rides," said Barber.

"He doesn't care what he is doing as long as his family is with him," said Barber's wife Rachle. "He loves to hunt and fish. He loves to camp and be outdoors. He plays softball and golf, he's quite amazing at both."

While he is in Iraq he is dearly missed by his family.

"He is a great husband and father and always puts his family first. We are lucky that God has blessed us with such an amazing man," said Rachle. "We can't wait for him to get home. We love and miss him very much."

Barber is planning a career in law enforcement and to stay in the National Guard until he retires.

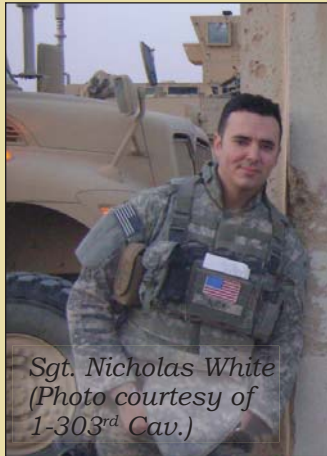


Sgt. Jerriid Barber and his family (Photo courtesy of Rachle Barber)



April's featured NCO: Sgt. Nicholas White

By Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr
81st BCT Public Affairs



Sgt. Nicholas White
(Photo courtesy of
1-303rd Cav.)

When new noncommissioned officers are inducted into the Corps of NCOs, they become part of a history and tradition that carry with them not only responsibility, but pride. NCOs are expected to take charge in the absence of orders, complete the mission and care for their troops.

Few NCOs understand the weight and satisfaction of being an NCO as well as Sgt. Nicholas White. Not

only does he pride himself in looking after his troops, guiding them and ensuring future generations of NCOs are being taught correctly, but he also takes stock in those who have come before him.

"As a young NCO, it is a great source of pride that I follow in the tradition of men such as Gary Gordon, Randall Shugart, Bill Guanere, Joe Toye, Paul Howe and Kyle Lambe, and as the torch is passed down to my generation, I can only express my gratitude, admiration and hope that I will be able to uphold the highest level of professionalism sent down for me by those before me," said White, a medic with Hotel Troop, 1-303rd Cavalry, 81st Brigade Combat Team, who has served in the Washington National Guard for the past six years.

After attending basic training in Missouri in 2003 and medic school in Texas in 2004, White volunteered for his first deployment to Iraq in 2006. He helped train Iraqi Police in modern police techniques and assisted them with their duties as part of a Police Transition Team in Baghdad. Now on his second deployment, White serves as a truck commander, conducting convoy security missions out of Al Taqaddum, Iraq, with the 1-303rd Cav. He has quickly become a valued member of the team and a leader to his Soldiers.

"He works with his crew and other crews late into the night, making sure they know and are proficient in their duties," said Staff Sgt. Ryan Gardner of Seattle, a squad leader with H Trp.

"He is an excellent example of what a Soldier and NCO is and should be," he added.

White's dedication and hard work were evident long before the deployment began. Staff Sgt. Richard A. Amone of Auburn, Wash., White's squad leader, said

White was "instrumental in pre-deployment training" and that he is one of only two medics in the brigade to qualify as a Squad Designated Marksman. The latter is one of the things White said he is most proud of, along with serving in the medical corps.

White, a former volunteer firefighter, graduated in the top 10 percent of his class during his pre-deployment medical training at Camp Bullis, Texas, and hopes to one day become a civilian paramedic. He also hopes to stay with the Washington National Guard and retire as a first sergeant or master sergeant.

His ability to move between positions and situations with ease is sure to help him in that endeavor. While in Al Asad, he has transitioned seamlessly from medic to truck commander to assistant convoy commander.

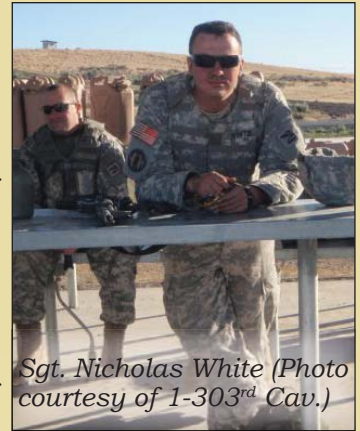
"[He] performs excellent under any condition or problem, always keeps a level head," said Sgt. 1st Class John Watson of Puyallup, Wash., White's platoon sergeant.

"Sgt. White is one of the most dedicated and professional NCO's I have ever had within my ranks," added White's first sergeant 1st Sgt. Brian Brashear of Selah, Wash., a 19-year veteran. "He consistently demonstrates tactical patience and professionalism under pressure."

While in Iraq, White spends his off time reading military history and biographies. At home in Lake Tapps, Wash., White hunts, fishes and goes target shooting. He is also engaged to be married.

Though deployments can be straining on relationships, White's fiancée Carissa Lambe says she is proud her fiancé has served two tours in Iraq and knows he would readily volunteer for more service if the need arose. His big heart, patience and selflessness are some of the things she loves most about him. She also said his natural leadership abilities make him a great NCO.

"To me a good NCO can be summarized in one word: Commitment," said White. "Commitment to the values of honor, integrity and loyalty. Commitment to placing the needs of their Soldiers above that of their own. Commitment to maintain standards and uphold the highest level of professionalism. True commitment in my opinion will form the best and brightest of NCOs."



Sgt. Nicholas White (Photo
courtesy of 1-303rd Cav.)



Sgt. Nicholas White and his fiancée Carissa
Lambe (Photo courtesy of Sgt. Nicholas White)



Remembering the Holocaust

April is National Holocaust Month

By Sgt. 1st Class Sheletha Quillin
81st BCT EO

"**H**olocaust," a word of Greek origin meaning "sacrifice by fire," was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews and millions of others by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.

The Nazis, led by Adolph Hitler, came to power in Germany in January 1933. They believed that Germans were "racially superior" and that the Jews were an alien threat to the so-called German racial community. Most European Jews lived in countries that Nazi Germany would occupy or influence during World War II.

The mass killings were part of "the Final Solution" that began in June 1941 with the shooting of Jewish civilians during the German invasion of the Soviet Union. By 1945, the Germans and their collaborators had killed nearly two out of every three European Jews as part of the "Final Solution."

Also subjected to the Nazi mobile killing units, or Einsatzgruppen, were over 200,000 Gypsies. Between two and three million Soviet prisoners of war also died as a result of disease, starvation, neglect

or maltreatment by the Nazis.

The plan did not stop with killing for purely racial motivations. It was extended to include at least 200,000 mentally or physically disabled Germans living in institutional settings as part of the "Euthanasia Program." German authorities persecuted homosexuals and others who did not fit the social norm. Political opponents and religious dissidents were also known to be incarcerated and mistreated.

The Nazis and their collaborators established concentration camps to detain Jews and those who presented a real or perceived threat. Here, they would monitor the Jews and then facilitate their deportation to ghettos, forced labor camps or killing centers where they were murdered in gassing facilities.

In the final months of the war, guards sometimes moved the inmates by forced marches, often called "death marches." The marches continued until May 7, 1945, the day the German armed forces surrendered unconditionally to the



Allies.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, many survivors found shelter in displaced persons (DP) camps administered by the Allied powers. Between 1948 and 1951, almost 700,000 Jews immigrated to Israel, including 136,000 Jewish displaced persons from Europe. Other Jewish DPs immigrated to the United States and other nations. The last DP camp closed in 1957. The crimes committed during the Holocaust devastated most European Jewish communities and eliminated hundreds of Jewish communities in occupied Eastern Europe entirely. 





A Soldier Story: *Then & Now*



Staff Sgt. Mathew T. Stayrook takes a moment during training Jan. 8, 2009 to pose with fellow members of D Co., 1-161st Inf. (CAB) and members of the Iraqi Army who let Stayrook and his squad fire their AK-47s on the PB Love Range on JBB, Iraq. (Photo by Pfc. Reil)

A Soldier's return to Iraq finds dramatic improvement

By Capt. Mike Vincent
1-161st Inf. (CAB)

"In 2004, we were conducting an outer perimeter patrol just outside of Al Ameria when we came across an Iraqi man flagging us down. Through our interpreter, we discovered the neighborhood generator was down and the generator needed some repairs that the local Iraqis didn't know how to do. So, we went back to our company area and grabbed our mechanic who knew generator maintenance and went back out. We repaired their generator. The neighborhood elder was very grateful and from that moment on, the attitude of the local neighborhood changed. From then on we actually saw a reduction of attacks and hostility towards us in that area," said Staff Sgt. Mathew T. Stayrook of Kennewick, Wash., recalling the moment he saw the key to stability and success in Iraq.

Stayrook, a veteran of Opera-

tion Iraqi Freedom II, is currently serving his second tour in Iraq as a convoy security commander with Delta Company, 1-161st Infantry (Combined Arms Battalion), 81st Brigade Combat Team. Stayrook has witnessed firsthand the dra-

"I think [the Iraqi Army] recognize the big picture and the benefits of good relations with the United States." Staff Sgt. Mathew Stayrook

matic changes in life and security in Iraq.

From Stayrook's perspective much has changed in Iraq since 2004, and the U.S. efforts have had a significant effect on stability.

"This tour in Iraq, I see a lot more of the country than I did in 2004," Stayrook said. "Every day I go out, I see less trash on the roads, more new roads and paving, new barriers and medians being built, less trash and improved buildings and homes. These kinds of things aren't possible without better security and an organized government with better resources."

Stayrook also witnessed a dramatic improvement in the Iraqi Army and security forces compared to 2004.

"Back then, the Iraqi Army would do a patrol with us in support and they were sloppy and lacked discipline. Today, as compared to 2004, it's like night and day," Stayrook said. "The Iraqi Army is courteous when they interact with us. They look and act professional and they're accommodating to our convoys and operations. I think they recognize

See STAYROOK page 24



Army National Guard (ARNG) ROTC Scholarship Information

Courtesy of Maj. Julie Spencer-Howard

Guaranteed Reserve Forces Duty (GRFD) and Dedicated Army National Guard (DEDNG) scholarships are available through the Army Reserve Officers' Training Course (ROTC). These scholarships guarantee that commissioned cadets serve ARNG. GRFD scholarships are available for up to two years and allow simultaneous use with the Select Reserve Montgomery GI Bill (a.k.a. "Guard" GI bill, chapter 1606 or 1607). The DEDNG scholarship is available for up to three years, but does not allow simultaneous use with the Guard GI bill. Major scholarship qualifications include: US citizenship, 2.5 GPA, under 31 years of age for the entire year of commissioning, pass the Army Physical Fitness Test, meet Army height/weight standards, full-time student and be of good moral character. Your local WAARNG officer recruiter will assist in setting up a meeting with the ROTC Dept. to ensure you meet the standards for enrollment.

These scholarships pay 100 percent tuition and mandatory fees, or can pay room and board (not to exceed \$10,000 per year). Room and board payment is for on-campus (pays actual cost, not to exceed \$10,000) or off-campus (pays the average R&B plan for the university, not to exceed \$10,000). All scholarships come with a \$1,200 per year book allowance paid directly to the student. National Guard scholarships for room & board can be used with federal and/or state tuition assistance to cover all major college expenses (tuition & fees, room & board, books). Cadets are also paid a monthly stipend in the following amounts: \$350 for the sophomore year, \$400 for the junior year, and \$500 for the senior year. If eligible for Chapter 1606

Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) the student may qualify for an additional \$350 per month MGIB "SMP" kicker. For Soldiers on the GRFD scholarship attending the following schools, both tuition AND room and board is paid: PLU, SU, Gonzaga and Northwest (Northwest attends UW Seattle ROTC).

Note that all ARNG scholarship students must participate in the Simultaneous Membership Program (SMP) with an ARNG unit while in school. The Cadet drills with an ARNG unit and paid at the rank of E-5, approximately \$250 per month, unless already in the ARNG and holds a rank higher than E-5. You are also non-deployable until completing BOLC III after graduation. You can also accept the GRFD while working on a Masters degree! Contact your local Washington Army National Officer Strength Manager for more information.

ROTC Departments:

1. *Central Washington University*
2. *Eastern Washington University* – Spokane Falls Community College students attend EWU ROTC.
3. *Gonzaga University* – Whitworth University attends GU ROTC.
4. *Pacific Lutheran University* – CWU Tacoma-Pierce College, Pierce Community College-Steilacoom Campus, St. Martin's Univ – Lacey, Tacoma Community College-University Place, Univ. of Puget Sound-Tacoma, UW Tacoma Campus all attend PLU ROTC.
5. *Seattle University*
6. *University of Washington* – Northwest University, Seattle Pacific University, and DeVry attend UW ROTC.
7. *Washington State University* – WSU-Vancouver can attend Univ. of Portland's ROTC program for free. 

2-146th FA Soldier takes charge

*By Sgt. Virgil Akins
2-146th FA*

Spc. Richard Abbott is a member of the Contingency Operating Base Marez Barrier Team, part of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 2-146th Field Artillery, 81st Brigade Combat Team's Task Force 146 that serves as the Base Defense Operations Center in Mosul. The Barrier Team is responsible for improving the outer base perimeter and improving blast mitigation for several areas of the COB. This mission involves emplacing and filling giant sandbags called Hescos and lining them with concertina wire. In many instances the team also lays tank tracks as speed bumps and strings cable as gate-securing devices.


Abbott joined the Washington



A track hoe fills Hescos along the COB Marez Perimeter in Iraq. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kelly Magleic)

National Guard three years ago. He became a Blackhawk mechanic as part of the 66th Theater Aviation Command. At annual training this past July, Abbott was transferred to Alpha Btry, 2-146th FA for the deployment, and subsequently moved to HHB, 2-146th FA for the BDOC mission of TF 146. Abbott

has become an incredible asset to the Barrier team.

With his section sergeant on leave, Abbott has become the 'NCOIC' of a team of four Soldiers and four Third Country Nationals. He calls the leadership role "hectic," but with his knowledge and experience is able to direct and lead his team. On working with TCNs, Abbott calls them: "Awesome. They work hard, work fast." He doesn't find the language barrier an issue because he has learned their sign language, and their work ethic has made it a rewarding experience. Currently Abbott's team is working on blast mitigation measures for the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle launch site and Helo refueling site on the Diamondback Airfield on COB Marez. 



BRINGING THE FUN TO IRAQ, ONE EVENT AT A TIME

By Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr
81st BCT Public Affairs

For 81st Brigade Soldiers stationed in Iraq, life can be incredibly stressful and incredibly boring. Long missions are followed by long days spent with little to do on base. Fortunately, across Iraq, there is Morale, Welfare and Recreation.

"I think MWR is important because it gives the troops something else to do and else to think about," said Lt. Col. Alan Dorow, the commander of 181st Brigade Support Battalion, 81st Brigade Combat Team. "It helps [the Soldiers] build esprit de corps and just have a good time. It helps them get away from the stress or the routine of their jobs up here."

As part of the Contingency Operating Base Q-West Mayor's Cell, 181st BSB Soldiers Sgt. 1st Class Shawna Snodgrass and Maj. Scott Cooley ensure that not only the Soldiers of the 81st BCT are entertained, but all of Q-West as well.

They organize base-wide MWR events such as basketball, volleyball and dodgeball tournaments, fun runs, video game tournaments and other challenges. They also order in Pizza Hut for the troops and air events like the Super Bowl, Daytona 500 and UFC fights on the MWR center's big screen TV.

"There are several things every single night that somebody can choose from and it gives them

something to do. It gives them an outlet, a way to decompress and it keeps them out of trouble," said Snodgrass.

The MWR duo also coordinates USO and other tour group entertainment shows coming to Q-West.

Entertainers such as comedian Scott Kennedy, the Minnesota Viking Cheerleaders, NASCAR drivers and military bands have come through Q-West in the last few months.

"It doesn't matter what it is; if they came out and enjoyed it, they're always really happy they did, and then they want to know, 'when's the next event?'" said Snodgrass.

Coordinating for each event requires a lot of preparation and time, but Snodgrass isn't complaining.

"I really like seeing the Soldiers and just seeing how much they enjoy the shows," she said. "It makes everything worth it to me. No matter how many hours we put in, or what goes wrong,... I just love to see how happy they are and for just a couple hours, they chill out and enjoy themselves."

While she enjoys it now, MWR was not a position she sought. Dorow in-

formed her of her upcoming position a few months before mobilization.

Her first assignment as the MWR NCO was to coordinate a trip for 181st BSB Soldiers and their spouses to see a Minnesota Vikings game in Minneapolis during their four-day pass from Fort McCoy, Wis., during mobilization training.


"Through that process I realized that it's something that I truly enjoy.

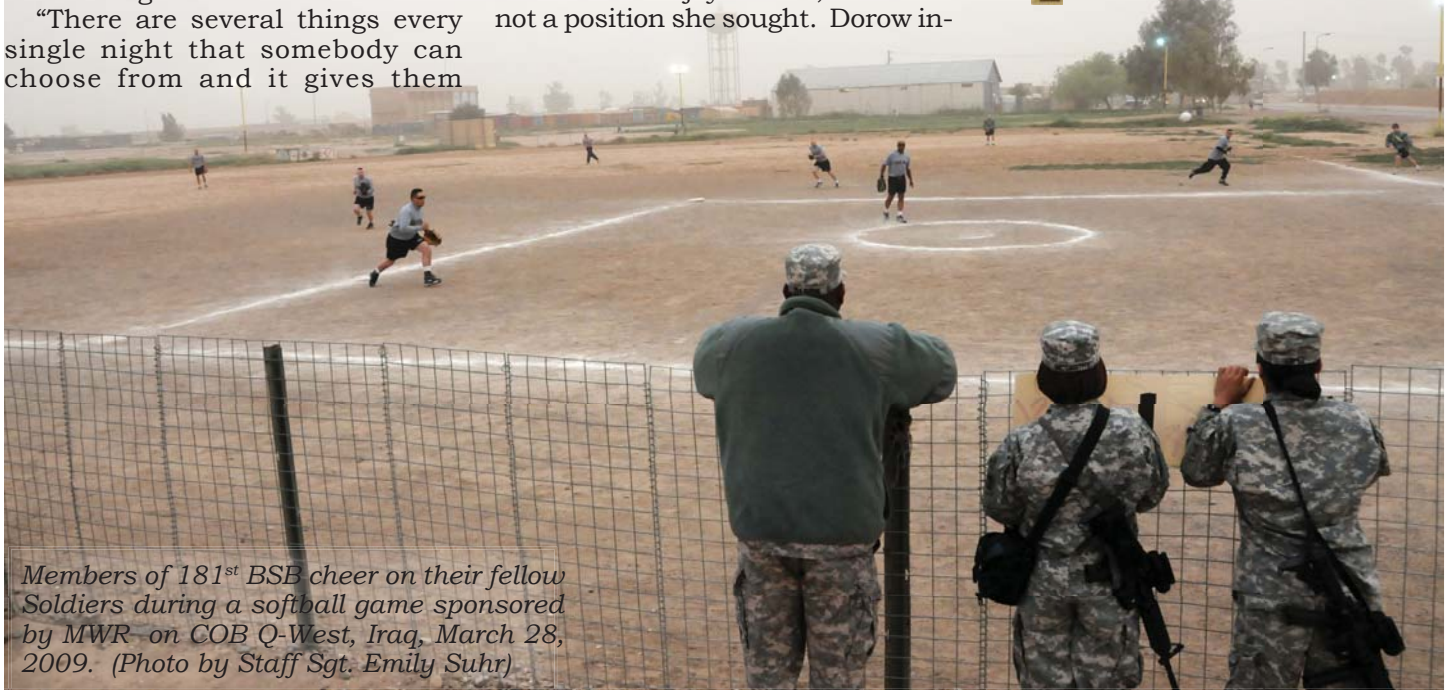
"It doesn't matter what it is; if they came out and enjoyed it, they're always really happy they did." Sgt. 1st Class Shawna Snodgrass

I love planning, I love coordinating. I love getting out there and talking to people and making all the organizations and entities come together, and then the end result. [There were about] 28 people that went to the

game. I coordinated the lodging and everything, and they had a fabulous time," she said.

The 15-year veteran of the Washington Army National Guard continues that trend in Iraq.

"They're there to have a good time and they have a good time," said Sgt. 1st Class Kirsten Froelich from 81st Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 81st BCT. "The MWR events that I've gone to, I don't think I've seen anyone leave that did not enjoy it." 



Members of 181st BSB cheer on their fellow Soldiers during a softball game sponsored by MWR on COB Q-West, Iraq, March 28, 2009. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)



New Online Videos Help Military Families Understand Health Benefits

Courtesy of TriWest

Grab the popcorn...military Families throughout TRICARE's west region now have a new, easy way to learn about their healthcare benefits through one of America's favorite pastimes—the movies.

TriWest Healthcare Alliance—the Department of Defense contractor that administers TRICARE, the military's healthcare entitlement, in 21 western states—is expanding its beneficiary education program to include streaming videos designed to help servicemembers and their families understand their healthcare benefits.

"TRICARE 2 You" video topics, which run an average of three minutes in a prime-time news format, include explanations of TRICARE plan options, how to access specialty care, behavioral health resources, pharmacy options and newborn enrollment, among others.

"We wanted to do whatever it takes to help our beneficiaries maximize use of their TRICARE benefit and avoid out-of-pocket costs," said David J. McIntyre, president and CEO of TriWest Healthcare Alliance. "This is especially useful for servicemembers, particularly those in the National Guard and Reserve who live or work in rural areas without convenient access to military base resources."

Produced by TriWest, in partnership with TRICARE Regional Office-West, the videos are housed in the company's new "TRICARE 2 You Online Library" at www.triwest.com/T2U. The portal also includes eNewsletters and published articles that answer frequently asked questions about TRICARE topics, as well as links to related resources, enabling families throughout the west region to find answers to common healthcare questions anytime, from anywhere with an internet connection.

TriWest is also making the videos available upon request to military treatment facilities (MTFs) across the west region that are equipped with DVD capabilities so patients waiting for appointments or prescriptions may view TRICARE 2 You videos while they wait.

For more information about TRICARE benefits or TriWest Healthcare Alliance, visit www.triwest.com or call 1-888-TRIWEST (874-9378).

About TriWest

TriWest Healthcare Alliance partners with the Department of Defense to do "Whatever It Takes" to support the healthcare needs of 2.7 million members of America's military Family. A Phoenix-based corporation, TriWest provides access to cost-effective, high-quality health care in the 21-state TRICARE West Region. Visit www.triwest.com for more information.

The 81st BCT Ravens play their last show



(From left to right) Sgt. Derek Dixon, from HQ Co., 81st BCT, Capt. Buddy Francisco, the commander of HQ Co., Maj. Doug Lineberry, the 81st BCT JAG, and Col. Christopher Fowler, the 81st BCT DCO, play their last show on Camp Ramadi, Iraq, Apr. 3, 2009. The four-some came together shortly after their arrival at Camp Ramadi to form The Ravens. The band, who plays music ranging from the Beatles to Nickleback, played their first show on New Year's Eve to an eager crowd. They followed up their debut show with a road trip to Al Taqaddum, Iraq, in February, where they played for troops from 1-303rd Cav. and HQ's UAV platoon. After months of practice, The Ravens introduced some new songs they wrote themselves during their final show on Camp Ramadi. Dixon accepted an AGR job in Washington and is heading back to the U.S. early. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)



Members of HQ Co., 81st BCT enjoy the last Raven show on Camp Ramadi, Iraq, from the front row Apr. 3, 2009. Approximately 200 Soldiers, Marines and Sailors from across Camp Ramadi came out to enjoy the show. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)



Col. Daniel L. Tack, the commander of the 371st Sustainment Brigade awards the Purple Heart to Spc. Tisha Fravel of H Trp, 1-303rd Cav. as Lt. Col. Michael Weitzel, the commander of 1-303rd Cav., looks on Apr. 4, 2009 at Al Taqaddum, Iraq.



1-303RD CAVALRY LEADS THE WAY

SOLDIERS AWARDED CABS AND PURPLE HEART

Eleven Soldiers were honored for their actions in combat during a ceremony held at Al Taqaddum, Iraq, Apr. 4, 2009. Sgt. Thomas Hay of Seattle, Wash., with Hotel Troop, 1-303rd Cavalry Regiment, 81st Brigade Combat Team, Spc. Roberto Whyte from Seatac, Wash., with H Trp, 1-303rd Cav., Spc. Mitchell Oake from Kent, Wash., with C Trp, 1-303rd Cav., Spc. Jeffery Brown from Chehalis, Wash., with C Trp, 1-303rd Cav., Spc. Jonathan Olander from Southworth, Wash., with C Trp, 1-303rd Cav., Cpl. Bryan Plum from Mesquite, Nev., with H Trp, 1-303rd Cav., Spc. Zachary Swanlund from Puyallup, Wash., with H Trp, 1-303rd Cav., Spc. Joel Clements from Las Vegas, Nev., with 62nd Transportation Company (attached to 1-303rd Cav.), Spc. Dontavis Dancil from St. Petersburg, Fla., with 62nd Trans and Spc. Herbie Julian from Cookeville, Tenn., with 62nd Trans were all awarded the Combat Action Badge (CAB) for their actions during incidents occurring between November 2008 and February 2009.

Spc. Tisha Fravel from Bliss, Idaho, with H Trp, 1-303rd Cav. was awarded the CAB and the Purple Heart. (Photos by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)



Capt. Dickson French, the S-1 for 1-303rd Cav., bows his head in prayer during the ceremony.



Spc. Jonathan Olander, Spc. Jeffery Brown and Spc. Mitchell Oake receive applause from the rest of 1-303rd Cav. after being awarded CABS.



HIGHLANDER DOCS

1-161st Infantry (Combined Arms Battalion) Medics keep their skills sharp with real-world training from real world professionals

By Capt. Mike Vincent
1-161st Inf. (CAB)

The combat medic's job is no easy task. A medic in an infantry company is the first responder and the resident medical expert on the battlefield. The Highlander docs of 1-161st Infantry (Combined Arms Battalion), 81st Brigade Combat Team strive to exceed the expectation of being the resident medical experts. They keep their skills sharp with a biweekly training program conducted by the battalion aid station and taught by resident specialists and medical providers from the Joint Base Balad, Iraq, hospital. The goal of the training is to provide the required 72 hours of continuing medical education to maintain each medic's EMT certification and expand their knowledge of trauma and routine injury treatment procedures.

Spc. Phillip Parker of Billings, Mont., said: "The training we do here definitely deals with injuries we see on a daily basis both on JBB and out on the road. The instructors here are actually the people who are going to see our guys for treatment, so from this training, we know what to look for and what they [the medical providers] are looking for."



Air Force Capt. Daniel Watson, a physical therapist at the Air Force Theater Hospital on Joint Base Balad, Iraq, shows medics from 161st Inf. (CAB) how to properly apply an ankle brace on Spc. Adam Rieker from Yakima, Wash., during recent medical training. (Photo by Capt. Mike Vincent)

Capt. Daniel Watson, a recent instructor and Air Force physical therapist who sees patients on a daily basis, said: "We go through the basics of treatment, examine X-rays, conduct an analysis and discuss treatment procedures with the students here."


Spc. Ryan Kingsley, a medic with Charlie Company, 1-161st Inf. (CAB) stated: "It's awesome training and it was definitely way more than what I expected. The medic basic course teaches us mostly trauma. But the training here focuses on stuff you see everyday and the training takes us way beyond and more in depth than our normal practice."

"During the training, we also realized there was a lot more we can do at the company level, which

reduces the patient workload at the TMC and the hospital," he added.

2nd Lt. Aaron Isaac, the battalion physician's assistant, and Sgt. 1st Class Chad Bennett, the medical platoon sergeant, recruited medical experts, MDs, specialists and medical instructors from in and around JBB to assist in the training.

"In addition to the trauma experts and doctors, we have also had optometrists, physical therapists, surgeons to discuss Traumatic Brain Injury and psychologists to discuss things like sleep apnea and medications," Isaac said. "The great thing is we are on JBB and we have all the resources right here on post."

The training lasts approximately two hours twice a week with discussion, practical exercises and demonstrations of injury treatments. The 1-161st Inf. (CAB) medical staff takes great pride in this program and the company medics take the training seriously. They are all proud of the medical support they provide to the Highlander Soldiers on the roads of Iraq. 

The Army Family receives recognition

By Lt. Gen. James L. Campbell
Director of the Army Staff

The Acting Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff, Army have emphasized that Army Families are a key component of our readiness. Army Families shoulder a great burden of sacrifice, supporting their Soldier and often enduring long periods of separation from their loved ones. Top notch care and support of

Army Families demonstrate our sincere appreciation and gratitude for their many contributions, and allow our Soldiers to fully concentrate on the fight and focus on their duties. Effective immediately, the word "Families" will be capitalized in all Army correspondence. Please ensure wide dissemination of this change. Thanks for your continued efforts to do all you can to provide steadfast support to our Army Families.



Curb Alcohol Abuse with Help from TRICARE

By Kristen Ward

TriWest Healthcare Alliance

It only takes one.

A single drink can have multiple effects on an individual. Depending on the person, these could include difficulty walking, blurred vision, slurred speech, slowed reaction times or impaired memory.

Those are just a few of the short-term effects.

Heavy drinking over a long period of time can lead to anxiety, depression, blackouts or liver disease, not to mention the cumulative impact on spouses and children.

Despite these dangers, the Department of Defense (DoD) estimates that nearly a quarter of active duty servicemembers (ADSM) consider themselves regular heavy drinkers — defined as having five or more drinks at least once a week. This habit can also negatively affect military careers and relationships.

Fortunately, the DoD offers resources to encourage responsible drinking or eliminate drinking entirely as part of its TRICARE entitlement.

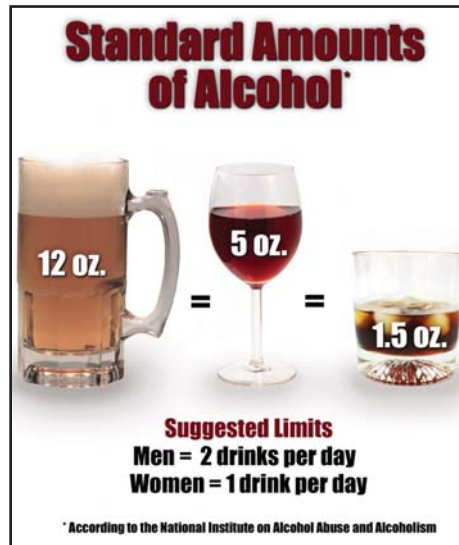
TRICARE Offers Behavioral Health Support

If there is a pattern of heavy drinking or changes in personality, help is available.

TRICARE covers certain treatments for abuse of alcohol and other substances. To use TRICARE benefits, ADSMs must get a referral through their primary care manager (PCM).

Active duty Family members may call 1-888-TRIWEST (874-9378) to see what services are available in their area.

Any applicable co-pays or deductibles and cost-shares (based on the sponsor's status and TRICARE program) will apply. Use network providers to save money. Specific coverage and limitations are found at



www.tricare.mil/mybenefit>Mental Health and Behavior>Types of Treatment>Treatment for Substance Use Disorders.

Steps to Curb Excessive Drinking

Drinking can have less of an impact if a person seeks help. For anyone trying to cut back on their drinking, there are several steps to take:

- **Write it down.** Keep track of how much alcohol is consumed on a calendar or in a journal. By taking note of each drink, a person becomes aware.
- **Know the numbers.** Be aware of standard drink sizes—12 ounces of regular beer, five ounces of wine, and 1.5 ounces of 80-proof spirits
- **Set limits.** Decide when and how much to drink. The National Institute for Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism recommends that

men limit themselves to a maximum of two drinks per day and women no more than one drink per day.

- **Use the buddy system.** Just like on the battlefield, ensure that a buddy is protected from danger. Confront that person if his or her drinking is spiraling out of control.

Resources Available

Other support groups and therapy treatments are also available. Check out these resources:

- www.aa.org: Find an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting near you.
- www.triwest.com: Visit TriWest's Behavioral Health portal under "Beneficiary Services" to watch streaming video of "Help From Home," which offers advice from behavioral health experts who are also combat veterans and military Families that have coped with effects of combat stress.
- www.thatguy.com: Learn about "That Guy" and the pitfalls of binge drinking through humor, testimonials and video.
- www.militaryonesource.com: Click on the "mind" tab on the left-hand menu, then click "alcohol" for many resources available to active duty Servicemembers and their Families.
- www.afterdeployment.org: Read and watch testimonials from other servicemembers describing how they overcame their post-deployment challenges.

Available Resources

- Alcoholics Anonymous www.aa.org
- TriWest Healthcare Alliance www.triwest.com
- That Guy www.thatguy.com
- Military OneSource www.militaryonesource.com
- After Deployment www.afterdeployment.org



Become an officer in the Washington Army National Guard



Officer Candidate School (OCS)



- OCS Minimum Entrance Requirements:
- 60 College Semester Hours (90 QTR) to start
- 90 College Semester Hours to graduate
- Minimum GT Score of 110
- Pass CH2 Commissioning Physical
- Pass 3 Event APFT (No Alternate Events)
- Commission age up to 41 years and 364 days
- Must be able to get Secret Security Clearance
- NO AGE WAIVERS AUTHORIZED for OCS

BENEFITS

- Accession Bonus – Up to \$10,000 (some exclusions)
- GI Bill Kicker Program
- Candidates in OCS promoted to E5 while attending the course



Warrant Officer Candidate School (WOCS)



- WOCS Minimum Entrance Requirements:
- E5 with PLDC or Warrior Leaders Course
- Minimum GT Score of 110
- Required college credit depends on Branch
- Pass CH2 Commissioning Physical
- Pass 3 Event APFT (No Alternate Events)
- Commission age up to 45 years and 364 days
- WOCS course starting in Redmond FEB 2010

Drill Pay Scale (over 4 yrs)

E4 – 283.68
E5 – 311.32
W1 – 414.44
W2 – 450.88
2LT – 445.40
1LT – 553.08

For more information on OCS or WOCS: <http://officer.washingtonarmyguard.org>

OFFICER: NGWAosm@ng.army.mil

WARRANT OFFICER: NGWAwoc@ng.army.mil

(253) 581-3030 Lakewood (South)

(425) 672-2230 Seattle (North)

(509) 342-4096 Spokane (Eastern WA)

1-185TH NCO EMBODIES SPIRIT THROUGH ART



Sgt. 1st Class Robert Tackett, medical platoon sergeant, 1-185th Armor (Combined Arms Battalion), stands next to the mural he painted on an old card table as a gift to his sensei (teacher), 8th Shodan Ryan Lowe, at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq, Mar. 29, 2009. The mural brings the spirit of this martial arts system to life. Tackett plans on sending this mural to his wife back in California, who will then present it to Sensei Lowe in person. (Photo by Capt. Renato Rossignoli)

By Sgt. Keith M. Anderson
16th SB Public Affairs

When Sgt. 1st Class Robert Tackett, medical platoon sergeant, 1-185th Armor (Combined Arms Battalion), isn't training his medics to save lives, he trains to inflict injury on his enemies, under a form of fighting he calls Bujinkan Ninjutsu.

But Tackett branched out to Ninjutsu artist this deployment, when he painted a mural on an old card table to present to his sensei (teacher), 8th Shodan Ryan Lowe.

"I recognized the potential immediately and began to turn this discarded table top into something much more," Tackett said. He said painting the table with elements of the fighting discipline were a way to relax during his down time in Iraq, and a way to remind himself of the important concepts of Bujinkan Ninjutsu.


"I think that it is very important for me to be reminded of these elements which represent more spiritual concepts such as Balance,

Adapting, Instincts, Tenacity and Perseverance," Tackett said.

It took Tackett more than a month to paint the four-foot mural of his martial arts system on the card table. It is a six-sided hexagon, with three layers of bright enamel white, two layers of bright blood-red and two traces of sharp midnight black as the main focus.

The mural brings the spirit of this martial arts system to life, he said.

"Well, as you can see, it is one big circle in the middle with six smaller circles surrounding it at the edges," Tackett said. "The large, center kanji translates to 'Bujikan Ninjutsu,' which is the name of my style of martial arts. The six smaller circles starting from the top and progressing in a clockwise manner translate to 'Earth,' 'Water,' 'Emptiness,' 'Scorpion,' 'Fire' and 'Air.'"

The Scorpion kanji represents his sensei. Tackett plans on sending this mural to his wife back in California, who will then present it to Sensei Lowe in person. 



THE RAVEN GALLERY



Spc. Alfonzo Rodriguez practices administering an IV on Cpl. Joshua Tarr during Combat Life-saver training with B Btry, 2-146th FA on COB Marez, Iraq, as Sgt. Damien Kirby enjoys the show. (Photo courtesy of B Btry, 2-146th FA)



Spc. David Olson with B Co., 1-185th Ar. (CAB) conducts maintenance on a vehicle on COB Speicher, Iraq, Mar 31, 2009. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)



Pvt. Joshua Garza of Renton, Wash., a Soldier with HQ Co., 81st BCT, checks his shot group during rifle range qualification on Camp Ramadi, Iraq, Mar. 21, 2009. (Photo by Sgt. Amanda Gauthier)



Lt. Col. Kenneth Garrison, the commander of the 81st BSTB, speaks to an Iraqi man as he is searched entering COB Q-West, Iraq, for a meeting Mar. 21, 2009. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kirsten Froelich)



Sgt. William Woodley of Romoland, Calif., a Soldier with D Co., 1-185th Ar. (CAB) drives his ASV on COB Speicher, Iraq, Mar. 31, 2009. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)



CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

By Lt. Col. Carl Steele
81st BCT Chaplain

As I write this, it is Good Friday. I hope that all of you were able to worship this week, whether it was a Good Friday service, Sunrise service, Sunday worship or Passover.

We are getting to the time in our deployment when our hearts and minds turn closer to home. Let me remind you to stay focused on the task you have. Remember that you still need to be in the Soldiering mindset until we are home. When we get home there are two things you can take advantage of, the Marriage Retreat and the Single Retreat.

The Marriage Retreat is a chance to get away with your spouse for a couple days in a nice setting. There is teaching on communication, problem solving, forgiveness and commitment. You will have plenty of time to relax and reconnect in a deeper way with your spouse. In the twenty plus that I have led since our last deployment, I cannot recall any one saying it was not worth the time. If you are fearful of going, ask someone who has been to tell you what it was like.

The Single's Retreats use a program called "How Not To Marry A Jerk." It goes over relationship issues that are good for dating as well as other areas of your life. How do you reconnect with friends and family?

Military One Source has increased the number of counseling visits from six to twelve. If you or your family needs to talk with someone now or once we are home, this is a great resource that you can use locally, militaryonesource.com.



Sexual Assault Response Coordinator

By Master Sgt. CathyJo Wings
81st BCT SARC

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. We are kicking off the Army's new sexual assault prevention campaign called "I .A.M. Strong." for Intervene, Act and Motivate.

INTERVENE:

When I recognize a threat to my fellow Soldier, I will have the personal courage to INTERVENE and prevent sexual assault. I will condemn acts of sexual harassment. I will not abide obscene gestures, language or behavior. I am a warrior and a member of a team. I will INTERVENE.

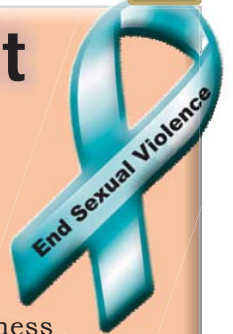
ACT:

You are my brother, my sister, my fellow Soldier. It is my duty to stand up for you, no matter the time or place. I will take ACTION. I will do what's right. I will prevent sexual harassment and assault. I will not tolerate sexually offensive behavior. I will ACT.

MOTIVATE:

We are American Soldiers, MOTIVATED to keep our fellow Soldiers safe. It is our mission to prevent sexual harassment and assault. We will denounce sexual misconduct. As Soldiers, we are all MOTIVATED to take action. We are strongest...together.

81st BCT SARC Master Sgt. CathyJo Wings
cathyjo.wings@ar.mnf-wiraq.usmc.mil
DSN 344-0932 VOIP 696-5171



Sexual Assault: It does happen

By Master Sgt. CathyJo Wings
81st BCT SARC

The following was taken from the Department of Defense FY08 Report on Sexual Assault in the Military:

Aggregate Report of Sexual Assault Incidents: In FY08 there were 2,908 reports of sexual assault involving Military Servicemembers:

- There were 2,265 Unrestricted Reports involving Military Servicemembers. 1,594 (70%) of these reports had Military Servicemembers

as victims. Some of these reports included more than one victim resulting in a total of 1,752 Servicemembers victims in the Unrestricted Reports received.

- Servicemember victims made 753 Restricted Reports of sexual assault. Fifteen percent (110) of victims that made Restricted Reports decided to change to an Unrestricted Report and participate in a criminal investigation. As a result of the change, 643 remained as Restricted Reports.

- The Military Services completed

a total of 2,389 criminal investigations on reports made during the prior to FY08, which involved 2,763 subjects.

The Department of Defense remains committed to eliminating sexual assault from the Armed Forces by sustaining a robust sexual assault prevention and response policy; identifying and eliminating barriers to reporting; ensuring care remains available and accessible; and by providing continuous, relevant, and effective training and education to all Servicemembers.



1st Lt. Anthony Marion, 181st BSB's IBIZ officer in charge, works in his office on COB Q-West, Iraq, Mar. 28, 2009. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)

Inspiring Iraqi businesses

By Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr
81st BCT Public Affairs

Within the Mayor's Cell on Contingency Operating Base Q-West, Iraq, the 46 Soldiers of 181st Brigade Support Battalion, 81st Brigade Combat Team do just about anything one could think of, from billeting and land management to military police services to morale, welfare and recreation. They are responsible for handling all contracts with KBR, screening and issuing badges to Iraqi citizens who work on the American base and developing and supporting the base infrastructure. They are a busy crew, working long hours to ensure Q-West runs smoothly and safely.

One two-man team within the Mayor's Cell, however, has the unique task of providing support, not for the base, but for the Iraqis.

1st Lt. Anthony Marion from Wilmington, Del., and Staff Sgt. Alvin Fernandez from Federal Way, Wash., run the Iraqi Based Industrial Zone, better known as IBIZ.

"We try to help the local Iraqi businesses by bringing them onto

the COB so they can establish businesses," said Marion, an 18-year veteran of both active duty Army and the Washington National Guard. "We try to mentor them on good business practices. Our key focus is to create more businesses and jobs for the Iraqis, not necessarily here on the COB, but something they can sustain after Coalition Forces are gone."

Through IBIZ, Marion and Fernandez have helped 13

Iraqi businesses flourish on COB Q-West, each business employing anywhere from four to 15 Iraqis. Some businesses, such as retail shops, have set up shop on the base itself, while others such as a gas station and asphalt plant have set up in an area of COB Q-West known as the Amber Zone, where local Iraqis can enter and utilize the services.

Marion walks potential business owners through the approval process and then he and Fernandez provide guidance on maintaining their businesses in order to prosper long after Coalition Forces leave Iraq.

"[We tell them], 'it's not neces-

sarily the right way, but this is how we run things in the States. This is how businesses prosper.' We just try to give them that mentorship, that training and those techniques," said Marion.

The position with IBIZ was not an area Marion, who is Quarter Master and works full time for the G-4 in Washington, was prepared for. He learned he and Fernandez would be running the section only about a week before arriving in Iraq.

"They said they chose us because we had the ability to deal with people in certain situations," he said, adding that much of the 181st Mayor's Cell staff kicks in to help the pair when needed.

The experience has been good, as he learned a new appreciation for the people of Iraq.

"It's totally different from last time I was here," said Marion, who deployed with the 951st Maintenance Company, 96th Troop Command in 2005. "Last time, my perspective of the Iraqis was – I'm just going to be honest – they were the bad guys. I looked at them all as being bad guys. Now I look at them and everybody's not bad. We're out here trying to help them and they're trying to help us."

"It's just two cultures working together, and there's a better relationship between the Iraqis and the Coalition Forces," he added.

DID YOU KNOW...


~ Astronaut Charles 'Pete' Conrad, Jr., the commander of Apollo XII, was the third man to walk on the moon. He started his military career as a private in the Pennsylvania National Guard.

~ The term 'National Guard' was first adopted by a New York militia unit in 1825 to honor the Marquis de Lafayette, hero of the American Revolution and former commander of the Garde Nationale de Paris during the French Revolution.



A Trp, 2-146th FA midnight riders called on to do the job

By 2nd Lt. Chad Crowley
2-146th FA

Running a shooting range is hard work and takes a lot of team effort. When Alpha Battery, 2-146th Field Artillery, 81st Brigade Combat Team needs the job done, 3rd Platoon is called on to do it right. The whole platoon was gainfully employed at the last range on COB Marez. "I don't know how Sgt. 1st Class Niles and his platoon got so good at running ranges," Sgt. 1st Class Liufau of 2nd Platoon was reported as saying. There are two types of ranges that 3rd Platoon Soldiers take part in. One type is an Escalation of Force (EOF) range, which practices the steps taken in order to protect the convoys that 3rd Platoon escorts on missions. At the EOF range, Soldiers fire M2 .50 caliber machine guns and the M240B 5.56mm machine guns. The Soldiers also rehearse the steps necessary to thwart any threats by showing force and presence on the road during convoys. The second type of range that the 3rd Platoon Soldiers take part in are the individual weapons qualification ranges, where the Soldiers shoot their M4 5.56mm rifles. In addition to the rifles the Soldiers routinely carry at all times, the Soldiers also get to test their skills with the M9 9mm handgun and the AK-47 7.62mm assault rifle. Each range conducted keeps the Soldier's battle drills well rehearsed, and most importantly saves lives. 



Spc. Christine Richards gets a helping hand while firing the AK-47 on COB Marez, Iraq. (Photo by 2nd Lt. Chad Crowley)



Sgt. Curtis Land shows how to "Git 'er Done" while firing on the range on COB Marez, Iraq. (Photo by 2nd Lt. Chad Crowley)




MILITARY ID = GET IN FREE

Budweiser is honored to salute the men and women of the armed forces and their families. Throughout 2009, members of the military and as many as three direct dependents may enter any one of Anheuser-Busch's SeaWorld, Busch Gardens or Sesame Place parks with a single-day complimentary admission.


Any active duty, activated or drilling reservist, or National Guardsman is entitled to free admission under the Here's to the Heroes program. Register, either by going to herosalute.com and submitting information or in the entrance plaza of participating parks, and show a Department of Defense photo ID.

As many as three direct dependents of military personnel also are entitled to free admission. Dependents may take advantage of the offer without their service-member, though an adult must accompany minor dependents, and dependent ages 10 and over must present valid dependent I.D. Not valid at Discovery Cove and Aquatica.

For more information, visit <http://www.herosalute.com/states/index.html> 



mmmmm.....cookies

Capt. Jackie Baird of the 81st Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 81st Brigade Combat Team makes friends with a local donkey on Contingency Operating Base Q-West, Iraq, with an oatmeal cookie, the furry guy's favorite treat, while Staff Sgt. James Brown and Staff Sgt. Christopher Herring look on. The donkey is one of four donkeys who used to wander onto Q-West for a visit with the troops. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Kirsten Froelich) 



181st BSB Provides Maintenance Support for Combat Operations

By Spc. Chelsea Mack
181st BSB

Bravo Company of the 181st Brigade Support Battalion, 81st Brigade Combat Team has transformed from a support company into a highly effective infantry element, performing combat operations in Iraq. This metamorphosis occurred within months. Comprised of mechanics, cooks, administrative personnel and medical personnel, B Co. is now providing convoy security for food, fuel and civilian trucks to and from Contingency Operating Base Adder.

The mission is tough and dangerous. Long hours on the road have proven menacing for B Co. Soldiers and equipment. Along with remaining vigilant during the mission, B Co. Soldiers have had to stay on top of vehicle maintenance. With more than 40 mission capable vehicles, B Co. maintenance section has had their work cut out for them. Performing annual services, as well as everyday maintenance, the mechanics have been working long hours to make sure that their equipment is mission capable.

"We're keeping busy. We work 12-hour shifts," said Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Bixer, the motor pool sergeant for the maintenance section. "CETS [Convoy Escort Teams] are always rolling out. When one CET rolls in from mission we try to correct all the faults on their 5988-E's [the Maintenance and Inspection Worksheet] just as another CET rolls out on mission."

Keeping up with daily maintenance is a tough task, especially since B Co. has four mission capable CETS.

To make things even harder for the maintenance team, the equipment they are operating isn't organic to their company. B Co. assumed control of all vehicles, equipment and maintenance assets from the unit they relieved when they arrived in COB Adder.

"The vehicles that we fell on when we arrived in country hadn't been maintained to standard," said Chief Warrant Officer Michael Davisson, a maintenance officer and platoon leader for B Co. "Performing proper annual services on all of our equipment has been one of our primary goals."

Annual services are performed every 12 months or 12,000 miles. They provide the mechanics with a good grasp on the current condition of their equipment.

"By focusing on the completion of annual services, it has enabled us to raise our maintenance ability and gives us a better understanding of how our equipment works," said Staff Sgt. Thomas Repass, the Shop Foreman for B Co.'s maintenance team.

With constant missions and overdue services, the mechanics of B Co. have managed to substantially raise the level of vehicle readiness.

"B Co. equipment averages 90 percent readiness rating," said Chief Warrant Officer Joey Litton, one of the maintenance

officers. The maintenance section can't take all the credit for making B Co. a success. Most of the Soldiers in the company have a strong maintenance background and assist whenever possible.

"One of our biggest strengths is that we have many mechanics in our company. We do a really great job of maintaining our equipment," said Sgt. Levi Bailey, a battle noncommissioned officer for Headquarters Platoon.

"Being in the National Guard has really been an asset," said Bixler. "Our Soldiers come from different MOS's and civilian jobs that cross-over and give them a lot of extra knowledge and expertise. It has been crucial to making our section's mission successful."

B Co.'s mission is far from complete. With many months of missions to come, the mechanics are committed to quality maintenance. They are constantly improving their techniques and keeping every vehicle as road worthy as possible.

"Our goal, as mechanics, is to keep our Soldiers safe when they roll out on mission. When we relinquish our vehicles to the unit that will be replacing us, we will know that the equipment is in the best possible condition," said Repass. "We want the Soldiers of our company to be proud of the work we have done."





Dealing with Post-Combat Issues

Mental health resources for servicemembers and families

By Shari Lopatin
TriWest Healthcare Alliance

Whether gone for two months or two years, returning from combat is grueling.

Servicemembers readjusting back into society need time to recover from the stress of a highly-charged war zone. Most adapt well after some time; however, if problems continue and interfere with daily activities, it's time to seek help from a healthcare professional.

If these individuals don't find help when they or a Family member suspect a problem, their symptoms may worsen, causing a spiral of reckless or self-destructive behavior, domestic problems, career challenges and even death.

TRICARE offers behavioral health benefits for eligible beneficiaries who need it.* Beneficiaries enrolled in TRICARE Prime may receive the first eight behavioral healthcare outpatient visits per fiscal year (Oct. 1 - Sept. 30) from a TRICARE network provider without prior authorization from their regional contractor.

Active duty servicemembers (ADSMs) should always seek care first at a military treatment facility (MTF), when available. ADSMs must have a referral from their primary care manager (PCM) and have prior authorization from their regional contractor before seeking behavioral healthcare services outside the MTF. ADSMs enrolled in TRICARE Prime Remote may call TriWest to help obtain authorization for civilian behavioral health care.

TriWest Healthcare Alliance offers a number of additional resources for servicemembers and Families throughout TRICARE's west region who are coping with depression, PTSD or other post-combat struggles:

"Help From Home" Video Series:

Available at no cost via streaming video or as a 2-DVD set on www.triwest.com, this series offers advice from behavioral health experts who are also combat veterans and military families that have coped with effects of PTSD.

Find it at www.triwest.com> beneficiary services>behavioral health>Help From Home.

Behavioral Health Portal at www.triwest.com:

Find articles and links to additional resources on a variety of topics spanning from children's behavioral issues to dealing with depression or suicide.

Find it at www.triwest.com>beneficiary>behavioral health

TriWest Crisis Line (1-888-284-3743): Accredited by the American Association of Suicidology and staffed with specially trained clinicians, this support line is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for anyone struggling with depression, PTSD or thoughts of suicide, including family members concerned about these signs in a loved one.

Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN) USA Brochure: What You Need to Know about Warning Signs and Getting Help: Information about the signs of depression or other concerns that may lead to suicide. Find it at www.triwest.com>beneficiary>handbooks and brochures/

Here are a few additional places to find help, separate from TriWest:

The National Resource Directory: Links to resources for recovering service members, veterans, their families and caregivers at www.nationalresourcesdirectory.org.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (273-8255).

*This is not a detailed list of benefits. For more comprehensive information about behavioral health support or benefits, visit www.triwest.com or call 1-888-TRIWEST (874-9378).



81ST BCT INSPECTOR GENERAL



By Sgt. 1st Class Paul Scott
81st BCT IG

It is everyone's right to contact an Inspector General. Some key things to keep in mind before contacting the IG are:

- What do you want the IG to do for you?
- Have you given your chain of command an opportunity to address the problem?
- Have you requested assistance from any other source or agency?
- Do you have supporting documentation?

Some issues are not IG appropriate, such as:

- Equal opportunity complaints. See your EO representative.
- Hazardous work conditions. Contact your local safety representative.
- Criminal allegations. Contact your chain of command, CID, NCIS or PMO

When in doubt, ask and we can work to get you to the appropriate person or agency to work your issue.

81st BCT IG:

Sgt. 1st Class Paul Scott
DSN: 318-344-0877

E-mail address:

paul.a.scott@us.army.mil
paul.scott@ar.mnf-wiraq.usmc.mil



THE RAVEN GALLERY



Spc. Matthew Coverdale of Yelm, Wash., from HHB, 2-146th FA, conducts maintenance on a vehicle at COB Q-West, Iraq, Mar. 27, 2009. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)



Sgt. Mark Camacho and Pfc. Thomas Lazama, both from 2nd platoon, B Co., 181st BSB, prepare for a mission at Camp Adder in Tallil, Iraq. (Photo courtesy of Sgt. Mark Camacho)



Sgt. Jerry Baily from Hughs Springs, Texas, a Soldier with B Btry, 2-146th FA, works on COB Marez, Iraq, Mar. 30, 2009. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)



Pfc. Brandon Templeton from A Co., 1-184th Inf. looks on as Spc. Daniel Krulee, also from A Co., maneuvers a remote control device during training on COB Q-West, Iraq, Mar. 27, 2009. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)



Sgt. William Surachi of Hesperia, Calif., a Soldier with D. Co., 1-185th CAB conducts vehicle maintenance on COB Speicher, Iraq, Mar. 31, 2009. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)



Staff Sgt. Paulo Burnside from Tacoma, Wash., of HQ Co., 81st BCT reviews a target with Sgt. Rhonda Buffington from Greenville, S.C., also with HQ, while at the range on Camp Ramadi, Iraq, Mar. 21, 2009. (Photo by Sgt. Amanda Gauthier)



Crazy Laws

❧ In all of Utah - Birds have the right of way on all highways.

❧ In Tennessee - It is illegal to use a lasso to catch a fish.

❧ In Oregon - A dead person cannot be required to serve on a jury.

❧ In Massachusetts, It is forbidden to put tomatoes in clam chowder.

❧ In Alabama it is illegal for a driver to be blindfolded while operating a vehicle

❧ In Brewerton, Alabama the use of motor boats are forbidden on city streets.

❧ In California a woman cannot drive a car while she is dressed in a house-coat.

❧ In Denver, Colorado it is unlawful to lend your vacuum cleaner to your next-door neighbor.

❧ In Devon, Connecticut it is unlawful to walk backwards after sunset.

❧ In Southbridge, Massachusetts, it is illegal to read books or newspapers after 8p.m. in the streets.

❧ In Florida Rats are forbidden from leaving the ships docked in Tampa Bay.

❧ In Illinois it is prohibited to drive a car without a steering wheel.

❧ In Seattle Washington, you may not carry a concealed weapon that is longer than six feet.

❧ In Oklahoma, Dogs need a mayor-signed permit to congregate in groups of three or more on private property.



Start saving for your retirement now

By Maj. Todd Bonham
HQ Co., 81st BCT

I've had servicemembers ask me about getting started with investing. In my civilian capacity as a financial advisor, I typically like to get people to identify why they are investing. Most of my clients point to retirement. Today, servicemen and women have a great opportunity to save for their retirement by participating in the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP).

The TSP is a federal government-sponsored retirement savings and investment plan. On Oct. 30, 2000, the Floyd D. Spence National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law 106-398) was signed into law. One provision of the law extended participation in the TSP to members of the uniformed services.

The TSP is a defined contribution plan. Very much like the civilian 401(k) retirement account. The retirement income you receive from your TSP account will depend on how much you have contributed to your account during your working years and the earnings on those contributions.

The TSP offers the same type of savings and tax benefits that many private corporations offer their employees under "401(k)" plans. TSP regulations are published in title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations,


Parts 1600 — 1690, and are periodically supplemented and amended in the Federal Register.

You may elect to contribute any percentage (1 to 100) of your basic pay. However, your annual dollar total cannot exceed the annual limit,

which is \$15,500 for 2008 and \$16,500 for 2009. If

you contribute to the TSP from your basic pay, you may also contribute from one to 100 percent of any incentive pay or special pay (including bonus pay) you receive, up to the limits established by the Internal Revenue Code.

Some of the benefits that the TSP offers includes tax-deferred investment earnings, low administrative and investment expenses, and the ability to transfer your TSP account to other eligible retirement plans such as traditional IRAs and eligible employer plans when you sever ties with the military.

Take a serious look at using the TSP to get started on your retirement plan. For servicemembers in their early 20s, just a little over the next 30-40 years can add up to a significant amount. For example, a \$500 contribution to start and monthly contributions of \$500 for 35 years can grow to a little more than \$120,000 if an investor achieves an investment return of 7%. Returns aren't guaranteed, but neither is the value of that new car we all like to have. 



HELP US MAKE THE DESERT RAVEN BETTER!

What is your unit doing? We want to know! Send your stories, story ideas and/or photographs to emily.suhr@ar.mnf-wiraq.usmc.mil or emily.suhr@us.army.mil by the 10th of each month.

Photographs need to be in a JPEG or TIFF format. Please include a Microsoft Word document identifying who is in the photo (Identification = full name, unit, duty position and hometown), what they are doing, when and where.

Don't forget to tell us who took the photos and/or who wrote the story!



Maj. Gen. Daniel Bolger, commanding general of 1st Cavalry Division and Multi-National Division – Baghdad, and Capt. John Wheeler, commander of C Trp, 1-303rd Cav., walk down an entry control point on Victory Base Complex Mar. 7, 2009. Wheeler, a two-time Purple Heart recipient from Plymouth, N.H., has led the Washington National Guard Soldiers through one change of mission while in Iraq and is preparing for a second. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Jason Kendrick)

Washington State Guardsmen adapt to change

*By Staff Sgt. Jason Kendrick
56th IBCT Public Affairs*

Comanche Soldiers of Charlie Troop, 1-303rd Cavalry Regiment, 81st Brigade Combat Team have been serving in Iraq since November 2008. Starting out in Multi-National Force – West, they now find themselves in Multi-National Division – Baghdad, attached to 1-124th Cav., 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 36th Infantry Division of the Texas National Guard.

When they started out, they were securing convoys from Al Taqaddum, now they find themselves securing Victory Base Complex's entry control points and towers on Camp Liberty, Baghdad. While this mission is vastly different from the one that they trained for and initially executed upon arrival in Iraq, they know the importance of their success in this duty.

"50,000 people get to wear a soft

cap because of the work we do on the ECPs and towers," said 1st Lt. Stephen Silber, a platoon leader from Seattle, Wash.

Even though the troopers have processed more than 5,000 vehicles and 40,000 personnel through the ECPs on Camp Liberty since the turn of this year, it has had fewer moving parts than their previous mission set, allowing for these Soldiers to possibly lose some of their focus. This has been combated by the command team of C Trp.


"The biggest thing we battle now is complacency," explained Capt. John Wheeler, a troop commander from Plymouth, N.H. "We are executing a lot of small arms ranges to keep them focused."

When the Troop changed their mission from one of convoy security to force protection, the first challenge was figuring out how to replace a unit twice the size of their own. It would

be up to the noncommissioned officer corps to keep missions going.

"We came in and immediately knew that we had to do more with less. The unit we replaced had 15 Soldiers working in their command post; I have only 6," explained 1st Sgt. Kevin Brooker, the C Trp. first sergeant.

Now, the Comanche Troopers are faced with another change of mission. They will be heading back to MNF-W to execute their original mission of convoy security. Although, they only performed this task for a short period of time in November and December, they escorted more than 50 million pounds of freight and were contacted by the enemy 14 times. To prepare, these Soldiers are not only providing force protection, they are training in anticipation of once again escorting convoys.

"We're now focusing on conducting drivers training on the MRAPs and other convoy operations," Wheeler said. 



1st Lt. Stephen Silber (right), a platoon leader serving with C Trp, 1-303rd Cav., briefs Maj. Gen. Daniel Bolger, commanding general of 1st Cav. Div. and MND-B, over a terrain model of an entry control point on Victory Base Complex Mar. 7, 2009. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Jason Kendrick)



HEALTH CORNER

By Lt. Col. Stephen Anderson
81st BCT Surgeon Cell

The Art of Sleep

About half of all Americans don't get enough sleep. In our busy life, we often trade sleep time for other activities, work, TV, video games, etc. The benefits of getting adequate sleep far outweigh the extra hour or two squeezed out of our day. The hormones that regulate your appetite, blood sugar and mood function much better when you are not sleep deprived. Try some of these simple steps to improve your quality of sleep.

Take time to relax

- It is important to take the time to wind down and relax before trying to sleep.
- Relaxing signals your body that it is time to slow down and rest.
- Establish a relaxing night time ritual, such as soothing music, reading or meditation.
- Avoid stimulating activities such as internet surfing, TV or phone calls.

Darker is better

- Your body regulates your sleep cycle in response to the presence or absence of light.
- Try dimming the lights as evening progresses.
- When it is time to sleep, try to make the room as dark as possible.
- Light can suppress the production of melatonin, a hormone that helps regulate sleep.


Put your thoughts to bed

- We all need time to think about and process our day, however the bed is not the place to do it.
- If you have problems "turning off your thoughts" at bedtime, try taking 10-15 minutes a couple of hours before bedtime to record your thoughts in a notebook or journal.
- Sorting out your thoughts for the day and recording them can help keep you organized and also keep you from lying awake at night thinking about your day.

No sugar or caffeine before bed

- Do not use any stimulants before bed. They cause your adrenal glands to produce cortisol, which wakes you up.
- If you need a snack before bed, make it protein. Try turkey or cheese.

Try to get more sleep

- Try an experiment. Get an extra hour or two of sleep every night for a week and see how you feel.
- Chances are you will notice a big improvement. 

Stayrook Continued from page 7


the big picture and the benefits of good relations with the United States."

Stayrook still sees many challenges ahead for the Iraqi government and the Iraqi people.

"Since the Status of Forces Agreement, it seems there hasn't been an increase in violence. Where the Iraqi Army and police have taken over, it seems attacks are down and things are running smoothly," he said. "The challenges are not so much for the Iraqi Army or the police, the real challenge is going to be for the Iraqi government. If they can put their differences aside and work for the good of the country and not for their individual interests, I think in time it will all work out."

Describing what changed with him and his Soldiers since 2004, Stayrook said: "Morale is a lot better and the attitudes of the Soldiers are a lot better too. In 2004, we were mortared every day and 300 of us lived in a huge warehouse. Today, attacks are way down and the living conditions are a lot better."

"I recall a day at PB Love utilizing the range for crew-serve and small-arms training. There were several Iraqi Soldiers there who shared several stories with us of their missions and also let us shoot their AK-47's," Stayrook continued. "I was glad to see that they were much more disciplined and knowledgeable than Soldiers I had encountered in 2004-2005. Although they liked working with the Americans they felt that they were prepared to shoulder responsibility for Iraqi's security. I can tell you I agree with them, but time will tell."

Stayrook is now halfway through his second tour and most likely, his last here in Iraq. He looks forward to returning home to his wife, Amy, and their four children. The first thing he'll do when he gets home, Stayrook said: "I'm going to Disneyland!" 



WASHINGTON ARMY NATIONAL GUARD SHINES ON MARINE BASE CAMP RAMADI

Headquarters Company, 81st Brigade Combat Team has the unique mission of providing base sustainment operations for a Marine Base in Iraq. Sgt. Karen Greene shares what the experience had meant to her

*By Sgt. Karen Greene
HQ Co., 81st BCT*

When I first arrived on Camp Ramadi, it was raining, cold, muddy and late. Our flights had been detoured and delayed a couple of times and, needless to say, we were ready to just collapse. I had heard some things about Camp Ramadi; some not so good. But all in all, I was ready for anything.

After settling in, I walked around the camp with eyes wide open and my heart breaking just a bit. Within three days, as I was escorted by our predecessors during the RIP, I saw buildings in dire need of repair. I saw living conditions that were deplorable. I saw frustration, exhaustion, and a lack of interest (or energy) by our predecessors to continue to care about any of these conditions. I continued to walk around in the ankle deep mud, taking in all the different sights at Camp Ramadi, and all I could think was, "Wow, we really have a lot to do!"

And so we did! From the moment I first started working within the Mayor Cell, I was energized to see such motivation, such incentive and such great enthusiasm among the Soldiers of our Brigade. Within the Mayor Cell, as well as all the sections in HQ Co., every Soldier was doing their part in coordinating a better approach, tactic or manner. It was like everyone was bustling to do their best to learn the ways, improve the ways, and generate new ways in which to make this camp a better place to live, visit or just stop in to get some peace. From communications to professional relationships, from dropping more gravel to ensuring safety, from lining up our assets to sharing those assets with those who need them, from increasing security to heightening economic awareness as it concerns every individual on the

camp. Everyone (units, tenants and contractors) were doing a remarkable job and this gave me a sense of pride. I was, and currently am, grateful to be a part of this Brigade.

As time went on, I found myself in a position to hear many comments from other units, and tenants on the camp. While sitting at the Green Beans area, one Marine noticed the patch on my shoulder and questioned if we were the Guard unit from Washington State. I replied: "Why yes, we are." The Marine said that he had been here on Camp Ramadi for some time and was a bit disappointed to be leaving now because "finally, things are getting better around here." I didn't really know what he meant and asked him to elaborate. He explained that, since our Brigade's arrival, everything's changed for the better. He stated: "You guys are really kicking ass." I was beaming with pride. Even at the Camp Ramadi Tenants' Meetings we heard laudatory comments regarding the efforts, collaborations and positive changes around Camp Ramadi.

When I walk around Camp Ramadi



A Marine walks across a makeshift bridge shortly after the 81st BCT's arrival on Camp Ramadi. A paved road now stands in its place thanks to the efforts of HQ Co. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)



HQ Co., 81st BCT Soldier Sgt. Karen Greene of Renton, Wash., stands guard on Camp Ramadi, Iraq. (Photo by Sgt. Donald Zeitler)

today, I can remember what it was like before and compare it to now. The changes that have taken place are abundant. I would like to share some of those things with you so that you too can feel the same sense of pride, gratification and overall accomplishments that you all have made possible.

Some of our Brigade's accomplishments on Camp Ramadi are: publicizing additional SPAWARs, an Education/Testing Center, various new Bazaars, a new Post Office, more picnic tables at Green Beans Plaza, paving the 5th Ave/Ramadi Trail, MWR gym improvements, MWR events with improved publication of those events, safer billeting and office spaces including several LSA's that emphasized an increase in the standard of living for all Soldiers and Marines, additional transient billeting, an additional athletic field, additional opportunities for organized sports, extended hours for the Camp Ramadi bus service, additional bus stops, significantly improved badge procedures, increased force protection, changes in the DFAC, and in fact we are the envy of Al Asad! Our DFAC has milkshakes!

In closing, I would like to express to everyone in the 81st BCT how thankful, proud and privileged we all should feel to know that we have accomplished much, and that what we continue to do, is making a real difference to many lives. Great Job 81st Brigade!



Scouts Out : The Eyes and Ears of 1-161st Infantry

By Capt. Mike Vincent
& Sgt. David Isaac
1-161st Inf. (CAB)

The scouts of 1-161st Infantry (Combined Arms Battalion), 81st Brigade Combat Team lead escort missions throughout Iraq. Their job is to guide the logistical convoy to its destination, clear or notify civilian traffic of the oncoming convoy and scan for potential Improvised Explosive Devices. They are the eyes and ears of the convoy commander.

A scout Soldier normally receives formal scout training at Ft Knox, Ky., and is then assigned to a cavalry squadron. However, due to the rapidly changing nature of the conditions on the ground, it has become necessary to assemble Soldiers from other units into scout teams to assist in convoy operations. The Soldiers selected for convoy scout operations are normally the most experienced, combat-tested Soldiers with prior knowledge of routes from previous Iraq combat tours.

"This is the best job in the world!" said Spc. Kevin Mireles of Kent, Wash. "If you can't be kicking in doors and going after the enemy, be a scout gunner."



Spc. Angel Bravo and Spc. Kevin Phillips, scouts with 1-161st Inf. (CAB), conduct their pre-combat checks as they aim their spot lights in preparation for their mission to Seitz. (Photo by Capt. Mike Vincent)

a 22-year-old construction worker from Kennewick, Wash., and a gunner with Delta Company, 1-161st Inf. (CAB). "An experience like this is something you will never forget. I want to look back at my life when I'm 80 and say that what I did here was something in my life that was worth a damn. Besides, I could never drive in downtown Kennewick in an MRAP with a .50 cal."

On his third tour in Iraq, Mireles' witnessed the evolution of the war first hand. "It gives me a good feeling that the United States didn't back down and kept our commitment to the Iraqi people to give them a better life," he said.

"Whenever we see the Iraqis in need, we throw out water or care package stuff we don't need to them," he added. "I think it shows Soldier goodwill and that we actually care about them. Every time I return to Iraq, I see that life is just a little better each time. It makes me appreciate what I have back in the states and makes me feel like I made a difference in someone's life."

"I joined the Guard to serve my country, get use of some of the benefits the Guard offered and to get a different perspective on life and a taste of something new," said Spc. Kevin Phillips,

A BTRY, 2-146TH MAKES ITS MARK

Spc. Brandon Phaysith of Alpha Battery, 2-146th Field Artillery, 81st Brigade Combat Team came up with a logo for the front door of the A Btry Tactical Operations Center on Contingency Operating Base Marez in Mosul, Iraq. Yes, that is an Anvil on a stick! You can laugh, but you don't want to get in their way. Phaysith also painted the company commander's door.

(Photos by 1st Lt. Matthew Baldwin)





In honor of April Fool's Day, the 81st shows they have a sense of humor...



Lt. Col. Kevin McMahan, the 81st BCT S-3, was greeted with a wall of water bottles blocking his doorway when he came into work March 23, 2009. (Photo by Maj. Paul Fison)

Maj. Doug Lineberry, the Judge Advocate General for the 81st BCT, was met by a sea of neon post-it notes covering his office when he returned from leave March 16, 2009, courtesy of his staff. (Photo by Sgt. Amanda Gauthier)



Spec. Sondra C. Orchard of Hayward Calif., a supply clerks for B Co., 184th Inf., takes a ride on a rocket mounted outside HHB, 2-146th's offices in Q-West (Photo by Staff Sgt. Anthony Priestley)

What is the best practical joke you have ever played or seen?



Staff Sgt. Francisco Velez from Port Orchard, Wash., HQ Co., 81st BCT, stationed at Camp Ramadi, Iraq

"When I was an MP, my wife had just bought a new car and didn't have insurance paperwork for it, so I told the Marines at the gate to mess with her. They went out, they pulled her out of the car and said 'you need to go in there and see our supervisor.' So she came in and starts explaining before she even realizes who it is, I've got my hat down and am at the desk sergeant's seat... She's freaking out and I tipped up the hat, and in front of all those Marines she decked me, flat out right across my chin."



1st Lt. Robert Newton from Port Angeles, Wash., 2-146th FA, stationed at COB Marez, Iraq

"My brother-in-law and my sister have these chickens... and my sister has a friend who has geese and she got one of the eggs from the geese and brought it home with her... and she thought it would be funny, so she took the goose egg and put it underneath the chicken. My brother-in-law goes out to check the eggs in the morning and he comes running in the house with this big goose egg. He's like: 'Oh my God, look at the size of this egg,' thinking this little chicken had laid it. My sister let it go on for a couple days before [she told him]."



1st Lt. Mark Smith from Sacramento, Calif., 1-185th CAB, stationed at COB Speicher, Iraq

"We told Lt. Rito Guerra... that we'd been extended for six months and he's a little upset about it."





SEATTLE MARINERS SALUTE TO ARMED FORCES NIGHT

Headquarters 81st Brigade Combat Team Ramadi, Iraq



Saturday Apr. 18, 2009 at 6:10 p.m.

Detroit Tigers Vs. Seattle Mariners

Join the Mariners for a special pre-game program honoring the United States Armed Forces, service veterans & support organizations. Festivities will begin at 5:30.

SPECIAL TICKET PRICES

Discount tickets available for all military service personnel, their families and friends.

- View Reserved Seats reduced to \$10 (regular price: \$20)
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Fans in attendance will receive a special commemorative military coin courtesy of the Mariners & Boeing at the conclusion of the game. (limit 20,000)

During the 2009 season, present your Military ID on Tuesday home game dates and receive 20% off regular price merchandise at all Mariners Team Store Locations. Restrictions may apply.

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IDENTIFY WHO IS IN THE PHOTO, WHO TOOK THE
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(IDENTIFICATION = FULL NAME, RANK, UNIT, DUTY
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