

# IN THE ZONE

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## MAGAZINE

**Soldiers re-up**  
for multi-year commitments

**Firefighter Academy**  
heats up training

Iraqi contractor helps restore

**Soldier Memorial**

JASG-C personnel provide security for

**President's motorcade**





**MAIL CALL** - Staff Sgts. Steven Delatorre and Arvilla Busby, along with Airman 1st Class Stephan A. Williams, pack up last-minute holiday packages at the now-closed Palace Post Office, which accepted and dispatched 301,500 pounds of mail and generated \$546,800 in postal transactions during the past four months.

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## ON THE COVER:

"Papa Noel" visits Iraqi children from Baghdad's St. George's Church Dec. 19 to deliver Christmas gifts and help spread holiday cheer. Earlier that day, the children were treated to a barbecue lunch and outdoor fun at FOB Freedom. For story and more photos, see pages 14-15.

*Photo by 1st Sgt. David Moore*

# IN THE ZONE

MAGAZINE

*Produced by the Joint Area Support Group-Central Public Affairs Office*

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## LEADERS' LOG

# New year brings change, challenges



Since the last newsletter the 50th Joint Area Support Group–Central enjoyed a fabulous Thanksgiving meal and now Christmas is upon us and a New Year is straight ahead. These can be sad times for many of us as we all miss our families and friends, but together our military family

will endure and our strong common bond will keep spirits high. Everyday I'm impressed with the high morale, dedication to duty and expertise of the JASG-C Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen. Your accomplishments over the last two months have been extraordinary.

I mentioned the other night at our Holiday social that we were celebrating three events - the Christmas holidays, a farewell to the Palace, and for the 50th IBCT Soldiers our six-month mark of the deployment. With 2009 approaching, our time in Iraq will go quickly. Most importantly we must stay focused and continue to make a difference in this year of transition for Iraq and do all we can to make the IZ a better place than we found it.

Currently everyone is working extremely hard to vacate the Embassy Annex and soon we will be at our new

home at Union III. The move has been labor intensive, but know that your efforts to return the Palace to the Government of Iraq is a landmark event and a major step of returning the IZ back to the Iraqis.

This year of transition will be a challenging one for Iraq with many important events beginning with Provincial elections. There will be peaks and valleys, but all must understand we are now here in a support role and the conditions in which we operate may change. Know that our priorities will continue to be execution of the IZ transition plan, ensuring force protection and maintaining IZ security. Day-in and day-out, we continue to make a difference!

As always a big thanks to our families, friends, family support groups and Rear Det personnel. Their support and overwhelming generosity over the holidays have been unbelievable. They truly make all the difference in the world. Never forget to say thank you to these great Americans.

Always look out for each other and be safe. One team, One Mission! Thanks for all you do!

**Col. Steve Ferrari**  
**Joint Area Support Group – Central**  
**Commanding**

# So far, so good at deployment midpoint

As we enter a new year, I want everyone to know we have had many successes in our year-long deployment so far.

Most notably, Joint Area Support Group-Central (JASG-C) personnel made their presence known when we joined together to successfully and safely provide security for President George W. Bush as he bid farewell to troops and leaders alike in the International Zone 37 days before ending his time as command-in-chief.

We faced an American election that peacefully elected a new president and commander-in-chief. As Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines, we have many ethnic backgrounds and religious beliefs that still distinguish our country as a 'melting pot' of peaceful success.

If we look around us right now, many personnel from the Navy and Air Force have been replaced by new Airmen and Sailors. Personnel who arrived here in September are now the subject matter experts who need to share their knowledge with their new counterparts.

Personnel need to remember we continue to face challenges on a daily basis. We must watch out for each other's well being and safety as we pass the half-way point through our deployment.

As we lean forward into the second half of our OIF tour, those challenges may bring some long duty days as we begin the process of establishing our new operational areas in the International Zone. I know each of you will handle these changes as professionals.

For some of our troops, this holiday season is the first they have spent away from friends and family, while others are familiar with this experience. With that thought, personnel are being taken care of and while we may not be with our loved ones, we have become an extended family during this deployment.

Always remember that while you have had many successes, you would not have had them without the support of your families and friends. Without them, we could not have had our tremendous success to date.

**Command Sgt. Maj. David Kenna**  
**Joint Area Support Group – Central**



# Lighting the Way to Tomorrow



## Iraqi contractor helps restore soldier memorial to former glory

*Story and photos by  
Maj. Jon Powers  
JASG-C Public Affairs*

Great things can come from simple beginnings. A project to bring light to a convoy staging area allowed an inspired Iraqi contractor to become a shining example for the citizens of Baghdad.

That was not exactly the intention of Hayder when he went to work on the circuit panels for the Iraq Memorial to the Unknown Soldier but his dedication went far beyond fuses and wire. A Nov. 6 ceremony celebrated his sense of patriotism.

The Directorate of Public Works, Joint Area Support Group-Central, began the project in approximately June 2008 to restore the street lights surrounding the memorial as a safety measure. Though simple sounding, the project became incredibly complex. The power source serving the area was damaged by fire years ago, and although it was repaired in the first phase of the project, the street lights still did not work.

“They had to basically rebuild

the transformers and circuits boards, that took two and half months,” said Petty Officer 1st Class Ricky Jones, project manager.

In order to properly test the system, the entire grid had to be turned

**“ We are taking charge and giving something from my company and presenting it to the Iraqi people. It is my duty to provide something good to the Iraqi people to make them proud and happy. ”**

- Iraqi contractor Hayder

on. This included all the circuits and the monument as well as the street lights.

“The wonderful byproduct of that project was the lights on the exterior of the monument were also illuminated. Frankly, it surprised

all of us but it was a wonderful surprise,” said Maj. Mark Hanley, Public Works director.

After seeing those first lights flicker to life, contractor Hayder was struck with a patriotic idea. He decided to use his electrical expertise, though it was not expected of him, to bring light and life back to the memorial’s iconic lighted horn. Dressed in red, white and green illumination, the horn had not been lit for years due to the damage.

Hayder did the work that he contracted to do, then on his own initiative began working on the lights on the monument. He and his workers continued to work for several more weeks on the monument and got most of the lights on.


Laboring weeks past the official completion of his contract, Hayder spent this own money and time shifting and switching bulbs to balance the gaps in the appearance. He succeeded in restoring the splendor of the monument through his unselfish devotion to the project.

Of the 2,500 bulbs, more than 800 were burnt out. By moving the

good bulbs around, Hayder was able to give a more balanced and aesthetic light show.

“We are taking charge and giving something from my company and presenting it to the Iraqi people,” said Hayder. “It is my duty to provide something good to the Iraqi people to make them proud and happy.”

He hopes his work will serve as an example to his children and others to use their efforts to build Iraq, not take from Iraq or destroy the country. The work on the monument ranks right among his proudest moments. “Many things I am proud of in my life - getting my education, having my children - and this project is equal to those in importance and the happiness it gave me.”

Jones also walked away with more than than a successfully completed project for his resume. “It is an honor to do something like this for the Iraqi people but also for all the Soldiers who have fallen.” 

**ILLUMINATING EXPERIENCE** - The Iraqi Memorial to the Unknown Soldier, left, was officially lit during a dedication ceremony Nov. 6. Iraqi bagpipers, members of the Iraqi Memorial to the Unknown Soldier guards, below, open the dedication ceremony.

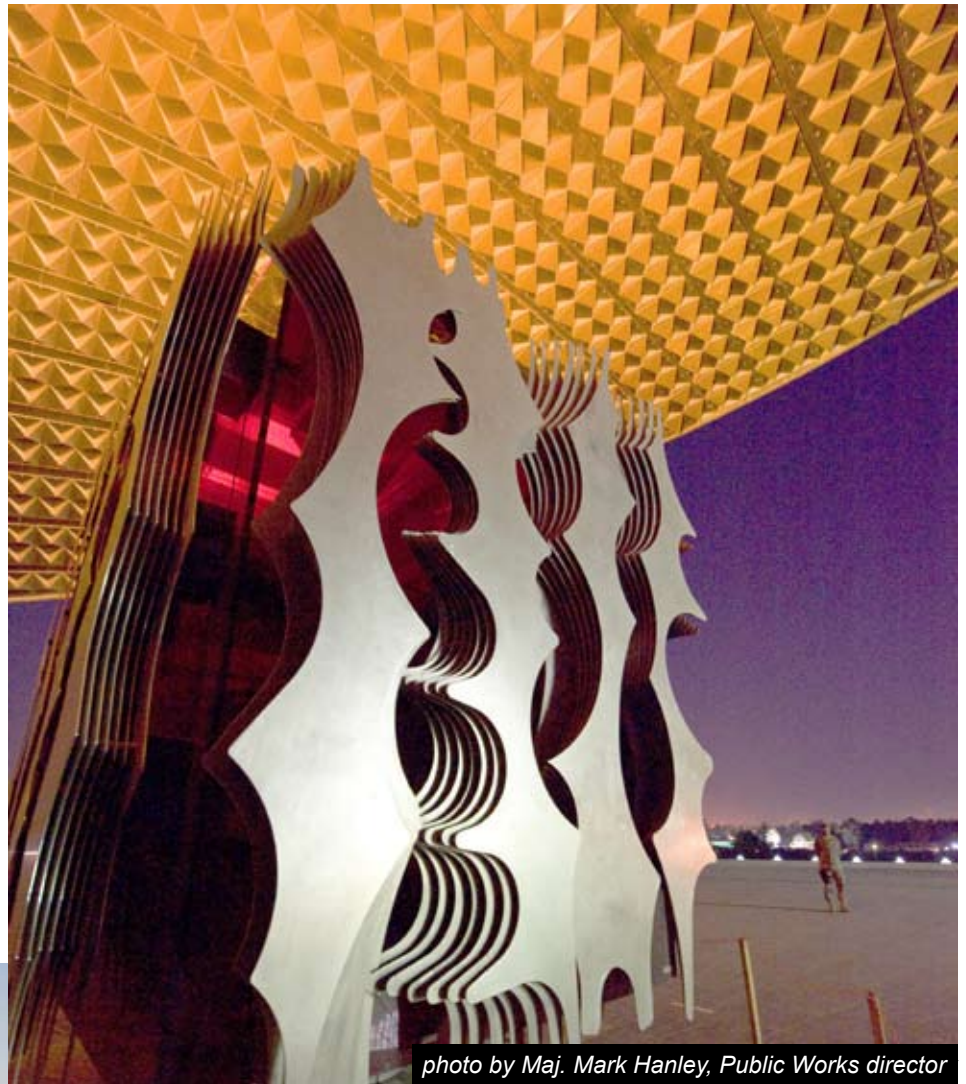


photo by Maj. Mark Hanley, Public Works director



# MASS

## DESTRUCTION

### OF WEAPONS



**A CUT ABOVE** - Sgt. 1st Class Michael Strawn, Joint Area Support Group-Central Security Directorate, above, checks the serial numbers of unauthorized weapons he is receiving from a private security company before having them destroyed. An Iraqi worker, below, cuts a Rocket Propelled Grenade launch tube into small pieces as part of the process to destroy unauthorized weapons overseen by Strawn.



## JASG-C NCO helps keep IZ streets safe

*Story and photos by  
Sgt. Bill Addison  
JASG-C Public Affairs*

In an area of the world where U.S. and Coalition forces are constantly fighting to remove weapons from the hands of their enemies, one member of the Joint Area Support Group- Central (JASG-C) is making sure they don't get them back.

One of Sgt. 1st Class Michael Strawn's jobs is to collect and destroy illegal, unserviceable or unwanted weapons in the International Zone (IZ). A big part of that equation lies in the personal security companies that operate in the IZ.

Strawn, of the JASG-C Security Directorate, said he personally inspects the arms rooms of every private security company within the IZ to make sure weapons and

ammunition are stored properly as well as to make sure the companies don't have any weapons they are not authorized to have.

"We don't want weapons out there that we don't know about," he said.

Keeping track of every weapon within the IZ is a major priority. It not only helps ensure only authorized individuals have weapons, it also enforces proper storage of weapons and munitions, according to Strawn. "We don't want people coming in and having easy access to weapons that they could take, sell on the black market or take and use against us," he said.

Strawn then takes the weapons to Ronco, the company contracted with the Department of Defense to destroy the weapons within the IZ. But it's not a case of dropping them off, and forgetting about

*continued on page 11*

## CHAPLAIN'S WORD

# Celebrating care, compassion

Chap. (Maj.) Jan Koczera  
JASG-C Chaplain

This is the holiday season, a time about care and compassion in the Jewish-Christian tradition.

I found a fascinating article about our urge to care in "Trust Me," a book on leadership by Ron Potter and Wayne Hastings. It seems that Margaret Mead, the famous anthropologist, was asked by a student what was the first sign of civilization in any culture. The student assumed that the answer would be a fishhook or a grinding stone or maybe a clay pot.

She answered him, "a healed femur" and further explained that a broken thigh bone is a fatal injury where there is no organized society



and the survival of the fittest reigns. A healed femur means that someone cared; someone had to hunt and gather for the injured one until the leg healed. This evidence of care and compassion is the first sign of civilization.

One thing I've seen in my 20 years in the Army is that real leaders

care. When I say "care," I just don't mean that they feel sorry for others or even have great empathy for their Soldiers; I mean that a leader who cares gets involved with others and does what they can to improve their life, its direction and quality.

And real leaders come at all ranks and levels of responsibility.

As we come to the halfway point of our deployment in this season of care and gifts, I encourage all of you, because all of you are leaders, to be involved, to make life better for others and make this decision to care a part of your personal legacy that you hold onto in all the years ahead.

May great blessings follow you in this holiday season and throughout the New Year.

## Season of Giving



The International Zone (IZ) Police handed out candy, toys, clothing and other items to families living in the IZ Nov. 14. Senior Airman Matthew Carr, right, led Airman 1st Class Paige Wetherell, above, Airman 1st Class Tanner Ray, Senior Airman Christopher Jodice, Staff Sgt. Russell Love and other IZ police officers during the event. Such donations are common practice for the IZ Police in the many neighborhoods that are part of their regular patrols.



# At the Ready



**ON GUARD**  
Sgt. Joseph Williams and Sgt. Phillip Purnell, JASG-C, provide route security as President George Bush, top left, met with Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, top right, Dec. 14.



photo by Sgt. 1st Class Derren Mazza, Combined Press Information Center

## JASG-C troops guard motorcade route for commander-in-chief

Story and photo by 1st Sgt. David Moore  
JASG-C Public Affairs

When President George W. Bush visited Baghdad's International Zone (IZ) Dec. 14, the long army of security was laid down by Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Joint Area Support Group-Central (JASG-C).

For the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen, the day started like all others with personnel reporting to their respective duty directorates such as Installations, Security and Support Operations,

By late afternoon, an estimated 200-plus personnel formed up in an undisclosed location for a briefing to provide details of the mission by the commander of the JASG-C and 50th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Col. Steven Ferrari, and the organization's top-noncommissioned officer, Command Sgt. Maj. David Kenna.

"Consider the mission critical to the U.S. and critical to Iraq," Ferrari informed the personnel as he ended his briefing without disclosing who the distinguished visitor was travelling through the streets of Baghdad's IZ.

"We'll all be in a position to make decisions," he added.

As Kenna moved in to brief the personnel, he announced who the visitor was. "It's the president. You are now a part of history to protect the president on his last visit to Iraq," he said.

By early evening, dozens of roads along the presidential motorcade's route were manned by armed military personnel from the JASG-C and the active duty 3/29th Field Artillery with the rules of engagement explicitly explained and rehearsed before the order was given to shutdown roads and stop pedestrians from entering the motorcade's route.

Later, a short order was given on radios to the force. "Lock down. Lock down," Ferrari ordered. With that order, military personnel stepped out of the shadows and moved up-armored, non-tactical vehicles to block the roads entering Arbataash Tamus, locally known as the 14th July Expressway.

Soldiers then moved into position to stop pedestrians from entering the road.

"This is a good mission. He had to come back one last time to visit the troops and visit this country's leaders," New Jersey Army National Guard Sgt. Joseph Williams of Phillipsburg, N.J., said as he watched over a street that included a 24-hour supermarket.

For the most part, Iraqi citizens who were held up from reaching their destinations were polite and patient, just waiting to see if they could catch a glimpse of Bush and the motorcade.

As all waited for what seemed like a brief hour, armed military personnel and Iraqi citizens watched the motorcade go by for the president's scheduled meeting with Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

After the motorcade passed, most of the JASG-C re-configured to position themselves as a quick reaction force in the event of any problems that the president would need another exit to leave the IZ.

But in the end, the operation ended quietly as Iraqis shook military personnel's hands, traffic moved again and Kenna said to the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen, "You did the mission exactly as expected, safely and successfully." 🇺🇸



# Troops tackle 14-mile tradition



**PHOTO FINISH** - First Lt. Douglas Coppola, a Colts Neck, N.J., native serving with the Joint Area support Group-Central, crosses the finish line of the 13.8-mile DANCON March carrying the unit guidon of the Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 50th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, New Jersey Army National Guard.

*Story by Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris*

*Photo by 1st Sgt. David Moore*

*JASG-C Public Affairs*

It's often said that if you're going to talk the talk, you've got to walk the walk.

If the former is truly earned through the latter, then bragging rights belong to participants in the Danish Contingent (DANCON) March around Baghdad's International Zone (IZ) Nov. 15.

About 500 personnel braved a chilly 5 a.m. start to the 13.8-mile walk that has been a Royal Danish Army annual tradition since the march's inception during a 1972 peacekeeping mission in Cyprus.

"It's a march that we do in all the missions where we have Danish soldiers," explained Col. Peter C. Alexa, senior Danish representative with NATO Training Mission-Iraq. "We've done it in the southern part of Africa, we've done it in the mountains of Afghanistan, and we've done it in the Balkans. We're also doing it with every contingent here in Iraq."

Water points, latrines and a fruit stand were set up along the route, and the IZ Police were on hand to handle emergencies. The march began outside the U.S.

Embassy (Provisional) and looped around a portion of the IZ. Participants had to walk five laps and return to the start point to complete the march.

"When I did the first lap, I couldn't imagine myself doing four more," admitted 1st Lt. Douglas Coppola, a Colts Neck, N.J., native serving as an accounting officer with the Joint Area Support Group-Central (JASG-C) Comptrollers Office.

The walk was not easy – even for a gym rat like Coppola – but taking on such a daunting physical challenge was half the fun. The other half came from socializing with an international melting pot of civilians and service members and embracing the march's celebratory atmosphere, epitomized by one Danish soldier who donned a Viking helmet and a U.S. Army captain who brought along several stuffed animals for company.

"What kept me going was walking with people, talking with people. I got to know a few Danish soldiers; for a brief period, I walked next to a few Air Force folks; we were just motivating each other," said Coppola.

"You got to meet the other soldiers, talk stories; you got to mingle with them," added Sgt. 1st Class Juan Plata, JASG-C readiness Non-Commissioned Officer In Charge (NCOIC) from Levittown, Pa.

Coppola also seized the opportunity to carry the 50th Infantry Brigade Combat Team's HHC guidon during the march. This N.J. Army National Guard brigade's headquarters company makes up most of the JASG-C.


"It was suggested by one of my comrades to take the guidon, and when I thought about it, I thought it was a great idea," Coppola explained. "I didn't know how many people in the JASG-C were going to participate, so I took it upon myself to ask the company commander if I could take the guidon and carry it through the five laps. (The request) made its way all the way up to the brigade commander, and he thought it was a great idea."

"The thing that stood out were the people who were carrying the unit colors," said Plata. "That's team cohesion; that's esprit de corps."

"I was very happy to do it," added Coppola.

So were the other marchers who crossed the finish line; they received a DANCON March medal, the knowledge that part of their \$25 registration fee would be donated to charity, and the satisfaction of having completed a unique and challenging test of endurance.

Alexa expressed his own satisfaction with conducting another successful DANCON March.

"I'm very pleased that so many people chose to participate, and I would like to thank all of them," he said. "If it wasn't for their participation, there would be no march." 

# Adjutant General of NJ visits IZ

*Story and photos by  
Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris  
JASG-C Public Affairs*



Two of the New Jersey National Guard's top leaders met with deployed "Jersey Blues" Soldiers from the 50th Infantry Brigade Combat Team during a trip to Iraq Nov. 18-20.

Maj. Gen. Glenn K. Rieth, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, and New Jersey State Command Sgt. Maj. Jerome Jenkins visited many of the 3,000 Garden State troops currently deployed to various duty stations in Iraq, including those serving as the Joint Area Support Group-Central (JASG-C) at the U.S. Embassy Annex in Baghdad's International Zone (IZ).


"I've had a great opportunity to visit Soldiers down at Camp Victory and over here in the International Zone," Rieth said. "For everything we're asking our kids to do - from guarding detainees to working very complex issues here within the International Zone - we should all be very proud"

The 50th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) Soldiers have been performing their mission since arriving in country in September. The brigade is scheduled to remain deployed until summer 2009.

"Coming up to the holidays - Thanksgiving, Christmas - it's going to be a tough time for the families, but I think the families recognize that the Soldiers have a job to do," said Rieth. "And they're doing it in a superb way."

Rieth spent his three-day visit touring the IZ and other parts of Iraq, giving him the opportunity to see where his Soldiers are living and working.

"I couldn't be more proud of the 50th IBCT and what they're doing for our nation, and how they've integrated into being part of this interagency and multi-component team here on the ground in Iraq," Rieth said.

"To all the Soldiers of the 50th Brigade - Hooah!" he added. 

**GARDEN STATE GENERAL** - Maj. Gen. Glenn K. Rieth, The Adjutant General of New Jersey, above right, speaks to Col. Steven Ferrari, Joint Area Support Group-Central commander from Berlin, N.J., during a visit to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad's International Zone Nov. 18-20. Rieth met with many JASG-C personnel, including Capt. Brian Stramaglia, below right.



# The Right Stuff



Celebrating their 1-, 3- and 6-year re-enlistments at the U.S. Embassy (Provisional) Dec. 13 are, from left, Staff Sgt. Gregory Twyman, Staff Sgt. Daryl Caulfield, Sgt. Brian Kofsky, Staff Sgt. Marlon Palma, Sgt. Wentworth Grayman, Sgt. Daisy Ferreira and Sgt. Kristine Tan.

photo by  
Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris,  
JASG-C Public Affairs

## Mass destruction of weapons

*continued from page 6*  
them. Strawn takes full ownership of the weapons from the time he picks them up to the moment they are destroyed.

“From beginning to end, I have to verify that that weapon went from one person’s possession to my possession to destruction, and it didn’t get into the wrong hands,” he said. “I sign off that yes, that weapon, that serial number: I’ve personally seen that destroyed.”

For Strawn, taking that level of ownership is just part and parcel with being a Soldier.

“To me, that’s just your basic accountability. It’s a big responsibility because I’m being entrusted by my superiors to ensure these weapons are being properly handled from beginning to end. I have to

be very accountable for my actions in making sure the process is followed from one end to the other,” Strawn explained.


**In the three months he’s been working in the IZ, Sgt. 1st Class Michael Strawn said he has personally overseen the destruction of more than 80 weapons and has confiscated more than 100 others.**

The Easton, Pa., native said he has spent his career in the National Guard working in ammunition depots, keeping track of and issuing out weapons and ammunition.

“So I’ve been around ammuni-

tion and weapons ever since I came in. I have a pretty good handle on the different ammunition types and how to handle the ammunition and most of the weapons that we deal with,” he said.

In the three months he’s been working in the IZ, Strawn said he has personally overseen the destruction of more than 80 weapons, and has confiscated more than 100 others which are awaiting destruction unless the owner is able to provide proper documentation for them.

“The whole point is that we’re trying to make sure these private security companies aren’t out there freelancing and going around like the wild, wild west, getting all kinds of weapons that in turn can be used against us,” he said. 



# FIRED UP

**BAND OF BROTHERS** - Maj. David Melendez, director of Public Safety, below, shares a laugh with Iraqi firefighter/instructors training at the Baghdad National Fire Academy. Melendez is a New York City firefighter in civilian life.



## Baghdad's new National Fire Academy trains first class of Iraqi firefighters

*Story by Maj. Jon Powers with contributions from 1st Sgt. David Moore  
Photos by Maj. Jon Powers  
JASG-C Public Affairs*

Firefighters have an extreme occupation. They rely on their comrades for their lives, and because of this they bond on a level where they share their knowledge and experience freely.

From the beginning, extreme circumstances surrounded Maj. David Melendez's career as a fireman. During the tragedy of 9/11, he was an emergency medical technician awaiting his opportunity to train as New York City firefighter. His chance came a month later when he

began the fire academy in the shadow of his fellow firefighters' loss. His entrance into the brotherhood of firefighters was a bittersweet moment.

Now, for the second time, his opportunity to train as a fireman comes from extreme circumstances. His deployment to Baghdad in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) allowed him to begin fire training again, but this time as one of the organizers at a unique academy. His own touchstone moment arrived, to share what he knew with fellow Iraqi firefighters.

"We are developing a course for the Iraqis to become internationally certified. In the past, they had a ba-

# “We all speak the language of putting the wet stuff on the red stuff.”

**- Maj. David Melendez, Public Safety director and New York City firefighter**

sic two-week course and they would have to go other places, like Bahrain; so a lot of these guys already know a lot,” Melendez said.

Most of the 20 Iraqi firefighters from the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior’s Civil Defense Force are already experienced fireman, so the focus of this course is to train them to be proficient trainers themselves. In Army lingo, this is “train the trainers” at its best.

“Some of the guys are Army, some Air Force. They can go back to their stations throughout Iraq and teach their fire company, and then here in the Civil Defense (facility) we are trying to develop a core curriculum so that everyone knows what to teach,” said Melendez.

“Being a firefighter... it is not about yourself, it is a collective team, a kind of brotherhood.”

The Multi-National Security Transition Command Iraq (MNSTC-I) Coalition Air Force Training Team fire rescue advisors, Tech. Sgt. Brian Partido and Tech. Sgt. Luis Ortiz-Acevedo, were previously conducting a fire school in Taji when Melendez’s predecessor saw them on television. After meeting them during the unit’s relief in place (RIP) Melendez had them moved to the IZ academy. The two found that what they lacked in equipment was solved by moving to the IZ academy.

“This is state-of-the art training. This place, the National Fire Academy, is like it was always meant to be here in Baghdad. To make this training work, we had equipment they (Iraqis) didn’t have. And the Iraqi firefighters had equipment we didn’t have,” said Partido, lead instructor for the training. “We took the fire apprentice course from the US Air Force and adapted it to the way Iraqi firefighters operate and had it translated into Arabic,” he

said of the new 60-day block of instruction.

“It doesn’t matter where you come from around the world, firefighters are truly a brotherhood when it comes to professionalism and the spirit of healthy competition,” said Ortiz-Acevedo, a Puerto Rico native.

Iraqi Army Cpl. Akram Huseen Ali, previously chosen to train as a Humvee driver instructor, said he likes his new job because he wants to help people. “Before, I didn’t

*continued on page 18*



**PUSHING THE LIMITS**  
Air Force Staff Sgt. Jorge Arce, above and at left, and Tech. Sgt. Brian Partido, at left, encourage an Iraqi firefighter/instructor to complete the 100-meter dummy drag portion of training at the Baghdad National Fire Academy.



# Making Spirits Bright



## Service members help Iraqi children, families celebrate Christmas holiday

*Story by Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris  
Photos by 1st Sgt. David Moore  
JASG-C Public Affairs*

As Santa Claus entered the room, children and parents clapped and cheered. Old St. Nick proceeded to hand out presents to the little ones, and families joined together in spirited caroling. It was an old-fashioned Christmas celebration worthy of a Norman Rockwell painting.

What Rockwell couldn't have captured, however, was that the carols were sung in Arabic and Aramaic and the man in the red suit was known as "Papa Noel."

Welcome to Christmas in Baghdad.

Nearly six-dozen children from St. George's Anglican Church in Baghdad's "Red Zone" were invited into the city's International Zone (IZ) Dec. 19 to share in holiday cheer, courtesy of the Joint Area Support Group-Central (JASG-C).

"When I was small, our church did the same thing, and that I never forgot," said Sgt. Maj. Israel Garcia, Support Operations sergeant major, JASG-C. "I'm hoping that this event will always stick in their heads, so they know the Americans are here to help them."

"This wonderful event today is being put on by the American troops for our children," explained Canon Andrew White, Episcopal pastor at the U.S. Embassy (Provisional) Chapel and vicar of St. George's Church. "I wish



**SEASON OF GIVING** - Iraqi children and families from Baghdad's St. George's Church were invited into the International Zone Dec. 19 to celebrate the coming Christmas holiday. Their day included fun and games at Forward Operating Base Freedom, top, followed by an afternoon visit by "Papa Noel" at Ocean Cliffs.



**TIME WELL SPENT** - Several members of the Joint Area Support Group-Central, including Spc. Ivania Brito, top left, Lt. Col. Brian Scully, above, and Maj. Joel Martin, below, helped make Dec. 19 a special day for nearly six-dozen Iraqi children.



that the people back home in the U.S. could see this kind of thing you're doing for the people of Iraq."

The Iraqi children and their families were treated to a morning of Frisbee toss, softball, basketball, craft painting and a barbecue lunch at Forward Operating Base Freedom. The afternoon was spent at Ocean Cliffs, where the festivities culminated with a visit from Papa Noel.


Throughout the day, gifts such as toys, backpacks, and sporting goods donated by various organizations and individuals in the United States were given to the children, who were mostly Christian but included a handful of Muslims.

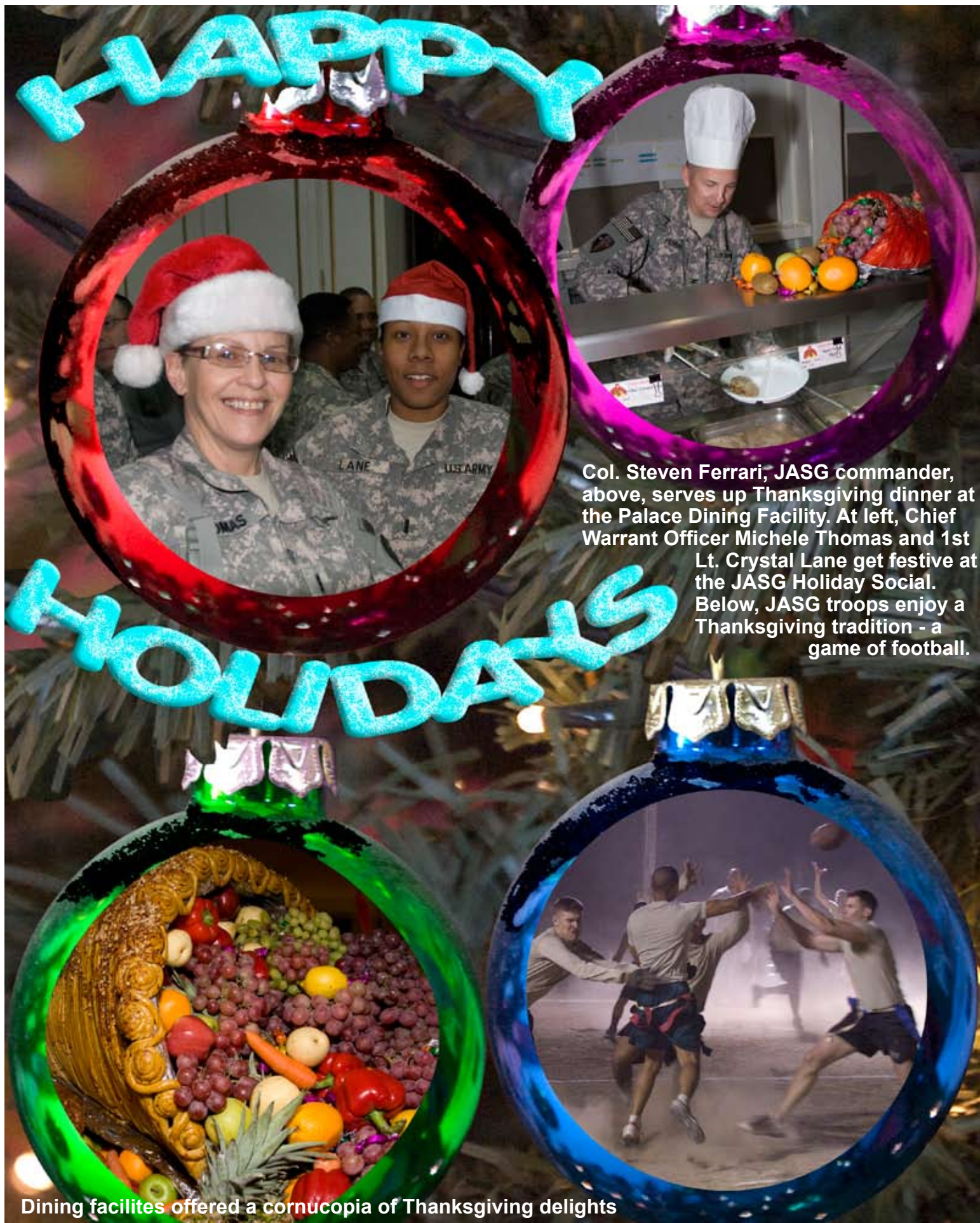
"We got the mayor of Vineland involved, and we also got my old unit, the 3rd/102nd retiree association, involved, and we also got the Faritan Church involved, and they went out and bought five- or six-hundred dollars worth of toys," explained Garcia. "The city got involved with donating more toys, we had a local shoe store donate forty-five or fifty pairs of brand-new shoes, and we had the Vineland High School donate equipment. It was a New Jersey group effort."

"We've had several churches back in the states that wanted to help provide Christmas presents to Iraqi children," said Air Force Lt. Col. Dawn Warner, deputy chief of staff for the director of Defense Affairs, Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq.

St. George's Church and the JASG-C sponsored a similar event in late-October, offering two-dozen children the chance to enjoy the fruits of FOB Freedom.

"Any time you get to help someone – I don't care if they're Muslim, Catholic, Christian, whatever – it should make you feel a whole lot better about yourself," said Garcia.

"This makes us feel really good that we can play along with the kids," said Spc. Ivania Brito, JASG-C administrative assistant. "I hope that they really do have a merry Christmas." 



Col. Steven Ferrari, JASG commander, above, serves up Thanksgiving dinner at the Palace Dining Facility. At left, Chief Warrant Officer Michele Thomas and 1st Lt. Crystal Lane get festive at the JASG Holiday Social. Below, JASG troops enjoy a Thanksgiving tradition - a game of football.

Dining facilities offered a cornucopia of Thanksgiving delights





1st Lt. Lisa Bethea, above, lights a candle during Christmas service at the Embassy Chapel.

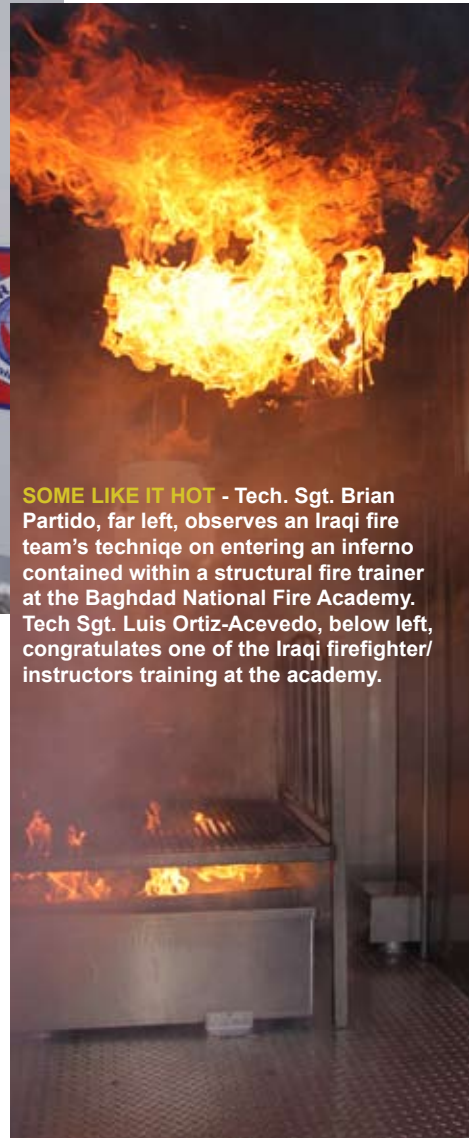


Above, a gingerbread house stands among dozens of decorations at the Palace Dining Facility.



Maj. Paul Nema and Navy Lt. Isaac Henry, from left above, light the Menorah during Hanukkah service at the Embassy Chapel. At right, Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Simpson enjoys a Christmas meal at the Palace Dining Facility.





**SOME LIKE IT HOT** - Tech. Sgt. Brian Partido, far left, observes an Iraqi fire team's technique on entering an inferno contained within a structural fire trainer at the Baghdad National Fire Academy. Tech Sgt. Luis Ortiz-Acevedo, below left, congratulates one of the Iraqi firefighter/instructors training at the academy.

# Fire Academy

*continued from page 13*


know anything about firefighting, I had no background.” Now he is grateful for this opportunity, the friends he has made and the training from the American instructors. He said in his heart he is now a firefighter.

The classroom instruction includes six subjects ranging from medical to basic fire knowledge, fire principles, advancing to fire control, hazardous materials, and structural training and aircraft fires. Partido has also noticed the willingness to share between the Iraqi students.

“They have different levels of experience, ranging from guys that have never been a firefighter all the way up to gentlemen who have been in for over 20 years. It is good to get the input from the older guys helping to teach the younger guys,” Partido remarked. “I think they will be excellent. We started from the basics and worked our way to the more advanced techniques and it’s amazing to see how far they have come.”

“It is great to be involved at this level, and to be able to work with both the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior is very challenging yet rewarding. I wouldn’t have missed it for the world,” Partido reflected. “They have great hearts and they’re enthusiastic about what they’re doing and they love being firefighters. We try not to instill any American principles in them, we give them the logic behind why we wanted to become firefighters, how we would like to help people, and take care of others and put our lives on the line.”

Though new to fire fighting, Akram found this to be true for himself. “Most of (the students) I didn’t know, but now they have become like my brothers; if anything happens to them it is like it is happening to me.”

As for the bond between this diverse collection of firefighters, Melendez summed it up best: “We all speak the language of putting the wet stuff on the red stuff.” 



## JAG CORNER

# OPSEC top concern for Web blog sites

*Col. Daniel G. Giaquinto  
Command Judge Advocate*

With our deployment and the continued importance of Operations Security (OPSEC), many questions have arisen regarding blogging. There are several sources of authority that impact on this subject, including, but not limited to, DoDD 5230.9, Clearance of DoD Information for Public Release; AR 530-1, Operations Security; Multi National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) Policy #9, Unit and Soldier Owned and Maintained Web-sites; and JASG-C Command Policy Letter SPO #1, JASG-C Web Portal Site.

This article will attempt to synthesize the authority and offer guidance primarily on personal blogs, and will address unit maintained Web sites as well. As always, this article does not suffice for your own review of the regulations or seeking appropriate advice.

In regard to making information accessible to the public on your own time, it is important to start with definitions. An unofficial Web site is one that is created on personal time and is neither produced in connection with official duties nor paid for with DoD funds.

A blog is a Web page maintained as a journal for personal comments, which may also include photographs or hyperlinks to other web pages. Blogs often contain personal thoughts - sort of a diary and guide site - mixing what is going on in someone's life with other happenings. A Webmaster is someone who maintains a Web page, portal, or site.

Soldiers who own, maintain, or desire to own or maintain an individual page, portal or site, must

register the Web site with their chain of command. Also, Soldiers must register the URL of their blogs with their chain of command. The same rule applies to Soldiers who supply editorial comment to a blog, even if they do not own, maintain, or administer the blog. Units are required to collect and furnish the Soldier registration information to their respective MSCs.

The registration information will contain, at a minimum, the unit, Web site IP address, company hosting the Web site, Webmaster or name of concerned person, and contact information. Units are also required to have a designated reviewer to monitor, on a quarterly basis, Web sites registered within their MSCs.

Although Soldiers posting information on personal Web sites or blogs need not clear in advance the posted information with military authorities, they may not at any time post "prohibited information." Generally the posting of information that would not be released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is prohibited. This includes but is not limited to:

- Classified information
- Casualty information before the next-of-kin has been formally notified
- Information protected by the Privacy Act
- Information concerning ongoing investigations
- Essential Elements of Friendly Information (EEFI), and
- For Official Use Only (FOUO) Information

It is important to note the rules that apply to personal Web sites and blogs, also apply to official Web sites, that is, any Web site hosted on the ".mil" domain, or any Web site hosted on a commercial

server but published or sponsored by a military command. However, a significant difference is that all information published on an official Web site must first be cleared in compliance with procedures set forth in AR 25-1 and AR 360-1.

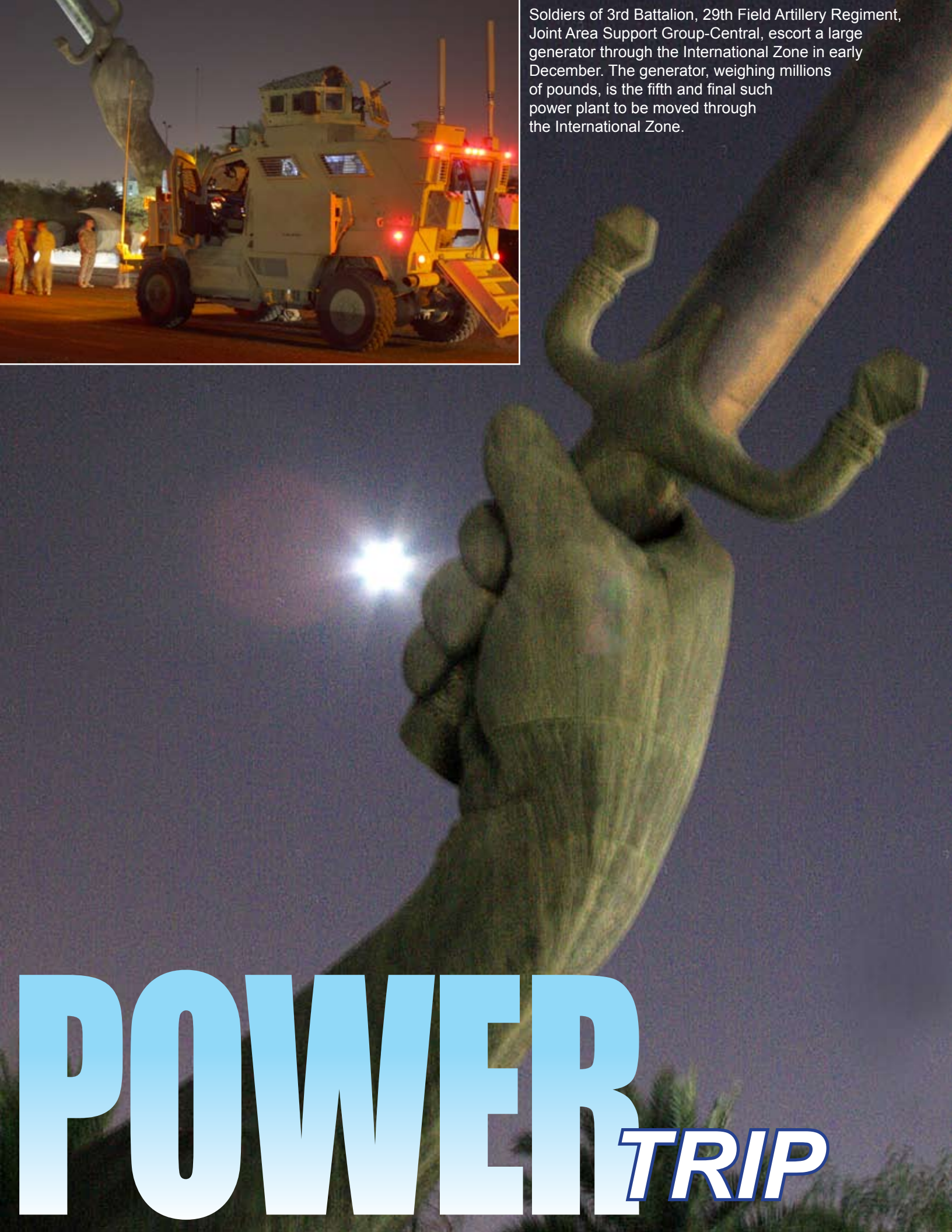
The policy rules regarding registration of Web sites and the restriction against releasing prohibited information are punitive. This means that violations of these rules may be the subject of adverse administrative action or action under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) for a violation of a violation of Article 92 (Failure to Obey Order or Regulation). UCMJ violations may be the subject of nonjudicial punishment (Article 15) or a court-martial.

Keep in mind that all publicly accessible information, even if it were intended only for a particular audience, is considered public. "It was not meant for the general public" is not a valid defense. When in doubt about the classification of information you wish to post, you should consult the S2 or PAO.

Unofficial and official Web sites provide a valuable service to the public and facilitate our personal and official communications. Although we do not give up our First Amendment rights when we take the oath to serve, these rights are subject to necessary and reasonable limitations based on the nature of our profession and its operational realities: Approximately 80 percent of information the enemy obtains about us is gathered from open sources. Before releasing any information in any type of manner, OPSEC should always be a central thought and concern.

Before blogging remember: OPSEC is our responsibility; OPSEC saves lives.

Soldiers of 3rd Battalion, 29th Field Artillery Regiment, Joint Area Support Group-Central, escort a large generator through the International Zone in early December. The generator, weighing millions of pounds, is the fifth and final such power plant to be moved through the International Zone.



# POWER *TRIP*