2

THE IRON SOLDIER

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

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Official Newsletter of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team

Al-Anbar Province, Iraq

2BCT AND IRAQI ARMY HELP TO ENSURE A SAFE VOTE

By Capt. Alfred A. Smith

A proud Iraqi man displays his finger, after voting.
Photo by Lance Cpl. Kenneth Lane

Making history has become almost a daily occurrence for the Iraqi Army and for the Soldiers, Marines, Airmen and Sailors of the 2BCT . Facing every challenge head on and coming out on top has become the standard. On October 15th they all set out to face their biggest challenge yet in Iraq. The men and women of the 2BCT were being called upon to secure polling locations throughout Ramadi, so that the local Iraqis would have a say in whether the new constitution was right for the future of Iraq.

Capt. James Daily (left) and 1st Lt. Jason Secrest, from B Troop 104 Cav. consult with Iraqi commanders at one of the eleven 2BCT polling sites, during the October 15th referendum elections held in Ramadi.
Photo by Sgt 1st Class Rich Scaricaciottoli

Preparing for the vote was a logistical challenge. Polling location had to be selected and prepared. Hundreds of poll workers had to be brought in from across Iraq. These workers needed to be housed and fed as well as transported safely to and from the poll sites. Coordination with the Iraqi Army was also a key component in the operation. But foremost on everyone's mind was security.

Iraqi citizens head to the polling sites and exercise their right to vote.
Photo by Sgt 1st Class Rich Scaricaciottoli

1st Lt. Jason Secrest, commander of Bravo Troop 104th Cavalry, was just one of the many dedicated individuals who did not want to leave anything to chance. "We used barriers, tanks, Humvees and sniper teams to ensure the voting process was uninterrupted."

Coalition Forces and members of the Iraqi Army secured the outer perimeter. Stopping vehicles from entering the area and conducting an initial search of all voters, the Soldiers seriously hindered terrorists from mounting any serious attack. The military presence was very large and very obvious.

"That was the plan," said Sgt. Thomas Hutton of Philadelphia, Pa. "We simply showed the insurgents that messing with us would be a bad idea."

The last piece of the complex puzzle was the security of the polling location itself. The responsibility to provide security inside the polling location and the area immediately around the outside of the polling location belonged to the Iraqi Army Soldiers. The decision to use only Iraqi Soldiers close to the polling site was intentional, and it proved to be the right decision.

"With a little cooperation and lots of help, we turned today into a chance for Iraqis to exercise their right to vote and

(Continued on page 13)

PREPARING FOR ELECTIONS

By 1st Lt. Antonia Greene

HABBANIYAH, IRAQ – Coalition forces aided the Independent Election Committee of Iraq (IECI) by providing a secure training ground for election officials.

Days prior to the October 15th election, IECI leadership and over 700 election officials met at Camp Taqaddum, piecing together last minute details concerning the polls. Coalition forces helped arrange the necessary transportation and available facilities in order for the IECI to conduct their business. With over two days of intensive preparation, the IECI leaders were able to effectively disseminate the election site operating procedures and conducted mock rehearsals with the officials, anticipating a variety of possible situations that may occur at the polls.

Poll workers get off a plane eager to assist in the Oct 15 elections.
Photo By 1st Lt. Antonia Greene

In the Task Force Panther area of operations (AO), coalition forces took a less active role in the Iraqi-run elections. In addition to continued steady-state operations, Team Panther also emplaced quick reaction force (QRF) elements, including a roaming outer cordon, in areas prone to insurgent attack. In AO Cobra, TF 3-1 Iraqi Army increased security and implemented more strict traffic control checkpoints.

Without interfering with IECI operations, the Iraqi Soldiers took the necessary measures to protect the newly acquired freedom they fight so nobly to uphold. The presence of more troops on the ground patrolling the common travel ways, the citizens were safe to vote.

The Iraqi Constitutional Referendum passed despite the noticeable opposition in the Al Anbar province. What matters most is that the people of Iraq embraced the democratic process. Voting is fundamental to an independent society and freedom only exists if the people exercise their right to influence. In December, Iraq will elect their national assembly. The October election signifies the strength of the Iraqi voice.

FRIENDLY WAGER

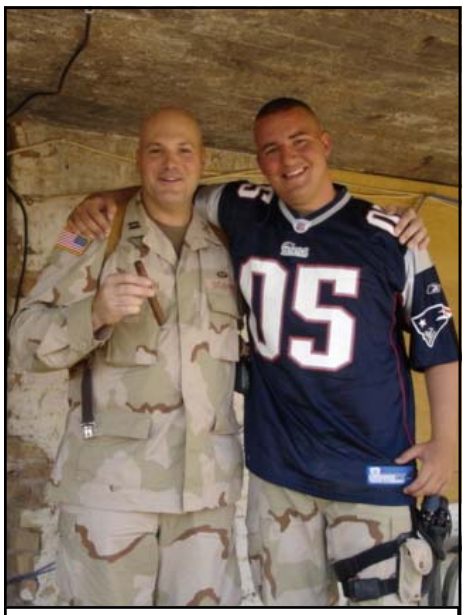
Our 876th Engineer Battalion is made up of Soldiers primarily from Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Rhode Island, with a smattering from other places.

As this is football season, we have fans rooting for the Pittsburgh Steelers, the Philadelphia Eagles, the Chicago Bears, and the Super Bowl Champion New England Patriots!

Prior to the season even starting, fans were showing their team pride in many different ways, both positive and negative. Some fans were prone to talking smack, others to quoting statistics, and still others to friendly wagers.

Spc. David Powell, assigned to HHC, 876 Engineer Battalion, has been known to take great pride in his Pittsburgh Steelers, and took *great* exception to the indignities perpetrated upon them at last season's ending. He was fully prepared to engage in a friendly wager, with Capt. Brian Thornton, B/876th commander, whereby the LOSER of Game 2: the Pittsburgh Steelers vs. the Super Bowl Champion New England Patriots, must wear the WINNER'S team jersey, for a photo opportunity!

Final score 23-20, PATRIOTS!! (On the picture - Spc. Powell is standing on a sandbag) Good sportsmanship all around!



As part of being on the losing end of a friendly football wager, Spc. David Powell; a diehard Pittsburgh Steelers fan, must wear the New England Patriots Jersey for all to see. The jersey belongs to Capt. Brian Thorton.
Photo by Sgt. Julie Wagner

Inside this issue:

The Other Side of Soldiering	*3*
876th Engineers Award First CMB	*4*
Third Cache Find for 2-69	*5*
Sensing A Presence	*6*
Some Added Protection	*7*
Iron Soldiers in Action	*8 & 9*
Clearing the Bonus Confusion	*10 & 11*
The Safety Corner	*12*
Express Yourself - I Will Fight for you	*14*
Happy Halloween	*15*

MAILING ADDRESSES FOR :

Ar-Ramadi
Soldiers Name
Soldiers Unit
Camp Ar-Ramadi
APO, AE 09362-9997

Habbaniyah / Taqaddum
Soldiers Name
Soldiers Unit
Camp Taqaddum
APO, AE 09381

Al Asad
Soldiers Name
Soldiers Unit
Camp Al Asad
APO, AE 09333

Please take into consideration, when mailing perishables: mail could take up to two weeks to reach Soldiers.

THE OTHER SIDE OF SOLDIERING

By **Staff Sgt. Gerald Barton**

(top) **Sgt. Kurt Power and Spc. Andrew Sales of Massachusetts are local heroes to the children of Tammim. The dynamic duo has been known to teach the children the difference between friendly forces and "Ali Baba."**
(Bottom) **If you look closely, the woman in the right hand corner has a tear in her eye. She said "You Soldiers are great for leaving your own children back home to take care of our children here."**

Most of the news coming out of Ramadi, as well as the rest of the Al Anbar province, concerns insurgent activity and the general state of unrest that plagues the area. It is unquestionable that the region is a hotbed of insurgent attacks, and the coalition forces spend a significant amount of time battling the anti-Iraqi forces. However, not all of the people who reside in the region are opposed to the efforts of the Americans, or the prospect of the emergence of a new and free Iraq. This fact was made apparent to a group of Soldiers from Company A, 3rd Battalion, 172 Infantry, part of the 1st Battalion, 172 Armor Task Force.

In many parts of Iraq, the small things Americans take for granted are considered a luxury. When children go to school there is no guarantee that there will be textbooks or sufficient classroom supplies for all of the students. In fact, it is more likely that they will go without. The classrooms are usually cramped with children sitting three or four abreast at sagging tables studying lessons off chalkboards that are worn to the point of being more white than black. When headmasters and teachers are asked what supplies they could use at the school, common items like pencils and notebooks usually top the list. This is where a small effort on the part of the coalition forces was able to demonstrate the goodwill that motivates the vast majority of American Soldiers deployed to Iraq.

On a sunny September morning, a small convoy of four vehicles rolled out through the gate at Camp Ar Ramadi. The 5-ton truck at the center of the column was the key to the day's mission. Instead of carrying troops fitted for combat, the truck carried backpacks, about 1,500 of them, packed tightly into cardboard boxes. In these backpacks there were school supplies; notebooks, pens, pencils, rulers, enough in each pack for one student. The accompanying Humvees in the convoy were the security element for the delivery, necessary due to the high number of insurgent attacks in the area. The ride to the first stop was short and uneventful. The Humvees were moved into position where they could provide security if needed, and the 5-ton backed up to the gates of the school.

The Al Noor School is typical of most schools in Tammim, a town on the west bank of the river that separates it from the main city of Ramadi. The 475 boys and girls enrolled at the school are educated in classrooms that line a dirt courtyard devoid of both vegetation and playground equipment. The boy's classrooms are in a building on one side of the courtyard and the girl's in a building on the opposite side. Inside the classrooms there are no bookshelves, no posters, and no maps.

As the Soldiers open the gate to allow the truck to back in, the students and teachers come out to see what the commotion is about. The kids are quickly, if not gently, persuaded to return to their classrooms while an interpreter informs the headmaster of the purpose of the visit. The school staff identifies the storage room and prepares space for the delivery next to several stacks of boxes marked with labels identifying the source as the United Nations Children's Fund. Some Soldiers unload the boxes while others

(Continued on page 4)

876th ENGINEERS AWARD FIRST CMB

by Sgt. Lisa Hanson

The Combat Medic Badge was created by the War Department on 1 March 1945. It was created to recognize the medical aid providers who shared the same hazards and hardships of ground combat alongside infantry Soldiers.

Spc. Kelly Floyd is the first to receive the Combat Medic Badge for the 876th Engineer Battalion. She performed her medical duties without any hesitation. Due to her quick responsiveness and skills, she was able to carry out the necessary medical aid that lessened the severity of an injury.

This is her story:

"It was one July morning, I, along with several Soldiers from the Bravo Company, went on a mission to find weapon caches. We were accompanied by Soldiers from the 44th Engineer Battalion. This was my first mission and I was kind of nervous but anxious at the same time. After hearing all the stories about possible IEDs and an increased amount of sniper fire, you would be nervous too. However, I prepared myself mentally, recapped on all of the training I received at Camp Shelby, and told myself, " I will do my best." Furthermore, I was fortunate enough to have a very experienced medic from the 44th EN BN at my side, offering me sound advice and words of encouragement that helped me through that mission and future ones as well.

Capt. Kurt Nielsen pins the Combat Medic Badge on Spc. Kelly Floyd's uniform.

One piece of advice that I will never forget is constantly being aware of my surroundings when helping casualties in a hostile environment.

About 15 minutes into the mission, I saw that the track in front of us had been hit by an IED. This was my wake up call. I didn't know if someone was hurt or not but I knew I had to find out and fast. From the look of the outside of the vehicle, it is a blessing that no one was seriously injured. There were about 4 casualties that we treated.

I'm truly proud of myself for receiving the Combat Medic Badge, however I know that I have a long way to go and the training never stops. My job here is to help save a lives and I will give it 100%."

THE OTHER SIDE

Continued from Page 3

visit the classrooms. They are met with some smiles and some looks of apprehension from the children and the teachers. A crowd of local kids who don't go to the Al Noor School begins to grow outside of the gates and the boldest ones approach the truck and say to the Soldiers "Hey mister, give me," the common English phrase that all Iraqi kids seem to know.

As the truck is unloaded, the first box is opened and the backpacks are passed out to the boys in one of the classrooms. The zippers are opened quickly and the contents explored by each child. The smiles are overwhelming. This scene is repeated in a second classroom, as the remaining boxes are unloaded from the truck. The delivery is completed in little time, and the Soldiers begin to make their way back to their vehicles. One Soldier notices a woman crying and has an interpreter ask her why. The interpreter poses the question, and as she wipes her tears she tells him "You leave your children at home and come here and risk your lives to help our children." The interpreter says, "She is crying because she is grateful."

The Soldiers get back in their vehicles and head to the next school knowing that, at least on this day, their efforts did not go without the gratitude of the people they are here to help.

Sgt. 1st Class Anthony James enthusiastically unloads school supplies off an up-armored five ton truck.

THIRD CACHE FIND FOR 2-69

By Capt. Chas Cannon

For the third time in as many weeks, elements of 2-69 Armor have discovered vast enemy weapons caches in eastern Ramadi; a sign that enemy insurgents may be running out of existing or accessible space to hide their contraband materials. In recent days, Soldiers of Dealer Company and other assets organic to 2-69 Armor unearthed two well-hidden and buried cache sites which contained numerous amounts of IED making elements and materials, small arms weapons, multiple mortar rounds, linked small arms ammunition, anti-tank mines, and American made rifles and machine guns.

This time, it was the "Strike Force" Soldiers of Able Company which were credited with the valuable discovery of the hidden cache. More exciting, however, was the fact that the operation was the very first conducted by Able Company under new leadership; CPT Thomas Barber, the current company commander who replaced outgoing commander, CPT Jerry Coburn, late last week. The productive and fruitful efforts of his first mission helped ease the transition to his responsibility of the nation's most prized asset: Soldiers.

The mission kicked off in the early morning hours of 09 OCT 2005 with three platoons from Able Company and a couple of sapper engineer squads from the 876th engineer platoon. Termed Operation Grease Monkey II, it called for a cordon and search of several garages and vacant buildings in the area.

Mortar Shells, Rockets, and Night Vision sniper scopes were just some of the weapons found in a large cache by the 2-69

In all, the cache included 15 AK-47's, 115 mortar shells, four HEAT rockets with spin stabilizers, six mortar tubes, 15 rifle grenades, eight 90mm HEAT projectiles, one Draganov night vision scope, 12 RPG rounds, one RPG launcher, 17 pineapple grenades, L505 laser range finder, 1000 rounds linked US .50 caliber, 1000 rounds linked Russian .50 caliber, 13 Egyptian grenades, one protective mask, an Iraqi Army uniform patch, four mortar base plates, seven fin stabilizers, 18 102mm exploder primers, 76 rocket propellant tubes, 1500 AK-47 rounds, three G3 rifles, three PKMs, one 75mm rocket warhead, 31 122 armor piercing tracer warheads, one 82mm land/ air rocket, 24 smoke rounds, and three trip flares.

The results of the cache spread quickly throughout the chains of command in the 2nd Marine Division; so fast, that LTC Robert Roggeman, a Mishakawa, IN resident and commander of the 2-69 AR, received a congratulatory note from the commander of the 2nd MARDIV, Major General Richard Huck which simply read: "Commanders: Tremendous find. Well done."

LTC Roggeman remains convinced that these cache finds "continue to erode the enemy's means to make war here in East Ramadi." With the results 2-69 AR has enjoyed in the last few weeks, finding cache sites seems to be "de rigueur" within the battalion.

TF 2-69 AR remains poised and committed to provide peace, prosperity, and security to the local citizens of eastern Ramadi. In the meantime, elements of the Speed and Power battalion expect to uncover several more enemy cache sites, much to the continued chagrin and embarrassment of the weakening insurgents.

War is cruelty. There's no use trying to reform it, the crueler it is the sooner it will be over.

~Union General William Tecumseh Sherman

SENSING A PRESENCE

By Capt. Stephen Norcross C/1-172AR Commander

Through the help of Iraqi citizens and a unit interpreter, members of Alpha Section, 3rd Platoon, B/1-104 Cav. and the two headquarters section tanks from C/1-172AR, discovered a weapons cache just minutes into their patrol.

On Friday, 20 October 2005, members of 3/C/1-172AR, "Men of Steel", were conducting a presence patrol in the Jazirah area, North of Highway 1. The patrol had just come off a nine hour shift on observation post duties as well as mounted combat patrols on the main supply routes.

During their follow-on mission of conducting a presence patrol, they provided more than a presence to a local insurgent. The patrol was moving along one of the numerous canal roads in the area to determine local atmospherics, infrastructure conditions, and to develop intelligence sources in the local community.

Members of Blue C/1-172AR pose in front of some of the weapons captured after being tipped off by Iraqi citizens. A sign that the local residents are starting to tire of the insurgency that has plagued their country.

1st Lt. Anselm Richards, assigned to B/1-104CAV and attached to C/1-172AR), accompanied by the unit interpreter, engaged in a discussion with local citizens who lived in the area. When the locals were asked about any insurgents, they replied that they did not know of any but they said that a nearby house was very suspicious.

Upon hearing this, Richards and two of his squad leaders, Staff Sgt. Mark Grelak and Staff Sgt. John Ciano decided to speak with the gentleman of the suspicious house. As they approached the house, a male exited the front door, and was met by the patrol leaders.

When questioned, the male initially stated he was the man of the house. When asked if there were any weapons in the house, the male stated that there were none. Quickly recognizing that something abut the man's demeanor was sketchy, and maintaining a healthy skepticism from knowing the area from previous patrols, the two squad leaders decided to search the house

Upon entering the house, the Soldiers immediately located several mortar rounds on the living room floor, and a mortar tube and tripod hidden away in one of the corners. The mortar tube and tripod were in excellent condition, showing signs of recent use.

Armed with this evidence of insurgent activity, the squad leaders brought in other members of the platoon to conduct a more thorough search of the residence. Several more mortar rounds were found in a freezer and a cooler. Several weapons, including a Dragonov sniper rifle and a semi-automatic pistol were discovered under the bed in the bedroom.

A mortar base plate and several car batteries were found in a car parked in the driveway. RPG Rounds, several machine guns, identification cards, a mortar firing table, video tapes, and intelligence documents where also confiscated.

The "man of the house" was detained, later identifying himself as a cousin of the actual homeowner.

Although not the largest cache ever found in AO Topeka, the actions of these Soldiers highlight their combat sense and ability to detect trouble. Working with the local citizens and their interpreter, these Soldiers were able to take yet another set of weapons off the street, and further the intelligence network by being alert to signs of deceit.

Their actions affirm that operations in Iraq are a platoon and squad level fight, and "ground level" actions and information drive the operations and intelligence train.

(left) **A Dragonov Sniper rifle with a high power scope and a large number of mortar rounds** (right) **were just some of the items found during the search of a suspicious house.**

SOME ADDED PROTECTION

by Capt. Brian S. Benner

1st Platoon, Charlie Co., 876th Engineer Battalion is going to take an even more aggressive approach in their mission thanks to its most recent addition to their track vehicle inventory.

The recent additions include M113A3s Armored Personnel Carriers (APC) with Add-On-Armor and Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) Cages. These are some mean looking vehicles, and everyone agrees that insurgents would be wise to steer clear of them.

The RPG cages were added on to APCs during the initial ground war to combat the increased threat of the rocket propelled grenades.

Most notably, these vehicles have taken a significant amount of work to get fully mission capable. However, now that the track vehicles have been returned to the Engineer Battalion, 1st Platoon has had the chance to make more improvements to them.

1st Lt. Joseph Martinkis and Sgt. 1st Class Steven Haer have been working around the clock with their men everyday to get internal communications between the Driver and Track Commander, as well as getting the external communications operational. Fortunately, they have some new communications equipment to go with their newly armored tracks.

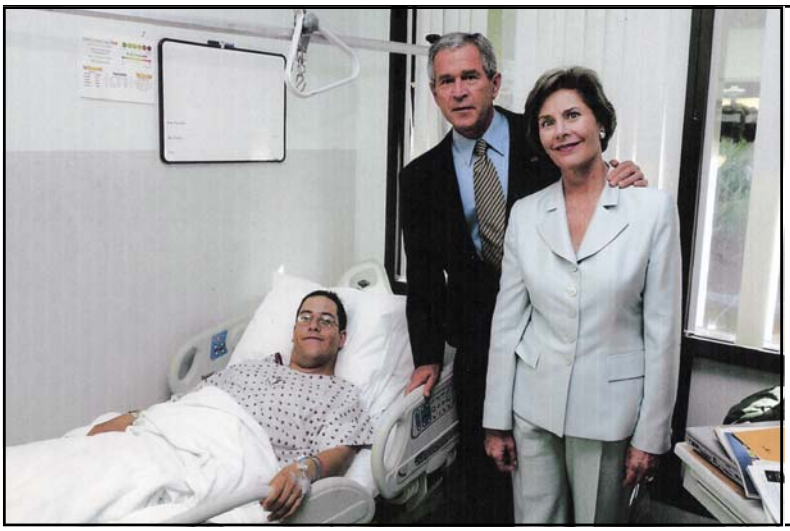
The VIC 3 communication system is a significant improvement over earlier models. The headsets are more comfortable and do not hurt your ears like the old system. The headset speakers provide crystal clear sound. They also give the Driver and Track Commander multiple speaking options regarding who hears what and why.

1st Platoon Soldiers have become experts at performing maintenance on these vehicles over the last 10 months. Now, they are adding additional expertise on the installation and set up of communications equipment.

The cross country mobility of these track vehicles will be extremely useful in our area of operations. They can respond to every event without having to use roads. The enemy will have to think twice when selecting a target because the tracks will go where ever the Soldiers want them to go.

Although we all hope that the lethality and versatility does not have to be fully utilized, it is a nice feeling knowing that it is available.

M113A3s Armored Personnel Carriers (APC) with Add-On-Armor and Rocket Propelled Grenade Cages are now part of the vehicle track inventory for the 876 Engineers. These are some mean looking vehicles, and Soldiers agrees that insurgents would be wise to steer clear of them.
Photo by Capt. Angelo Catalano



Sgt. Christopher Forsythe of Palmyra, Pa. was severely injured from an IED explosion while on patrol with his unit, Bravo Co. 1-109th Infantry, in Ramadi.

Sgt. Forsythe was eventually brought to Walter Reed Medical Center to undergo treatment. While there he received some unexpected guests.

President and Mrs. Bush stopped in and gave Sgt. Forsythe some words of encouragement and the Presidential Coin.

Sgt. Forsythe is doing well and expected to make a full recovery from his injuries.

2ND BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM
IRON SOLDIERS IN ACTION

Sgt. 1st Class David Vair, poses in front of a flag made by his daughter.

A M109A6 Paladin fires a counter-fire mission.
Photo by Capt. Darryl Bertani

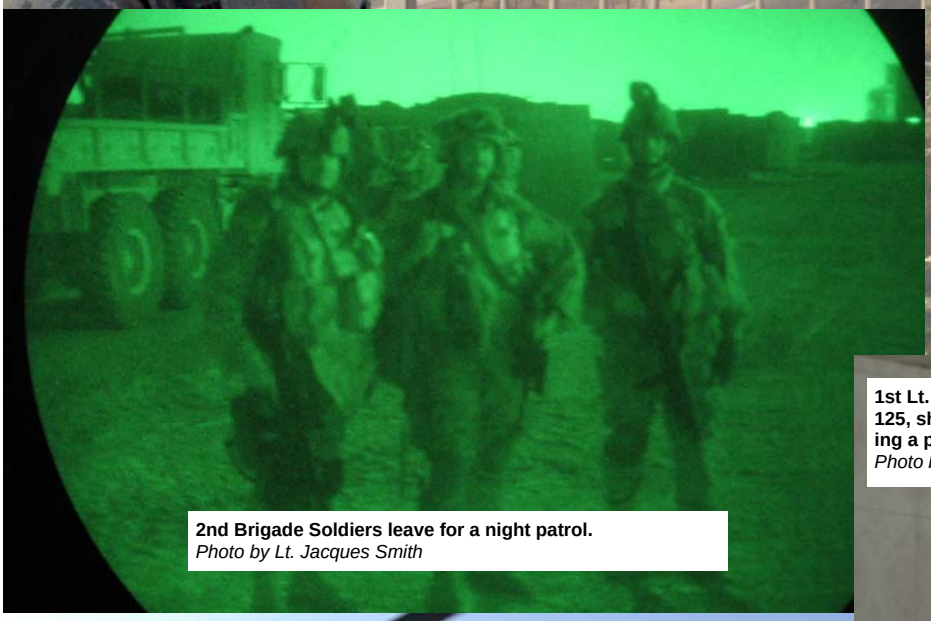
(Back Row L-R) **Spc. Alissa Skorupa of Scranton, PA, Spc. Jennifer Reed of Pittsburgh, PA, Spc. Amanda Lomax of Hohenwald, TN, Sgt. Jessica Harper of Sellersville, PA,**
(Front Row L-R) **Spc. Mary Steppacher of Scranton, PA and Spc. Stephanie Wells of Rochester, IL during a recent Lioness mission.**
Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Richard Scaricaciottoli

Sgt. Peter Barnes of Wilmington, DE. Provides over watch for Iraqi troops.
Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Richard Scaricaciottoli

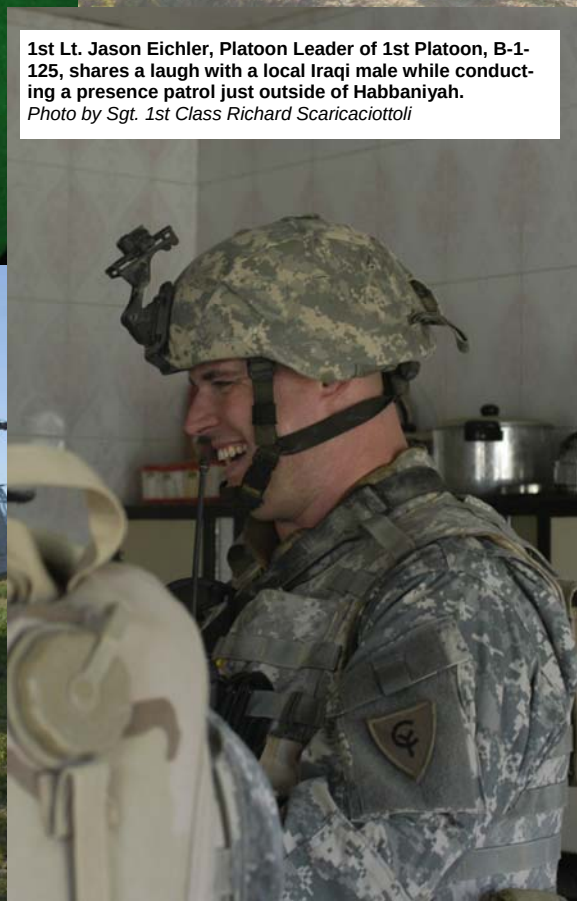
Send your pics to SFC Scary (Richard.Scaricaciottoli@us.army.mil) Include a brief description and who took the pic.

Staff Sgt. John Wersler of Philadelphia, PA, looks for possible terrorists during the October 15th referendum.
Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Richard Scaricaciottoli

Staff Sgt. George Goodon of the 1/167 Cavalry, poses with a captured enemy weapon. The weapon appeared to be very advanced in design and function.
Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Richard Scaricaciottoli



2nd Brigade Soldiers leave for a night patrol.
Photo by Lt. Jacques Smith



1st Lt. Jason Eichler, Platoon Leader of 1st Platoon, B-1-125, shares a laugh with a local Iraqi male while conducting a presence patrol just outside of Habbaniyah.
Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Richard Scaricaciottoli

Soldiers from the 1-167 Cavalry and a Marine prepare to board into a CH-46 Sea Knight after completing a mission in Jazzera.
Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Richard Scaricaciottoli

CLEARING THE BONUS CONFUSION

by Sgt. 1st Class Shane Cole

That's right, over 3 million dollars has been set aside for 250, 2/28th BCT Soldiers that have already reenlisted or extended.

Recently, there has been quite a bit of confusion throughout the ranks concerning re-enlistment/extension bonuses. Most of it has come from our friends at the Stars and Stripes who ran a very misleading article in their October 22, 2005, Mideast edition.

The headline on the cover page read: "DOD ends bonus for some Army Guard. Combat re-enlistment benefit will be honored for signed contracts". At least they wrote "some" on the cover, however, when you turn to pg 6 to read the article the story headline screams: "DOD ends re-enlistment bonus for Army Guard". I couldn't believe what I was reading! Had the National Guard Bureau (NGB) gone crazy? We had just received the new Selective Reenlistment Incentive Policy (SRIP), from NGB just 3 weeks prior, which detailed all the incentive programs for National Guard Soldiers for the new fiscal year. It hadn't mentioned anything about bonuses being eliminated; in fact the new SRIP left everything the same as far as deployed Soldiers were concerned.

So what in the world was going on? Well, let me explain. It seems that the author of this article, Jeff Schogol, is a little confused on his terminology. The way the article reads, you would assume that the reenlistment bonus for activated National Guard and Reserve Soldiers was being eliminated, that's where the trouble begins. All National Guard Soldiers in Iraq are activated, what Mr. Schogol should have said is, Active Guard and Reserve (AGR) Soldiers! There is a huge difference in the article when you substitute Active Guard and Reserve/Technician for any reference to a group of Soldiers, see highlighted article on the next page.

Here are the entitlements/incentives for qualified, ACTIVATED, M-DAY National Guard Soldiers:

Can reenlist/extend within 12 months of current ETS

$6,000 – 3yr option (Soldiers who have received one previous 3yr NG re-enlistment bonus – Can still opt for $15,000 6yr option)

$7,500 – 3yr option

$15,000 – 6yr option

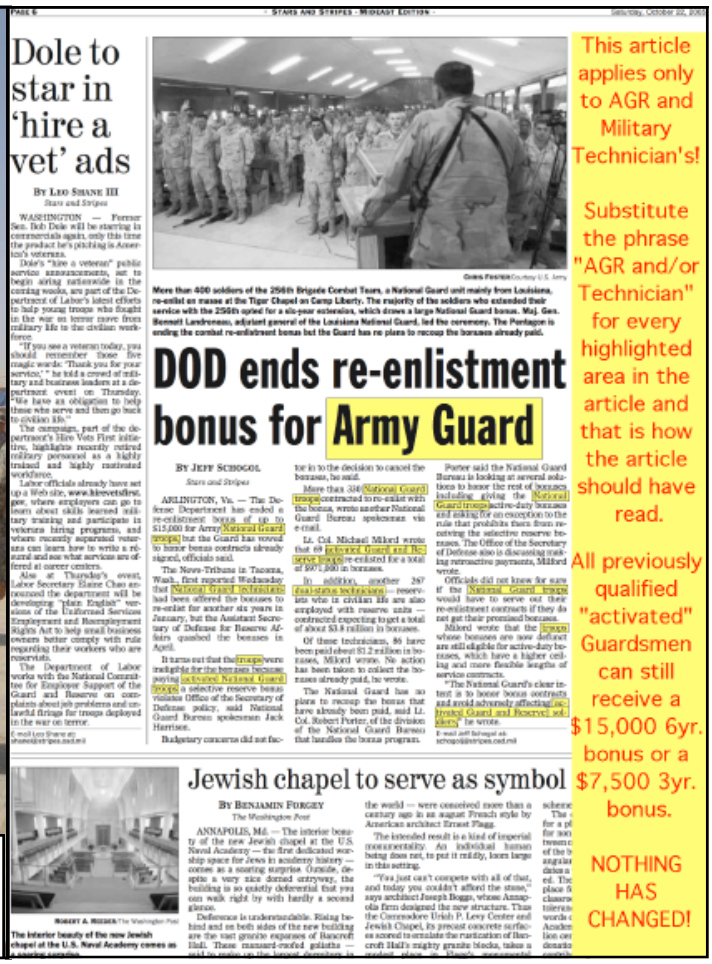
$18,000 Student Loan Repayment Program

Montgomery G.I. Bill Kicker (additional $200/month for a full time student – skill level 1 & 2 under 14yrs total service)

Enhanced Montgomery G.I. Bill (increases MGIB payments from $288/mo for a full time student, to $401.60/mo if deployed >90 days but <1 yr, to $602.40/mo if deployed 1yr but <2 yrs. Apply through the state Education Office upon re-deployment w/ DD-214)

Federal Tuition Assistance Program (up to $4,500/yr – can be combined with all MGIB benefits)

Lt. Col. Richard Miller swears in (L-R)Sgt. Ken Black, Spc. Brandon Myers, Staff Sgt. Steven Ogden, Spc. Jay Davis, Sgt. Jeffery Hoskins and Sgt. Jason Faulkner at the Reenlistment Ceremony. All are member of 2-222 Field Artillery.



PAGE 6 — STARS AND STRIPES · MIDEAST EDITION — Saturday, October 22, 2005

Dole to star in 'hire a vet' ads

By Leo Shane III
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Former Sen. Bob Dole will be starring in commercials again, only this time the product he's pitching is America's veterans.

Dole's "hire a veteran" public service announcements, set to begin airing nationwide in the coming weeks, are part of the Department of Labor's latest efforts to help young troops who fought in the war on terror move from military life to the civilian workforce.

"If you see a veteran today, you should remember those five magic words: 'Thank you for your service,' " he told a crowd of military and business leaders at a department event on Thursday. "We have an obligation to help those who serve and then go back to civilian life."

The campaign, part of the department's Hire Vets First initiative, highlights recently retired military personnel as a highly trained and highly motivated workforce.

Labor officials already have set up a Web site, www.hirevetsfirst.gov, where employers can go to learn about skills learned military training and participate in veterans hiring programs, and where recently separated veterans can learn how to write a résumé and see what services are offered at career centers.

Also at Thursday's event, Labor Secretary Elaine Chao announced the department will be developing "plain English" versions of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act to help small business owners better comply with rule regarding their workers who are reservists.

The Department of Labor works with the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve on complaints about job problems and unlawful firings for troops deployed in the war on terror.

E-mail Leo Shane at: shanel@stripes.osd.mil

Gates Foster Courtesy U.S. Army

More than 400 soldiers of the 256th Brigade Combat Team, a National Guard unit mainly from Louisiana, re-enlist en masse at the Tiger Chapel on Camp Liberty. The majority of the soldiers who extended their service with the 256th opted for a six-year extension, which draws a large National Guard bonus. Maj. Gen. Bennett Landreneau, adjutant general of the Louisiana National Guard, led the ceremony. The Pentagon is ending the combat re-enlistment bonus but the Guard has no plans to recoup the bonuses already paid.

DOD ends re-enlistment bonus for Army Guard

By Jeff Schogol
Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Defense Department has ended a re-enlistment bonus of up to $15,000 for Army National Guard troops, but the Guard has vowed to honor bonus contracts already signed, officials said.

The News-Tribune in Tacoma, Wash., first reported Wednesday that National Guard technicians had been offered the bonuses to re-enlist for another six years in January, but the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs quashed the bonuses in April.

It turns out that the troops were ineligible for the bonuses because paying activated National Guard troops a selective reserve bonus violates Office of the Secretary of Defense policy, said National Guard Bureau spokesman Jack Harrison.

Budgetary concerns did not factor in to the decision to cancel the bonuses, he said.

More than 350 National Guard troops contracted to re-enlist with the bonus, wrote another National Guard Bureau spokesman via e-mail.

Lt. Col. Michael Milford wrote that 69 activated Guard and Reserve troops re-enlisted for a total of $971,500 in bonuses.

In addition, another 287 dual-status technicians — reservists who in civilian life are also employed with reserve units — contracted expecting to get a total of about $3.8 million in bonuses.

Of these technicians, 86 have been paid about $1.2 million in bonuses, Milford wrote. No action has been taken to collect the bonuses already paid, he wrote.

The National Guard has no plans to recoup the bonus that have already been paid, said Lt. Col. Robert Porter, of the division of the National Guard Bureau that handles the bonus program.

Porter said the National Guard Bureau is looking at several solutions to honor the rest of bonuses including giving the National Guard troops active-duty bonuses and asking for an exception to the rule that prohibits them from receiving the selective reserve bonuses. The Office of the Secretary of Defense also is discussing making retroactive payments, Milford wrote.

Officials did not know for sure if the National Guard troops would have to serve out their re-enlistment contracts if they do not get their promised bonuses.

Milford wrote that the troops whose bonuses are now defunct are still eligible for active-duty bonuses, which have a higher ceiling and more flexible lengths of service contracts.

"The National Guard's clear intent is to honor bonus contracts and avoid adversely affecting activated Guard and Reserve soldiers," he wrote.

E-mail Jeff Schogol at: schogol@stripes.osd.mil

Jewish chapel to serve as symbol

By Benjamin Forgey
The Washington Post

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — The interior beauty of the new Jewish chapel at the U.S. Naval Academy — the first dedicated worship space for Jews in academy history — comes as a soaring surprise. Outside, despite a very nice domed entryway, the building is so quietly deferential that you can walk right by with hardly a second glance.

Deference is understandable. Rising behind and on both sides of the new building are the vast granite expanses of Bancroft Hall. These massive-scaled goliaths — said to make up the largest dormitory in the world — were conceived more than a century ago in an august French style by American architect Ernest Flagg.

The intended result is a kind of imperial monumentality. An individual human being does not, to put it mildly, loom large in this setting.

"You just can't compete with all of that, and today you couldn't afford the stone," says architect Joseph Boggs, whose Annapolis firm designed the new structure. Thus the Commodore Uriah P. Levy Center and Jewish Chapel, its precast concrete surfaces scored to simulate the rustication of Bancroft Hall's mighty granite blocks, takes a

Robert A. Reeder The Washington Post

The interior beauty of the new Jewish chapel at the U.S. Naval Academy comes as a special surprise.

This article applies only to AGR and Military Technician's!

Substitute the phrase "AGR and/or Technician" for every highlighted area in the article and that is how the article should have read.

All previously qualified "activated" Guardsmen can still receive a $15,000 6yr. bonus or a $7,500 3yr. bonus.

NOTHING HAS CHANGED!

OVER 3 MILLION PAID TO IRON SOLDIERS IN REENLISTMENT BONUSES

So Far...

1 Command Sergeant Major

2 Master Sergeants

16 Sergeants First Class

43 Staff Sergeants

74 Sergeants

4 Corporals

109 Specialist

1 Private First Class

Have all gotten a re-up Bonus

MARINES SWEEP THROUGH AR-RAMADI

By Cpl. Shane Suzuki

AR RAMADI, Iraq (Oct. 4, 2005) -- Two platoons from 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, along with two Army units and a company from the Iraqi Security Force, took part in Operation Bowie, Oct.2 through the 4 in order to disrupt insurgent positions in southern Ar Ramadi.

The operation, which was the first major operation conducted by the battalion since arriving in Iraq a few weeks ago, was the first to be held in the known insurgent stronghold of the Humara District since the Marines of 1st Battalion, 5th Marines patrolled the area in July.

"We conducted a cordon and search of the area south of Ramadi that has traditionally been a safe haven for insurgents," said Capt. Twayne Hickman, Company I's commanding officer. "It went very well. The Marines did a great job, worked for a long period of time and stayed focused on the mission."

In the day leading up to the sweep, Marines from Company L, as well as Army units in nearby areas, conducted patrols throughout the city. When they were finished conducting their patrols, the main effort of the mission, Company I and the ISF moved across the train tracks that separate the Humara district from the city.

3-7 Marines patrol the streets of Ramadi during Operation Bowie

"The ISF did exceptionally well," said Hickman. "This was probably one of the better companies we've worked with. My Marines were happy with their capabilities, and the experience they gained during the operation is invaluable."

While sweeping through the mostly rural area, the ISF assisted the Marines in identifying people who were not from here and helped in searching homes and buildings for weapons caches and insurgent propaganda.

"Although we had no major finds of insurgents or caches, we had a great opportunity to interact positively with the residents of the city," said Hickman. "Our experiences with a large number of the local population have been largely positive. Anytime we can interact with them, it demonstrates our commitment and willingness to help."

These positive interactions are at odds with what many of the Marines expected before coming here. Many expected a more violent city that is resentful of American influence. It's a welcome surprise that the local population seems to want a peaceful solution to the insurgency that hinders their efforts to ratify a constitution and establish a stable government, he said.

"In our zone, the locals are much more receptive than I expected," said Hickman. "Their overriding desire is to stop the fighting and explosions in their neighborhoods.

"I would say to everybody that doubts our necessity being here, our participation in this mission, 'If they could see the Iraqi children, the conditions they grew up in, they would have no doubts about us being here.'"

THE SAFETY CORNER

URBAN LEGENDS

In the last couple of months, our Brigade has seen many challenges. Most of the challenges have been in the area of "Combat Readiness." Several vehicle accidents have resulted in a loss of combat power, many injuries, and one death. While accidents are expected in this environment, we are also expected to take measures to ensure minimal injury and loss of life. We are required to "push the envelope," still keeping safety in mind as we drive at high rates of speed and over canal roads. We are "pushing," however, much beyond our capabilities.

This month, we will be exploring some "Urban Legends" pertaining to Combat Readiness and protective measures we should be taking. While the "reasons" Soldiers give to avoid doing the Right Thing may seem justified, our Command has made decisions based on *proven tactics* to ensure that we do not unjustly lose combat power.

URBAN LEGEND: It's OK to speed on the FOB if you are late for a mission.

LEGEND: FALSE

Daily reports come to the Brigade Safety Office of Soldiers driving too fast inside the wire. The HIGHEST speed on the FOB is 30 KPH, which converted is 20 MPH. No one driving inside the wire should be going over 20 MPH for any reason, but, of course, some Soldiers do. The normal speed is 20 KPH all other speeds are set with signs. If you do not see the sign, the speed is 20 KPH.

When stopped, the speeding Soldier will give any number of "reasons" (read: excuses) that he or she was driving over the speed limit. One of the most common excuses is: "I am late for my mission."

Being late for something does not justify speeding through areas. Being late means that time was not managed properly. It would not be good to injure someone while speeding due to poor time management skills.

Another excuse a speedy Soldier has given is: "I looked and I didn't see anyone around." Since the Soldier was stopped by someone, obviously the speed demon didn't look hard enough. The one person that is "not seen" will be the one person injured on the road.

The last excuse example is "The set speed is too slow for me. I drive at high speeds while in combat, I can handle it while on the FOB." That statement was overheard from the driver of a vehicle who killed a Soldier in T.Q. Letting arrogance override common sense will almost always get someone killed.

Along with speeding, it seems some Soldiers do not believe they need to drive on the roads. The roads are there to be driven on. The dirt in between the roads is not. It creates a dust hazard when vehicles do not drive on the roads, and creates a confusing traffic pattern. To avoid unnecessary accidents, all drivers must stick to the roads.

Sticking to the roads entails riding over the speed bumps, not around them. Yes, drivers must slow down to hit the bumps, but that's the point. Speed bumps may be a royal pain, but it is one way to ensure the speed limit is enforced.

URBAN LEGEND: Wearing a seatbelt does more harm than good.

LEGEND: FALSE

All Soldiers in 2nd Brigade must wear seat belts while in a vehicle. We know, however, that some of the vehicles we have do not allow "freedom of movement" while wearing seatbelts. Even without the freedom of movement, all seat belts must be worn at all times. An excuse for not wearing them was given as "I can't unbuckle it fast enough to get out." If we were to review our TTPs and do proper risk management, it would be found that the enemy's most common mode of engagement is IEDs. Following the TTPs, at no point would a Soldier "jump out" after an engagement. In fact, it would be found that after encountering an IED, the first step is to drive away and push through it, which implies an increase in speed and thus an increase in the chance of a vehicle accident.

The chances are higher that a Soldier will have a serious injury as a result of not wearing a seat belt than any Soldier will need to exit a vehicle quickly while on a combat mission. Seat belts will keep Soldiers in place in the event of a vehicle rollover, and that includes rollovers caused by an IED.

As for Soldiers not wearing seat belts while on the FOB, even at 30 MPH, any collision can cause severe injury. If seat belts in vehicles are broken, take the time to put it on the 2404 and get them repaired. A seat belt could be the only thing between life and death while on a combat mission.

URBAN LEGEND: The Groin Protector and Throat Guard really wouldn't help me in a situation.

LEGEND: FALSE

Some Soldiers do not believe that wearing all of their protective equipment is necessary. "Protective equipment" includes all

(Continued on page 13)

ELECTION DAY FOR IRAQ

Continued from Page 1

Spc. Tariq Lee of Philadelphia, Pa stands ready behind a M2 50 Cal. Machine gun during the voting process.
Photo by Sgt 1st Class Rich Scaricaciottoli

have a say in their future," said Sgt. 1st Class David Hamilton of Philadelphia, Pa. and the Bravo Troop First Sergeant.

The day started out slow. The polls opened at 7am but the first voter at the location being secured by the 104th Cav. did not show until around 9am. Disappointment started to set in when at 11am only 7 people had cast their vote. Fears arose of a repeat of the January elections, where Sunnis boycotted, and very few ballots were cast throughout the 2nd BCT's current area.

The situation changed drastically around noon when, seemingly out of nowhere, the local Iraqis started showing up to take part in the democratic process. By 2pm the number of votes cast jumped dramatically. The flow of voters continued and at times it even led to small lines of voters waiting to have their say in the country's future.

By the time polls closed at 5pm over 4,000 ballots had been cast at the eleven 2BCT polling site in the vicinity of Ramadi. An undeniable sign that the local Sunni population had chosen to have their voice heard by the Iraqi leadership. Many of the people who voted had their individual reasons for risking attacks to come to the polls.

"This is the way we will make the country safer," said an older Iraqi man that did not want to use his name.

"This is a great thing. We will be a strong country soon," said another man.

After casting his vote, Ahmed Bazey Al Ftaican, a local leader, said "Without this vote there would never be a chance for freedom. The Iraqi Army and Coalition forces did a good job. Everybody feels very safe today."

1st Lt. Secrest summed up the day by saying, "In the face of adversity we were able to execute a troop sized mission and help over 600 people to exercise their freedom to vote safely and without fear. This is why we are here. This is Democracy in action."

Over 600 Iraqis took part in the election process at this polling location in Ramadi
Photo by Sgt 1st Class Rich Scaricaciottoli

URBAN LEGENDS

Continued from Page 12

pieces of the IBA (groin protector, deltoid protectors, neck and throat protectors), and ACH Helmet. Not only is it absolutely necessary to wear all the protective equipment issued, *it is required* that all Soldiers under 2nd Brigade wear that equipment. It is interesting to hear Soldiers complain about "bad" equipment and shortages when the Soldiers will not wear all of the equipment they have been issued.

The main reason for not wearing each piece of the protective gear is simple: it is restrictive and uncomfortable. The answer to this complaint is simple: it is uncomfortable and restrictive because it works. The more restrictive the equipment is simply means the more area of the body is covered. If Soldiers want to survive an attack, then Soldiers must wear the proper protective equipment.

Recently, a Soldier with D/2-69 AR was attacked with small arms fire while on a dismounted combat patrol. He was struck directly in the upper torso. The round impacted in his Sapi Plate, and resulted in no injury. If the Soldier had not been wearing his protective equipment properly, he would have been injured, possibly severely. Personal protective equipment works when it is worn correctly.

Seeing the most common "urban legends" dispelled and proven untrue, things look pretty grim. It is hard to keep things positive as we are sitting on over $250,000 in vehicle damages due to accidents which could have been prevented. We have had one death due to an accident and over 20 serious injuries. There are no awards given for injuries sustained during accidents. The only thing to come out of an accident is an investigation, commander's inquiry, and an Article 15. More importantly, each accident we have results in a loss of combat power. How many pieces of equipment, vehicles, and personnel can we afford to lose to preventable accidents?

We have not been following the regulations and procedures outlined for us by the Commander, reiterated to each battalion command, and then to the NCOs at all levels. Ironically, there is an overwhelming amount of lower level NCOs who are responsible for not following the regulations and policies they are supposed to be enforcing in their lower enlisted Soldiers. It is sad to think that NCOs cannot follow simple regulations with enough respect that would encourage their lower enlisted to follow them as well.

Express Yourself

I Will Fight For You - A Dedication to Erick Slebondik

By SSG John T. Jeffery, TF Saber, HHC 1-172nd AR BN

On **September 15, 2003** a front page article appeared in the New York Times entitled, "For Citizen Soldiers, an Unexpected Burden". In that article a Staff Sergeant in the California National Guard complained about a 16 month deployment by saying, "It's too much to ask." This comment got the attention of a young college student. That day he penned a reply to the editor which was printed in the New York Times one week later, on September 22, 2003, and entitled, "My Duty as a Soldier". His words follow:
By PFC ERIC W. SLEBODNIK - Indiana, Pa., ***written on Sept. 15, 2003***

My Duty as a Soldier - *Appeared on September 22, 2003* of the New York Times

To the Editor, As a member of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard, I find your Sept. 15 front-page article "For Citizen Soldiers, an Unexpected Burden" rather disheartening.

We members of our great nation's armed forces are to fully expect to stand ready to defend what we have. We know what we signed up for, whether we are on active duty or otherwise. It is our honor and our duty to preserve, protect and defend, and it is a poor testimony to our cause if our duty is, to quote Staff Sgt. Mike Gorski, "too much to ask."

Where would we be as a civilization if at one time or another we decided that dying on the hills of Gettysburg, the shores of Normandy or the mountains of Afghanistan was "too much to ask"?

The men and women of America's armed forces must continue to stand proudly behind our mission on the front lines of freedom in these dark and uncertain days.

Shortly after Eric's death in combat, Brooke Bloem, Eric's girlfriend wrote a letter to the editor of the Times-Tribune, in which she captured Eric's devotion to his fellow Soldiers and his love for FREEDOM.

To the Editor, In response to Kendra Sledzinski's Oct. 4 letter to the editor, "Sorrow Over Death, Anger Over War," I, as Sgt. Eric W. Slebodnik's girlfriend and future wife, would say that he would be thoroughly disheartened by her destructive words (even though they were well-intended).

Eric did not share Kendra's views on the war as being a "senseless crusade." He believed whole-heartedly in what he was fighting for — our freedom. If we don't confront terrorism at its source it will come to us as it did on 9/11.

Thanks to our brave American Soldiers like Eric, Afghanistan and Iraq will never again be a safe haven for terrorists. Eric told me numerous times that he was proud to be a member of the American armed forces, and he was willing to give his life for this cause.

Through e-mails while he was fighting in Iraq, he expressed the need to protect, defend and preserve our freedom and our way of life. He never wanted for me, his family or his friends to live in fear of being attacked on our homeland.

I know that Eric would be horrified to hear that a "friend" would state that his heroic death has turned out to be for "no real reason."

I believe in this country, and would personally like to thank all of our men and women who serve in our military. Without you, we would not have the freedom to say what we believe, as hurtful and offensive as it may be. God bless America.

*BROOKE BLOEM - Clarks Summit **10/09/2005***

After the report of his death SGT Slebodnik's parents, Joe and Cynthia, were going through his papers. They came across a poem he had written on the back of a church prayer sheet ***dated August 18, 2004*** prior to returning to his last semester of college before being deployed.

I WILL FIGHT FOR YOU

In the mountains high
The deserts hot
Or the alleys narrow
I will fight for you

When you sleep in your bed
When you watch the TV
When you laugh quietly in church
I will fire my weapon
I will sweat and bleed
I will pray for home
I will fight for you

Though many oppose me
Saying "Support our troops"
but denying my mission:
Freedom is still not free
I will fight for you.

When you work in the office
When you watch the birds
Cut the grass and spot the planes
I will fight for you.

When you work your crafts
When you take your pictures
Cook their meals and read before bed
I will fight for you

When you go to your school
Later you play your guitar
Write your stories and listen to tunes
I will fight for you

For your liberty and your lives
For your homes and your friends
For the Constitution
For our faith
I will fight for you.

Before Eric deployed overseas one if his family members asked him if he wished he hadn't signed up for the Guard, and if he was afraid of dying "over there". Eric replied that he knew since God had foreordained his time to die, he wasn't afraid to go, and was proud to go, and wanted to go. Then he said, "My new motto is that I would rather die for something, than from something."

These are his words. They should ring just as true today in our ears as he intended them to then, even as we carry on with our mission, our duty as Soldiers.

The Iron Soldier is a publication of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 28th Infantry Division (M). It is produced by the Public Affairs Office of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team

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HAPPY HALLOWEEN

Have a story or picture for the Iron Soldiers?

Contributions from all Soldiers throughout the 2nd Brigade Combat Team are encouraged for consideration. Please enclose a detailed description of the people (name, rank and unit) and subject matter for each story and photo. Include your name, unit and contact information.

Contact your unit Public Affairs Rep located on the left side of this page or send an email to richard.scaricaciottoli@us.army.mil

REST IN PEACE, WARRIORS

In Memory Of
Staff Sergeant Jens Schelbert
Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion-69th Armor

In Memory Of
Private First Class Andrew Bedard
Lima Company, 3rd Battalion-7th Marines

In Memory Of
Lance Corporal Sergio Escobar
India Company, 3rd Battalion-7th Marines

In Memory Of
Staff Sergeant Brandon Sneed
Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion-69th Armor

In Memory Of
Sergeant Leon Johnson
Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion-69th Armor