

The Marne Express

"Mission, Soldiers, Teamwork"

Volume 2, Issue 22

Serving the Soldiers of Task Force Baghdad

December 18, 2005

In this week's edition of *The Marne Express*



Martial arts
page 8



Election
pages 10 & 11



Supply patrol
page 15

Iraqis cast votes to decide future

Spc. Dan Balda
4th BCT PAO

BAGHDAD – The day appeared downright festive. It seemed that every single Iraqi citizen on the streets of Baghdad was happy and smiling – happy for a new start and the chance to cast their vote for a stable government which hopefully will put an end to the bloodshed.

The Iraqi Parliamentary Elections Dec. 15 gave Iraqis the chance to showcase their national pride and the hope they have for their future.

"Nationalism is defined by the actions of the people," said Maj. Ross Coffman, 4th Brigade Combat Team executive officer. "It only takes a moment to see their faces as they vote, to see their pride, not only because they are voting, but because they are part of something bigger. That is promising. Not only for the efforts we've made, but also for the future of the country."

The future seems to be the center of Coffman's focus and for good reason.

Their votes have been cast, the polls are closed, so the next logical step

See ELECTION, page 10



Spc. Kelly K. McDowell

Iraqi Police secure the gates while local residents crowd around the complex waiting for a chance to work at the polling sites. Workers, ballots and other supplies for the national election were gathered and prepared for an escorted convoy to each polling center Dec. 14.



Staff Sgt. Kevin Bromley

Throngs of IA Soldiers head to the polls in Taji on the morning of Dec. 12. Elements of the 9th IA Division patrol the Taji area north of Baghdad with U.S. Soldiers from 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division.



Pfc. William Servinski II

An Iraqi citizen receives his ballot to vote at a downtown Baghdad polling site during the Iraqi Parliamentary Election Dec. 15. See pages 10 and 11 for more election photos.

IA Soldiers exercise right to vote

Sgt. Matthew Wester
3/1 AD PAO

TAJI, Iraq – Iraqi Army Soldiers northwest of Baghdad voted three days before the country's national elections, freeing them for duty on Dec. 15.

Soldiers had been working to make polling sites throughout the area secure prior to election day.

On Dec. 12, thousands went to the polls themselves and voted at a site in Assariya village, near Camp Taji, north of

Baghdad.

"I am very glad," said Pvt. Zaheer, an infantryman with 9th Iraqi Army Mechanized Division. "This is good for all Iraqis, not just for us."

This is the third time within a year that Iraqis have participated in democratic elections: following the success of the interim government elections in January and the Constitutional Referendum in October.

The Iraqi Soldiers formed

See VOTE, page 10

m 7 sends

A Christmas message for Soldiers

Command Sgt. Maj. William M. Grant
3rd Inf. Div. command sergeant major

A week before Christmas in 1778, Gen. George Washington moved his Continental Army headquarters to a place called Valley Forge, an area approximately 25 miles west of Philadelphia which had recently been occupied by British troops.

As we all know, Washington and his men faced incredibly difficult conditions at Valley Forge.

Most of the Soldiers had no shoes or winter clothing, food shortages led to starvation, and the majority of the men were crammed into tents which did little to protect them from the frigid temperatures and rampant disease. More than 2,500 men died that winter and as Christmas time rolled around, it would seem as if they had little to celebrate.

And yet, despite the misery of their living conditions, the Soldiers rose above their circumstances and found joy in the spirit of the season. Even in the face of adversity, the morale of the Continental Soldiers that Christmas was surprisingly high.

History tells us the men sang, told stories, played games of cricket and staged theatrical plays. They made it through that hard winter by bonding together and focusing on the good things life has to offer.

While Marne Soldiers are certainly better-fed and have warmer clothing than our early forebears, we still share some of the same feelings of loneliness and homesickness that the Continental Army must have experienced more than two centuries ago.

Like those Soldiers, we must find ways to make the best of a tough situation.

In the spirit of the Christmas season, I ask that you think of the good things in your life – turn your thoughts to what is pure, honest and just in the world.

Don't focus on the negative or grumble about things you cannot change – this is wasted energy. Make a conscious effort to spread holiday cheer among your teammates. Give thanks for the leaders who guide you every day here at the forefront of freedom; and give thanks for those who support you back in the rear, the families who keep the light of hope burning in the window until your safe return.

While nothing can replace the feeling of gathering around the Christmas tree in your own living room or unwrapping gifts with your best friends at your side, there are many things we can do to have a successful Christmas this year.

We are lucky to have modern technology on our side – communication devices that the Continental Army Soldiers couldn't even dream of having.

I encourage all of you to keep in touch with family and friends through video-teleconferences, webcams, e-mail, instant messaging and phone calls. This will be as good for you as it is for your loved ones.

Given a choice, certainly we would all rather spend the holidays with our families, but this year we've been called to fulfill a vital mission in the name of democracy. As men and women in uniform, we have a higher calling which sometimes requires personal sacrifice for the greater good.

You are performing an important mission here in Iraq – one whose impact will be felt in this country for generations to come. Your families understand that and share the pride of the entire nation in what you're accomplishing over here.

The command group thanks you for your steadfast performance as Marne Warriors, for being obedient to your call to duty and for keeping the flame of democracy burning bright, no matter where you are in the world on Christmas Day.

God Bless You. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Don't shoot ...



call EOD.



STAY ALIVE

0017

IEDs KILL

The Word on the Street

What was the worst Christmas present you ever received?

"A hand-knit purple and pink sweater with prancing reindeer on it."



Capt. Brian Spurlock
3/1 AD
Ohio

"A lump of coal."



Staff Sgt. Glenn A. Henderson
HSB, 1/118th FA
Georgia

"The same old pink Barbie sweater from my grandmother every year."



Pvt. Latisha M. Saloy
C Co., 125th FSB
Pennsylvania

"I got a Syracuse basketball jersey from my brother, but I'm a Duke Blue Devil fan."



Spc. Albertano Jimenez
B Co., 125th FSB
Oregon

"This wig."



Pvt. Rudy MPAD
100th MPAD
Texas

The Marne Express

Task Force Baghdad Public Affairs Office

Commanding General: Maj. Gen. William G. Webster Jr.

Public Affairs Officer: Lt. Col. Robert Whetstone

Public Affairs Supervisor: Sgt. 1st Class David Abrams

The Marne Express Staff

Editor: Sgt. 1st Class Brenda Benner
Layout and Design: Spc. Emily J. Wilsoncroft

Staff Writers: Master Sgt. Peter Chadwick, Master Sgt. David Abrams, Sgt. 1st Class Ken Walker, Staff Sgt. Raymond Piper, Staff Sgt. Kevin Bromley, Staff Sgt. Russ Rozean, Sgt. Andrew Miller, Sgt. Matthew Wester, Spc. Ricardo Branch, Spc. Ben Brody, Spc. Jennifer D. Atkinson, Spc. Derek Del Rosario, Spc. Brian Henretta, Spc. Maria Mengrone, Spc. George Welcome, Spc. Daniel Balda, Spc. Kelly McDowell, Pfc. Jason Jordan.

The Marne Express is an authorized publication for members of the U.S. Army. Contents of The Marne Express are not necessarily official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, Department of Defense, Department of the Army or the 3rd Infantry Division. All editorial content of The Marne Express is prepared, edited, provided and approved by the Task Force Baghdad Public Affairs Office.

Commentary

Saddam's palaces: a legacy of ego

Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Mills

1st BCT PAO

It never ceases to amaze me how important perception was to Saddam Hussein and the other members of his Ba'ath Party.

Take, for instance, Forward Operating Base Danger, one of Saddam Hussein's palace complexes, in Tikrit. It's all about perception.

There are about 136 buildings on FOB Danger, a healthy handful of which would be considered palatial.

Recently, Danger was handed over to the Iraqis. Notice I don't say "handed back to the Iraqis," because the Iraqis didn't own them before – Saddam did.

As you walk around Danger, or any other of the massive palace complexes in Iraq, it's easy to see the great irony in their existence.

They are monuments to one man, Saddam Hussein. They glorify his life and times. In just about every design element his initials are either engraved or printed. Sometimes his full name is used to create a design.

I was lucky enough to take a pre-handover tour of FOB Danger with two Iraqi engineers who worked on the palaces for Saddam. They knew every detail you would be curious about, from

how the places are ventilated to which room Saddam slept in and for how many nights.

I was told that each of the large palatial buildings were manned full time by crews of cleaners, cooks and butlers, who kept the buildings ready for use 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

They were prepared, I was told, for Saddam's arrival. They didn't know when he would show, but if they weren't ready for him when he walked in the front door they would pay dearly.

The engineers were asked which palaces were used by Saddam; which were his favorites?

He did have a couple of favorite spots on Danger, one of them being the so-called "Floating Palace" down on the Tigris. It's right on the water and he could sit on the "front porch" and dangle his feet in the river.

One of the palaces was built to his exacting standards and he slept in it once, pronounced that he didn't like it, and never returned.

The huge palace that housed 42nd Infantry Division Headquarters was used for conferences I was told. It was started right after Desert Storm, and finished in 1999.

I asked how many times it was used for its purpose. I was informed it was

used maybe once a year between 1999 and 2003.

Yet another palace, the one that housed the division commander, command sergeant major, and other staff, was never used. It took nine years to build and no one ever stayed in it until we took it over.

So what was the perception Saddam was trying to get across? What was the perception he was trying to squash?

Saddam's palaces are the opposite of reality in every way. They are grand, larger than life, and meant to represent him. They were created as monuments to his legacy.

He wanted people to perceive that his rule was as glorious, as incredible, as outlandishly grand as those palaces.

He also wanted people to think that he was building these monuments to them.

At least one of them, the conference palace that was the division HQ, was dedicated to the people of Iraq. Of course, not one of those people of Iraq were able to get near "their" palace.

Throughout most of the buildings are images of togetherness, and teamwork.

On one building, "Great Victory Palace" along the Tigris, are scenes of Saddam's "great victories." Included

is a scene, etched in the stone, of an Iraqi Soldier with his arm around a Kuwaiti. In the background are the distinctive Kuwaiti Towers from Kuwait City.

Togetherness and teamwork. That's why Iraq invaded Kuwait, right?

Saddam's palaces are an obvious example of bending perceptions to suit your needs.

On a much smaller scale I guess we all build our own little "Saddam's palaces" now and again.

No one wants to be seen as something they aren't, and there are plenty of us who don't want people to realize what we really are.

Instead of changing perceptions, maybe it's a good idea to change how you do things.

If you catch yourself building one of those palaces, though, you might want to think about Saddam Hussein.

Eventually someone's going to drag you up out of your hidey-hole and out into the light – and it won't be pretty.



And now, the million-dollar question: who is fighting this war?

1st Lt. Kadett Derry

100th MPAD

Our year in Iraq is almost over and I find myself reflecting on all that I have seen.

I see how terrorist acts are expanding to the rest of the world, not because we are here fighting it, but because history changed on that Sept. 11 morning when they hit our homeland.

We have been attacked many times before by terrorist acts – the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, the bombing of U.S. Navy vessels, and the embassy bombings in Africa.

But that September morning was the day that we as a nation decided to stand up and say "no more!"

Do we know how to fight a war on terror? Does anybody really know how to effectively stop terrorists?

Everyday I see we are learning what works and what doesn't. It is easy to say what we could have done better. Hindsight is always 20/20.

A question I reflect on is this: if I had known in advance that Sept. 11 was going to change my life, would I have joined the military? Earlier I would have said, "No way, this war does not affect me."

Sure, the price of gas might rise, but it's not worth risking my life for.

Now that I am here and have seen what we are doing and have met the people we are helping, my answer would be a resounding "yes!"

How often do we as individuals get to be involved in such a noble cause?

I am in the middle of something bigger than I ever thought I would be a part of.

How often do we get to help another nation stand on its

own?

How often do we get to stand up for liberty?

Is it difficult and dangerous? Sure it is.

Just as our own road to democracy was not easy, Iraq's won't be either. The challenge was worth it 229 years ago and it is worth it now.

I have received many questions from my family and friends in the U.S. asking whether or not the news being reported in the states is actually happening. Though the questions are usually direct and specific, I only comment on things I'm knowledgeable about or specific situations I've seen for myself. This is easy to do. Unfortunately, I can not always mention all that I know.

At times, I am privy to information that the general public does not know. Often, that information helps me understand the big picture, so I

try to convey that big picture in my correspondence with friends and family.

I don't tell them everything because we are at war.

If the enemy knew all that we are doing to protect Iraq from terrorists, our efforts would not be as productive. I can assure you that I and every Soldier here wants our time here to be productive and worth our sacrifices.

I still remember when the U.S. military first arrived in Kuwait during Desert Shield/Desert Storm and the media was already on the ground covering the event. When does reporting everything we do in a war start to hurt the mission and our Soldiers? Does there need to be monitoring and accountability of what the military does?

Sure. Any group or person with absolute power will eventually misuse that power. That is why there are checks and balances.

I don't mind it when people back home voice their opinions, even when they are in complete contrast with my own. This opposing voice is part of the checks and balances and is often healthy. They have that freedom given them by our U.S. Constitution.

However, I find myself getting upset when others do not know all of the facts, yet they try to persuade others to believe these partial facts or "half-truths."

My role as a public affairs officer in this war and the events I have seen make me evaluate closely what the media reports and whether I trust those reports. Recently, my trust in the media has been bombarded by doubts.

There is a silent war going on in the media for the hearts

and minds in both Iraq and America. Who is winning that war? Who is fighting that war?

These are questions that I have begun to ask. I question whether media outlets have their own agendas and are persuading us accordingly. They understand that perceiving is believing.

When did the media stop reporting what was going on and start pushing their agendas? I must have been too involved in covering the events that are changing history and keeping my Soldiers safe to notice.

The elections will highlight the success of the Iraqi people and the steps that they have taken to become free. The elections will hopefully provide a blueprint for other nations that are seeking a way of life free of tyranny and oppression.

I hope when history looks back on this moment in time, instead of highlighting the mistakes which were made, it will instead shine a brighter light on the bigger picture, that of a nation taking it's first steps toward democracy.

History should highlight the efforts of both the American and Iraqi Soldiers and the people who believed and supported those Soldiers. I am proud to be one of those Soldiers!!

Our presence here and our resolve to finish what we started will be a clear sign to any terrorist group that we as a nation will continue to fight against terrorism and pave the way for democracy.



Unsung Heroes

Command Sgt. Maj. William M. Grant

3rd Inf. Div. command sergeant major

Today's Army couldn't do its job without the use of technology – computers are essential for everything from communications to map-reading to surveillance, and everything in between.

Even the slightest malfunction of the smallest piece of equipment can cause hours of work to go undone, and that's why Soldiers in the 3rd Infantry Division Automation Management Office are always busy.

The DAMO team is always on the job, making sure that everyone's e-mail is up and running, and the system stays connected.

The hard work they do to maintain this division's network and equipment keeps daily operations running smoothly.

Although they stay behind the scenes, the DAMO plays a huge role in keeping Marne Soldiers hooked up and switched on.

Rock of the Marne!



Sgt. 1st Class Brenda Benner

Sgt. Daniel A. Hannan, a 1st Detachment, 3rd Signal Company, Special Troops Battalion information systems analyst, inspects a computer's hardware components.

Soldiers remember sacrifice of fallen brothers

Staff Sgt. Raymond Piper
4th BCT PAO

BAGHDAD – Soldiers and friends gathered to honor the memory of four fallen Soldiers who were cherished sons and caring fathers, and three of who were loving husbands, from 3rd Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment at Forward Operating Base Falcon Nov. 12.

First Lt. Justin Smith, Staff Sgt. Brian Freeman, Spc. Robert Pope and Pfc. Mario Reyes were killed Nov. 7 while conducting security operations in southern Baghdad. Their interpreter, Emad Jamal Kamal, was also killed during the terrorist attack.

"These men, an example for us all, were aggressively searching vehicles to prevent the enemy from transporting contraband and improvised explosive devices through our area and into Baghdad," said Lt. Col. Ross Brown, 3/3 ACR commander.

Brown said he really got to know Smith in Kuwait while he was walking around the motor pool one day monitoring the maintenance of the vehicles.

"Since I had recently taken command and didn't know the lieutenants in the squadron very well, I pulled him aside and asked him about his background and family. The question about his family triggered him to immediately reach into his pocket and pull out his wallet," Brown said.

Smith showed a picture of what Brown believed to be the happiest baby in the world.

Brown said, "As I looked up at Justin, I saw the same happiness and the same smile as the baby. After that day, every time Justin thought I looked out of sorts he would pull out the picture of his smiling baby boy and we would both smile at each other, my day made."

1st Lt. Tom Weitzel, 3rd Platoon leader and a friend of Smith, said, "He talked about his family more than any other man I know. Chances are if you only knew him slightly, he had shown you pictures of his little boy, Hayden."

Capt. Scott Seidel, I Troop commander, said Smith had an energy and spirit like no other.

"His excitement for life only paled next to his endless creativity," Seidel noted. "Whatever the problem or situation, there were no boundaries. There was no thinking outside the box because there was no box."

Brown said Freeman epitomized quiet competence.

"He didn't talk much; but when he did, he commanded attention and was a leader and friend who could be counted on."



(Left to right) Staff Sgt. Sean Cannon, Spc. Casey Sullivan and Pfc. Christopher Johnson Jr., from 3rd Sqdn., 3rd ACR, say a prayer in memory of their fallen comrades and friends during a memorial service at FOB Falcon Nov. 12.

"Staff Sgt. Brian Freeman was something special," said Staff Sgt. Sean Cannon, 4th platoon sergeant. "When he came to 4th Platoon in September, I knew he was going to be a great addition to the platoon. His dedication as a Soldier was unquestionable."

Freeman talked to Cannon about his goals when he first came to the platoon. "He wanted to retire as a command sergeant major," Cannon said, "and I know from the short time we worked together he would have accomplished that goal."

Pope earned a notable distinction as the troop commander's driver. His voice was a familiar one as he answered radio calls for his boss.

"Like any crew, I got to know Spc. Pope very well," Seidel said. "He was a New Yorker tried and true. Like any great New Yorker, he saw what happened to the center of their universe in New York City and he took the call to enlist."

Spc. Casey Sullivan, a close friend of Pope, said, "I never met a guy in my life who was loved and liked so much

by his friends, but once you got to know him, it was easy to tell why. He would go to the ends of the earth for whatever the cause."

Reyes immigrated to the United States with his family from Mexico and joined the Army in 2004.

"He joined the Army ... to serve his adopted country like his older brother Sgt. Ortiz Reyes who is currently serving in Taji," Brown said.

"Pfc. Mario Reyes was 19 years old and full of life," Cannon said. "He came to the platoon in February shortly before we deployed. He was small in stature, but his love for family and friends was larger than life."

Reyes' friend, Pfc. Christopher Johnson Jr., said he was a great man, son, friend and Soldier.

"Pfc. Reyes and I were more than friends – we were brothers. Everywhere I went, he was right by my side," Johnson said.

Johnson was with Reyes at the checkpoint and had talked to him a few minutes before the car-bomb attack.

"It was so fast, there was nothing

anyone could do to prevent it," he said. "We had each other's back until the end."

Emad Jamal Kamal was called "Bob" by the Soldiers in the unit. He learned English working with Americans while doing laundry in western Baghdad and had been with I Troop from the beginning of the deployment.

"Bob represents the best of Iraq in that he was willing to face the risks associated with fighting the insurgency in order to bring a better future to his country," Brown said.

Seidel said, "Bob was a patriotic man who saw that Iraq could become something better. He helped our troop to better understand the culture and people who seemed so different. He broke bread with us, he lived with us and he ultimately gave his life with us."

Brown said, "I will never forget the confidence that these men exuded when I visited them. I will cherish my memories of them and honor them for the rest of my life."

No
Soldier
left
behind

Sgt. Matthew Maupin

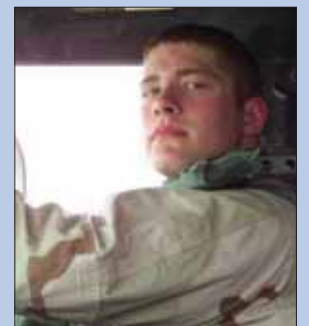
"I will not leave a fallen comrade"

These well known words from the Warrior Ethos ring true for Sgt. Matt Maupin.

Maupin is an Army Reserve Soldier from 724th Transportation Company who was captured April 9, 2004 during Operation Iraqi Freedom 2.

Sgt. Maupin – we are still looking for you and we will find you.

You have not been forgotten.



Avn. Bde. Soldiers bid farewell to comrade

Spc. Jennifer D. Atkinson
Avn. Bde. PAO

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – Task Force Baghdad Soldiers gathered to say goodbye to a fallen warrior Dec. 3.

Sgt. Grzegorz “Jak” Jakoniuk, B Company, 4th Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment (Assault Helicopter), died of a gunshot wound Nov. 30.

“We come together in grief,

acknowledging our human loss,” said Battalion Chaplain (Capt.) Chris Goza at the memorial service. “May God grant us grace to find comfort in pain; in sorrow, hope; and in death, resurrection.”

A native of Poland, Jakoniuk enlisted in the U.S. Army Aug. 21, 2001, and became an American citizen in January 2005, before deploying in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 3.

“Jak was truly a special individual,”

said Capt. Jennifer Reynolds, B Co. commander. With a trademark smile and a laid-back manner, Jakoniuk took most things in stride, including the constant difficulty with his name, she said.

Because his name was so hard to pronounce, when he became a citizen “the guys immediately told him his new name was ‘Greg Jackson’ because none of us could pronounce his name properly,” Reynolds added.

Sometimes Jak could be a bit frustrating, simply because it was hard to argue with his straightforwardness, she continued. When Reynolds told him to replace a pair of worn-out boots, he said, with a typical shrug of his shoulders, “But these are comfortable.”

An experienced crew chief, Jak not only managed to beat pilots to the aircraft most days, but took the time to make sure the crews had food for a long mission, Reynolds said.

During tense situations, Jakoniuk had a way of defusing a situation with a smile and a thumbs-up, she said.

More senior crew chiefs would attempt to find things wrong with an aircraft and usually came away from Jakoniuk’s aircraft “frustrated because they didn’t find anything, but also proud because he took care of it so well,” Reynolds noted.

“The guy was a unique person,” said Staff Sgt. Mark Bilon. “Jak was always smiling, always wise-cracking ... he was a hard worker when he wanted to be and a clever talker when he didn’t.”

With plans for college and financial savvy, Jak was headed for success, Bilon said. Jak was mellow, and was never wound up or high-strung.

“We’ve lost a friend,” said Bilon. But, he added, “When you think of him, laugh and smile and take it easy.”

Spc. James Berkenbush worked with Jakoniuk and was his roommate at Fort Campbell, Ky. during OIF 1 in Mosul; and once again at Camp Taji.

“I was closer to Jak than I was to either of my two brothers,” Berkenbush said.

Jakoniuk had an insatiable thirst for knowledge, he added. When Jak wanted to know more about how something worked, he would go out and buy books on the subject.

“He probably read more books in a year than I have in my entire life,” Berkenbush said.

While at Fort Campbell, Jakoniuk taught himself to play the violin. After taking the violin out of the box, Jak couldn’t get it to make any sound so he went out and bought several books on playing and taking care of a violin.

“When he was learning to play it in the room, it was the most God-awful thing I’d ever heard,” said Berkenbush. “But I always admired him for his continual motivation to better himself.”

Although Jak could come across as abrasive to some, to Berkenbush he always seemed confident and self-assured. No matter what, Berkenbush could always count on his roommate for a smile, a thumbs-up, and a generosity of spirit.

“Jak, we will all miss you, we will never, ever forget you,” said Reynolds. “Rest in peace, my brother.”

Jakoniuk is survived by his father, Cezary Jakoniuk of Poland, and his brother Dominik Jakoniuk, of Chicago.



Spc. Jennifer D. Atkinson

Photos remind mourners of the fun-loving, inquisitive spirit of Sgt. Grzegorz “Jak” Jakoniuk, B Co., 4/3 Avn., during a memorial service Dec. 3.

High-tech ‘cable dogs’ keep Task Force Baghdad talking

Sgt. Andrew Miller
100th MPAD

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – Before they deployed to Iraq, most members of 3rd Signal Company’s cable platoon did not know what their jobs would be. In fact, the cable team didn’t even exist.

Upon arriving in theater, 1st Lt. Shawn Boles, 3rd Sig. Co. executive officer, learned he would lead a new team that would be responsible for the installation and maintenance of Task Force Baghdad’s entire communications network in the city. At that time, all but three of the team’s 18 Soldiers were slated to work outside of their intended occupational specialties.

The newly-formed team relied heavily on the knowledge of its four cable specialists (a fourth recently joined the team). Eventually, through experience and collaboration with other units, they discovered the best way to get past hurdles.

Sgt. Rebecca Willard, one of the team’s original cable specialists, said it was difficult at first to work with Soldiers from outside of her specialty. This was especially the case when they were working with fiber optics, because such tasks are highly technical. She said her team members have since come a long way.

“They have learned a lot of what it takes to do the job and they take great pride in it,”

Willard said.

Boles said experience came easily to the cable team because they had endless work. The early days evolved into many late nights.

When they got to Iraq, much of the task force’s network was not working. Sgt. 1st Class Janeen Whiteside-Harris, the cable team’s platoon sergeant, said existing cables and fiber optics lacked the organization and labels necessary for efficient troubleshooting.

“We had to pull everything out and start from scratch,” Whiteside-Harris said.

In light of their mammoth mission, Boles said interaction with other organizations has been invaluable to his team’s success. One unit in particular, 35th Signal Company’s cable platoon, assigned to 18th Airborne Corps, has been trading experience and parts with Boles’ team throughout their deployments.

The ability to trade parts reduced their wait for supplies, sometimes drastically. Reducing the wait helps get the inoperable systems working faster, thus enabling Soldiers to work on other projects.

Whiteside-Harris said they have also benefited from working with their civilian counterparts. Experts with Raytheon Company have shared years of fiber optics experience and extensive equipment knowledge.

For some on the team, this experience may eventually earn

them significant profit. Whiteside-Harris said three Soldiers are on the brink of earning certification with The Fiber Optic Association.

“We have a team of professionals,” Whiteside-Harris said, smiling. “I am so proud of them.”

Whiteside-Harris said her team members have conducted independent research on some of their projects, making improvements on how they do what they do. Such research has repeatedly changed the way she thinks of her job, and she has

even begun requesting new and different equipment based on the Soldiers’ findings, she said.

These new techniques and equipment have enabled a very small cable team to turn a large, unreliable network into one that is organized, operational and sustainable. Boles said he expects all of the task force’s existing buildings to be similarly wired by the end of his tour.

The cable team leaders said their replacements would ideally be left with nothing to do but maintain an already-established network.



Sgt. Andrew Miller

Sgt. Rebecca Willard, a cable team supervisor with 3rd Sig. Co., STB, gets down and dirty while installing new cables in an old building. Willard and her team install and maintain the system that makes the internet and telephone communication possible.



Photos by 2nd Lt. Paul Fisher

Above: 2/101st Abn. Div. Soldiers provide security along a perimeter as others from the unit search an island in the Euphrates River for weapons caches and terrorists. Below: Weapons and munitions found by 2/502nd Inf. Soldiers are laid out on the ground near the area of southwest Baghdad where they were discovered.

2/101st Abn. Soldiers find caches, terrorists on island

Pfc. Kelly K. McDowell
2/101st Abn. Div. PAO

BAGHDAD – Task Force Baghdad Soldiers found multiple weapons caches on an island in the Euphrates River Nov. 28.

Military officials had been monitoring suspicious activity near the Euphrates River southwest of Baghdad for a couple of weeks.

When conditions were right, Soldiers from 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st

Airborne Division were ready to spring into action.

"The timing was right to attack the target," said 2/101st Airborne Div. Commander Col. Todd Ebel. "The pieces of the puzzle fit close enough."

Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment secured the objective and discovered three significant weapons caches.

The Soldiers also searched surrounding homes and facilities, detaining two suspected

terrorists.

In total, they uncovered 11 500-pound bomb shells, C-4 explosives, welding equipment, mortar rounds, miscellaneous bomb-making material, 57-millimeter rockets, 40 bags of fertilizer, 12 directional charges, five 155-millimeter rounds, 100 feet of detonation cord, three rocket-propelled grenades, eight bags of 20-millimeter rounds and other munitions and explosives.

An explosive ordinance

disposal team was called to the site to conduct a controlled detonation of the caches.

"The large bombs and welding material are critical," Ebel said. "It is likely this material was used for improvised explosive devices and possibly vehicle-borne IEDs that threaten Iraqi citizens and Coalition Forces. I could not be more proud of these Soldiers. They do this every day to help bring peace. No one could ask more of them."



Rollin', rollin', rollin' ...



TF Baghdad delivers wheelchairs to Iraqis

Near left: Pfc. Mario Sanchez hands a wheelchair assembly kit to a member of the Khadamiyah District Advisory Council while Sgt. Stephen Early prepares to unload another during a coordinated effort between the Khadamiyah DAC and 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division Nov. 26. Both Soldiers are from 1st Squadron, 71st Cavalry.

Far left: Khadamiyah residents carry wheelchairs past a humvee. More than 40 wheelchairs were given to disabled residents of the area.

Photos by Staff Sgt. John R. Rozean

Sweet dreams ...

Grandmother sews pillowcases for troops

Spc. Maria Mengrone
100th MPAD

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – A retired Florida schoolteacher wants Task Force Baghdad Soldiers to have sweet dreams – or, at the very least, lay their heads on brightly-colored pillows each night.

Many people back in the U.S. do whatever they can to help Soldiers cope with a deployment by sending care packages and letters of thanks and appreciation.

Debbie Leslie of Clearwater, Fla., however, has found a unique way of sharing her gratitude for Soldiers serving in Iraq through her handmade pillowcases.

"It's so little for me to do, especially if it brings the thought of home and that someone is thinking of them, thanking them, and praying for their safe return," Leslie said.

She spends her free time as a member of a local quilt guild and through her skilled craft finds the time and energy to send batches of pillowcases to Soldiers serving

in Iraq.

"I thought the pillowcases sounded like a good idea, so I got the pattern and made some to include in a care package," she said.

The 71-year-old grandmother of two has close ties to the military because her son is currently serving in the U.S. Navy. Her experience as a military mom gives her an insight into the sacrifices military personnel make each day.

Using her own creative genius, Leslie has found various ways to package her pillowcases by using different themes and patterns.

"Most were patriotic, but she also added some patterns that would appeal to females more than males," said Sgt. Robert J. Mayo, operational law non-commissioned officer in charge with Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division.

Mayo said when the pillowcases arrived they were popular with the troops and "were gone in no time."

"I realized there were

some NASCAR fans in our group, so I asked her if she could make a couple of NASCAR pillowcases and she was more than happy to make them," Mayo said.

During the course of the deployment, Leslie has sent nearly 100 pillowcases in five separate shipments.

"Everyone I have shown the pillowcases to has loved them," Mayo said. "A lot of Soldiers want to get more than one pillowcase."

Leslie's creative and distinctive way of showing her appreciation for Soldiers in Iraq, especially those serving in the 3rd Inf. Div., has garnered much reciprocated appreciation from the troops.

Soldiers who have "met" Leslie through electronic or regular mail admit they can't help but maintain a standing friendship with her.

However seemingly small her contribution, her pillowcase project proves that kindness, concern, and selfless gestures go a long way in boosting a Soldier's morale.



Spc. Maria Mengrone

Sgt. Robert J. Mayo shows Sgt. Colin B. Wilson the newest shipment of pillowcases from Debbie Leslie, a retired Florida schoolteacher. Both Soldiers are from Headquarters and Headquarters Operations Company, STB.

Students send Soldiers seasonal cheer with homemade holiday cards

Pfc. Jason Jordan
1/10th Mtn. Div. PAO

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – In an attempt to bring the holiday spirit to deployed Soldiers, students and teachers from a New Jersey school have sent hundreds of homemade greeting cards to troops with the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division deployed to Baghdad.

"We wanted to do something for our

American Soldiers who are stationed overseas," said Dr. Nell Sanders, principal of the Allen W. Roberts School in New Providence, N.J.

The school encourages writing in every subject and thought it would be a great idea to

combine writing with doing kind things for deployed troops, she said.

James Bullaro, a fifth-grade teacher at the school, had his students create cards weeks in advance, and then collected them all for shipment in time to reach the Soldiers overseas before the holidays.

This year, the school is focusing on the "6 Pillars of Character Education: Caring, Fairness, Respect, Trustworthiness, Responsibility and Citizenship."

"Through modeling, we are teaching the students that part of being a good citizen means to do your share to make your school and community better," Bullaro said. "One way to achieve that is to get involved with the community and world affairs. We decided it would be nice to send cards, letters and poems to the

Soldiers to let them know that they are in our thoughts and that we appreciate everything they are doing."

Bullaro then contacted his brother-in-law, Maj. Erick Sweet, an aviation officer with 1/10th Mtn. Div.

"James wanted to do something special for the troops that the kids would be proud of," Sweet said. "He did all of the work. It was his brain-child and his initiative that put it all together. I just provided him with an address to send it to."

The Allen W. Roberts School often does things throughout the year to support the community, but rarely do the children receive a response like they did from the Soldiers.

"I have been updating my kids weekly about what is going on with the Soldiers," Sanders said. "We do a lot of fund-raising for different causes like Hurricane Katrina and the tsunami, but the kids never get to see where the money really goes. They are really looking forward to finally seeing their efforts in the hands of the Soldiers and really making a difference in someone's life."

The reaction from the Soldiers has surprised not only the students, but those who organized the event as well.

"The response from the Soldiers has been huge," Sweet said. "(The students) are so genuine in their cards, and the artwork has been amazing – everything from flowers, to Army scenes, to turkeys and you name it."

Several Soldiers have replied back to the children, including a personal reply

from 1/10th Commander Col. Jeffrey J. Snow.

The students also drew comics, smiley faces, the American flag, and other holiday pictures with messages of encouragement.

"It was really touching to see the effort the kids put into their work," said Sweet. "The messages and the artwork were all very awesome. It really makes you feel good about being here."

The students feel as though Soldiers have really tough jobs due to the traveling and the wars that must be fought.

"I think writing to the Soldiers is important because it might cheer them up or make them feel close to home," one child wrote. "I know if I were a Soldier in Iraq and just received a letter and a picture from children in the United States, I would feel so glad!"

The children have received such an overwhelming response to the project

that school officials decided to continue efforts to support the troops in Iraq.

"We believe it is important for those of us who are not serving in the armed forces to let your troops know that we appreciate the sacrifices they are making for our government," Sanders said. "We didn't realize how big of a gift we had. It makes you realize that people must be really lonely sometimes, especially on the holidays. We don't want to stop what we have started."

The last project the students completed for the Soldiers was 250 cards created for the Thanksgiving holiday.

Sanders promised that the Christmas shipment will be even bigger as more people hear about it.

"It is really amazing how something as simple as a card from a child can lift the spirits of a warrior," Sweet said. "It makes you appreciate those whose freedom we fight to protect."



Staff Sgt. John R. Rozean

Sgt. 1st Class Bill Hobgood, Chief Warrant Officer Jeffery Moore, and Sgt. 1st Class J. D. Sheffer, all in 1/10 Mtn. Div., read holiday cards sent by elementary school students.

Training to fight ...

Liberty Soldiers build martial arts skills

Spc. Emily J. Wilsoncroft
3rd Inf. Div. PAO

Life can get stressful during a deployment, and one stress-reliever that most people find effective is exercise.

This, in itself, is enough for many individuals, but others want more. They say, "I'd like to learn a new self-defense technique during my workout!" In Michael McLain Foley's Kodan Kan martial arts classes at Camp Liberty, they can do just that.

"I've been training in martial arts for a couple of years so when I saw that someone was teaching over here, I was pretty excited," said 1st Lt. Marco Honrado, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 704th Military Intelligence Brigade, one of Foley's more advanced students.

Foley began developing Kodan Kan martial arts in the 1980s, and has been teaching Soldiers martial arts since 1977, when he himself joined the Army as a military policeman.

Now in theater as a civilian contractor, Foley said his main motivation for starting the classes was to supplement any combatives training that the Soldiers had already received.

"Until recently, the Army didn't teach fighting," he said. "And still, it only teaches you what to do once you're already on the ground, and when you're only fighting one opponent."

Spc. Kirk Stickley, 92nd Chemical Company, 92nd Engineer Battalion, who has been attending Foley's classes for more than four months, called the fighting style "more realistic" than Army-taught combatives.

"If I don't have my battle buddy there all the time and I'm attacked, do I really want to roll around on the ground and grapple with this person one on one? Or attack through this person, and be ready for the next one that might come at me?" Stickley said. "Seldom is someone going to fight you in hand-to-hand and one-on-one. You will have to dispatch that person quickly and move on to the next or keep going in some situations."

Warrant Officer 1 Roy Hodges, the officer in charge of imagery intelligence for Headquarters and Headquarters Operations Company, Special Troops Battalion, agreed that Kodan Kan martial arts takes Soldiers a step or two above their regular training. "I believe it brings an added value," he said. "It allows the Soldier to be

able to fight on his feet and not just the ground. If a Soldier is trained to fight on his feet and the enemy is not trained, there is no need to go to the ground."

According to Spc. Joshua Eldridge, an unmanned aerial vehicle technician for Shadow Company, STB and another regular Kodan Kan student, the training he receives in the classes is both practical and valuable.

"(Foley) has unique experiences that he can pass on to us," he said. "His techniques have been proven in combat and it shows in his ability to teach us how to use his style against multiple opponents."

"We use various combinations of strikes, hands, elbows, shoulders, knees and feet to accomplish the goal of neutralization," Eldridge added. "We are trained to remove the threat of an enemy in less than five seconds so that we can move on to the next threat."

Foley has earned black belts in several martial arts, and his students call him "Shihan," a title which refers to the highest level of belt under "Grand Master." His classes are available for anyone interested, regardless of skill-level.

"A few Soldiers, when they came in, said straight out, 'I don't know how to fight,'" Foley said.

One might think that including students of all levels might prove confusing to the beginners or boring for the more advanced members. According to Honrado, that's not the case.

"The teaching method is very good," he said. "The classes are relatively small compared to what you would find back in the States. This allows for each student to receive a lot of personal attention."

Stickley added, "We start off learning how to block, punch, kick and do some basic combos that will protect you from an attacker. While going through the course you find that you will easily be able to adapt this and integrate it into your combatives training or any other skills you already might possess — not to mention that being an advocate for self defense, this is a style that is easy to learn and adaptable, and after your first session you will know how to protect yourself from an attacker."

Foley said the techniques his students are learning help them to gain more of a "warrior spirit."

"It makes them better Soldiers," he said. "I want them to survive."

If nothing else though, it keeps



Photos by Spc. Emily J. Wilsoncroft
Staff Sgt. Hellen Pyramides, 240th Quartermaster Company, and 1st Lt. Marco Honrado, HHC, 704th MI Bde., practice combative moves under the watchful eye of instructor Michael McLain Foley at Camp Liberty's division gym.

Soldiers active and focused on improving their skills.

"We're doing an important mission and we work at it everyday, but the physical and mental release of practicing martial arts is priceless, especially here," Honrado said. "My goal was keep on training out here. I thought I'd have to continue my training on my own, but thankfully someone has given me the opportunity to learn more and

train with him instead."

The classes are held every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 5 a.m. and 5 p.m., to accommodate any and all potential students.

"With the workload and lack of free time it is incredible that someone would take this much of their own time to help other people," Honrado said. "Shihan has given us a great opportunity out here that's open to everyone."



Above: Foley leads his students in warm-up punching exercises during a morning Kodan Kan class at the division gym.

Right: Spc. Kirk Stickley, 92nd Chem. Co., 92nd Eng. Bn. (laying on mat), and Sgt. Alexander Villa, 240th Qm., practice the "Pretzel," a leg-lock technique, as Foley gives pointers.



Aviation Brigade troops taught combat-lifesaving skills

Spc. Jennifer D. Atkinson
Avn. Bde. PAO

CAMP TAJI, Iraq — With rapidly changing front lines on a highly-mobile battlefield, the

Army's Combat Lifesaver program has become a crucial part in increasing the level of medical treatment on the ground or in the air.

For the Aviation Brigade,

increasing the number of CLS-trained Soldiers provides better support to air crews and ground forces the brigade supports on a daily basis.

Fast and highly-skilled medical support is available to ground units, through either their own medics or medevac units. However, if units are moving fast, or are farther forward than their support elements, the number of medics can be limited.

With large numbers of injured Soldiers possible at any given site, a medic may be stretched very thin, so Combat Lifesavers act as a bridge between the standard self-aid or buddy-aid training each Soldier is familiar with and the more in-depth treatment offered by a combat medic.

The Avn. Bde. recently completed its first full CLS certification class at Camp Taji.

CLS-trained Soldiers provide emergency care as a secondary mission and do not replace combat medics. Since CLS-qualified Soldiers aren't medics by training, everything they do is "to the point, and specific to trauma," said Sgt. 1st Class James D. Rolon, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Avn. Bde. medic.

The CLS training teaches Soldiers to deal with "more immediate problems, like falls, vehicle accidents or gunshot wounds," said Spc. Glen B. Ordinario, a medic with HHC, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment (Attack Reconnaissance). "They're not looking for heart attacks or allergic reaction, or anything chronic."

Ordinario and Rolon recently led Soldiers through three days of intense training; starting with the basics of buddy aid, moving through patient assessment and into more advanced life-saving techniques.

During the training, written tests measured the student's grasp of the book-taught material, while practical exercises allowed them to put their new skills into practice.

The first day of class focused on refreshing and building Soldiers' buddy-aid skills, such as splinting, controlling bleeding, and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Soldiers also learned how to perform an abbreviated battlefield patient assessment.

"Learning the right sequence for the assessment is pretty tough," since it's a bit different from the buddy-aid evaluation, Rolon said.

During scenarios designed to simulate the casualties found in the battlefield environment, Soldiers are also taught more advanced procedures.

Rolon said CLS students use a mannequin during the teaching scenarios, especially with complex procedures such as re-inflating a collapsed lung with a needle.

On the second day of class, the mannequins are put to the side for the most infamous part of the CLS class: the IV section. Students initially practiced inserting needles into plastic IV tubing stretched across a table.

For the practical exercise, the class was split in half. Each section crowded around

one of the two instructors, and watched with wide eyes.

Ordinario walked through the procedure for finding a good vein, including how to figure out the best vein to use and how to use a constricting band to help plump up smaller veins.

On the other end of the room, Rolon showed his technique to figure out which vein to use and how to clean the site. Ending with instructions on how to control the plastic catheter and secure the tubing, both instructors made the procedure look easy.

After the block of instruction, students were paired up, supplies were set out and the class held its collective breath.

"Okay, you've got to do this today, so let me know when you think you're ready," Rolon said as he walked between the two rows of students.

"This is harder than it looks," said Sgt. Melissa Crawford, D Company, 3rd Bn., 3rd Aviation Reg., as she tried to get a good line set up on Spc. Gilbert Palmer, D Co., 3/3 ARB. After several tries, Crawford had to stop to let Palmer rest for a few minutes.

"Sticking another Soldier with a needle is the hardest part for most of these guys," Rolon said.

On the third day, everything is reviewed and the students are tested again. After Soldiers have passed all the practical exercises and the written tests, they are certified Combat Lifesavers, ready to step up to help their fellow Soldiers if needed.



Spc. Jennifer D. Atkinson

Pfc. Chris Harrington concentrates on Spc. Dustan Boyd's arm as he inserts the needle for the IV practical exercise portion of the CLS course taught by medics from HHC, Avn. Brigade. Both Soldiers are from D Co., 4th Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment (Assault Helicopter).

1/76 Soldier hurdles language barrier

Staff Sgt. Raymond Piper
4th BCT PAO

BAGHDAD — When 1st Battalion, 76th Field Artillery Regiment began riding with the 13th Georgian Infantry Battalion on missions in Baghdad, language was a huge barrier for the two units.

"We would get two or three Georgians with us on missions, but unfortunately they wouldn't have an interpreter so we wouldn't be able to communicate properly," said Capt. Ryan Avila, a former platoon leader with 1st Bn., 76th FA.

Then along came Pfc. Daniel Nasereddine, who was one of Avila's platoon members. Nasereddine emigrated from the Ukraine and spoke Russian, giving him the ability to communicate with the Georgians.

"With Nasereddine, I was able to find out how long they had been in the military and what kind of the training they had," Avila said.

With his Soldier's help, he was able to find out that many of the Georgians have combat experience and training specific to Iraq.

"Once I knew this, I could focus on helping them to learn the routes in Baghdad," Avila said.

Nasereddine was exposed to many different languages as a child because he lived in many different parts of the world.

His father is Lebanese and his mother is Ukrainian, so he lived in both the Ukraine and Lebanon. Instead of trying

to master a number of languages, he decided to stick with English.

"Since I was a baby, I have been exposed to English, but it wasn't until I went to college that I learned the writing and grammar part," Nasereddine said.

After his parents divorced, his father immigrated to America where Nasereddine followed him years later.

"After I finished college, I decided to move to the United States because the work environment is better there, even though I love the Ukraine."

After coming to America, he came to the realization that he needed more self-discipline and began to think about joining the U.S. Army.

"My decision to join the Army was probably the best thing I've ever done," Nasereddine said. "The main part is I like it and I always wanted to be in the Army. In my mind, it's part of the process of becoming a man."

He said one of the reasons he joined the Army was because he wants to work with languages with the National Security Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation or a similar organization.

Once he receives his citizenship, one of his goals is to go to Officer Candidate School and apply for the military intelligence field where he can apply his knowledge of languages.

"This deployment was a really good experience," he said. "It's a really great life experience. The way I am now can't even be compared to how I was at the beginning of the deployment."

Iraqi firefighters turn in UXO to U.S. troops

Maj. Russ Goemaere
2nd BCT PAO

BAGHDAD — Iraqi firefighters from the Rusafa Fire Station in east Baghdad turned over more than 200 rounds of unexploded ordnance to elements of Task Force Baghdad for destruction Dec. 1.

The firefighters gave 65 artillery rounds and 143 mortar rounds to elements of 1st Battalion, 9th Field Artillery.

This is a continuing effort and partnership between the leadership of the Rusafa Fire Station and 1st Bn., 9th FA to rid the area of unexploded ordnance and denying terrorists potential bomb-making material.

"On Nov. 3, we secured a slightly

smaller, but still significant, load of munitions in the same location," said Maj. Jay Sawyer, operations officer for 1/9 FA. "I am glad to be working with the firefighters here to make the community safer for everyone, especially the children who like to play in areas where much of the unexploded ordnance still remains. The most exciting aspect to me is that the Iraqi citizens provide the Iraqi Security Forces and Fire Departments with the location of unexploded ordnance they find in their neighborhoods. The people want their communities safer and they look to the Iraqi government to provide that safety."

All of the ordnance was later destroyed by a U.S. explosive ordnance disposal team.



Courtesy photo

Iraqi firefighters from the Rusafa Fire Station in east Baghdad watch as Soldiers from 1/9 FA inventory unexploded ordnance Dec. 1.

ELECTION,

continued from page 1

would be to look to the light on the horizon as a sunrise.

"Today they chose their leaders for the next four years," Coffman said. "If someone chooses to vote as many did, Sunni, Shia and Kurd all participated, they chose to vote because they believe in the future of their country. It's another step for democracy."

Iraqis citizens were able to vote in droves mainly because of the stellar security job provided by the Iraqi Security Forces.

According to Coffman, the violence stayed at or below the normal level. There were a few explosive devices and isolated indirect fire incidents, but otherwise election day was very safe.

"The ISF took the front, just as they have for the last two elections," Coffman said. "Basically, this was run by Iraqis, the polls and the security, and the Americans were there in case something happened and they needed our assistance," he continued. "Today was another milestone in the ISFs' capabilities. They were able to secure numerous sites across the country and prevent the anti-Iraqi forces from influencing those sites."

Staff Sgt. James Bryant, a team leader with B Company, 4th Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, was especially encouraged by the performance of the ISF. He's part of a military transition team training ISF members since August.

Bryant encountered a few of his former trainees during a foot patrol through Karrada and beamed like a proud teacher.

"It's great seeing these (guys) out here because they are like my own Soldiers," he said. "When you train up the new guys in your unit, and you see them excel, it's a good feeling ... they are using all the skills they've learned and doing their job. It's going to make a big difference for this country's future."

Coffman was inspired by the actions of the troops on this monumental occasion.

"The job the Iraqis and our forces have done is nothing short of amazing," he said. "The MiTT and (special police training) teams (who have) stood beside the Iraqi forces during training and mission execution over the last year will carry Iraqi security in the future for the next five to 10 years. It's an honor being part of America's team here in Iraq, standing side by side with Iraq's team making sure that this is a safe place for the Iraqi people."



Spc. Dan Baldat



Sgt. Matthew Wester

Above: Iraqi citizens head to the polls northwest of Baghdad on Dec. 15. Thousands of Iraqis turned out to vote on election day.

Top right: An Iraqi family makes their way to their local polling site during the Iraqi Parliamentary Elections.

Below: An Iraqi boy wears a patriotic banner while another behind him displays an ink-stained finger celebrating the election day at a voting area in the Shula neighborhood of western Baghdad Dec 15.



Photo credit

A celebratio





Spc. Emily J. Wilsoncroft

n of democracy



Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Walker



Spc. Emily J. Wilsoncroft

Above: An Iraqi Soldier does a security check on an Iraqi man before allowing him to enter a polling station in a western Baghdad neighborhood Dec. 15.

Top left: An Iraqi woman, along with IA Soldiers providing security outside a Baghdad polling station, displays her purple-ink-coated finger to show that she voted. Iraqis voted on their permanent, 275-member Council of Representatives, allocating 230 seats according to the population of each of Iraq's 18 provinces. Left: Iraqi citizens conduct a parade Dec. 15 in the Shula area of western Baghdad celebrating the vote and publicizing their candidates.

VOTE, continued from page 1

long columns and marched to the polls while other IA Soldiers guarded the Assariya site.

"The Iraqi Security Forces vote early so they can do their job on election day," said Capt. Richard Hicks, a team leader for A Company, 490th Civil Affairs Battalion. "(They) primarily provide security for the citizens of Iraq, so that they have an opportunity to vote in a safe environment."

Hick's team works with the citizens of the area to improve infrastructure and quality of life.

"The Iraqi Security Forces are the lead element in providing this security. They are the ones people see at the polling sites," Hicks said. "It's a further demonstration of their ability

to take the lead as they will guide their country following the election."

The IA Soldiers took charge of security during the recent referendum vote and were successful at curbing attacks and ensuring citizens made it to the polls safely.

After voting, some troops danced and sang patriotic songs. One Soldier led his comrades in a chant extolling the virtues of their favorite candidates.

"It really means a lot to see how much enthusiasm they have," Hicks said. "It's just a very warming experience to share that with them here and see democracy in action."

"I hope for democracy and security for this country," Zaheer said as he headed to the polls to cast his vote.

Deployed Soldiers hit the books in Iraq

Spc. Emily J. Wilsoncroft
3rd Inf. Div. PAO

BAGHDAD – Although every Soldier deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom accomplishes their mission for the good of the larger whole, many here in Iraq are using their “down time” to accomplish a mission for their own good – that of continuing their civilian education.

Some Soldiers say it’s just a way to pass the time, while others are actively planning for their future lives beyond the military.

Either way, the Fort Stewart Tuition Assistance Hub has processed more than 5,000 requests for tuition assistance from deployed Soldiers since the hub was initiated in April. All those requests can only mean one thing: there’s a lot of learning going on.

Sgt. 1st Class Keith Ciano, an operations sergeant in Headquarters and Headquarters Operations Company, Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division, is currently working toward two simultaneous bachelor’s degrees – one in Business Administration with Saint Leo University, and one in Computer Information Science with University of Maryland University College. He has accumulated the bulk of his credits during deployments.

“I first began my studies while deployed to Operation Joint Endeavor in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” Ciano said. “I was eligible for promotion to staff sergeant and needed promotion points. A little more than a year later, I deployed again to the Balkans and my best friend and I got into a heavy competition of who could earn the most college credit while deployed. I won.

“While deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom 3, I discovered how boring my off-duty time could be and that it could be a golden opportunity to continue my education,” he added.

Because a Soldier always has to put his mission first, most have said earning a degree while in a combat zone can be difficult – but not too difficult to keep them from hitting the books anyway.

“I am able to do my work in my office or in my room,” said Staff Sgt. Maxine Glover-Blackwood, noncommissioned officer in charge of personnel for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Division Support Brigade.

Glover-Blackwood has already completed her Bachelor’s of Arts in Criminal Justice from Columbia College during this deployment, and is now enrolled in a Masters program in Human Resources Management with Bakers College.

“If I have to go somewhere, I will either do it before or make arrangements (with the instructors),” she said. “The instructors are very good about working with us,” she said.

Pfc. Pedro Loureiro said his biggest obstacle is finding the time in each day to fit all his scholastic requirements.

“There is a lot of reading that takes hours to complete and papers are due every week,” said Loureiro, a tanker with D Company, 3rd Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment. “While others play their PlayStations and watch movies, I tend to my college work. I have been doing online college for eight months now. Some weeks are worse than others, depending on our schedules, and since they are never set in stone I have learned never to wait till the last minute to complete assignments.

“Online college is great overall, assuming that you can donate at least two to three hours a night to strictly college,” he continued. “That, of course, can only be done if the Internet doesn’t go down.”

Spc. Jason Tuck, an administrative clerk in Headquarters and Headquarters Support Company, STB, said he’s learned to balance his time between work and school, but still finds it a bit of a challenge at times.

“A Soldier has to be ready for whatever,” he said. “There are times when guard duty or missions prevent you from being near a computer ... (also) the time zone difference creates a disconnection with group assignments and communication. Online discussions and class participation may not be very resourceful.”

Even so, Tuck, who is 10 credits away from a B.A. in Management from Jarvis Christian College, added that he enjoys being kept busy, so trying to fit classes and homework into his daily schedule doesn’t bother him.

Others, like Spc. Sarah Williams, an HHSC, STB personnel and administration center clerk, said her main struggle is finding the energy to work on her degree – an associate’s in General Studies from Columbia College – after her workday is done.



Spc. Emily J. Wilsoncroft

Spc. Jason Tuck, HHSC, STB, studies during a few minutes of down time from his job as a 3rd Inf. Div. administrative clerk at Camp Liberty.

“Sometimes I just want to go to sleep instead of working on school,” she said.

But Williams, like her fellow students, hits the books anyway, and continues to work toward her goal. Most agree that in this case, the end truly justifies the means.

“Obviously, my duties come first,” Ciano said. “I have to make sacrifices, which mostly amount to foregoing sleep in favor of studying. But the reward has been the completion of three courses so far with a 4.0 GPA, with two more in progress with a 3.8 GPA between those.

“It helps keep me busy and makes the time go by faster,” he added. “I have not looked at this deployment as a year, but as three eight-week terms and two 15-week quarters. It has been easier to digest that way.”

Although student-Soldiers have factors working against them, they do have one important thing in their favor – the help of Army education centers.

“I must admit that I was amazed by how much the education centers went out of their way for me,” Loureiro said. “From calling the schools, to faxing, scanning, and everything else – anything I needed I didn’t have to ask twice.”

When Soldiers send in tuition assistance requests, TA Hub employees back

at Fort Stewart are responsible for screening potential students’ education records and authorizing financial aid.

“They are wonderful,” Glover-Blackwood said. “At times, (they were) even able to call me here, not just assisting me, but the 30-plus Soldiers I was trying to help, and we all appreciated it.”

Another option Soldiers have when pursuing higher education is the eArmyU program.

“The nature of asynchronous learning enables me to study in smaller, more frequent periods instead of having to attend class three times a week on a fixed schedule,” Ciano said. “This freedom has only been made possible through the advent of online learning, particularly the eArmyU program.”

“Of the 5 classes I enrolled in, 4 were through eArmyU,” he continued. “Enrolling online through eArmyU precludes the need to go through an Army education center.”

But no matter which road they travel, all of these Soldiers are headed for the same destination – success.

“I really miss sleep,” Ciano said. “But to quote one of my favorite lines in Michael Shaara’s ‘The Killer Angels’: ‘There never came a hill for nothing.’”

Love of country drives Iraqi Army Soldiers forward to success

Spc. Maria Mengrone
100th MPAD

BAGHDAD – Despite continued terrorist attacks against Iraqi Army forces, Soldiers in the 6th Iraqi Army Division vow to take critical steps forward to ensure democratic stability throughout their homeland.

Originally, these IA Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Company would never have thought the

mere act of showing up to work would signify their bravery and resolve to counter a faceless enemy.

But now, 6th IA Div. Soldiers said they realize their ability to function as a normal military headquarters company has been the key to overcoming the monumental challenges they’ve faced.

“We always try to live the principles we are shown in the work that we do,” said Iraqi Army Pvt. Hayder Sabah, HHC supply clerk. “We must enforce the standards.”

Coming to work is something many Iraqi Soldiers enjoy because the salary is decent and they are being exposed to a new way of thinking and solving problems. Sabah said most of the company’s Soldiers simply love serving their country.

Many IA Soldiers like Sabah are aware that the road to democracy has been rough, but they realize that through perseverance the momentum to rebuild Iraq will continue.

The IA headquarters company currently operates much like a typical U.S. military unit.

“HHC has a functioning administrative section, supply room, transportation section, security section, weapons room, a finance office and (their own) cooks,” said U.S. military advisor Sgt. 1st Class Carlos Magwood, Military Transition Team, Special Troops Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division.

“Our mission here is to train the new Iraqi Army so that one day they can recapture the battlespace, thus reducing U.S. presence in their country,” Magwood said.

Although the Iraqi Army unit is currently mission-

capable, MiTT advisors continue looking for ways to help daily IA operations and improve upon their basic Soldiering skills.

Magwood said holding formations and conducting drill and ceremony instills discipline in Soldiers. He advises the Iraqi troops to continue employing marching drills; he also reiterates the importance of personnel and equipment accountability.

The struggle to stand up a capable fighting army is making progress in the eyes of the HHC Iraqi Soldiers who put their lives on the line every day.

“I want my Soldiers to take charge of Iraq someday and through training we will be able to accomplish that,” said Iraqi Army Sgt. Manar, military police noncommissioned officer in charge, HHC, 6th IA Div.

Manar has served in the Iraqi military for nearly 20 years and is a member of the growing NCO corps. He is keenly aware of the danger that he faces.

“I would like to bring in more Soldiers to train and make them military police,” Manar said.

The headquarters unit continues to move forward in operating as a normal military company, but the measure of its success is not only the number of weapons they have or the amount of driver’s training their Soldiers receive. The unit’s success is also measured by the changing attitudes of the Iraqi Soldiers.

When Manar was asked why he serves in the Iraqi military even though he fears for his life, his response was short, simple and similar to responses of U.S. Army Soldiers: “Because wearing the uniform gives me pride and I love my country.”



Spc. Maria Mengrone

A Soldier assigned to HHC, 6th Iraqi Army Division receives a new uniform and a pair of desert combat boots issued to him by the company supply clerk.

LOOK! Up in the sky!



An Iraqi Air Force crew chief welcomes Iraqi passengers onto an aircraft, as an all-Iraqi aircrew flew their first solo mission aboard a C-130E from Ali Air Base to New Al Muthana at Baghdad International Airport Nov. 28. The nine aircrew members are part the 23rd Iraqi Squadron, which have been receiving training at Ali Air Base.

Spc. Derek Del Rosario



Sgt. 1st Class Ken Walker

A U.S. Soldier runs to the loading ramp of a C-130 Hercules to add one more package at New Al Muthana Air Base. The transport aircraft was the first Iraqi Air Force mission completely crewed and piloted by members of the Iraqi Air Force. Iraqi Air Force Col. A. J. Mohamed, deputy commander and Lt. Col. Mike Mawson, U.S. Operations Support Officer were on hand to greet the aircraft and crew.

What Soldiers need to know before shipping belongings home

Spc. Brian Henretta
100th MPAD

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – As 3rd Infantry Division's mission in Baghdad draws to a close, Soldiers are scrambling to prepare their personal items to be sent home.

But before attempting to mail or pack items into a military van, Soldiers should keep in mind that certain items have been prohibited for shipment or possession.

Among these items are those covered by general order number one, which includes weapons, ammunition, explosives, pornography, alcohol, narcotics and gambling devices. Violators who attempt to ship these items face investigation and punishment through Uniform Code of Military Justice action or court martial, which may include loss of rank, forfeiture of pay and allowances, confinement in prison and bad conduct discharges, said Special Agent John Aiello, and investigator with the U.S. Army criminal investigation command.

Other items which can not be shipped for safety purposes include aerosol or pressurized containers, matches, flammable or combustible material, corrosives, peroxides, and switchblades, or any knife that is not in its proper case, said Staff Sgt. Miranda Smith, noncommissioned officer in charge of accountable mail with the 155th Postal Company.

All packages sent through the mail system are inspected by postal workers prior to sealing the boxes. If contraband is found during the inspection, the item will be confiscated and the Soldier can be detained by the postal workers until military police or criminal investigation command investigators arrive to the scene, Smith said.

If contraband makes it past the inspectors, the sender is by no way in the clear.

"100 percent of packages sent from Iraq are x-rayed at the naval base in Bahrain. (Naval Criminal Investigative Service) agents open suspicious packages and seize any

contraband," Aiello said.

They then identify who mailed the package and inform CID, which takes over the investigation and informs the Soldier's chain of command. Sometimes Soldiers try to outsmart investigators by listing fake names as the package sender, but CID has ways to find who the sender was and they are prosecuted, said Aiello.

Soldiers have gone to great lengths to hide items in the mail, but the x-ray machine catches everything, Smith said.

"X-ray machines have found a shotgun wrapped inside aluminum foil rolled up inside a rug, and a pistol found inside a DVD player that was taken apart and reassembled. You can try to hide things and the inspector might miss it, but the x-rays won't," said Smith.

Batteries and cigarettes for personal consumption, unused hookahs, and most TA-50 are items that have recently been authorized for mail shipment that had not been in the past, Smith said.

"TA-50 can be mailed now except for kevlar, bulletproof vests and their armor plates," Smith said. "However, it is important for Soldiers to understand they are still accountable for anything they send, and it can't be considered a field loss if its lost in the mail."

Smith also offered advice that will help Soldiers prepare their packages for shipment.

Ensure you take out the batteries from all electronic equipment, she said. Batteries can cause electronics to make noises or vibrate. This causes postal handlers to suspect possible bombs. These packages will be opened and all the contents are confiscated, Smith said. Also, she suggested ensuring that your packages weigh less than 70 pounds. They also must not exceed 108 inches in any dimension, or they cannot be mailed.

When it comes to connex containers, standards are just as high for controlling what can be shipped home.

Every item is inspected by customs officials before it can be packed into the connex, said Air Force 1st Lt. Ross



Spc. Jimmy D. Lane Jr.

Sgt. David Butts (right), an inspections sergeant with 155th Postal Company, searches a package belonging to Sgt. 1st Class Jerome Lewis, 200th Engineer Battalion, at the Camp Liberty post office Dec. 11. Searches are conducted to protect mail handlers, prevent contraband from reaching the U.S., and protect American agriculture.

Kurtz, Multi-National Corps-Iraq provost marshal office law and order officer, during a recent training course for customs officials.

In addition to inspectors checking for contraband, there are narcotics dogs who search for drugs during inspections, Aiello said.

If any items are found that warrant a felony, a federal investigation occurs. If a Soldier or civilian is convicted, it will follow him in his records for 40 years. This bars people from obtaining privileges such as security clearances, civilian employment, loans and scholarships, Aiello said.

Investigators do use their discretion during searches and investigations.

"If someone is found with one small item, such as a shell from a bullet tucked away in an ammo pouch for example, and they honestly didn't know it was there, we listen to them. We can test for fingerprints and do other tests to see how it got there. If

you didn't do anything wrong, we want to show you didn't. If you did do it, you will get caught," Aiello said.

It's not just personal safety or general order violations that necessitate inspections of all items shipped home. Our country's agricultural industry is endangered by Soldiers who unknowingly bring home uninvited guests.

Iraq is home to many species of termites, beetles and other insects that can wreak havoc on U.S. crops. Entire crops from farmers who provide us with our food supply can be wiped out by species that are foreign to our ecosystem, said Kurtz.

Agricultural items include untreated wood, fruits and vegetables, wildlife and plants whether living or dead, rocks, and sand.

While most Soldiers want to bring a souvenir home to remember their deployment, do not let a memento from Iraq lead to disciplinary problems and possible harm to others.

1/71 Cav. Soldier examines scars of war

Hart Seely

Syracuse Post-Standard

Nearly every morning, he walks the perimeter. It clears his head. He can ponder what happened overnight. He gets to stretch his legs.

He changes his route, a precaution against snipers. After 15 years in the U.S. Army, he knows the value of reducing risks. So he walks near the base of the great wall that separates central Baghdad from Forward Operating Base Independence, the home of B Troop, 1st Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment.

"It always seems quiet in the morning," said Staff Sgt. Evert Janson, as he began a recent walk this week, passing the checkpoint that separates the U.S. and Iraqi sides of the military base.

"Sometimes, the nights are quiet, nothing going on," he said. "Then all the sudden, towards morning, it gets crazy. It can be stressful."

At age 45, Janson is B Troop's oldest soldier. His wife, Betsy, and two daughters Amy, 8, and Sarah, 6 live on the Fort Drum base near Watertown, N.Y. He works nights in the troop's Tactical Operations Center, the "TOC," monitoring radio calls from across the area.

Nearly every day, he hikes through the past and future of Iraq.

On a recent sunny morning, he walked down a road that bisects the former military airfield. En route, he passed a smoldering metal dumpster outside the Iraqi National Guard headquarters, and a stretch of pavement littered with trash.

"When we got here in August, this was all garbage," he said. "It's actually much better."

He pointed to a team of Iraqi workers following a trash truck a sign of more progress.

Janson walked on, passing a two-story concrete building

with iron bars over the windows. It was the barracks of the Iraqi Army. Two soldiers stood on the sidewalk. One bent to wash his hair at a knee-level outdoor faucet. The other smoked a cigarette. He waved. Nearby, laundry hung from a security cable.

Janson hiked toward an old soccer field, overgrown in some places and chewed by machinery in others. The frame of a goal stood at one end. Metal awnings one red, one green shaded benches on each opposite sideline. At a corner stood a slab of poured concrete. It held two white marble tablets, onto which was inscribed: "HICKS FIELD."

"Upon the fields of friendly strife are sown the seeds that upon other fields on other days will bear the fruits of victory. CA Douglas MacArthur," the inscription went on. "In memory of SFC Gregory B. Hicks, B Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. Killed in action 8 Jan 2004. Operation Iraqi Freedom."

Janson paused a moment, then headed into a long, flat expanse, flanked on both sides by empty concrete pads.

"This was once all warehouses," he said. "They're gone. Only the foundations are left. Right smack in the middle of the floorings are craters. They must have bombed it from the air. They leveled this place."

Janson, an artillery expert, said the bombs were probably dropped early in the war.

In early 2003, United Nations weapons inspectors visited this base in search of Saddam Hussein's infamous weapons of mass destruction. They wondered what he kept in this row of giant warehouses. When the war began, probably during the phase of "shock and awe," this base was bombed.

"Very precise," Janson said. "Every single one, dropped smack dab in the middle of the

concrete. There's maybe 10 slabs in a row. That's a lot of tonnage."

As he walked, Janson pointed to the walls around the base. Each huge section, shaped like a shield, once held the emblem of two crossed sabers, the symbol of Saddam's military. Now, concrete blocks cover the inscriptions.

Janson noted birds flying in and out of crevices in the blocks.

"Those are bullet holes," he said. "They busted up the concrete, and now birds nest in it."

He walked on, past spray-painted Arabic graffiti, unreadable to most Americans. He pointed out patches of towering, 10-foot-tall reeds and ornamental shrubs that probably dated back to the early days as an airfield. He talked about flowers he'd seen bloom amid the rubble.

"The morning glories are huge here," he said. "Big as a silver dollar. Bigger."

He came to the shell of a former warehouse. Two corrugated steel sides were gone, and the roof showed gaping holes. Beneath it, three Iraqi soldiers trained a guard dog by playing fetch with a ball.

Janson went to a steel door in the corner. It opened into two windowless, concrete-walled rooms. In the center of each room, a four-inch long steel hook hung from the cement ceiling.

Janson said he could not fathom a good reason for such a hook to be in such a place. But on the previous day, news accounts told of an Iraqi police station that was found to be holding prisoners in a tortuous, underground setting.

"I don't know what they were hanging from the ceiling," Janson said. "I just hope it wasn't people."

He walked to another concrete building, where huge holes were punched in the sides.

On one interior wall, some-

one had drawn a faceless man with an AK-47 and scrawled an obscenity about the U.S.A. In the next room, the obscenity was repeated, this time about Iraq.

Janson walked on. Beyond the northern wall, several acres of construction materials waited on wooden pallets, ready to go. After Thanksgiving, Bravo Troop will leave Independence and continue its neighborhood patrols from Camp Liberty, outside Baghdad. By next summer, an estimated 2,000 workers will be rebuilding this land as a base for the Iraqi Army.

He passed a crushed Iraqi helmet, nearly buried in fresh bulldozer tracks. He noticed on the pavement several spent AK-47 bullets, most likely the result of "celebratory fire." For weddings or grand occasions, the Iraqis traditionally shoot their guns at the sky. The bullets always land somewhere.

Janson passed a series of tall posts, though their connecting fence was gone. Ten feet above the ground, barbed wire ran from post to post, signs that a secondary fortification once stood here.

"That was to keep people out, even the guards," he said. "Whatever was in here, I guess they didn't trust their own guards."

He stopped at a small crater, the site of a recent mortar attack. Three times since B Troop arrived at Independence, the base has taken mortar fire. In one attack, a contractor was killed, several others wounded.

"We were having a meeting inside the dining facility when the mortars struck," Janson recalled. "In fact, the meeting was about doing the right things to stay safe."

"Here it is," he said, pointing to an almost perfect 2-inch circle in the pavement, which flowered out about five feet in all directions. "See where the nose cone went in? Right there? You can see where the shrapnel

"When we got here in August, this was all garbage ... it's actually much better."

Staff Sgt. Evert Janson
1/71 Cav. Regt.

pinged off the pavement. . . . "The other mortar landed in the middle of the workers," he said. "And there's another one that hit inside the American side. And the workers at one point found an unexploded mortar round. . . . They picked it up and were bringing it, saying, 'Hey, look what we found!' And we were, 'PUT . . . IT . . . DOWN.' They had no concept of how dangerous it was."

He came upon a square concrete pad, about 80 yards wide. Its center had been pulverized, the bomb crater billowing out 100 feet in all directions. He walked to the edge of the pad, where a cement curb had disappeared in places.

"Look at how the metal rebar is twisted," he said, pointing to iron spokes that leaned almost 90 degrees away from the center. "The cement is about five inches thick, and it's completely blasted through, and the rebar is all bent outward."

The explosion blasted everything outward, even the steel bars at the base.

"It must have been spectacular," he said. "This one going, BAM, then that one, BAM, maybe ten in a row. The explosions. The fright. The sounds. The smells. The fires. Everyone in this neighborhood heard it. Everyone knew it. It must have been total chaos."

The walk was done. As Janson passed the Iraqi Army barracks, the soldiers waved.

"One thing hasn't changed," he said. "They're young."

Hart Seely was embedded with 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. Article used courtesy of the Post-Standard.



Photos by Pfc. Jason Jordan

Cpl. Phillip Heyde, 3rd Battalion, 6th Field Artillery Regiment, treats a simulated open chest wound on role player Spc. Emelio Benavides, 10th Brigade Support Battalion, during a mass casualty exercise at the Camp Liberty Post Exchange Nov. 18. "The purpose of this exercise was to prepare our Soldiers for a real-life mass casualty crisis," said Capt. Shonnel Makwakwa, a medical officer with 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division. Soldiers from each battalion of 1st BCT, 10th Mountain Div. participated in the event.

Soldiers prepared for terrorist attacks



Sgt. Scott Rebarchak, 3/6 FA, provides oxygen to role player Spc. Chad Harris, 1st Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, as he simulates unconsciousness during a MASCAL exercise.

Division awarded for high number of reenlistments



Sgt. 1st Class Brenda Benner

Maj. Gen. William G. Webster Jr., 3rd Infantry Division commander (center), and Command Sgt. Maj. William M. Grant, 3rd Inf. Div. command sergeant major (left), present the Forces Command Commanding General's Retention Excellence Award for Top Production to Sgt. Maj. Craig T. Lott, division retention sergeant major on behalf of the retention office at the 3rd Inf. Div. headquarters Nov. 27. The plaque was awarded to the 3rd Inf. Div. on behalf of the retention noncommissioned officers and other leaders for a job well done in fiscal year 2005. "This doesn't stop with '05," Lott said. "We are on pace to surpass 5,000 reenlistments by the time we leave Iraq. This accomplishment is based on the efforts of Soldiers in service and deed. Their decision to stay (with the 3rd Inf. Div.) is a demonstration of the professionalism of the team."



- To purchase, contact your staff section NCOIC
- Make checks payable to the "Marne Association"
 - Cash is accepted
- Prints will be available for pick-up upon return to Fort Stewart, Ga.
- Division POC is Maj. Thomas Whitaker (G-5) at: thomas.whitaker@us.army.mil

Wounded Warrior Program supports military education quest

The following message excerpt from Department of the Army Headquarters provides guidance concerning U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program Soldiers in continuance on active duty, COAD, and in continuance in active reserve status who are attending professional military education courses.

For more detailed guidance, refer to the following regulations:
AR 635-40 – Physical evaluation for retention, retirement or separation.
Dated 15 August 1990.

AR 350-1 – Army training and education. Dated 9 April 2003.

COAD and continuance in the active reserve status is a system that allows Soldiers who, although unfit by a physical evaluation board because of physical disability, can still serve effectively within assignment limitations and train within the limits of their profile provided they meet course graduation requirements.

According to the provisions in AR 635-40, COAD or continuance in the active reserve status Soldiers must be unfit due to physical disability.

The physical disability must be a basically stable condition or one for which accepted medical principles show slow progression. The Soldier must be able to maintain himself in a military environment without jeopardizing individual health or the health of others. The Soldier must not require an excessive amount of medical care.

U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program Soldiers who are approved for retention on active duty and active reserve status as the result of an approved COAD and continuance in the active reserve status application are eligible to attend professional military education service schools, provided they are otherwise qualified.

The expiration date cannot be determined.

The Army G-3/5/7 point of contact for this message is Master Sgt. Charles M. Timms at:
charles.timms@hqda.army.mil.

Phone: (703) 614-9812 or DSN: 224-9812.

Correcting a misnomer: Who and what is a Hajji?

Jake Lester

Cultural and Political Advisor

On the 7th of the Islamic month of Dhu al-Hijjah of the Hijri year of 1426 (corresponding to the Gregorian date of 8 or 9 January of 2006), devout Shiite and Sunni Muslim men and women from all over the world will converge on Mecca, Saudi Arabia for the single most important spiritual experience a Muslim can have.

They make the journey to experience the Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Hajj is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, that is, one of the basic religious duties that a Muslim must perform, if they are able to, and which separates the Muslim from the non-Muslim.

During the Hajj, a pilgrim travels to Mecca to perform a series of rituals and visits to places intended to reinforce the

believer's basic convictions and to commemorate Abraham's act of faith in being prepared to sacrifice his son to God.

Muslims believe that God did not in the end demand this sacrifice, but substituted a sheep instead. This commemoration is known as 'Id al-Adha, the Feast of the Sacrifice.

Some of the rituals of the Hajj are:

Donning the Ihram: Pilgrims at Mecca will wear an unadorned shroud-like two-piece white garment called the ihram. It is designed to show that there is no difference between the rich and the poor in the presence of God, and to remind them of their mortality.

Standing at the hill of 'Arafah: Pilgrims will stand on the Hill of 'Arafah from the early afternoon till sundown, spending their time in prayer and contemplation of their lives. The scene of all the pilgrims

standing in their shroud-like garments dramatically conveys the message of the reality of the Last Judgment to each participating pilgrim. On the following day it is a duty for the pilgrim to slaughter a sacrificial animal.

The stoning of the Devil: This involves throwing a number of pebbles at a representation of Satan.

Circling of the Ka'bah: This is a procession around the black stone structure of the Ka'bah in which the pilgrims will complete seven circuits of the Ka'bah. This ritual is performed twice: once upon arrival at the Ka'bah, and once after the stoning of the devil.

These rituals, along with the grandeur and historical significance of the places visited, combine to make the Hajj a moving experience that forms for many a pilgrim the high point of his spiritual life.

For Iraqis throughout the thirteen years preceding the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the Hajj was subject to the manipulations of the Ba'ath Party.

Hajj visas were allotted based largely on nepotism, and half of the quota was reserved for members of the intelligence services. Knowing this, the Saudi Arabian government granted Iraq only 25,000 visas to be distributed among more than 25 million Muslims. Although Saudi Arabian government officials felt that the previous restrictions placed on the number of Iraqi pilgrims were justified, during 2004 they tentatively granted post-Saddam Iraqis an additional 5,000 Hajj visas, thus increasing the number to 30,000 pilgrims.

The visa allotment is expected to increase to more than 40,000 this year.

In response to the title's question – a Muslim who has

performed the Hajj will have earned an honorific title; the word Hajj will be placed before the first name of a man, and Hajjah before the name of a woman.

In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the honorific title for males is Hajji, which is why some of our troops quite inaccurately call the Iraqis "Hajjis."

For questions about Iraqi culture and religion, please send an e-mail to hugh.lester@mnd-b.army.mil.

Due to time restrictions, unfortunately not every question received can be answered.



Jake Lester

Current procedural guidelines, requirements for official military photographs

The purpose of the new guidance is to eliminate the requirement for photography facilities to print hardcopy photographs. As a result, this eliminates the requirement for Military Personnel Divisions, Personnel Service Battalions, and Brigade Combat Teams to forward hardcopies of the official photographs to Human Resources Command on officer personnel.

New procedural guidance:

Effective immediately, Army multimedia and visual information and supporting Department of Defense activities are no longer required to provide hardcopy photographs for active Army officer personnel. The Army National Guard and the Army Reserve whose selection boards utilize an automated board process with Department of the Army's Photo Management System, also no longer require a hardcopy of the photograph.

Army National Guard and Army Reserve Soldiers who fall under the jurisdiction of state adjutants general or under troop program unit commanders, may still require hardcopy photos. Photo studios will upload the photograph to DAPMIS and produce hardcopy photos as required for this population of Soldiers.

Contracted Army multimedia and

visual facilities should contact their contracting office representative to modify their existing contract and include the new requirement in any future statement of work.

Photography facilities must ensure that all of the photographs are uploaded into DAPMIS as required by AR 640-30. Current policy allows reserve component officers enroute to phase three of basic officer leader course, captains career course and the warrant officer basic course to be photographed during their training.

For photography facilities that do not upload photographs to DAPMIS, the photographer must save the photographic images as a .jpg file with 300 dpi resolution (about 350k file size), four inches wide by six inches long and email them to dapmis@hoffman.army.mil.

In order to ensure image integrity, the photographer will not give the Soldier a digital file copy. Active measures must be taken to ensure the accuracy and integrity of all official DA photographs.

The Department of Defense zero tolerance policy, DODD 5040.5, alteration of official DOD imagery on altering photographs must be strictly enforced. Multimedia and visual

information managers at all levels are responsible for enforcing this policy. Photographers can improve the contrast, color balance, and light levels electronically, but will not alter the image in any way as to misrepresent the actual image.

The only uniform authorized for official photographs is the class-A green service uniform. The photographer will ensure that official photographs are not taken in unauthorized uniforms such as the Desert Camouflage Uniform and Battle Dress Uniform, or in civilian attire.

The photographer will destroy all devices which contain the Soldier's social security number. This includes hard drives, and printer cartridges based on AR 380-5, paragraphs 3-16, 4-27, and 4-32. All hard copies of photographs and emails with a service member's SSN will be destroyed. This information is considered "for official use only."

Commanders are asked to help photography facility personnel avoid reshoots by ensuring that the Soldier reports to the photo facility in class-A green service uniform wearing all current authorized permanent accessories, decorations, and insignia per AR 670-1.

Soldiers can go to this Web address to locate the nearest authorized photograph facility and select a map: <https://vifp.afis.osd.mil>.

These changes in procedures will be updated in AR 640-30.

Point of contact is Ms. D. J. Williams at commercial: (703) 325-3834, DSN: 221-3834 or at e-mail dapmis@hoffman.army.mil.

For additional information see the following references:

AR 640-30, photographs for military personnel files

AR 670-1, wear and appearance of army uniforms and insignia

AR 600-8-104, military personnel information management/records

DA PAM 25-91, visual information procedures

DODD 5040.5, alteration of official DOD imagery

While in Iraq, Soldiers are authorized to have official photos taken in DCUs. Soldiers may go to the photo lab next to the Camp Liberty Post Exchange to have their photos made for one dollar apiece.

LEGAL

PROBLEMS?

CONTACT YOUR UNIT'S SJA

FOR GUIDANCE

DESERT JUSTICE

Legalities of returning home

Capt. Heather Herbert
1st Lt. Jason M. Wong
Legal officers

It's the moment we have all been looking forward to since we arrived in country, the moment when Iraq is in our rearview mirror.

Do not let this moment of joy be tarnished by a simply legal mistake that could have been avoided.

Discussed below are the top three legal issues Soldiers encounter on redeployment and how to prevent them, or at least minimize the damage.

1. Rip up those Powers of Attorney

The only way to make sure your Power of Attorney has been legally revoked is to destroy it.

Destruction may be accomplished by ripping, burning, or otherwise destroying the original document.

The key to revocation is the destruction of the ORIGINAL document!

In the event you come across copies of the original, it can't hurt to destroy those documents also. However, destruction of a copy will not act as revocation. You MUST destroy the original document.

If you are aware of any businesses where the POA has been used, you should send a certified letter to each business that may have a copy of your POA to inform the business that your POA has been revoked.

This is the only way to protect yourself! You should have a good idea of which businesses have a copy of your POA – your bank or credit union, insurance company and utility companies are good examples of companies that may have copies of your POA.

If you determine that your POA was used in a manner you did not intend, come to the Legal Assistance Office immediately.

2. Determine if any lawsuits have been filed against you

Unfortunately, some service members will return from Iraq to learn that someone has filed a lawsuit against them. In most cases, the court will delay the trial until the service member returns from deployment.

In a few cases, the court may not know that the service member is deployed and will allow the lawsuit to proceed in the service member's absence.

If this occurs, it is likely that the lawsuit will be granted against the service member, resulting in potentially large judgments against you.

These judgments are worse than a debt – it's a court order requiring you to pay the amount of the lawsuit.

If you learn that a lawsuit was filed against you while you were deployed, come to the Legal Assistance Office immediately.

3. Get a copy of your credit report

Each year you are entitled to one free copy of your credit report. The official free credit report Web site is

www.annualcreditreport.com.

This is the ONLY website you should use.

There are hundreds and perhaps thousands of websites that promise free credit reports, credit counseling, and the ability to clean up, or increase your credit score.

Unfortunately, there is only one official website, and use of any other website may result in hidden fees or services.

As a Soldier, you are at high risk for identity theft.

The U.S. military requires a social security number on nearly every official document. In addition, members of the military often move frequently, whether due to deployments or reassignments.

As a result, it is very important to regularly check your credit report for inconsistencies and irregularities.

Ordering a free credit report can assist in determining whether you have been a victim of identity theft,

whether your trusted agent is misusing an old Power of Attorney, or determine if you have been the victim of a lawsuit.

Ordering a free credit report can be done online. It's easy and it's free. In some cases, you may be able to receive your credit report via e-mail. If you find anything unusual or need help reading your credit report please stop by the Legal Assistance Office.

4. Don't get scammed out of your hard-earned money

Caveat Emptor – let the buyer beware!

Every car dealer, stereo store and computer retailer in the Hinesville and Savannah area is anxiously awaiting your return.

These retailers know you earned tax-free money and received reenlistment bonuses, yet had little or no opportunity to spend your money in Iraq.

Do not let a slick salesman, or the offer of a "limited-time only" deal sucker you out of your money. Beware of after-market auto accessory stores with limited sales histories. Ask for references.

If a car dealership is pushing you to sign a lease, stop! Think!

It is probably not in your best interest.

Leasing a vehicle is rarely a good deal for Soldiers, based upon restrictions on mileage and the ability to relocate in another state.

When an individual comes selling their products door-to-door, Stop! Think!

Is this something you need to purchase right now?

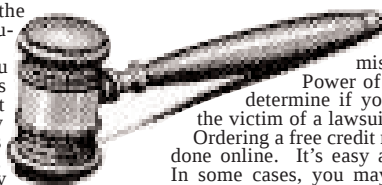
Do you really need the item being sold?

Can the product be purchased from a reputable store within the area?

If the product is really as great as claimed, then you should be asking why it cannot be purchased at a local store.

Before you sign any contract, please stop by the Legal Assistance Office and ask for help to review the document.

A half-hour of your time may save you thousands of dollars and immeasurable heartache later on.



Chaplain's Corner

Soldiers and Reunion after deployment

Chaplain (Capt.) Charlie Lee
1/9 FA chaplain

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 states "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace."

Yes, there is a time to deploy, and a time to redeploy, a time to separate, a time for reunions, a time to work, and a time to rest.

Today, as we come to the end of our one-year deployment and as we approach redeployment, it would be profitable to take a look back and count our blessings and then look forward and make our plan for our reunions. Successful reunions are another big challenge for Soldiers and their spouses.

Soldier's missions never end. Therefore, we should not take lightly the reunion process. Reunions require patience, courage, love, forgiveness, care, positive thinking and hope.

Currently Soldiers are happy and excited because the Christmas spirit is around us and redeployment is near. However, a long deployment and separation from home makes people tired and weary.

We all have issues. Some of us have major issues while others have minor issues, but you can be certain that we all have issues. It's worse for a person who does not realize that they have issues because they can't fix something unless they think it's broken. A person who tries to deny and avoid their issues causes more issues later on.

We all have a burden that we carry around from day to day.

Many may have financial obligations. Others may have a foreboding family illness, unrealistic expectations, or perhaps marital issues that are weighing them down.

Remember this: All of the problems you left behind have not magically disappeared. All the expectations you have about your reunion may not happen.

Thus, it is important to understand and accept that things back home will probably be different from what you expect.

The list of burdens could go on and on.

According to the book of Job 14:1, "Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble."

There is a problem that we all face. All Soldiers and spouses are tired and weary physically, mentally, and emotionally.

So, what should we do?

I advise you not to give up ... there is hope! Take it one step at a time and try not to rush. The best thing you can do is to go slowly. And remember ... "If it's not broke, then don't fix it!"

Here are a few more things to remember: We must express our love, pride, care, and appreciation for each other.

Three simple words can make a world of difference – "I Love You." Assure your spouse of your love by showing your love and affection. Remember, men in general need to receive three main things; encouragement, appreciation, and admiration.

On the other hand, women's needs are a little different. These include an assurance of love, appreciation, and of validation.

Communication is the key to experiencing a healthy reunion. Communication will help you understand different expectations and have a closer relationship. James 1:19 advises we put this into practice. "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." (NIV)

Communication "Dos and Don'ts"

Do:

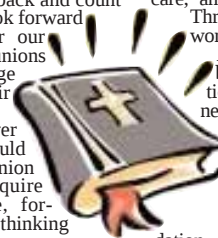
- Share the details of your daily life (but not the secret information)
- Talk about your feelings, both positive and negative.
- Be real, express your love.
- Be positive

Don't:

- Blame your spouse by critiquing decisions he or she has made.
- Concentrate only on your problems (keep a three to one balance of positives vs. negatives)
- Make your spouse the only outlet for your frustrations.
- Lie or hide things by omission.

God bless you in your redeployment and reunion.

"BATTLEKINGS!"



In Memory of ...

Sgt. William B. Meeuwse, A Co., 2/502nd Inf.
Staff Sgt. Aram J. Bass, A Co., 2/502nd Inf.
Sgt. 1st Class Eric P. Pearrow, 3/3 ACR
Sgt. Jerry W. Mills Jr., A Co., 1/13 Armor
Sgt. Donald J. Hasse, A Co., 1/13 Armor
Sgt. Grzegorz Jakoniuk, B Co., 4/3 Avn.
Sgt. 1st Class Richard L. Schild, C Co., 1/147th FA
Staff Sgt. Daniel M. Cuka, C Co., 1/147th FA
1st Lt. Kevin Smith, A Co., 1/76th FA
Spc. Adrian N. Orosco, 1/11 ACR
Sgt. Julia V. Atkins, 64th MP Co.
Spc. Clarence L. Floyd Jr., A Co., 1/320th FA
Sgt. Kenneth Casica, B Co., 1/502nd Inf.
Staff Sgt. Travis L. Nelson, B Co., 1/502nd Inf.
Sgt. 1st Class James S. Moudy, 1/71 Cav.
Spc. Jared W. Kubasak, 3/3 ACR
Staff Sgt. Curtis A. Mitchell, C Twp., 3/7 Cav.
Spc. Lex S. Nelson, 1/41 FA
Staff Sgt. Michael S. Zyla, A Co., 2/70 Armor
Sgt. Brian C. Karim, A Co., 2/70 Armor
Spc. James C. Kesinger, HHC, 2/70 Armor
Spc. Peter J. Navarro, A Co., 2/70 Armor



You may be gone,
 but you're not forgotten.
 We will continue the fight.



Faces & Places



Spc. Derek Del Rosario

Pfc. Nathan Bryant, a radio operator with 602nd Area Support Medical Company, re-adjusts the Christmas display at the Witmer Troop Medical Clinic Dec. 9.



Sgt. 1st Class Ken Walker

Staff Sgt. Laura Hall, Sgt. Jon Gassaway, Staff. Sgt. Martin Sambrano all with 155th AG Postal Company, 3rd Soldier Support Battalion and Capt. Ross Kaplan, A Co., 3rd SSB, share their Christmas spirit with fellow Soldiers in a big way with their "Cup-O-Joe" makeshift lounge located on Pad 11. Soldiers are welcome to drop by and relax with a cup of coffee, and for a large pizza can get their weapon cleaned.



Sgt. Andrew Miller

First Lt. Kadett Derry enjoys a holiday treat Dec. 8 thanks to a care package sent from home. Derry, from Texas, is a public affairs officer with the 100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment.



Lt. Col. Christopher Royer

Sgt. Ivey Perkins, Headquarters and Headquarters Support Company, Special Troops Battalion, watches from the gunner's hatch of her vehicle as two Sunni children pose for a picture in Al'adl Kharkh, Baghdad after a soccer field dedication.

Black Knights move into tie for fifth place in Atlantic hockey standings

www.goarmysports.com

Special to The Marne Express

WEST POINT, N.Y. - Jereme Tendler's short-handed goal early in the third period pulled visiting American International College even and that is the way things ended Thursday evening as 1,160 fans witnessed a 2-2 overtime tie at West Point's Tate Rink.

With the one point earned in the league standings, Army moved into a tie for fifth place in Atlantic Hockey with idle Canisius. The Griffins do have two games this weekend before breaking for the holidays.

Army (4-9-3, 2-5-3 Atlantic Hockey) enters the holiday break unbeaten in its last two contests and 4-2-3 in its last nine games.

Tendler finished off a two-on-one break while short-handed and beat Black Knights' goalie Brad Roberts for the game-tying goal.

Army peppered the Yellow Jackets' net in the final 20 minutes with 19 shots. However, AIC freshman goalie Tom Fenton steered every attempt aside to preserve a point for his squad.

The Black Knights outshot the Yellow Jackets (1-9-2, 1-6-2) by a whopping 52-18 margin. Fenton finished with a career-high 50 saves.

Jeff Fearing put the hosts on top just

over midway through the first period when he banged home a rebound off a shot by Chris Bilec.

However, AIC answered two minutes later on a power play goal by Chad Richardson.

Bryce Hollweg then gave the Black Knights another one-goal advantage when he finished off a nice set up by linemate Luke Flicek with 2:22 left in the second period.

Chase Podsiad fed Flicek, who one-timed a pass cross ice to Hollweg standing on the far post.

The sophomore center flicked the puck into an open net for his team-leading fifth goal of the year.

Roberts made 16 saves in goal for Army, who is off until Dec. 29 when the Black Knights travel to Storrs, Conn., for the UConn/Toyota Classic.

Army will face host Connecticut in the first round of the four-team tournament. That contest will count in the league standings.

The Black Knights will then face either Massachusetts or Bowling Green the following evening.



Bryce Hollweg

Football on FOBs soothes stress for Soldiers

Hart Seely

Syracuse Post-Standard

BAGHDAD, Iraq - At Forward Operating Base Independence, each Friday is "refit day," when the 1st Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment's B Troop services vehicles and equipment, and lets Soldiers work a reduced schedule.

Across Iraq, Friday is a day when many U.S. forces try to squeeze in a day of relaxation - their only break over the week.

But it's not all rest. At Independence, Nov. 18 was Football Friday, when the troop's marathon tournament of touch football took precedence over most regular pursuits.

It's part of the First Annual All Baghdad Two-Hand-Touchdown

Tarmac FOB Ball Tourney.

"It pulls the troop together," said Sgt. 1st Class Neil Hoffman, who functioned as sort of a tournament director and master of cere-

Liberty, on the outskirts of Baghdad.

For about three hours, it seemed as though everyone on the base was playing or watching football. Even Soldiers in guard posts and gates got occasional updates over the radio.

It was a day for Soldiers in sweat-soaked T-shirts to rekindle boyhood glories.

Receivers ran improvised patterns along the makeshift field an asphalt surface bordered by buildings and pre-fabricated blast barriers while quarterbacks heaved long, arching bombs.

The Soldiers were not back home Nov. 18.

But for a brief time, they weren't in Baghdad, either.

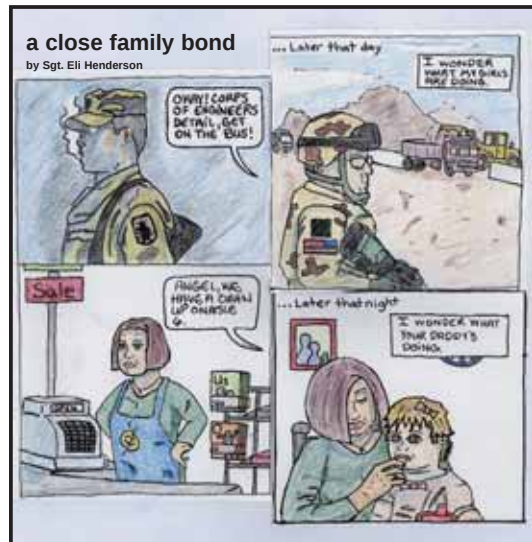
Hart Seely was embedded with 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. Article used courtesy of the Post-Standard.

"[Playing football] pulls the troop together."

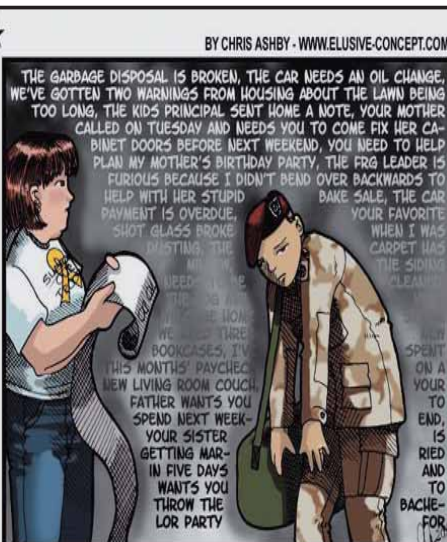
Sgt. 1st Class Neil Hoffman
Tournament director

Cartoon Corner

★ OPERATION ELUSIVE CONCEPT ★



★ OPERATION ELUSIVE CONCEPT ★



Have something you'd like to contribute to the bi-weekly comic strip? Contact emily.wilsoncroft@id3.army.mil.



In the Movies



Three films to get you in the holly, jolly, holiday spirit

Spc. Adam Musil
2nd BCT PAO

Judging from that last piece of leftover turkey you finally plucked from the back tooth with the "deep groove," Thanksgiving is over – which means it is time for Mr. Capitalism's favorite holiday, Christmas.

I know some of you would rather it be called "X-mas," but honestly, is there that much religion in a holiday designed around buying gifts, gorging on food and paying homage to a once pagan god whose modern day costume was designed by Coca-Cola? I think not.

Every holiday season in the states we are bombarded with various types of films to lift our spirits and make us think that, at least for a moment, everything in the world can be fixed with a little peace, love and understanding.

In the spirit of the holidays, I have compiled a list of holiday movies that are not only worth watching, but worth purchasing if for no other reason than to dust them off and watch once a year while trimming the tree.

You will not find any new releases on this list, but what you will find are old Yuletide classics.

First up is "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" which first aired in 1964.



"Rudolph" was a made-for-television, stop-motion animated film.

Most of you have probably seen this movie, and while the animation is dated compared to the computer generated entertainment of today, the story of a young reindeer outcast from his peers still makes for enjoyable viewing.

In fact, it only gets better as you get older. As a child, what I once found as a silly out-of-date cartoon, (and this was in the 80s) is now a campy classic that was no doubt created by people under the influence of something other than egg nog.

After being banned from the reindeer games because of his bright nose, Rudolph teams up with Hermey the elf, who wants to be a dentist, and Yukon Cornelius, a prospector. During their journeys the group encounters an abominable snowman and an island of misfit toys.

Rudolph takes pity on the toys, returns to the North Pole

and enlists the help of Santa to rescue the toys. The only problem is, the island is fogged over and Santa can not see where to go. You can probably guess what happens next.

The film was directed by Kizo Nagashima and Larry Roemer. Roemer you may remember from his other classic work, "The Ballad of Smokey the Bear" ... okay, maybe not.

The only "star" of the cast was Burl Ives who plays the voice of Sam the Snowman, the narrator of the story.

For the more artistically inclined you may remember Ives as Big Daddy in the screen version of "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof." Or others may remember him as the narrator to the "Ewok Adventure," the 1984 Star Wars TV show that proves George Lucas was milking the franchise well before "The Phantom Menace."

Next on the list is "A Miracle on 34th Street," the 1947 classic starring Maureen O'Hara and a young Natalie Wood.

After the Macy's Santa



Claus is found drunk in the street, a replacement is quickly needed. Enter a nice old man who just so happens to be named Kris Kringle. The young Susan Walker, portrayed by Wood, takes a liking to the old man. However, when the man says he is the true Santa Claus, Susan's mother, Doris, (O'Hara) gets suspicious.

After a series of tests, doctors can find nothing wrong with Kris and thus decide he is harmless; after all, he does seem to have the Christmas spirit flowing through him. However, Kris isn't out of the woods, and after more poking and prodding he breaks down and is committed. Inspired by Kris, Doris' love interest Fred (who happens to be a trial lawyer, imagine that) decides to prove in court that Kris is in fact the one and only Santa Claus.

"Miracle" is a lighthearted holiday movie that is sappy, but perfect for getting into the holiday spirit. The only turnoff for some may be the film is in black and white. There is a modern version that is in color, but to me the black and white gives the film an extra layer of innocence.

There have been numerous adaptations of Charles Dickens' classic "A Christmas Carol," but if you want to watch the best one you need to

pick up the 1951 version directed by Brian Desmond Hurst and starring Alastair Sim as the incorrigible Ebenezer Scrooge. Originally titled, "Scrooge"

when released in the United Kingdom, "A Christmas Carol" follows the Dickens story with no deviation or attempt at flashy theatrics.

Instead, the story is told simply, allowing Sim to perform the role of Scrooge better than anyone ever has.

The film is shot in black and white, which gives me the same feeling of innocence I derive from "Miracle."

There is really nothing to say about the story that has not already been said; however, this version is the only version able to captivate me with Scrooge's world and convince me Scrooge is something more than a rehashed character from an old book.

So there you have it. You may not be able to change where you are stuck for the holidays, but you can at least do your best to put yourself in the spirit. And if you allow yourself, I feel these movies will help you do just that.



"In the old days, it was not called the Holiday Season; the Christians called it 'Christmas' and went to church; the Jews called it 'Hanukka' and went to synagogue; the atheists went to parties and drank. People passing each other on the street would say 'Merry Christmas!' or 'Happy Hanukka!' or (to the atheists) 'Look out for the wall!'"

– Dave Barry, humor columnist

"People can't concentrate properly on blowing other people to pieces if their minds are poisoned by thoughts suitable to the twenty-fifth of December." – Ogden Nash, poet

"Christmas is a time when everybody wants his past forgotten and his present remembered. What I don't like about office Christmas parties is looking for a job the next day."

– Phyllis Diller, comedienne

"From a commercial point of view, if Christmas did not exist it would be necessary to invent it."

– Katharine Whitehorn, journalist

"Mail your packages early so the post office can lose them in time for Christmas."

– Johnny Carson, TV personality

"I stopped believing in Santa Claus when I was six. Mother took me to see him in a department store, and he asked for my autograph."

– Shirley Temple, actress

"The Supreme Court has ruled that they cannot have a nativity scene in Washington, D.C. This wasn't for any religious reasons. They couldn't find three wise men and a virgin."

– Jay Leno, TV personality

