

The North Star

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Unconventional board gets explosive

By Sgt. Johnathon Jobson
TF Marne PAO

Army boards are generally pretty straight forward. The Soldiers report to the president of the board and proceed to answer a series of questions presented by the board members on a multitude of Soldier skills and military topics.

Soldiers and noncommissioned officers who were competing for the 317th Military Police Battalion's Soldier and NCO of the Quarter board, Dec. 28, at Contingency Operating Base Speicher were treated to a new type of board.

Rather than just having to memorize information and recite it to the board members, Soldiers were re-

quired to do physical tasks also. Their tasks included vehicle maintenance, weapons functions, communicating via military equipment and then there was a secret task. They had to react to contact with an improvised explosive device within a convoy.

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209th Aviation Support Battalion protects, serves



Photo by
Staff Sgt. Mike Alberts,
25CAB, 25th Inf. Div.
PAO

Sergeant Faa-moaga Time, a QRF Soldier assigned to Co. A, 209th ASB, 25CAB, TF Lobos, attracts attention from local Iraqi children during a foot patrol at Al Khanik, a small village just outside of Tikrit, Iraq, Dec. 20.

By Staff Sgt. Mike Alberts
25CAB, 25th Inf. Div. PAO

Soldiers of the 209th Aviation Support Battalion, Task Force Wing's Quick Reaction Force, protect Soldiers and civilians on Contingency Operating Base Speicher as part of base defense operations ... but that's only part of their story.

The QRF Soldiers also assist Task Force Marne's civil affairs teams with humanitarian-supply drops to local Iraqi residents.

It's a unique mission matched by the unusual variety of Soldiers tasked to accomplish it. None of the QRF Soldiers are infantrymen or civil affairs specialists.

In fact, almost every Soldier is trained in a different military occupational specialty; among the unit, 13 different jobs are represented.

Captain Martin DeBock, commander, Company A, 209th ASB, also known as the Task Force Lobos, anticipated the challenges his QRF would face prior to deployment given their

array of skill sets.

"We knew that our QRF would not be strictly a base security element but would do missions outside the wire," Capt. DeBock said. "For that reason, we ensured that all the Soldiers selected for the team received additional field training before we deployed."

Some of that training included advanced rifle marksmanship ranges, combat life-saver qualification, convoy live-fire, and other training for basic, intermediate and advanced Soldier skills.

"Separate from the QRF function, 3rd ID identifies specific missions that typically fall in the area of community improvement projects," Capt. DeBock said. "Quite a bit of investment is going into the local communities for schools and different businesses. QRF transports personnel to check on the status of those various projects."

Currently, QRF Soldiers are assisting TF Marne in their evaluation of construction progress at two primary schools, replacing two smaller inade-

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"Traditionally, Soldier and NCO of the Quarter boards are just an appearance board where the Soldier's required to remember a series of facts and articulate those to a panel," explained Command Sgt. Maj. Gregory Dorsey, command sergeant major of the 317th MP Bn. "I believe that it's a better measure of success when a Soldier is tasked not only to talk those actions, but walk those actions. Therefore in the 317th MP Bn. we have physical or performance based events as well."

In order to successfully complete the secret task Soldiers had to correctly react to an IED attack on a convoy in which they were a vehicle commander.

To properly simulate this activity Command Sgt. Maj. Dorsey requested help from the Task Force Troy counter-IED team also stationed at COB Speicher.

Task Force Troy also conducts in-country counter-IED training for U. S. Forces, Iraqi Army Soldiers and Iraqi Policemen.

The team from TF Troy setup a convoy scenario in

which they had placed small explosive charges along a road running through their explosive ordnance disposal range that were randomly detonated as the convoy passed to simulate an IED attack.

Each Soldier's convoy was subjected to one explosion, after which the Soldier had to go through all of the correct steps in reacting to an IED

attack and was graded by a member of the TF Troy team.

"We are here testing their soldiering skills and their knowledge based on all the training that they have gone through," said EOD Chief Petty Officer Ryan Burton, the lead chief petty officer for EOD teams at COB Speicher. "It's also a way for us to have some fun."



Photo by Sgt. Johnathon Jobson, TF Marne PAO

A convoy passes a mock IED explosion during the 317th MP Bn.'s Soldier and NCO of the Quarter board. In addition to the standard appearance board, the Soldiers were also judge on hands-on activities like reacting to an IED. EOD technicians from Task Force Troy, the counter-IED task force in Iraq, assisted the 317th to create a realistic IED-attack lane.

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quate buildings in both Al Khanik and Albu Hamad, towns just outside COB Speicher.

Additional projects include physical infrastructure improvements for several small businesses and a perimeter fence in the town of Al Sequor.

First Lieutenant Eric Baca, a native of Houston, Texas, is Capt. DeBock's QRF platoon leader.

He elaborated on the unit's dual function as both a ground maneuver element and a QRF.

"We're divided operationally in two areas," 1st Lt. Baca said. "In the QRF area, we investigate incidences like indirect fire that may occur on the [base], conduct perimeter security and respond to [certain] incidences off the COB," he explained. "But, we're also a maneuver element. We participate

in key leader engagements, meet local leaders and listen to their needs, and [facilitate] help for the local population around COB Speicher."

Like most of his Soldiers, it's this latter element of their job that 1st Lt. Baca enjoys most.

"I really enjoy interacting with the Iraqi people," he said. "It's a humbling experience. They really don't have much, and they really don't ask for much more than the basic necessities, like food, clean water, electricity and security for their families. It's wonderful making a positive impact in their lives."

Sergeant Francis Diaz, light-vehicle mechanic and assistant patrol leader, and Staff Sgt. Juan Vizcarra, heavy-vehicle mechanic and assistant platoon sergeant, are two of 1st Lt. Baca's

senior leaders.

Both shared Baca's opinion about the opportunity to interact with local Iraqi citizens.

"I really feel like I personally am making an impact on the lives of the local populace," said Sgt. Diaz, a native of New York City, N.Y., and eight-year Army veteran. "We've established a mutual respect, something that I didn't expect would happen. They understand that we want to help them, and we understand that we're here to help."

"This is really different from my last deployment," Staff. Sgt. Vizcarra added. "Getting to use my basic Soldier skills and interact with the local populace is rewarding. The people still need [and ask for our] help and are grateful to us. I love helping people."

Brother makes re-up special

By **Spc. Michael Adams**
TF Marne PAO

When Vernadette Johnson, of Hartsville, S.C., was in high school, she looked up to her brother, Ervin who was a field artilleryman in the Army.

She wanted to follow in her brother's footsteps and joined as well. Her brother went to the Reserve Officer Training Corps at South Carolina State University and became an officer.

Vernadette, now a specialist and a petroleum supply specialist with 2nd Squadron, 6th Cavalry Regiment, 25th Combat Aviation Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, decided to re-enlist. She had her older brother, now Capt. Ervin Johnson, an Electronic Warfare officer with Task Force Marne, who she always looked up to growing up, swear her in at a ceremony held at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Dec. 26.

"I chose to re-enlist because I love to serve my country," she said. "I love to

travel and, I have met a lot of different people in the Army."

While the reenlistment was good for the military, it also made Spc. Johnson happy that this reenlistment was kept in family.

"It was amazing to have my brother re-enlist me," she added. "He is my role model. I grew up with him. He is also my best friend. To re-enlist in combat and to have my brother here with me is wonderful and a blessing. I was lost for words after the ceremony."

While Spc. Johnson was very happy with the ceremony, her brother felt it

was a privilege to administer the oath.

"It was an honor," he said. "I know a lot of people that have VIPs re-enlist them, General Casey re-enlisted some Soldiers when he visited here, but she had me, her brother, do it."

Specialist Johnson joined the Army, in part, because she looked up to her brother.

The two were very close growing up because their two older siblings had already left the house when they were coming of age.

While the two were close growing up, Capt. Johnson said he did not

make the decision for her, she always was able to decide things on her own.

"She made the decision herself," he said. "It shows that she's committed to helping fight the war on terrorism and it's an honor for anyone to serve." Specialist Johnson has a number of plans while in the Army.

She re-enlisted to be stationed at Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah. She plans to make the Army a career and be a drill sergeant as well as an officer during her career.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Alberts, 25CAB, 25th Inf. Div. PAO
 Specialist Vernadette Johnson, a petroleum supply specialist with 2nd Sqdn., 6th Cav. Regt., 25th CAB, 25th Inf. Div., re-enlists, while her brother, Capt. Ervin Johnson, an electronic warfare officer with TF Marne, administers the oath, Dec. 26 at COB Speicher.

Qualitative Management Program returns to Army

Special to the North Star

The Qualitative Management Program will be reinstated in 2010 after being discontinued since 2002. The program is being reinstated to "ensure senior noncommissioned officers serve in a manner consistent with good order and discipline, and that those serving in positions of authority perform in an exemplary manner," stated in a July 23 letter from Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs Thomas R. Lamont.

Senior NCOs with 20-30 years of active, Reserve and National Guard may

be denied continued service under the QMP if Human Resource Center receives any of the following documents pertaining to the Soldier since the date of his or her last promotion: a general officer letter or memorandum of reprimand; a conviction by court martial or punishment under Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice; a relief for cause NCO Evaluation Report; an NCOER with a rating by the senior rater of fair or poor in the overall performance or potential blocks; an academic evaluation report indicating the Soldier has failed an

NCO Education System course.

Only command sergeants major and sergeants major with 30 or more years active service and senior NCOs with approved retirements will be exempt from QMP consideration.

Soldiers who will be affected by the fiscal year 2010 QMP board, which will convene Feb. 2, have been notified by mail. They have until Jan. 26 to submit mitigating matters to the president of the board, or submit a request for voluntary retirement. The retirement request must be submitted by Jan. 10. All will be honorably discharged.

Task Force Marne Heroes of the North



Sergeant Wendy Groves, of Mount Lake Park, Md., is with the 115th Engineer Company, 779th Engineer Battalion, 130th Engineer Brigade. She is the senior medic for the unit. While providing medical support on a mission at Samarra, Sgt. Groves attended to the health-care needs of more than 40 Iraqis, including interpreters, Iraqi Police and council members. She treated everything from cuts to ear infections. Her caring attitude and professionalism positively affected the hearts and minds of those she provided care for and contributed greatly to positive relations between the Iraqi Police and the U.S. Army. Sergeant Groves is an outstanding Soldier who continually puts the welfare of her Soldiers above her own. She truly exemplifies the 779th motto, 'do right, fear nothing.' It is because of her willingness to serve others that Sgt. Groves is today's Task Force Marne Hero of the North.



Corporal Daniel Stakley, of Athens, Ga., is with 4th Platoon, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division. His knowledge, dedication and commitment to excellence has provided the Soldiers of the unit with the highest quality weapons maintenance with all crew served weapons being operational despite a grueling patrol schedule. He has also turned in more than 14 line item numbers of theater property equipment and maintained 100 percent accountability of all sensitive items for the entire task force. In addition to his duties as an armorer, Cpl. Stakley has also served as a team leader for the battery post security detachment, successfully leading his team in all missions and ensuring that his Soldiers remain properly trained and proficient on all warrior tasks and drills. Through challenging times and conditions where we demand more out of our junior noncommissioned officers than ever before, his dedication to success has made him the epitome of the NCO. Corporal Stakley's commitment to the mission and his unit are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Army and set a sterling example for today's NCO corps.

Weird inventions of 2009



Above: Sleeping Bear: What better way to discourage bear attacks when camping in the woods than to make them think you've already been eaten by another bear. Artist Elko Ishizawa has created this sleeping bag for a warm and safe night's sleep.

Top right: Fish Hotel: The first fish hotel has opened in Amsterdam. The hotel allows you to drop off your fish when you go on holiday and has a 'tennis court' and 'swimming pool.'

Right: Clawz: Meet the real-life Edward Scissorhands. Valentino LoSauro cuts the hair of Shannan Stewart with his revolutionary Clawz, which he claims cut hair twice as fast as normal shears, in Fort Myers, Fla., USA. He spent two years developing his invention.



Task Force Marne Celebrates New Year, Iraq-style

Special to the North Star

Task Force Marne Soldiers ushered in the New Year with a unique flair of rock music, non-alcoholic champagne, a blimp, and 500 pounds of explosives.

Eight hours before the crystal ball dropped in Times Square Marne Soldiers were watching their replica of a time ball slowly float upward, as they counted down into the new year.

The base's Aerostat reached its apex at the stroke of midnight, and revealed the familiar blue and white 3rd Infantry Division flag suspended underneath. At that very moment, 500 pounds of explosives were detonated by

the base Explosives Ordnance Detachment, and Soldiers rang in their New Year in Iraq singing Auld Lang Syne.

"This is better than Time Square. I know I've been there," said Maj. Gen. Tony Cucolo, the TF Marne commander.

The countdown and explosive fireworks kicked the celebration into full throttle, but the party started two hours prior with rocking tunes from the Task Force Marne Band's rock-n-roll ensemble "Sasquatch". The band entertained the crowd throughout the evening. "The rock band loves to play every chance they get," said Chief Warrant Officer Two Jonathan Ward, 3rd Inf. Div. band director, "It



wasn't hard to get them to stay up extra late so they could entertain the crowd."

The night was full of excitement and as the band played outside the headquarters building, Staff Sgt. Alexis Holbert, raised her right hand and renewed her commitment to the Army by re-enlisting just before the midnight countdown. She is the last of many Task Force Marne Soldiers to re-enlist in 2009.



Photo by Sgt. Joseph McAtee, TF Marne PAO

TF Marne Band's rock-n-roll ensemble "Sasquatch" entertained Soldiers and civilians during the New Year's Eve celebration on COB Speicher.



Task Force Marne Commander Maj. Gen. Tony Cucolo gives the crowd insightful information about Staff Sgt. Holbert during her re-enlistment ceremony on New Years Eve.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Shonn Loftin

THE North Star

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2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team,
3rd Infantry Division

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