



Engineers Maintain Balance in Iraq

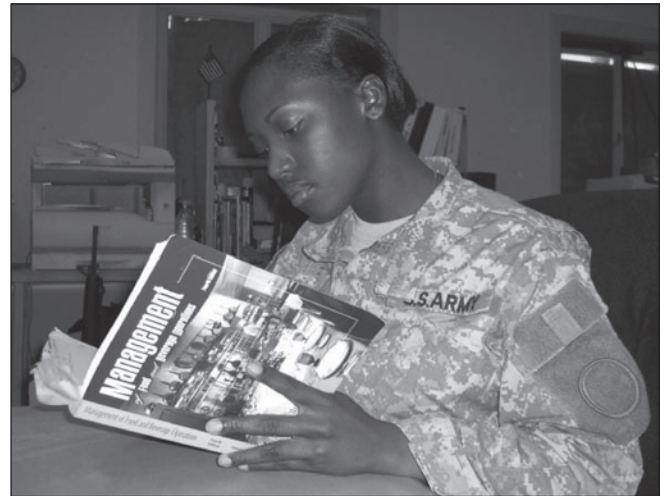
By Captain Michelle L. Vargo

At times, it's hard to be a Soldier, but still they must learn and execute their mission on the battlefield. They must sustain the demanding tempo of today's Army, sharpness on the battlefield, and endurance for the long fight, all while preserving a sound lifestyle and balance in their personal lives.

Every branch of the military is working as a team to win the Global War on Terrorism. Leaders and Soldiers are developing their skills and are more technically and tactically proficient than ever before. Coalition forces are currently executing Operation Iraqi Freedom (05-07), which includes many Soldiers who are in Iraq for the second and third time. This time around, these Soldiers are taking advantage of many resources and gaining military knowledge.

Education

Many Soldiers are using their time off to continue formal studies or to learn something new. A battalion promotions clerk studies nightly; she is taking an eight-week course offered through Central Texas College and currently has 41 college credits toward her degree. An operations sergeant completed his associate's degree from Central Texas College while deployed.



A Soldier studies for a college class.

An assistant construction officer is learning Spanish through the Rosetta Stone Program, available on Army Knowledge Online (AKO). A great resource for any Soldier who wants to learn a language while deployed, AKO aids comprehension with lessons, pictures, questions, and tests.

In the interest of teaching others, a supply sergeant taught criminology classes twice a week. His course prepared Soldiers for their College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exam, and they hope to obtain a certificate of completion, which in some cases can be used toward a degree.

Led by excitement from the film release of *The Da Vinci Code*, a chaplain held a four-week study group on the historical accuracy of the book, with six Soldiers participating. Some read the book or planned to watch the movie and said that the study helped shed light on the intriguing mystery behind the plot.

Physical Fitness

While some Soldiers focus on education, others work on physical fitness. A majority of Soldiers are taking advantage of the yearlong time frame to become more fit. Several participated in biathlons



Asian-Pacific Heritage Month included cultural dances.



Soldiers perform leading roles in a theatrical production.


organized by Logistics Support Area (LSA) Anaconda's morale, welfare, and recreation office. Although initially apprehensive about participating in the dual event, all participants finished and vowed to try a biathlon again. In August, deployed Soldiers participated in the Relay for Life to raise money for the American Cancer Society. Soccer, basketball, and volleyball have also been team-building sports during the deployment.

Entertainment

On LSA Anaconda, many other opportunities are also available. For example, personnel took the opportunity to express themselves by playing lead roles in a play titled *Bugs, Brits, Builders, Strange Bed Fellows*. A 25-person team performed the theatrical production that lasted 2 1/2 hours, ran for two days, and drew a 250-person audience on opening night.

Other personnel celebrated Asian-Pacific Heritage Month by participating in cultural dances from Hawaii, Samoa, and New Zealand. There was a luau atmosphere and ethnic food that included a pig roast.

Summary

Even though their primary purpose is to support Operation Iraqi Freedom, Soldiers in Iraq also need to maintain personal balance. Exercising the mind through formal or informal classes, staying physically fit, and participating in cultural events can help lessen the stress experienced during deployments to areas of conflict. 

Captain Vargo is the battalion civil engineer for the 84th Engineer Battalion (Combat). She has served three years in the 84th and has deployed twice in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.