

Get the inside story on the 1st Infantry Division's Transition Team training, its mission and what it takes to be a TT servicemember

Duty First

Fall Winter 2007



Special Transition Team Issue

Also featuring photos and stories from 1st Bde., 2nd Bde., 3rd HBCT, 3rd IBCT, 4th IBCT, 1st CAB, 1st Sustainment Bde. and more

The Transition Team Issue



On the cover: Transition team members meet with their Iraqi counterparts during training at Fort Riley's range complex.

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Transition Teams: An overview

*Series by 1st Infantry Division
Public Affairs Office*

The concept of using small embedded teams of military advisors to assist foreign security forces is not new. However, the concept of using these teams in Iraq and Afghanistan has garnered considerable public attention over the last year, especially since the publication of the Iraq Study Group's report in December of 2006.

In this report, the Study Group stated in their first sentence that "there is no magical

formula" for success in Iraq. However, one of the Group's key recommendations was that "the United States should significantly increase the number of U.S. military personnel, including combat troops, embedded with and supporting Iraqi Army units." At the time this article was published, the U.S. Army, Air Force and Navy had already consolidated transition team training at Fort Riley, under the 1st Infantry Division. Teams had been training in Kansas for months already, and a significant number of Big Red One transition teams had already deployed to Iraq.

Nobody knows for sure what the future holds in Iraq, but it's likely that the requirement for transition teams will continue. These teams provide essential support for developing security forces vital to stability in both Iraq and Afghanistan. With effective security forces, these nations' governments will be able to operate in increasingly stable, relatively peaceful environments. This stability will hopefully allow the Iraqi and Afghan governments to focus more of their resources toward improving their quality of life, through democratic and economic advances.

A brief history of transition teams

The Army began using transition teams in early 2004, as operations shifted to the self-reliance of Iraqi and Afghan security forces. Initially, teams were provided primarily by units already in Iraq. These "internal" teams operated with minimal training and resources in their efforts to advise, teach, and mentor the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).

As the role of transition teams increased in importance, the Army began, in 2005, training advisory teams at several locations, to include Fort Carson, Colo.; Fort Hood, Texas; and Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

In March 2006, U.S. Army Forces Command decided to consolidate transition team training at Fort Riley initially under the 24th Infantry Division, commanded by MG Dennis Hardy. The mission would be passed to the 1st Infantry Division upon its arrival Aug. 1. LTG Russel Honore's First Army would provide the initial cadre of trainers from one of his training support brigades to augment Fort Riley, while the 24th and then 1st Infantry Division reconfigured their organizations to train these teams.

On the 1st of June, 2006, Soldiers from First Army's 2nd Brigade, 91st Training Support Division, commanded by COL Ray Lamb, started adviser training at Fort Riley. Initially, only teams headed for Iraq were trained at Fort Riley, but since then the teams bound for Afghanistan have also come to Kansas for their training. On August 1, the 24th Infantry Division transferred authority for Fort Riley and the training mission to the 1st Infantry Division.

Dedicating the 1st Infantry Division Headquarters and two of the Division's brigades to transition team training demonstrated the



Photo by Anna Morelock

Army's commitment to the transition team mission. Although the Army was criticized by some journalists for moving too slowly, the Army recognized as early as 2004 the value of transition teams, and took the initiative by creating teams "out of hide" while developing a strong training program.

Visits by Army, Department of Defense, and Congressional leadership to Fort Riley underscored the importance of the transition team training mission. Fort Riley hosted nearly all key leaders in the fall of 2006, to include Vice Chief of Staff of the Army GEN Richard Cody, Chief of Staff of the Army GEN Peter Schoomaker, Secretary of the Army Francis Harvey, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

The bottom line became clear: the consolidation of training at Fort Riley under the 1st Infantry Division provides standardization of high quality training, more effective use of resources and fast integration of lessons learned.

What are Transition Teams?

In short, transition teams advise, teach and mentor Iraqi and Afghan Security Forces, and provide direct access to Coalition capabilities such as air support, artillery, medical evacuation and intelligence gathering. As advisers, teams help develop capabilities of Iraqi and Afghan Security Forces, so they become capable of independent, effective security operations.

Teams typically travel in armored Humvees, and spend most of their time with the Iraqi or Afghan unit they advise and support. The normal size of teams is 10-16 military personnel, depending on the type of unit they advise. However, the number of members in a team can range from as few as three to as many as 45. Many teams are supplemented in theater with security or other support.

Only highly qualified senior officers and noncommissioned officers are employed in teams. These officers and NCOs bring a wide range of combat and combat support specialties to include: operations, intelligence, logistics, communications, engineering, fire support, medical and garrison operations. This multi-functional aspect of teams is further complemented by considerable individual combat experience.

Teams provide mentorship: flexible, resilient and steadfast teams provide a positive and professional example for their Iraqi partners in dealing with adversity and the challenges of serving in a democratic nation. They work with their Iraqi and Afghan counterparts to enhance the understanding of the rule of law and fundamental human rights.

The officers and NCOs of these teams are selected based upon their grade, skill and experience match, balanced with the amount of time they have had since their last deployment (dwell time). Also, it's not just active Army training: Fort Riley trains Soldiers from active duty, the Army Reserve, and National Guard as well as airmen and sailors from our sister services.

As a side note, the Marines currently differ in the way they deploy teams. Their teams are connected to regimental rotations, whereas the Army, Air Force, and Navy send out teams independent of unit rotations. The Marine Corps is committed to the same principles of transition team training, and the 1st Inf. Div. communicates closely with the Marine Corps to ensure parallel training and standards.

Transition Teams on the battlefield

The mission of transition teams is to advise, teach and mentor Iraqi and Afghan security forces, and to provide direct access to Coalition capabilities such as air support, artillery, medical evacuation and intelligence gathering. In the end, transition teams assist Iraqi and Afghan Security Forces in assuming full responsibility for the security of their country.

Over the past three years, the Iraqi Security Forces have been rebuilt from the ground up to be a modern, effective fighting force. Afghan Security Forces were in place already, but the increased effectiveness of both nations' forces are a result of initiatives taken in early 2005 and training provided by embedded transition teams.

The role of transition teams in both Iraq and Afghanistan likely will not diminish in the near future. These teams are crucial in the establishment of professional security forces that effectively support the fledgling democratic governments. With the establishment of effective security forces, the governments of these nations gain credibility and the ability to carry out their political missions — missions based on democratic values that will bring a better life to the people of those nations.

Much of what these teams do goes unnoticed by the public, and that's not necessarily a bad thing; it's part of what these teams do. They lead from behind. They put the Iraqis and Afghans up front, in the lead for security missions of all types. Good transition teams guide their units to victory – victory on the battlefield and victory in the eyes of the

Iraqis and Afghans. As public confidence in security forces grows, Iraqi and Afghan security forces gain pride and effectiveness.

From October 2006 to September 2007, the 1st Infantry Division will train approximately 4,500 officers and noncommissioned officers in this critical mission. While there is no “magic formula” for success in Iraq and Afghanistan, each of these Big Red One transition teams undoubtedly will help create the conditions required for success.



Training Transition Teams



The benefits of consolidating training at Fort Riley under the 1st Infantry Division are numerous, to include a more effective use of resources and the standardization of training. Certainly, moving all training to one location saves money and streamlines processes. Most importantly, however, the consolidation ensures the highest standard of training for each deploying team

Each team trains for approximately 60 days at Fort Riley. Training focuses on seven core competencies: combat skills, force protection, team support processes, technical and tactical training, adviser skills, counter-insurgency operations and understanding the culture.

Beyond these core competencies, teams with special requirements receive modified training to meet their needs. For example, Garrison Support Unit (GSU) transition teams have met with local Kansas municipal administrators to better learn how to effectively manage a city.

Training foreign security forces is not an easy job, and cultural and language differences pose significant challenges. The training at Fort Riley takes these factors into account, and teams are provided more than 40 hours of language instruction; cultural awareness training is incorporated throughout. Teams also receive substantial training and exercise in the use of interpreters. Interpreters speaking both Iraqi Arabic and Dari languages add realism and training value to the training environment.

The goal of each transition team is to help the Iraqi and Afghan Security Forces establish doctrine and processes which should ensure continued stability when the teams depart. In order to accomplish this, teams must learn to ‘lead from behind’ in advising, teaching and mentoring. This is a cultural change in itself for most U.S.

military men and women, who are used to ‘taking charge and leading from the front.’ And yes, women do train and deploy with transition teams. Women most often train and deploy in teams such as the previously mentioned Garrison Support Units or Motor Transport teams.

As the conditions and tactics on the battlefield change, and as we continue to learn how to better train forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, we also continue to modify and adapt training. IED training is constantly modified, sometimes on a daily basis, to reflect the most recent tactics and counter-improvised explosive device techniques. Counter-sniper training was developed to meet that growing threat, and teams often return at mid-tour to provide face-to-face guidance on what works and doesn’t work in country.

Transition team training first prepares teams to advise, teach and mentor Iraq and Afghan security forces. However, teams receive extensive training as well in battlefield survival skills, weapons, advanced first aid and combat driving skills. This critical training helps ensure the survivability of teams in Theater.

In-Theater training

Training continues after teams deploy from Fort Riley. Teams deploying to Afghanistan undergo an abbreviated training and transfer program, but for teams deploying in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the process tacks on another 24 days.

Teams headed for Iraq first stop at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, for theater-orientation training. Camp Buehring focuses seven days of training on High Risk of Capture training, foreign weapons familiarization, crew-served weapons training, counter-IED training, convoy live fire, and language training.

Next is Camp Taji, Iraq, where teams polish skills at the Phoenix Academy. The Phoenix Academy is currently an eight-day school that provides counter-insurgency training, advisory skills training, language training and additional hands-on training for communications systems teams will employ.

Finally, teams go through a 10-day Relief in Place/Transfer of Authority (RIP/TOA) process. During this final phase of training, teams receive detailed briefings, are introduced to their Iraqi counterparts, and are made familiar with their area of operations by the outgoing team. The incoming team must brief its higher headquarters and satisfy the commander that all requirements to ensure a successful handover have been met.

Total training time for Operation Iraqi Freedom teams, including the RIP/TOA, is approximately 85 days. ▀



"We all need to understand what's going on with these transition teams because they are the way we are going to bring this war in Iraq to a close." 1



"This training is real. The trainers here at Fort Riley really know what they are training. They know what to look for in Iraq." 2

PROGRESS REPORT

"I am very impressed with the performance of the Iraqi army. There was a time when Coalition forces had to urge Iraqi forces to fight. That is not the case anymore. They are not only capable of fighting; they want to fight for a sovereign Iraq." 3

"We've trained and equipped them, and now we're trying to go to the next level with different training programs and different initiatives. What I see on a daily basis is great leaders, great 'shertas' (police officers), putting their lives on the line and truly becoming a more professional force." 4



"I wanted them to see the type of training we do – how we take individual training and collective training and build upon it so you can combine it into situational training exercises that prepare soldiers and leaders to execute operations in all types of theaters." 5



"We believe in the Afghan security forces and when we showed them that we believed, they started believing in themselves." 6

- 1: U.S. Rep. Nancy Boyda (D-Kan.), member of the House Armed Services Committee
- 2: Nasser Hssaini, a reporter for Al-Jazeera television
- 3: BG Dana Pittard, the now-former assistant division commander for maneuver for the 1st Infantry Division and the former commander of the Iraq Assistance Group
- 4: MG Kenneth Hunzeker, former 1st Infantry Division Commander who assumed control of Multinational Security Transition Command Iraq's Civilian Police Assistance Training Team in October 2006.
- 5: Command Sgt. Maj. Ruben Espinoza, command sergeant major for the Combined Security Transition Command in Kabul, Afghanistan
- 6: Zahir Aghbar, Afghan police chief

Sailors learn Army TT tactics at Funston

*Series by 1st Infantry Division
Public Affairs Office*

Navy Cmdr. Phil Blaine is a pharmacist. He's also a member of a transition team destined for Afghanistan. He and the other members of his team will be standing up a hospital when they deploy, but first, they have to get through their training at Fort Riley.

The equipment they wear weighs between 50 and 70 pounds and for someone who isn't used to wearing it, it doesn't take long to get worn down. That was the hardest thing Navy Lt. Priscilla Del Carpio had to deal with.

"Never in a million years did I think I'd be doing all this Army stuff," Del Carpio said. "I knew I'd be deploying sooner or later, but I always thought it would have been with the Navy.

"The body armor is something you get used to eventually," Del Carpio said. "But when I first put it on I thought, 'holy moly,' and then add your weapons and all your other gear; it wears you down.

"It doesn't hurt nearly as bad as it did the first two days I wore it," she said. "The first day I wore it, I really thought I was going to cry,"

Another thing Del Carpio said she had to get used to were the terms the Army uses.

"They speak a different language than we do," she said. "Sometimes we have them slow down and explain what they just said. But we're getting used to it and it's become second nature to us now."

Blaine, Del Carpio and the rest of their team were learning building clearing techniques, one of the most dangerous jobs there

is, said Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Walder, the first sergeant for Battery G, 1st Battalion, 5th Field Artillery Regiment.

"We're showing them the basic stack procedures, sectors of fire and entry techniques," Walder said.

The training is progressive, Walder said. "It's the crawl, walk, run method of teaching. We're starting everyone off in glass houses," said Walder, explaining a glass house as a taped-off area symbolizing a building with rooms.

The next level for the teams to master is a closed building.

"It's basically the same thing as the glass house but we've added walls and have them work in a dimly-lighted area," Walder said.

From there, the last step is a blank-fire assault on a building.

"We've added pictures of the enemy and of friendly bystanders," Walder said. "As they make their way through the building they have to pick and choose where they fire.

"Knowing how to do this is a great basic skill to have," Walder said. "No matter what type of unit they belong to, if you get told you have to do this, there's no such thing as an administrative move. You will have to do it, and knowing how will save their lives."

"This is like drinking water through a fire hose," Blaine said of the training. "There's so much to do, so much to learn. We're like sponges and taking it all in."

Blaine said since he and his team have been training, they've done a lot of marksmanship, convoy movements, classroom work and language training.

"We've had a lot of classroom work in the Dari language,"

SFC Christopher Walder, Btry. G, 1st Bn., 5th FA Regt., briefs Navy transition team members before they conduct the crawl portion of their mission, practicing stacking techniques in "glass houses."



Blaine said. “Hopefully, we’ll be able to converse with our counterparts when we get there. At least we’ll be able to say ‘hello’ and ‘goodbye.’”

(Below) Navy CPT Steve Nichols (front) and Navy Senior Chief Petty Officer Shawn Ahrens practice clearing a room during transition team training at one of the post’s urban cluster sites.

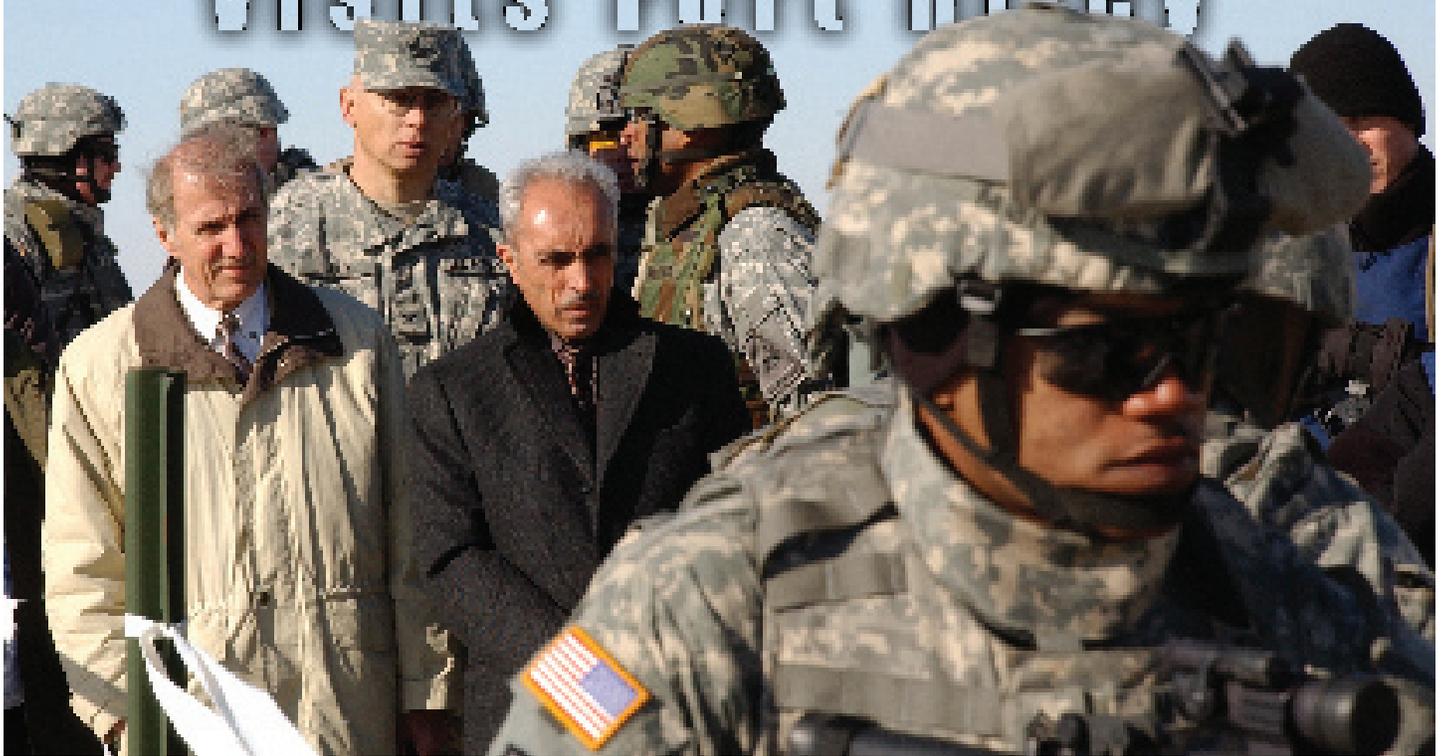
(Right) Navy CPT Steve Nichols and Cmdr. Lawrence LeClair breach a room during training at one of the post’s urban cluster sites.



Navy transition team members practice clearing a room during training at one of the post’s urban cluster sites.



Iraqi Army Chief of Staff visits Fort Riley



Iraqi Army Chief of Staff GEN Babaker Shawkat B. Zebari, center, watches as transition team training advisers demonstrate urban operations techniques during his visit to a Fort Riley training range Jan. 26 to observe TT training. While there, he also met with post leaders and conducted a press conference for local and national reporters.

***Story and photo by
SGT Stephen Baack
1st ID PAO Editor***

The Iraqi Army Chief of Staff visited Fort Riley training areas Jan. 26 to observe transition team training, meet with post leaders and conduct a press conference for local and national reporters.

GEN Babaker Shawkat B. Zebari, who was selected as the commanding general and chief of staff of Iraqi Joint Forces in 2003, met with then commanding general of the 1st Infantry Division and Fort Riley, MG Carter Ham, and with COL Norbert Jocz, commander of the 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division.

Transition team training remains among the Army's top priorities in transferring military authority and responsibility to Iraqi Security Forces, and according to Babaker, the mission of American servicemembers in Iraq is moving toward a visible conclusion.

"The security situation clearly is most critical inside Baghdad," Ham said. "In other parts of the country, there have been

some great successes with the Iraqi Security Forces. (Babaker's) convinced that cooperation among the Americans, the other coalition members and the Iraqis can start to bring security to Baghdad just as they have in other parts of the country."

"We hope and we envision that by March '08, the vast majority of the American troops will be able to leave the country and be withdrawn, save for some bases – American bases outside the city limits – which can be used and relied upon when need be," Babaker said, through his translator.

The Iraqi general watched as TT members demonstrated close-quarters combat techniques to a group of mock ISF members at one of the post's urban cluster sites.

"This is a basic thing that they are doing here, but it is very useful because they can put that into practice in the field when they go to Iraq," Babaker said of the training.

Anytime a country's highest ranking military officer visits training it's important, Ham said.

"In this case it's particularly important for him to see the training that's on-going

for the advisers because it's his soldiers that we're advising," Ham said, adding that the general gave the trainers good insight, tips and advice on the training along with strong encouragement to continue.

One piece of advice Babaker offered U.S. military leaders was to remain focused on relations with Iraqi citizens.

"Mostly he's asked to make sure that we continually emphasize the importance of understanding the cultural environment in which our advisers and our Soldiers are operating, so that they can be more effective in their missions inside Iraq," Ham said.

"I am confident that the Iraqi army will be a very powerful, very strong, very capable army in the near future, and it will be a great friend of the American people and military," Babaker said. "We will be with you Americans shoulder-to-shoulder in enforcing the rule of law – not just in Iraq – even outside of Iraq. And, terrorism has to be eradicated through the cooperation that exists between you and us." ▀

TT veteran returns to share knowledge

*Story and photo by MSG Jack Lee
1st Brigade PAO*

A Fort Riley transition team Soldier home for some rest and recuperation stopped by post to visit with transition teams in training to share insights about the Iraqi theater of operation.

SSG Jeffrey Marks, a mobilized Army Reserve Soldier from Fayetteville, N.C., was eager to share his knowledge.

“As a student here, I would have liked a veteran to be able to visit with us about the actual job in Iraq,” Marks said. “I didn’t hesitate to volunteer to return to Fort Riley and talk with the teams.”

He is but one of many who have volunteered.

This program has been around for a while now. “Having the deployed graduates visit with current trainees has been a real plus for us,” said MAJ Brett Gullett, then-S-3, chief of operations for the Fort Riley training mission. “We currently have more than 30 transition team members scheduled to rotate through here between now and the first week of March.”

Gullett said he has received positive reports from both the returning Soldiers and current TT Soldiers.

“From all reports, this is something that everyone seems to think is a very good idea and we will continue to do as long as possible,” Gullett said, who explained the two-to-three-day visits normally are tacked onto a TT Soldier’s R and R leave.

“Every effort is made to hook up the veteran with his replacement team and anyone who has been deployed knows how nice it is to meet your replacement,” he said.

“The TT member in training has the chance to ask many questions and this helps the teams with the fear of the unknown,” Gullett said.

When meeting with the replacement team isn’t possible, other measures are taken. Marks visited briefly with the Soldiers of Class 10, who were manifesting, and then with a border transition team from Class 13.

“We were able to talk about his role as a military intelligence officer, the assets he has and the level of support for his team,” said CPT David Salazar, intelligence officer, Class 13. “Although we have different roles – he’s a police adviser and we will be a military border team – our jobs are similar in an adviser role capacity.

“I’m glad to see Soldiers are coming back to share their experiences,” Salazar said. “Soldiers from our eventual forward operations base in Iraq have come back and spoken with us, and that has been very helpful.”

He added that they have been in e-mail contact, too.

Gullett said this is but one area where TT training has been

‘From all reports, this is something that everyone seems to think is a very good idea and we will continue to do as long as possible.’

- Maj. Brett Gullett
then-chief of operations for TT training mission

updated. “We continually evaluate our training effort and make changes as necessary,” Gullett explained.

Marks praised the training he received at Camp Funston.

“As an Army reservist, there was a lot of good and needed training for me,” he said. “For instance, I never fired an [M-9] pistol until I was here or had much experience driving a Humvee.”

He experienced both during his training at Fort Riley.

“All in all, what this training did was to prepare me to be careful, that I needed to be conscience and aware – in the right mindset – at all times,” Marks said.

Marks added he appreciated the cultural awareness training he received.

“The Iraqis seem to love us to death,” he said. “We were very well received and they seemed glad to see us.” Working closely with the Iraqis has taught him something, too. The Iraqi police are young and cultural awareness is an ongoing process, Marks said.

“Through an interpreter I told a young policeman I admired his gloves,” Marks related. “Well, the

next day he tried to give them to me – which is their custom.

“I thanked him and very politely told him that I had a pair and didn’t need his,” Marks said, relieved the issue was settled nicely, with no hurt feelings. ▀



SSG Jeffrey Marks, mobilized Army Reserve Soldier and transition team veteran, shares his knowledge during his visit to Fort Riley



An Iraqi army instructor (right) prepares his trainees, all Iraqi army soldiers from the 3rd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Division (Mechanized), to storm a building “mock up” Dec. 19 during training on Camp Taji, Iraq.

Big Red One transition teams train Iraqi Army

*Story and photos by SGT Jon Cupp
1st BCT, 1st Cav. PAO*

CAMP TAJI, Iraq – New basic training graduates with the 3rd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Division (Mechanized) trained with the assistance of military transition teams from the 1st Infantry Division here recently on how to conduct cordon and searches.

The training consisted of the IA troops performing practice raids in two building “mock-ups.”

According to CPT Eric James, operations officer and adviser for the 329th TT, the training lasts three to four weeks and readies the Iraqi troops before they have to encoun-

ter the challenges of working in actual urban environments and checkpoints.

“We’re taking new Iraqi soldiers, before they get assigned to a company, and giving them additional training,” said James, a native of El Paso, Texas.

In addition, the training, which has been referred to as “train-the-trainer” style instruction, allows the team’s subject matter experts to assist Iraqi noncommissioned officers and warrant officers to give blocks of instruction – all the while junior enlisted Iraqis are training simultaneously.

This, James said, is important to the Iraqis eventually taking full control in every aspect of military operation.

“We’re trying to push them forward,

essentially putting them in the lead when it comes to planning, resourcing and execution for missions and training,” he said.

Prior to coming to Iraq, SSG Michael Lewis, a combat medical adviser and trainer for 329th TT, trained at Fort Riley to learn how to instruct Soldiers in infantry-style

‘I hope every Iraqi citizen feels the same way I feel. I am really proud to wear the Iraqi Army uniform.’

**- PVT Abdul Shakir, 3rd Bn.,
2nd Bde., 9th IA Div. (Mech.)**

tactics. A medic and a native of Leesville, La., Lewis is now training Iraqi soldiers alongside his Iraqi noncommissioned officer counterparts.

“Working here, we’re getting to see the infantry side, and it’s an important role, but it’s just one part of all the training to help them build a company,” he said.

Lewis, who is also helping the Iraqis put together a medical aid station, said he is impressed with the progress of the Iraqi soldiers.

“Sometimes we’ve had to catch up with

them,” Lewis said. “The better they do their training, the better they can take over their own security. We show them what to look for during raids and at checkpoints so when they actually get out there they won’t overlook anything.”

IA soldiers said they all have their own reasons they train to defend their country.

“I have a lot of good feelings about serving my country on the ground. I’ve lived on all my life to help the Iraqi people,” said PVT Abdul Razaq Shakir, who serves in the 3rd Bn., 2nd Bde., 9th IA Div. (Mech.). “We

will risk our lives to help our country and to fight against the insurgents and anyone else who tries to bring our country down.”

“We pray to God to make peace on this country to make things normal as they were before,” said PVT Al Hamad Vadir, 3rd Bn., 2nd Bde., 9th IA Div. (Mech.).

“I hope every Iraqi citizen feels the same way I feel,” Shakir said. “I am really proud to wear the Iraqi Army uniform.”

Having worked several months with the Iraqis, James said he is confident of the abilities of the Iraqi troops and their training.

“Anytime we’ve done big, important coalition operations, the Iraqi troops have always accomplished their missions,” James said. “We roll out with Iraqis many times a week to do patrols or check on troops in the area of operations and we feel as comfortable with them as we would rolling out with our own troops.”



SSG Michael Lewis (upper left), a combat medical trainer and adviser for the 329 Military Transition Team, shows an Iraqi soldier the proper way to position his body for doing a search during training on Camp Taji, Iraq.

Inset: Iraqi Army soldiers from the 3rd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 9th Infantry Division (Mechanized) storm in and clear a room during training on Camp Taji, Iraq. The training was done with the assistance of U.S. Soldiers from the 329th Military Transition Team.



Transition Team press conference

The former commander of the Iraq Assistance Group visited transition team servicemembers and gave a press conference at Fort Riley.

Story and photos by
SGT Stephen Baack
1st Inf. Div. Editor

Then- IAG Commander BG Dana Pittard, who was also the 1st Infantry Division's assistant division commander for maneuver, sat down with seven local journalists at Forward Operating Base Army Strong to discuss the current state of the TT mission in Iraq, and where it's headed.

As Pittard explained during his press conference, the IAG is a joint command-and-control effort from the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force set up to oversee the dual TT mission of advising and force protection for the Iraqi security forces.

Pittard described the evolution of the TT training mission from its focus on one of almost entirely combat skills and force-protection survival skills training to the next step of becoming an adviser: having an understanding of Iraqi culture and the inner-workings of the Iraqi Security Forces.

While the latter has come to the forefront, the former is still important according to Pittard.

"We need advisory skills being taught here at Fort Riley," he said. "At the same time, it's force-protection survival skills. It's always that balance between those, but primarily it's making sure that our advisers are trained in advisory skills and have the preparation necessary to be effective advisers of Iraqi Security Forces."

When one journalist asked him to grade the current state of TT training, Pittard said what was once a C+ is getting to an A product now due to the focus on advisory skills.

"There are three things that are probably most difficult to teach: cultural awareness, language and then the subtleties of advisory skills," he said. "There is really a subtleness that needs to take place."

The aggressive, hard-charging attitude some Soldiers possess is not necessarily what TTs require, and it is not what the IAG is looking for in its teams, explained Pittard.

"You must have experience," he said. "You must have knowledge, but we want the Iraqi Security Forces to take charge ... we have to be very careful about who we pick and how we train people."

A large portion of the press conference focused on progress – not only that of TTs, but of progress within the ranks of the Iraqi army,

the Iraq police and the Iraqi national police.

"I think we owe it to the American people to have progress, to give the American people hope that, in fact, it is going in the right direction."

Pittard listed positive strides in Iraq, which he partially credited to the third and most recent version of the Baghdad Security Plan effected late last year.

The Iraqi government has learned some lessons from the last Baghdad Security Plan, he explained. During the second plan, which was from August to October of 2006, several Iraqi army battalions had problems deploying to Baghdad. GEN Casey and the Iraq Prime Minister commissioned an investigation into the reasons behind those problems.

Pittard was one of the two generals in charge of that investigation. He and an Iraqi army general came up with 10 ways to have more successful deployments.

He attributes an increased success of Iraqi battalion deployments to things like incentive pay, more training and focus on deploying units, and recognizing that wherever Iraqi soldiers go, they will be able to take leave.

"This has kind of been our framework, or template, for future Iraqi army deployments," Pittard said. "In fact, now in this new Baghdad Security Plan, we've had nine – I say again – nine Iraqi army battalions that have successfully deployed to Baghdad.

"That's a big deal as far as ownership of securing their own capital," he added. "They're coming from all throughout Iraq."

Pittard did not forget to credit the TT effort with much of the progress in Iraq.

When he left Iraq as a brigade commander in early 2005, there were two struggling Iraqi army divisions, he told reporters. Now there are 10 capable Iraqi army divisions averaging between 8,000 to 10,000 personnel. That is primarily due to the efforts of the TTs, he said.

The TTs have also worked hard to oust militia influences throughout the ranks of the Iraqi Security Forces.

"A lot of that has been removed – not entirely – but a lot of that

has been removed from the efforts of the transition teams again with the U.S. forces there,” said Pittard.

“Our transition teams identified five national police brigade commanders – out of the nine – that had had militia influences,” he added. “All five of those have now been removed. It’s taken a long period of time to do that, but they have been removed.”

Since then, he has seen impressive results in Iraq’s newly trained national police.

“Out of the four national police brigades that have now graduated ... there have been zero transgressions,” Pittard said. “I’ll define transgressions as extra-judicial killings or being accused of any militia-type crimes. That’s huge because we haven’t seen that before.”

That does not mean, Pittard told one reporter, that these strides are a sign that cultural, religious or nationalistic solidarity is a priority. In fact, even-numbered divisions of the Iraqi army are from specific regions because of these differences, while the odd-numbered divisions were for the most part recruited nationally.

“You must embrace the Iraqi culture and accept the fact that there are familial, tribal and religious influences,” Pittard said. “We recognize that. In fact, it’s to make them more professional – help them to become a more professionalized force, but it’s going to take Iraqi leadership to really do that.”

He said it will also take the right Iraqi leadership to curb or eliminate insurgent infiltration of the ISF.

“What we’ve found is if the right leader’s in charge, whether it’s an Iraq battalion commander, brigade commander, division commander, less and less of that happens and [there is] more accountability for actions.”

As the current plan is set up, during the early “clear and control” phases of securing cities and towns, each ISF brigade-sized unit has partnered with it a U.S. coalition battalion of 600 to 700 personnel. As troops and police gain control during the “retain” phase, the

U.S. battalion moves out of the area of operations. The transition teams become larger and stay in the area – possibly making them the last ones standing.

“Ideally, one day most of the transition teams will come from internal sources within our BCTs there in Iraq... ideally.”

If plans such as these fail or cannot endure the lack of support and patience of the American people, Pittard points to the pre-9/11 Afghanistan that represented a sanctuary and breeding ground for terrorism as an example of the type of failed state Iraq could become.

“The average time of counter-insurgency operations... is about nine to 12 years,” Pittard said. “Do the American people have that much patience? Probably not. That’s why we must show a certain amount of progress. It’s incumbent upon us to do that, along with our Iraqi counterparts, who, by the way, are on a different timeline. Their timeline is not the same as ours in the least bit.”

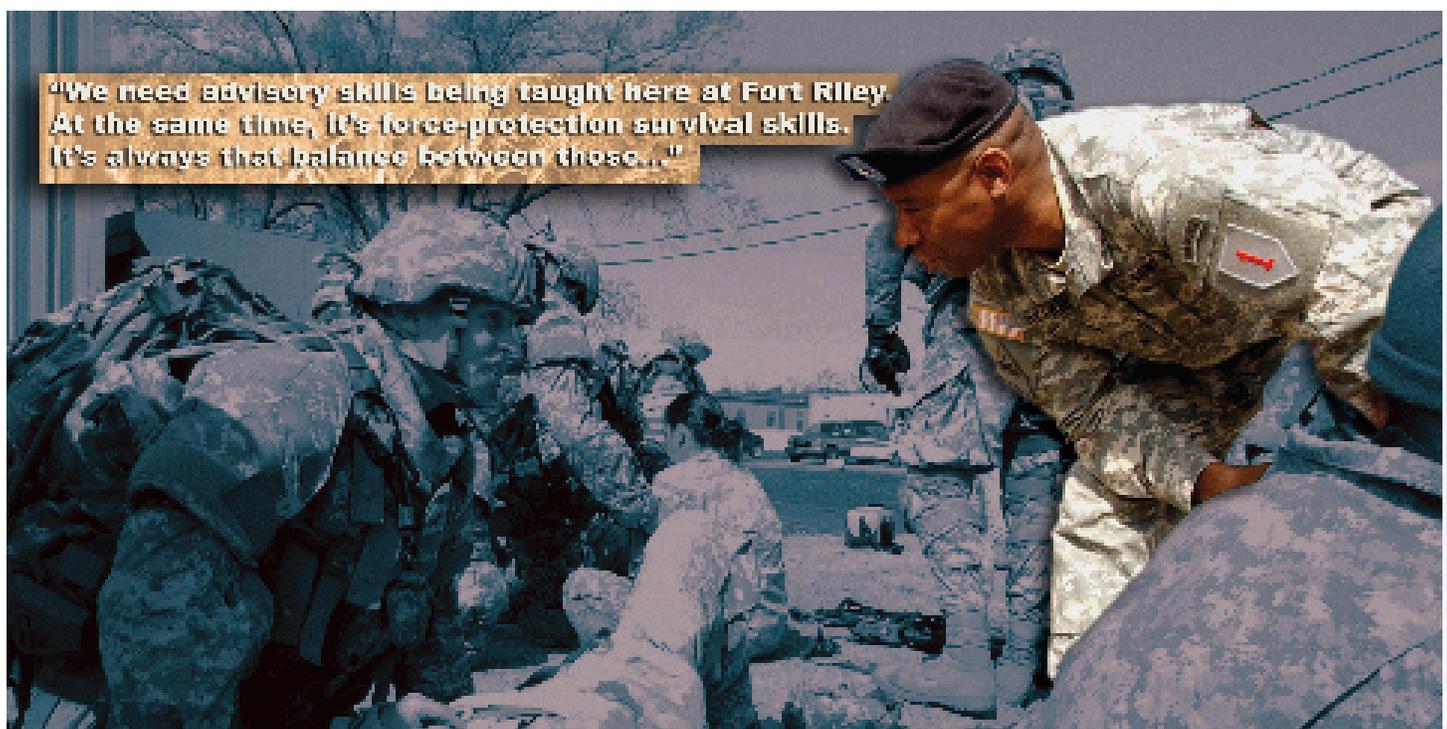
The Iraqi people have to be also convinced that what is happening now, in fact, is progress, he said.

“If you ask the Iraqi man on the street, they’ll tell you the conditions were better before we came,” he continued. “And they’re right from a basic services perspective, in the Baghdad area for sure. Politically... it is better because it is in fact a democracy, at least from our view. And there are other places in Iraq ... where they will tell you it’s much, much better because they’re free of Saddam Hussein and the Baa’thist party.

“If we’re talking about the Iraqi Security Force, and that’s the lane that I am in, then there has been tremendous progress,” he said. “Is it fast enough for the American people? Maybe not. It will take time.

“So, it does vary, but I think ultimately the assessment of our success or failure will be the Iraqi citizens,” Pittard added. “Do they in fact feel more secure now than they did four years ago? Most will tell you now that they don’t. That must be addressed before we ever depart.”

“I think we owe it to the American people to have progress, to give the American people hope that, in fact, it is going in the right direction.”



“We need advisory skills being taught here at Fort Riley. At the same time, it’s force-protection survival skills. It’s always that balance between these...”

MASCAL

Exercise

TT trainees test their combat lifesaver skills

*Story and photos by
SGT Stephen Baack
1st ID PAO Editor*

As a group of Iraqis made their way to Mecca for a religious holiday, an explosion ripped through their vehicle killing and wounding the occupants. When Iraqi Security Forces and local onlookers converged on

the scene, an unknown chemical agent filled the air and enveloped everyone.

The transition team Soldiers who encountered this training scenario may never see anything quite like this when they get to Iraq. Successfully taking on situations like this March 22 mass-casualty exercise, however, reinforces the faith of at least one medic for his combat lifesavers.

“Every day it’s new trials and tribulations, but we’re getting through it and right now I am so confident in the team,” said SSG Marcell Jones, battalion TT medical adviser for Team 93-99. “I don’t see myself having any problems with the team as far as medical is going and just the personal knowledge that the guys uphold.”

The MASCAL, part of the four-day Mission



MAJ Chris Kuhn, battalion team leader for Team 94-07, helps comrades “save a life” as he applies a combat application tourniquet to a dummy during the mass-casualty exercise portion of the team’s four-day, course-culminating mission-readiness exercise March 22 around Fort Riley’s urban clusters.

Readiness Exercise that serves as the culminating evaluation for TTs, tested the Soldiers in their combat lifesaving skills and in dealing with Iraqi people.

Central to their final test were three groups: the civilians on the battlefield (COBs), the mock Iraqi Security Forces and the observer/controllers, who evaluate and provide input to the TTs after each part of the exercise.

“It’s fun,” said Denise Corey, a COB at the MASCAL. “Sometimes it’s hard work, but I understand the reason we’re doing it. My husband’s a Soldier, so when he goes downrange I want him to be prepared. That’s why we’re here . . . The more realistic we can make it for them, the better the training, and the more accurate it’s going to be.

“Our Soldiers are down there fighting and being injured and being killed, unfortunately, but that’s the reality of it,” she said. “It’s extremely important to keep them trained properly and to keep them prepared for any situation.”

Corey added that the scenarios, just like downrange, can sometimes change day-to-day. The COBs are instructed to do one thing, she said, and 10 minutes later it could all change.

“The MRX so far has been pretty good,” said CPT Joe Peltier, executive officer, intelligence officer, and one of the many combat lifesavers for Team 94-07. “We’ve been thrown in to all types of different scenarios that we can encounter in Theater. Every exercise that they throw at us has been a learning experience. I plan to continue to learn and take that forward with us.”

Though Peltier and his team knew there would be a MASCAL exercise as part of the MRX, he and his team had no idea when, where or what the circumstances would be.

“I think that’s good for training,” Peltier said. “If you know something’s going to happen, you’ve got time to get yourself mentally wrapped around everything that you need to do. You can walk through it a couple of times; do rehearsals.

“I think when we get in Theater, we’re not going to have time to do rehearsals if stuff happens on the fly on the streets, so it’s good training for us,” Peltier added.

When the whole thing was over, Peltier and others were happy with their performance.

“We performed very well,” he said. “People broke down, didn’t have to be asked



CPT Joe Peltier, executive officer, intelligence officer and one of the many combat lifesavers for Team 94-07, applies a combat application tourniquet to a civilian on the battlefield during a mass-casualty exercise portion of a group of transition teams’ four-day, course-culminating mission-readiness exercise March 22 around Fort Riley’s urban clusters.

or told what to do. People started identifying and reacting based off their training.”

During the after-action review, observer/controllers gave special recognition to the medic on site.

“These casualties are dead,” said SFC Grannan to the group during the AAR. “Take these out of this area. They do not need to be around the live patients. That was perfect. Sergeant Jones, you did an excellent job, just to let you know.

“I noticed when you went by you did

correct people,” Grannan continued. “And you did look at them and say, ‘Make an assessment, make an assessment. Did you look at everything?’ You did a super job. Congratulations. I think you did an excellent job. You guys are lucky. You’ve got a good medic.”

Jones credits a lot of his success to his team.

“When I’m not there I always know they’re going to be there for me if the situation permits,” Jones said. “It’s a real good thing that they’re combat lifesavers.”

4th IBCT Dragons

settle into Iraq capital



COL Ricky D. Gibbs, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Inf. Div. commander, speaks to the troops after the transfer of authority ceremony, March 8, at Camp Falcon, Iraq. The Dragon Brigade transferred authority with the 2nd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division in the ceremony.

*Story and photo by PFC Nathaniel Smith
4th IBCT PAO*

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FALCON, Iraq -- The 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division officially took over for the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division in a transfer of authority ceremony here March 8.

COL Ricky Gibbs, commander of the 4th IBCT "Dragons," hailed his Soldiers' preparation for their mission.

"You have trained hard the past 18 months standing up this great brigade," Gibbs said. "You are well-trained, well-led and combat ready.

"I ask you to never lose sight of your principle objectives: protect the peace-loving people of Iraq and destroy the thugs and criminals who terrorize this country."

CPL Ed Herring, a team leader from 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 4th IBCT, said Multi-National Division-Baghdad troops are fighting for a good cause.

"I'm a true believer that if you can help someone you really should go out of your way to do it," he said. "I believe the United

States has the capability to do that, to help these people have a better life for themselves."

Part of that better life, Herring said, is the freedom of democracy and safety within their neighborhoods.

With that thought in mind, the Greeley, Colo., native said the unit has been preparing for everything.

"Anything they can throw at us, we want to be able to have it already in the back of our minds exactly how we're going to respond to those problems," he said.

The Dragons' commander had advice for his troops as they set out to provide that better life for the Iraqi citizens of Baghdad's Rashid security district.

"Fear nothing, trust your God-given instincts, know the capabilities of your men and your unit," he said, "and never ever underestimate our enemy or the depths to which he will stoop to achieve his objectives.

"I have total trust and confidence in each and every one of you, and know we will be victorious on the battlefield."

The Dragons have been in Iraq since mid-February. The unit activated in January 2006.



SGT Joshua Hess of Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, practices his skills on a Military Operations in Urban Terrain range at Camp Buehring, Kuwait.

MOVING IN

Big Red One troops learn urban warfare

**Story and photo by
PFC Nathaniel Smith
4th IBCT PAO**

CAMP BUEHRING, Kuwait -- Less than a century ago, the U.S. Army engaged in trench warfare. Soldiers have adapted to different forms of combat over the years, and the battle in Iraq is no exception. Today, the Army must adjust to the rigors of urban combat.

Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment not only had to train up on their Military Operations in Urban Terrain skills, but they also had to make the transition from functioning as artillerymen to infantrymen.

To facilitate this transition, the Soldiers of Battery B, 2nd Bn., 32nd FA Regt. conducted close-quarters marksmanship training at the Camp Buehring MOUT Range Feb. 17.

Second Platoon Leader 1LT Jeff Christy, Battery B, said his Soldiers have accepted the challenge and are performing admirably.

"They're absolute sponges," Christy said. "Each time we train, a new dynamic is introduced into this training. They've really absorbed it, and they're doing a fantastic job."

The unit has made great progress from the beginning of their close-quarters marksmanship training in October to now, Christy said.

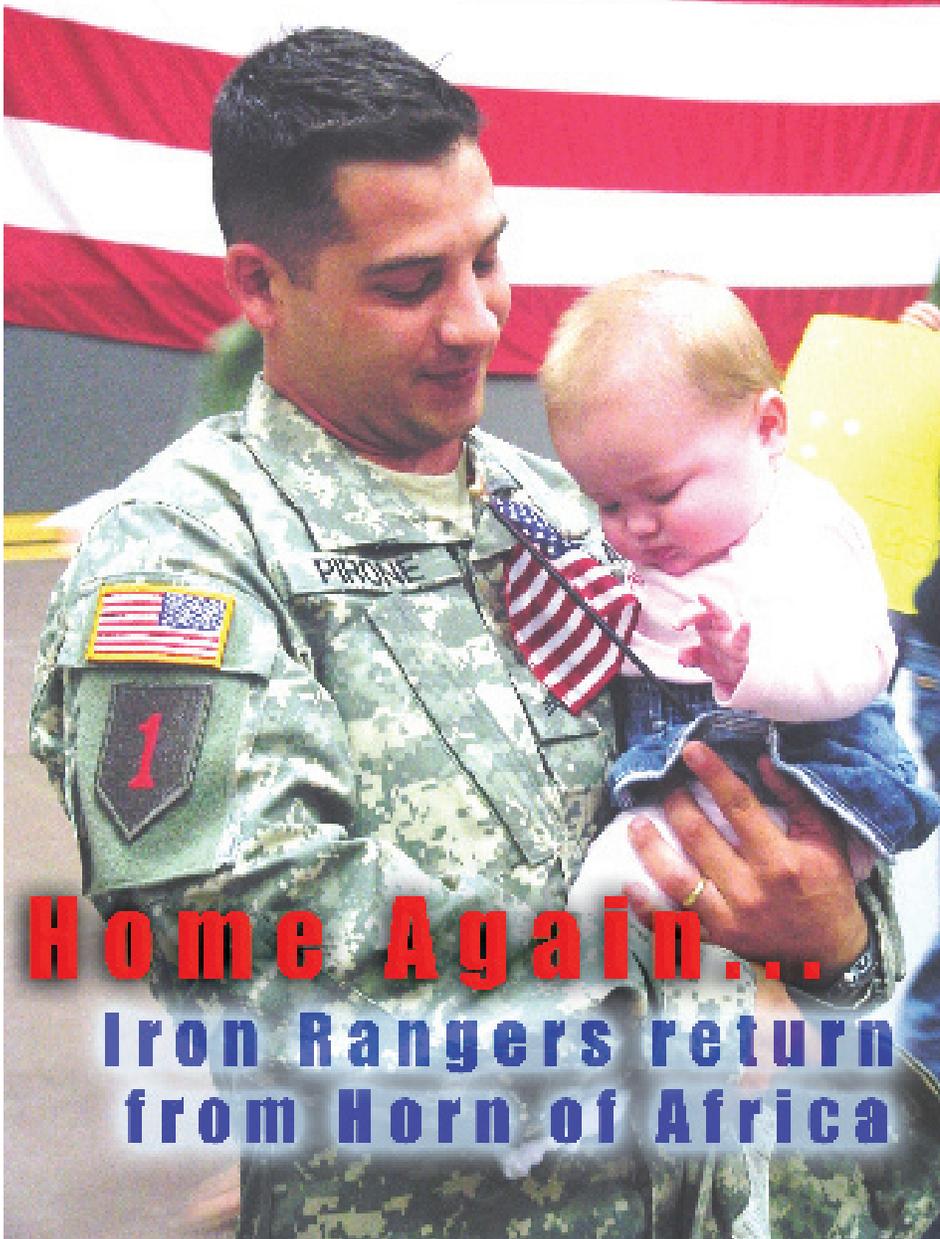
SFC George Allen, the platoon sergeant of 2nd Platoon, Battery B, said the train-

ing has been more intense than previous training.

"Here, we have subject matter experts who help assist not only myself and the platoon leader," Allen said, "as well as those lower enlisted to grasp what it's like to maneuver and engage on a target. Not only is this training intense, but it prepares us for our next step headed toward Iraq."

Allen said his Soldiers are accepting their tasks enthusiastically.

"I can honestly say I wouldn't want to deploy with another group of Soldiers," he said. "The Soldiers of 2nd Platoon, Battery B, are very highly motivated, eager to train, and eager to learn. They're focused on the mission at hand." ▀



Home Again... Iron Rangers return from Horn of Africa

SGT Matthew Pirone holds his daughter, Isabella, at the redeployment ceremony for Company A, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment.

**Story by PFC Andrea Merritt
1st Sust. Bde. PAO**

The audience waiting anxiously in the stands March 26 at Craig Gym, some holding signs, erupted into a thunderous applause when the Soldiers of Company A, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment marched into the gym before the break of day.

The Soldiers were welcomed home from their yearlong deployment to the Horn of Africa during the ceremony.

As the applause died down, "Iron Ranger" Commander LTC Frank Zachar spoke to the crowd.

"These men have seen and done more in a year than most Americans dream of doing

in their entire lifetime," Zachar said.

While deployed in support of Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa, which was based out of Djibouti, Africa, the unit conducted force protection operations, built schools and dormitories, and trained Ugandan and Ethiopian armies.

"It was very rewarding to know that we were training a military that is going to play a large role in the future of that continent," said CPT Joel Huelsmann, company commander for Co. A, 1st Bn., 16th Inf. Regt.

"It was very humbling and I know my guys enjoyed it and got a lot out of that program," Huelsmann added. "Up until the very last minute, they were working hard and doing a good job reflecting the 'Big Red One.'"

"Thanks for all you have done... Mission complete. Duty first. Fall out," Zachar said at the end of his speech.

On the command of 'fall out,' a sea of people rushed the floor in order to greet their loved ones.

"I started bawling [when I saw him]. I was extremely happy," said Shery Tucker, wife of returning Soldier SSG Michael Tucker, a squad leader in the company.

"It feels great [to be home]," Tucker said. "I have my wife and my kids here."

Tucker spoke candidly about his experience in Africa. "A lot of people think that when we got to Africa we don't really do anything when we're over there," Tucker said.

The U.S. Navy and Army engineers worked together to build the schools and dormitories and "it was our job to keep them safe while they did it. So we did a tremendous amount of work over there for the people of Djibouti and other countries," Tucker said.

After the ceremony, many of the Soldiers said goodbye to their comrades, with whom they had spent the past year in Africa, and exited the building with their Families by their side.

"It's great to be back home and great to be back on American soil," Huelsmann said.

Though Devil Brigade elements have still been redeploying, Company B of 1st Bn., 16th Inf. Regt. has returned, as well as the 1st Battalion, 5th Field Artillery Regiment and 1st Battalion, 34th Armor Regiment. ♣



Stacy Haynes embraces her husband, SPC Gordon Haynes, who just returned from a year's deployment to the Horn of Africa.



Photo by SFC Jefferey Troth

Units of 1st Combat Aviation Brigade line Cavalry Parade Field for their deployment ceremony.

Post wishes farewell to 1st CAB

Story by SPC Michael Howard
1st CAB PAO

A little more than a year ago a small contingent of Soldiers marched onto Fort Riley's Cavalry Parade Field and became the 1st Combat Aviation Brigade, starting a new chapter in aviation history. On Aug. 30, the 1st CAB Soldiers marched onto the same field to start another chapter during their deployment ceremony.

"Today, you stand ready with more than 2,800 Soldiers and five civilians representing 70 different occupation specialties," said BG Keith C. Walker, 1st Infantry Division assistant division commander for operations. "And now you are going into the thick of it."

The 1st CAB is headed to Iraq in support of the Global War on Terrorism. Their mission in theater will be to support the Iraqi government's ongoing efforts to improve internal security, economic growth and infrastructure development.

"Your aircraft, crews and the support personnel who keep them flying are a vital piece in the fight," Walker said. "You'll support ground troops negotiating the complex urban environment. You'll guard convoys and patrol neighborhoods. You'll help provide transportation for Soldiers and security from the air."

COL Jessie O. Farrington, 1st CAB commander, said he knows his Soldiers and civilians are ready to meet their upcoming missions, which will include attack, reconnaissance, assault, lift and medical evacuation operations.

"I assumed command of this great brigade two months ago and have been absolutely impressed with the challenging path they followed to get to this point," Farrington said. "The commanders and leaders down to the lowest level are responsible for the tremendous combat readiness of this brigade."

Farrington showed off his brigade to Walker, Sen. Sam Brownback and Rep. Jerry Moran during an inspection of the troops at the ceremony.

The brigade prepared for their Iraq deployment with numerous battalion field exercises, combat training center rotations, gunner-

ies and mission rehearsal exercises.

"The intensity and aggressiveness of this preparation will prove invaluable and undoubtedly will save lives of Soldiers within the brigade and ground forces we support and fight with," Farrington said. "All this could not be accomplished without the support of the Family members. Their unwavering support will prove to be a stabilizing influence."

The United States "is a special place, it is not the land that makes it special, it is the people – it is you. It is your willingness to commit, it is your courage, it is your willingness to sacrifice that make this place special," Brownback said

during the ceremony. "I thank you for doing it."

The ceremony concluded with the brigade, battalions and companies casing their colors, which will remain cased until a ceremony in Iraq, and the singing of "The Big Red One" song and "The Army Song" to send the Soldiers off on their journey.

"While in Iraq, the Combat Aviation Brigade will fly tens of thousands of combat hours in very trying conditions ... while maintainers, transporters, logisticians, fuelers and administrators in this great brigade work around the clock in order to sustain this monumental effort," Farrington said.

"Why do we ask so much – our country has called, our division, this brigade and these great Soldiers have answered that call and the Soldiers on the ground that face uncertainty and possible death around every street corner demand it – and the 1st Infantry Division's Combat Aviation Brigade will be there – it's what we do." ▾



Photo by SPC Michael Howard

COL Jessie Farrington, 1st Combat Aviation Brigade commander, (second from right) takes BG Keith C. Walker, 1st Infantry Division assistant division commander of operations, Sen. Sam Brownback and Rep. Jerry Moran on an inspection of the troops Aug. 30 during the 1st CAB's deployment ceremony on Cavalry Parade Field.

Dagger Brigade spearheads project

Pump station improves quality of life for Risalah residents

Story by CPT David Levasseur
2nd BCT, 1st Inf. Div. PAO

BAGHDAD — A project crucial to removing sewage was recently completed in the Risalah neighborhood of the Rashid West security district, a primarily Shia neighborhood in the southwestern portion of the Iraqi capital. The area had been suffering from a glut of standing sewage, made worse by the heavy rains over the past several weeks.



Photo by MAJ Robert Nash

CPT Patrick Bailey and CPT Nick Bauer, both from the 2nd BCT's Essential Services Cell, inspect the new facilities at Sewage Pump Station TC3.

The completed project, dubbed Sewage Pump Station TC3, now allows neighborhood sewage to be pumped out of the neighborhood and to a main station that serves the entire southern Baghdad region. The pump station required refurbishment of the building, installation of the two primary pumps, purchase of two portable pumps, and installation of a new transformer to power the entire system.



Contractors completed all work Feb. 1, and an inspection by members of the city council was concluded about a week later, marking the formal completion of the project.

“The inspection by the city council was critical to this project. It marks the formal completion and gives the council ownership of the pump site,” said CPT Patrick Bailey of the 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division's Essential Services Cell.

The Risalah city council, in cooperation with the Baghdad Essential Services Council, began planning the project nearly six months ago.

There were a few setbacks. Initially, the project was beset by security concerns and some small attacks at the site. Other challenges included the beginning of the rainy season, which slowed work due to wet conditions.

“The contractor was able to complete this project because the security situation has drastically improved since it was started,” Bailey said. “TC3 shows the people of this area that things are improving and that their local governments really do work.”

2nd Brigade's 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment: Greetings from Iraq





GEN David McKiernan (right), the commanding general of U.S. Army Europe, talks with Perruindian, Ind., native SPC Jason Landrum, a gunner with Company C, 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, about his decision to re-enlist at Combat Outpost Carter in Baghdad's Rashid district April 16. The general conducted a re-enlistment ceremony and met with the Schweinfurt, Germany-based troops during his visit.

USAREUR general meets with 1st ID's 2nd Brigade downrange

*Story and photos by
PFC Nathaniel Smith
4th IBCT PAO*

BAGHDAD – The commander of U.S. Army Europe met with Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division out of Schweinfurt, Germany, in the Iraqi capital's Rashid district April 16.

GEN David McKiernan rode with the Vanguards from Forward Operating Base Falcon, where the 1-18th is based for their current deployment, to Combat Outpost 'Carter,' the Company C, 1-18th's outpost named for one of their Soldiers killed by an

explosively formed projectile in late 2006.

During the visit, McKiernan read the oath of enlistment to a group of Co. C Soldiers who were re-enlisting.

PFC Patrick Hyatt, an infantryman from St. Louis, Mo., said he enjoyed having the general preside over his re-enlistment.

"It's nice having him come and interact with the Soldiers," he said. "It shows the Soldiers who he is and what he does."

As for why Hyatt decided to re-enlist, he said the opportunity to learn and experience more in the Army was too much to pass up.

"I like the experience of what I do, it teaches me more," he said. "I want to see

new things."

After completing the ceremony, McKiernan gave all of the Soldiers the opportunity to ask him questions, and he also took the opportunity to ask them about their concerns.

"It's not often that we get to come down here and talk face-to-face," McKiernan said to the troops.

Questions from the Soldiers from Co. C varied, but the main focus was on the recent announcement of an extension for all U.S. forces in Iraq, as well as the schools and hospital back in the Schweinfurt military community. ▀



An Expert Infantry Badge trainer gives course instructions to a 3rd IBCT Soldier during train-up for the EIB competition.

Story by SGT Todd Goodman
3rd IBCT PAO

Challenging weather, ticks, scorpions, copperheads, one rattlesnake, a black widow and a tarantula the size of a grapefruit are par for the course for 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division trainers at the Expert Infantry Badge test site.

“Don’t forget the chiggers,” Sgt. William Gooding, a brigade intelligence non-commissioned officer and radio trainer, said. “I have bites all up and down both legs. I won’t miss the chiggers.”

Training the Soldiers who are going out for the EIB isn’t as tough as testing for the badge, but it’s no walk in the park, either. It’s basically four weeks in the field. No air conditioned offices. No nice lunches at the local sushi bar. Heck, even a mundane trip to the dining facility is hard to manage. Out here, Meals Ready to Eat are the popular dish, though there are freshly-cooked hot dogs for sale next to the site entrance.

Ah, the test site. Consisting of 22 lanes spread over a good-sized area on West Fort Hood, it was “landscaped” by the train-

ers. Every neatly-placed rock that lines entrance ways was moved by hand. Every sandbag (and there are plenty) was filled and placed by a trainer. Every Big Red One design, also was done by them. Of course, there is a bit of an incentive – the winning lane design will receive an Army Commendation Medal, he said.

Decorating took place during downtime. At times, a trainer has nothing to do but sweat like a pig or get soaked by a thunderstorm. Other times, it’s a steady stream of Soldiers for hours on end.

“It’s been a good experience for all Soldiers out here,” Gooding said. “The trainers get to do what they initially were taught to do when they came into the Army.”

Normally, Soldiers testing for the EIB are trained by Soldiers who already have the badge. That is not the case this time around. In fact, female Soldiers are training infantrymen.

Pfc. Heather Campbell, a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear equipment NCO with the 201st Base Support Battalion, 3rd IBCT, 1st Inf. Div., has been on site since early June.

“Usually, it’s just EIB holders doing the training, but the brigade didn’t have enough badge holders,” she said. “So people in the particular MOS are doing it.”

Overall, training infantrymen has been a positive experience for her – though she did have one sergeant refuse training.

“I like it,” Campbell said. “I think they respect us (women) more. We are out here helping them get their badges. And we’ve been helpful, like giving them hints to help them remember nerve agents.”

Just being on site from 0700 – 1700 for a month should garner a trainer respect. They drink nearly eight liters of water each day and take whatever nature throws at them. In Campbell’s case, bugs have been the problem.

“Let’s see,” she began. “I had scabies out here in June. Last week I had little bumps all over my face and ears. It was so bad that my eye swelled shut and my throat was beginning to swell.”

Bug bites and disease aside, she sort of enjoys it.

“It’s an escape from society and I like that,” she said. “It’s hot as hell, but it’s peaceful.”

Sustain to Victory

1st Sustainment Brigade Soldiers set to deploy

Story by PFC Andrea Merritt
1st Sust. Bde. PAO

Soldiers and supporters from Fort Riley and surrounding areas gathered at Cavalry Parade Field Aug. 24 to attend the deployment ceremony for the Soldiers of the 1st Sustainment Brigade.

The brigade, which is composed of

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, the 1st Signal Network Detachment and the Special Troops Battalion, is scheduled to deploy this fall.

Guests at the ceremony included BG Keith Walker, 1st Infantry Division assistant division commander of operations; Robert Shadley, a retired major general who commanded the Division Support

Command, which reflagged as 1st Sust. Bde. in February, from 1990 to 1992 during Desert Storm; and four mayors from Platte County, Mo., who sponsor the Special Troops Battalion, 1st Sust. Bde.

When the clock struck 9 a.m., cannons blasted to signal the start of the event. During the ceremony, the ADC(O) presented 1st Sust. Bde. with a campaign streamer, which had been awarded to the DISCOM for its deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2004 to 2005.

“Your support is vital to Multi-National Division – Baghdad’s mission,” Walker said. “The work you will do quietly, professionally, behind the scenes 24 hours a day, seven days a week are the reasons our units are so successful today.”

Since August 2006, the unit has relocated from Germany to Fort Riley, Kan., reorganized from DISCOM into the 1st Sust. Bde. and is now preparing for its deployment to Iraq.

“As we have reorganized into the 1st Sustainment Brigade, we build upon the DISCOM legacy that traces its roots back to 1917 ... Now is our chance to stand upon the shoulders of the giants that have gone before us, move forward and turn a page in a new chapter of the 1st Sustainment Brigade’s history,” said COL Kevin O’Connell, commander of the 1st Sust. Bde.

The brigade’s mission during deployment will be to “plan, monitor, control, synchronize and supervise all sustainment, human resources and financial management support to forces in central Iraq,” O’Connell said.

After the speeches, the brigade and its subordinate units simultaneously cased their colors, which they are slated to uncasing in another ceremony once they reach their destination. ▀



Photo by PFC Andrea Merritt

LTC Robert Brem, commander of Special Troops Battalion, 1st Sustainment Brigade, and CSM Eugene Thomas, the battalion’s command sergeant major, case the unit’s colors during the brigade’s deployment ceremony Aug. 24 at Cavalry Parade Field. They cased their colors simultaneously with the brigade’s other subordinate units, Headquarters and Headquarters Company and the 1st Signal Network Detachment.

3rd IBCT Soldiers engage in sling load training

Soldiers step up, hunker down, rig up, strap down, lift off in hands-on exercise

*Story by SGT Todd Goodman
3rd IBCT PAO*

One way to beat rush hour traffic and avoid roadside bombs is to park under a helicopter, strap the Humvee to it and let the chopper airlift it to the destination.

That is what the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, was training to do July 25.

It's called sling load training and was the regiment's first major training event coordinated as a company. This exercise has a couple of practical uses. First, it eliminates the need to look out for improvised explosive devices.

"Anytime you can reach your objective without traveling roads in Iraq, you minimize risk by 90 percent," First Sgt. Christopher Kowalewski, Company D, 2nd Bn., 2nd Inf. Regt., said. "That is huge."

And secondly, it makes squeezing into constrained battlefields feasible.

"There are different ways to get to a battlefield," said CPT Kitefre Oboho, commander of Co. D, 2nd Bn., 2nd Inf. Regt. "This gives us options. For example, in

Afghanistan you can't always drive to your objective. There are places where a helicopter can go that a Humvee can't. It gives us flexibility when trying to fit into a confined area."

Prior to the field exercise, the company trained for hours upon hours at the battalion, rigging vehicles and de-rigging them, then doing it all over again. Proficiency is the key.

"Every platoon in Delta will be sling load certified and tactically proficient," Kowalewski said. "Training will continue. We definitely won't be satisfied today."

A proficient unit should be able to rig a vehicle in less than 10 minutes. And while some groups successfully rigged a vehicle in eight minutes, some needed a bit more time. There are a lot of checks and rechecks that must be done before airmailing a Humvee.

"You just have to pay close attention to make sure everything is set right and taped down," said PV2 James Caird, a 2nd Bn., 2nd Inf. Regt. infantryman. "You have to secure the heavy equipment that is inside the vehicle, like shovels and pick axes. Right now, it's simulated, but in real world environment you'd also have ammo cans and fuel."

"You could really injure Soldiers if things fall out or off, like side mirrors and antennas or freak accidents like the windows blowing out while flying over a city," said Pfc. Joel Moreno, a 2nd Bn., 2nd Inf. Regt. infantryman.

Once the vehicles were rigged properly, the Chinooks, provided by Company B, 2nd Bn., 4th Inf. Div., flew in and the exciting portion began. As the giant choppers hovered above the Humvees, several Soldiers ran out, fighting the wind from the rotors, climbed atop the vehicle and strapped the chopper's line to the rig. Once secured, signals were given to the pilot and away went the Humvee – next stop, the landing zone.

But there was more than just sling load training going on during this exercise. Soldiers not preparing the Humvees for takeoff were pulling security. Even proper radio communication classes were going on simultaneously. No down time for this group of infantrymen. And it was a constant check-up of who was and who wasn't wearing the proper equipment, such as eye protection.

"You! Get over here," Kowalewski yelled. "What goes over these (he pointed to the Soldier's eyes)? Why aren't you wearing them? Hey, show me how you engage an insurgent. Right now, show me. Pretend there is one coming at you right now." The Soldier turned and raised his weapon. "How are you going to engage him with no magazine in your weapon?"

Mentoring never stops.

"You have a lot of young, inexperienced privates who don't have a clue about combat situations," he said. "If you are lackadaisical with little stuff, you are going to have problems in the future. Iraq is a different animal completely. We are going to beat that fact into their heads." ▀



Soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, prepare a Humvee for lift-off during the battalion's sling load exercise.



Thunder returns to Fort Riley

An M1A1 Abrams tank from 2nd Bn., 70th Armor Regiment unleashes hell July 30.

Story and photos by PFC Francisca Vega, 1st ID PAO

After more than two years of inactivity not even Mother Nature's lighting, which detained mission plans for more than five hours, could prevent the "Thunderbolts" from returning a little Soldier-made thunder to Fort Riley July 30.

Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 70th Armor Regiment rolled their tanks from Custer Hill to the firing range and patiently waited for the ammunition point to release the rounds for their M1A1 Abrams.

"We conducted an LFAST, which is a Live Fire Accuracy Screening Test," said Staff Sgt. Kevin Lewis, a master gunner for Company C, 2nd Bn., 70th Armor Regt. "Basically you shoot the tanks and make sure they're hitting what they're supposed to hit.

"The overall goal is to successfully screen each one of the tanks," he added. "We just picked these tanks up from (new equipment training) and this is the first time that we actually got to use them."

"These are brand new tanks that have been refurbished and we don't know whether or not the main gun is going to work," said Spc. William Diederich, a Thunderbolt tanker. "We are going to launch some big bullets down range to make sure all of our systems and weapons are good to go," Diederich said before his tank and crew went up to fire. "It will be my fist time. I'm kinda nervous," he added.

Sgt. Chadwick Reed, gunner for the bat-

talion commander's tank, was in the first tank to fire on Fort Riley in more than two years.

"It was a little different," Reed said with a smile on his face. "It actually felt pretty good. I haven't been on a tank in a while.

"It definitely improved morale," Reed said. "This is our job; it's what we do. This is our money maker right here."

Reed wasn't the only one who thought the training brought the tankers together.

"It's training as a team, getting to know them and know how they operate," said Spc. Ian Poe, a loader for 2nd Bn., 70th Armor Regt.

Fifteen tank systems were inspected in spite of minimal staffing and poor weather. Several others tests will be conducted in the next couple of months to ensure the fire control systems on the Abrams work properly.

But the training doesn't stop here.

"We've got maneuvers we still have to go on. We still have to go to National Training

Center of course. We still have a gunnery to fire and actually qualify to use our tanks," Reed said. ▣

(Below) Staff Sgt. Kevin Lewis (front, on truck), master gunner for 2nd Battalion, 70th Armor Regiment, hands M1A1 Abrams ammunition to Soldiers to fire July 30 during a Live Fire Accuracy Screening Test on a range here.



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