



DRAGON FIRE

Vol. 1, Issue 9

February 2008



On the Road to Recovery

For the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team

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...on San Antonio,
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...uring training at
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...Smith/4IBCT)

FROM THE MOUTH OF DRAGONS

A time for reflection for Dragons

Task Force Dragon Soldiers, families and friends- Welcome to yet another edition of DRAGON FIRE magazine.

This is an important time for the Dragon Brigade. For many of us, it marks our official one-year "boots on the ground" mark, having departed in late January and February of '07 and having taken the fight to the extremists in Rashid ever since.

It is a time for reflection. It is also a time to acknowledge our Soldiers' tremendous accomplishments and significant achievements, including breaking the back of Al Qaeda and other criminal and extremist elements throughout the district, the reconciliation efforts not only between Sunni and Shia sects, but with the Government of Iraq as well, and the enormous energy spent to rebuild infrastructure and restore essential services.

This is also a time to look back on those 89 souls who have made the ultimate sacrifice under the Dragon banner, and the more than 700 wounded Dragons who spilled blood to keep the Iraqi people safe and secure. It is a time to look to the countless contributions our families and friends made, and continue to make, in helping us to keep our eyes on the ball, and reminding us of what is important in our lives.

As we near the end of our deployment, I expect the lead-



Col. Ricky Gibbs on a battlefield circulation of Doura's Airplane Road.

ers in this great brigade combat team to continue to stress discipline, teamwork and fight the complacency that can set in as our Soldiers naturally begin to think ahead to better days. We must continue to look after our troops and do everything we can as leaders to ensure their safety. Shortcuts are not an option-- continue to keep them focused on the mission, cognizant of proper safety procedures, and more importantly-- DISCIPLINED!!

There is still much to do here, so do the right thing- because it is right! Look out for your Battle Buddy and those Soldiers to the left and to the right. Together, we can continue to build on the forward momentum towards progress that the Brigade's Soldiers worked so hard to achieve.

Finally, with February being Black History Month, it is a time to reflect on the many thousands of African-Americans who have served in our Armed Forces dating back to the Revolutionary War, and those who continue that proud tradition of service today. Thank you for your patriotism and dedication to the

mission and your fellow Soldiers.

DUTY FIRST!

*Col. Ricky D. Gibbs
Dragon 6*

GETTING AFTER IT!!

Each month Command Sgt. Maj. Jim Champagne will select a photo of a Dragon Brigade Soldier Getting After It. The Soldier in the photo should cut out the photo and bring it to Dragon 7 to receive a Brigade coin.



Sergeant Gabriel Steel from the 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment, 4th Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division moving down an alley to search the backyard of a house in Saydiyah is this month's Getting After It winner. The "Tuskers" from Fort Stewart, Ga., are currently attached to Task Force Dragon.



Pvt. Jason Little of the 4th Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, 4th Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division comes across an unexpected sign while on patrol in southern Baghdad's Saydiyah neighborhood. The "Tuskers," who are deployed out of Fort Stewart, Ga., are currently attached to Task Force Dragon. (Pierot/NECC DET Combat Camera)

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On the cover

Spc. Gilbert Gomez, a member of the Company B, 610th Brigade Support Battalion vehicle recovery team from San Antonio, hooks a tow cable to an M88 recovery vehicle during training at Forward Operating Base Falcon, Dec. 27. The "Titans" were preparing for Baghdad's upcoming rainy season. (Smith/4IBCT)

One Team...

Sons of Iraq join fight in Saha

by *Spc. Nathaniel Smith*
4 IBCT Public Affairs

It takes a village to raise a child, a team to win a championship, and, in Baghdad, a combined effort of forces to return a neighborhood to life.

Following that philosophy, Sons of Iraq, with the support of the 1st Battalion, 7th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division, assumed responsibility of manning checkpoints in southern Baghdad's Saha neighborhood, Jan. 5.

The Sons of Iraq, SoI for short, are volunteers from within their own neighborhoods who man checkpoints, ensuring the overall security of their own residences.

To Lt. Col. Myron Reineke, the commander of the 2nd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment from Spring Valley, Minn., the benefits of having the extra guards is clear.

"With returning security comes returning essential services," the Spring Valley, Minn., native said.

As an example of the returning essential services, plans are already being made for an electric power substation to be built in the neighborhood to return power to an area where there is none.

Col. Abdul Kadhem, the commander of the 1st Battalion, 7th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division, which operates in Saha, said the day was just a step toward a brighter future for the people of the region.



A combination of Sons of Iraq, Iraqi National Police, and Coalition Forces raise their hands together in a symbolic show of unity and celebration for the establishment of the SoI in southern Baghdad's Saha neighborhood, Jan. 5. The 2nd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, currently attached to the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, operates in the area.



The future site of an electric power substation in the Saha neighborhood of southern Baghdad. The electricity provided by the substation is an example of the essential services the additional security provided by Sons of Iraq will allow for the citizens of the region.

"This is the first day to open this checkpoint, and we had a visit to make sure everything's alright; to see if anything's wrong and if we're able to fix it," Kadhem said. "I hope everything gets better. We're preparing for the second stage, which is returning essential services. We want to bring life back to normal."

The guards who are being entrusted with this task are not just people off the street. Reineke said prospective volunteers go through a thorough screening to ensure they are not criminals who would rather see the region regress than

...One Fight



The 1st Battalion, 7th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division commander, Col. Abdul Kadhem, talks with one of the Sons of Iraq in southern Baghdad's Saha neighborhood, Jan. 5. Kadhem said the SoI have the full support of his 'shurta,' or police, in fulfilling their duties.

progress.

"We take their names, pictures, fingerprints, scan their eyes so that if they are involved in any kind of illegal activity, we can prove it," he said. "This helps us to keep everybody within the law. Most of them are great Iraqis who want to secure their neighborhoods, but that's how we screen them."

Reineke added that the new security positions provide an opportunity for citizens who want to see their country improve get jobs in other security entities.

"We also want to transition them to jobs within the Iraqi Security Forces so that their salaries can be picked up by the Government of Iraq, they can be given jobs with the government for their future," Reineke said. "These security guard jobs are temporary. We want them to have permanent jobs with the Iraqi Police, National Police, and Iraqi Army."

In an area where citizens have left due to violence and the lack of simple services like sewage and electricity, Kadhem now sees an opportunity to bring them back through the new CIS.

"We want to bring back the families that have been displaced. The reason the families left was the security and the services," he said. "To bring those families back, we need the services, but the first part is the security. Now we bring in the people of the area to take care of the issue, and coming from this we're going to be seeing a lot of good services.

A year-old request met

An Iraqi Police station was opened in southern Baghdad's Rashid District in front of a gathering of several hundred Iraqis, Jan. 22.

The grand opening of the Abu T'shir police station took place in front of a mixed crowd of all sects and political parties, reflecting the unity of the region.

Harker Heights, Texas, native, Col. Ricky Gibbs, the commander of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, saw many facets of progress through the opening of the post.

"This is a great day for Rashid, specifically Abu T'shir," Gibbs said. "This is an opportunity for Iraqis to protect Iraqis, to put good, hard-working young men to work and give them an honest-paying job so they can take care of their families; all across the board, this is a great day."

The station's opening, which took place thanks to the combined efforts of Coalition, Iraqi Police, and neighborhood workers in security and construction, answers a year-old neighborhood council request for a new IP station in the neighborhood.

The 2nd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment is the Coalition Forces unit currently operating in Abu T'shir.



Col. Mohammed speaks to his 'shurta,' or police, at the Abu T'shir police station opening, Jan. 22. (Smith/4th IBCF)

BUILDING A BETTER

One wire at a time

by *Spc. Nathaniel Smith*
4 IBCT Public Affairs

When Company C of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team's special troops battalion showed up at Forward Operating Base Falcon in February 2006, they didn't just see their little corner of southern Baghdad where they would be operating for the next 15 months; they saw more.

They saw opportunity.

One of those opportunities was to improve the FOB Falcon Morale, Welfare and Recreation center.

The "Cobras" began working on a theater, gaming room and Internet café in January, which is scheduled to be completed by mid to late February.

Other improvements Company C has made around the base are two Internet cafes and an archery range for all Soldiers, regardless of battalion, brigade or division, to enjoy.

Sgt. Jeremy Murphy, a line of site radio operator with Co. C, 4-1 BSTB from Mobile, Ala., said the MWR improvements boil down to taking care of Soldiers.

"It's basically why we become noncommissioned officers: to take care of Soldiers. It's not just the Soldiers we're in charge of, it's all Soldiers," Murphy said. "It's a good thing."

Even the younger Soldiers in Co. C, like Pfc. Justin Heidelberg, a telecommunications operator from Bakersfield, Calif., recognize how much the new facilities will mean to his fellow Soldiers.

"I like it because whenever I got here, I wish I would have had something like this here. It's an awesome feeling to know that whenever this gets done, I'll be able to see Soldiers here taking advantage of it," Heidelberg said. "I didn't have this stuff here; if I would have had it, it would have made it a whole lot easier. I hope the Soldiers that come after me, that are gamers like myself, can play against other gamers on this FOB, and they can get together and have a good time.

"It'll get their minds off what's going on over here. They can get lost in a game and have a good time with their buddies."

While the Soldiers have made the improvements to the MWR happen, Capt. Steven Elgan, the company's commander from Gooding, Idaho, said the project was a brigade-wide effort.

"I was approached by the mayor cell, and they said they wanted a theater in there; we went in and did an assessment of the building. We noticed there was space for not only theater, but also for a game room. We got together, planned it all out, and pushed

FTER FOB

through all the paperwork," Elgan said. "There were enough people backing it, including the whole chain of command, we were able to get all the equipment and building enhancements approved."

He added that the swift endorsement of the project from the senior leaders was an assertion that they care about the young Soldiers on the line.

"This is a statement from the chain of command and the people that approved this saying, 'We're willing to invest in the Soldiers, and we want to give them a top facility for them to enjoy themselves, step out of a war zone, and have some relaxation time.'

"It was good that we got it all approved."

While the MWR improvements, the Internet cafes, and the archery range are all very visible indications of the "Cobras" contributions to their base, Elgan said many of the Soldiers' contributions to their unit, and the rest of the FOB, go unnoticed.

"From the beginning, Company C has done a lot of things behind the scenes for the majority of people. People go in any building on this post, they have a computer on their desk or phones sitting on their desk. They don't put a whole lot of thought on how they got there or how that Internet is coming to them," he said. "The unit has done a lot of behind-the-scenes work."

Despite the contributions to the morale and welfare of Soldiers Company C has provided, Elgan said the unit has contributed most by enabling everyone on the base to perform their duties.

"The biggest accomplishment is the building of the communications background that we've established on Falcon, from a very thrown-together network to something that was cleaned up and allows communications between every facility, unit and non-government entity so it all works efficiently and we can do our jobs."

Murphy said all the projects, from the improved network to the MWR improvements, are a reflection on the company's collective attitude: improve on all things.

"Always leave it better than how you've found it," he said. "Any project we've ever had, that's always been the main focus."

"In the grander scheme, we're just a small piece of the bigger puzzle that's happening across Baghdad," Elgan added. "Hopefully, Company C has made a significant, positive impact on our area of influence that will affect all the units to come here to FOB Falcon."



2-11 IA teams up with Black Lions

Story, Photos by
Spc. Nathaniel Smith
4 IBCT Public Affairs

With the ceremonial passing of a pistol, the 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 11th Iraqi Army Division assumed responsibility over northwest Rashid from the 2nd Bn., 1st Bde., 10th IA Div. in a transfer of authority ceremony at Joint Security Station Jihad, Jan. 18.

The 2-11 IA are comprised entirely of Iraqi soldiers from the Iraqi capital.

Lt. Col. Ed Rowe, the 2-11 IA Military Transition Team Chief from Gaithersburg, Md., said the arrival of a brigade where a battalion was operating was a large step forward for the region.

"This is significant for Northwest Rashid because it puts all of Northwest Rashid under one commander with two brand-new, well-equipped, well-trained units," Rowe said. "They are coming to sustain security and bring improved security to the area; it's a great day for the Iraqi Army and the people of Iraq."

Maj. Eric Overby, the executive officer of the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, which is the Coalition unit that operates in the area, said the 2-1-10 IA have performed exemplarily in their duties.

"2-1-10 has fought with honor and has fought with courage," the Plentywood, Mont., native said. "From stopping vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices to resettling families, you have performed with action."

While the prior unit has executed their mission admirably, Overby said he looks forward to working with the new group of Iraqi soldiers.

"We look forward to working together and protecting the Iraqi population with 2-11 IA, and continuing to forge an everlasting peace within Iraq," he said.

Rowe felt confident the new unit will be more than capable to pick up where 2-1-10 left off due to their extensive training.

"The arrival of 2-11 IA is significant because they are a well-equipped unit, a unit coming out of the Besmaya Training Facility (east of Baghdad) that trained as a unit," he said. "They are one of first Iraqi Army units to graduate in that manner."

The 2-11 IA is now responsible for the Jihad and Furat regions Northwest Rashid, as the 2-1-10 IA move to the Hadar and Al Boetha neighborhoods of Southeast Rashid.



Lt. Col. Haydar, the commander of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 10th Iraqi Army Division commander, hands over the commander's pistol to Lt. Col. Mahmoud, the commander of the 1st Bn., 2nd Bde., 11th Iraqi Army Division commander, as Maj. Eric Overby, a Plentywood, Mont., native serving as the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment executive officer, looks on during a transfer of authority ceremony between the two units at Joint Security Station Jihad in southern Baghdad, Jan. 18. The pistol symbolizes the official passing of responsibility over the sector to the new unit.



Iraqi Army soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 10th Iraqi Army Division, right, and the 1st Bn., 2nd Bde., 11th Iraqi Army Division stand in formation during the units' transfer of authority ceremony at Joint Security Station Jihad in the Rashid District, Jan. 18. The 2-11 IA are the first unit to be composed of soldiers entirely from Baghdad.

Families return to Saydiyah with help from Tuskers



Iraqis line up at a school in southern Baghdad's Saydiyah neighborhood Feb. 9 to stake their legal claim to property they had previously departed because of violence. A deed or an active lease was required before people were allowed to begin moving into their homes.

Story, Photos by Spc. Nathaniel Smith
4 IBCT Public Affairs

Multi-national Division-Baghdad Forces, with the help of prominent civilian leaders, in southern Baghdad's Rashid District began the process of moving 200 displaced families back into their homes, Feb. 9.

The 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment, 4th Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, attached to Task Force Dragon, and members of the Saydiyah Neighborhood Council began accepting paperwork to verify that families moving back were legal residents of the area.

Soldiers and Iraqis were looking for a deed or an active lease to show ownership of property.

If that property has been damaged or destroyed, the rightful owners will be reimbursed with up to one million Iraqi dinars.

For one local man, to have the legal residents of the neighborhood coming back was a sign that things are looking up.

"To see people moving back into Saydiyah, this is one of the greatest days of my life," said one resident. "I'm very excited; the people from Saydiyah are good people, it's just people from the outside who are causing problems."

Another man agreed.

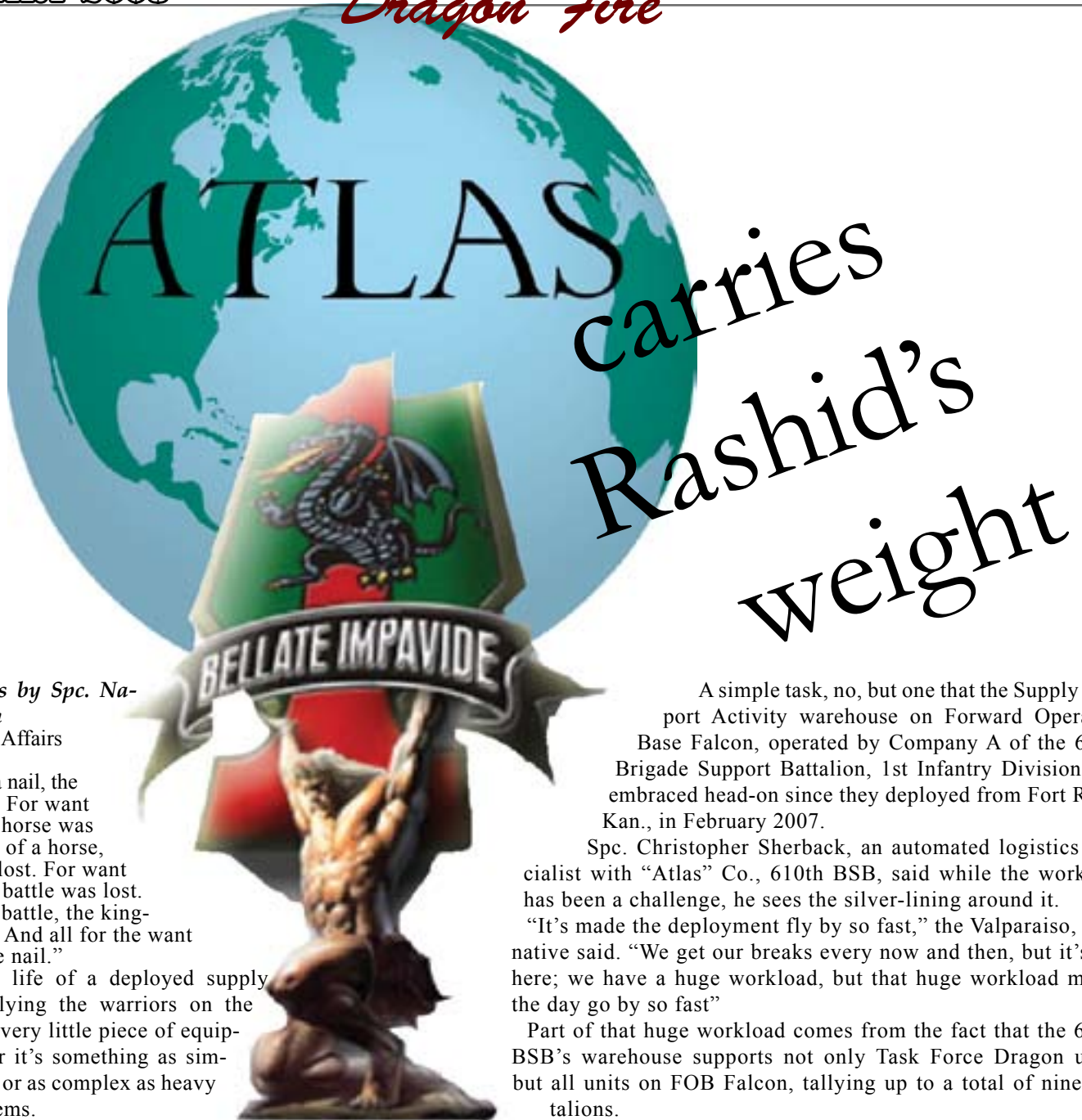
"Right now, we're in very good shape," he said. "We want to make it excellent; we don't want to go down."

Due to the high volume of people trying to move back into the region and the thorough process through which everyone's paperwork is being vetted to guarantee no criminals are trying to infiltrate the area, the Soldiers extended the process through the weekend, with the intention of not quitting until all the displaced residents are back in their old homes.

9 A timetable could not be set on when the process would be complete.



Local leaders in the southern Baghdad's Saydiyah neighborhood thumb through documents to verify people's legal ownership of property, Feb. 9. The exhaustive process was mandatory to guarantee criminals were not moving into the region.



Story, Photos by Spc. Nathaniel Smith
4 IBCT Public Affairs

“For want of a nail, the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe, the horse was lost. For want of a horse, the rider was lost. For want of a rider, the battle was lost. For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost. And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.”

Such is the life of a deployed supply section: supplying the warriors on the ground with every little piece of equipment, whether it's something as simple as a screw or as complex as heavy weapons systems.



The outdoor supply depot at Forward Operating Base Falcon. These supplies are held to support units in an area of operations as large as the city of Orlando, Fla.

A simple task, no, but one that the Supply Support Activity warehouse on Forward Operating Base Falcon, operated by Company A of the 610th Brigade Support Battalion, 1st Infantry Division, has embraced head-on since they deployed from Fort Riley, Kan., in February 2007.

Spc. Christopher Sherbak, an automated logistics specialist with “Atlas” Co., 610th BSB, said while the workload has been a challenge, he sees the silver-lining around it.

“It’s made the deployment fly by so fast,” the Valparaiso, Ind., native said. “We get our breaks every now and then, but it’s fun here; we have a huge workload, but that huge workload makes the day go by so fast”

Part of that huge workload comes from the fact that the 610th BSB’s warehouse supports not only Task Force Dragon units, but all units on FOB Falcon, tallying up to a total of nine battalions.

Killeen, Texas, native Sgt. Deangela Black, the stock control specialist for the Phoenix’s SSA, said on top of supporting units on FOB Falcon, they assist other bases in the area when possible.

“We provide a lot of support for units at other FOB’s; say another base’s SSA doesn’t have a needed part, they call us,” she said. “If we have it on us, we coordinate to get them the part.”

Despite all the work going on at the 610th BSB’s warehouse in their little corner of the post, the supply Soldiers’ day-to-day duties largely take place behind the scenes, unnoticed by ground pounders.

Sherbak, who is on his first deployment, said that’s fine with him.

“Personally, that’s how I like it; I like being the one supporting all the guys out there,” he said. “I’ve been supply for four years now, and I’ve loved every four years”

Black, who is on her second deployment, said her job provides a sense of satisfaction, supporting the guys on the ground.

“Even though I’m not going outside the wire, I feel

good about my job because I know everyone here is supporting them with the necessary supplies they need to complete their mission,” she said. “I feel good about that; without those supplies, they can’t do what they need to so we all tie-in together.”

With 5,500 lines of supplies, it’s no surprise the 610th SSA is capable of tying into everything going on in the Rashid District, from Aamel to Saha and Saydiyah to Doura.

Still, supporting an area of operations roughly equivalent to the size of Orlando, Fla., is no small task, and it’s one the “Phoenix” has accomplished for the past 11 months.

Yet, Sherbak, who is married and has a four-month old boy waiting at home, has no intention of letting up now and failing his fellow Soldiers. Instead, with the end so close in sight his philosophy regarding redeploying is simple.

“We’ll get there when we get there.”



Equipment is loaded outside the supply support activity warehouse at Forward Operating Base Falcon in southern Baghdad, Jan. 28. Supplies at the warehouse are held to support not only units organic to Task Force Dragon, but all units on FOB Falcon.



1 *The supply support activity warehouse at Forward Operating Base Falcon in southern Baghdad is where nine battalions are supplied from. The warehouse is operated by the “Atlas” of Company A, 610th Brigade Support Battalion, 1st Infantry Division.*

Snapshots in time

Rangers endure tough year

Snapshots

On Feb. 5, the Rangers of 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment will have served a year in Iraq. Their tour could not have come at a more pivotal time as they entered one of the most volatile areas in Baghdad and played a central part in Gen. David Petraeus' surge. At a time in their deployment when prior units would be moving back to the States, the Rangers continue to fight, continue to build. Each Soldier has a story here in the Sunni dominated area in Eastern Baghdad. Each Soldier has moments that will stay with them long after the battle is won. Twelve stories have ended here in Iraq but the courage and dedication those men showed continue to drive us all. These are some of those stories. Moments that changed the course of the battle or the course of a life. Snapshots of an epic. Fear and courage live side by side in this place. Bravery occurs daily and becomes the bond between brothers. After a year, the Rangers have proven themselves to the Iraqis and each other and know that these moments will help define who they are and what they stood for in the years to come.

Maj. David Goetze, Operation Officer, 2-16 Inf.

Defining moments for me are all centered on the Soldiers and the incredible things they have accomplished. When we did our first operation, everyone was nervous. They didn't know what to expect and they may have had some doubts as to their own skill sets. They were asking themselves, "Do I have what it takes?" But they went out into the unknown and accomplished the mission to a high standard and

that victory crushed those feelings of doubt. Our training was good and they had what it took to go toe-to-toe with the enemy. Still today our Soldiers are highly motivated, they are highly trained and they are very proficient in what they do. Every day they risk their lives and never once have they said, "Were not going to do it. Send someone else." They will do whatever it takes to accomplish the mission.

The Soldiers in our Battalion have seen things in this country that the people back home will never have an idea of and should never have an idea of. We give them a few days break during a 15-month tour and then they go right back out and do it all again. It is completely amazing and mind boggling to me that our Soldiers are able to do that. The things they have seen and they still continue to go out there every day.

Our Soldiers go out and do things every day which, if it weren't infantry doing the work, would be considered heroic. Our Soldiers make heroic deeds a common task. Our Soldiers do things every day which I think makes them heroes and they think is just what needed to be done.

And it is not just the "fighters." Our support personnel go just as far beyond what is required to support the fight. Just as an example, a light infantry battalion is set up to support about 14 humvees. Right now our mechanics maintain about 200 pieces of rolling stock with the numbers meant to cover 14. The transporters, the medics, the cooks, each and every Soldier has gone the extra step and each one sees what they do as their duty. They don't complain, they don't think what

they do is anything more than what it takes to get the job done yet every day what they do is above and beyond. We have made heroic the standard and that makes what they do just that much more special.

1st. Lt. Brandon Bear, Mortar Platoon Leader, HHC

Everything changes the first time you come under fire. The first time we had a rocket-propelled grenade shot at us and came under small-arms fire things definitely didn't go right. At that moment, every man in this platoon realized that training was over. For the first time each individual had to deal with the thought that an RPG could hit my truck and blow me up or an improvised explosive device could kill me and everyone in the truck. That moment, when that happened, everything changed. From that moment on every man woke up and understood that they could get shot that day and that the actions they took, the training they put into effect, was what was going to keep them and their buddies alive.

Being here forces you to look at life differently. When I went home on leave, and saw the crap that people complain about. I just couldn't take it. I just kept thinking, these people just don't care about the people over there and what they are doing. They will never see what we have seen or go through anything like what we have gone through ever in their entire life. What I have seen makes me appreciate life. It makes you look at things differently and it kind of angers you that people don't really take life that seriously back in the States. They take

Continued on page 14



Staff Sgt. Arthur Guerra, the Charlie Company, 2-16 Inf., Fire Support Non-commissioned Officer, pulls security during Operation Middletown, Sept. 12, in Al-Amin, New Baghdad. This operation resulted in Charlie Company detaining the targeted criminal responsible for trafficking weapons from Iran and attacks against Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition Forces.



from page 12

everything that they have for granted.

I'm not a particularly religious person yet while I was here I started to pray all the time. I don't know if it was luck or if God was on our side but I know a lot of people were praying for us. I always prayed before patrol, asking God to look out for the men and let them come back. You get jitters when you roll by something that you think is going to kill you and make it or an IED explodes just behind you or right in front or ends up hitting another patrol just after you past it. This place forces you to believe in something.

Lt. Col. Ralph Kauzlarich, Commander, 2-16 Inf.

My best and worst days are easy to identify. The best was the very first operation we conducted as a taskforce, Operation Ranger Dominance in which we moved throughout our Operational Environment as a task force, three companies abreast with our National Police partners beside us. That was probably the most significant task force operation because it showed the Iraqi people unequivocally that we were going to provide security. It also provided our inexperienced task force a shared experience when they walked together into the unknown. That single day set the tone for our entire deployment and gave our Rangers a sense of confidence and competence in moving mounted and dismounted throughout the Ranger OE.

The worst day that we had here, and I can honestly say the worst day of my life, was Sept. 4, when we lost four Soldiers in one explosively-formed penetrator event with a fifth suffering from a double leg amputation. Losing an entire fire team in one fell swoop, that day was surreal, to see so many great Rangers get wounded and killed. Yet we have to deal with reality and as a commander I had to stand over two men as they were given last rights and watch two other Soldiers evacuated with injuries, one of whom would die after fighting his injuries for five months. The final fallen Ranger was being guarded by what was left of the platoon. It showed how quickly life can flee and at the same time it showed how hard it is to kill a man, with the last Ranger to fall surviving five months on sheer will and spirit. Even though the injuries got the better of his body, they never beat his spirit.

Staff Sgt. Francisco Gietz, Platoon Sergeant, and Spc. Justin Cooper, Medic, Company A, 2-16 Inf.

After clearing a suspected cache location in New Baghdad, Staff Sgt. Gietz's vehicle patrol was struck by an explosively formed projectile. Gietz immediately dismounted his vehicle and began maneuvering towards the vehicle which had been hit. After linking up with the platoon medic, Cooper, both were engaged by the enemy from both sides of the road and from the rooftops. Both men began returning fire while moving towards the stricken vehicle. With rounds impacting all around them, the men spotted someone they believed to be the trigger



man whom they physically detained. Gietz physically restrained the man while Cooper engaged the enemy. Both then held their position under fire while the platoon moved up to take custody of the detainee. Once the detainee was secured, both Soldiers moved out from the relative safety of the position they had established and moved 150 meters under fire to the stricken vehicle.

Upon reaching the vehicle, Geitz began treating injured Soldiers while simultaneously issuing orders to reorganize the platoon in order to protect the casualty collection point and continue to engage the enemy. Cooper immediately began to treat the most seriously injured Soldiers one who had an amputated hand, one with severe shrapnel injuries and another with a severe eye injury. As the most serious wounds were cared for both Soldiers issued constant reassurance to the injured men while they were loaded and evacuated for further medical care. Gietz has been submitted for the Bronze Star Medal with Valor

and Cooper has been submitted for the Army Commendation Medal with Valor.

SSG Asila Ume, Squad Leader, Company C, 2-16 Inf.

Staff Sgt. Asila Ume's truck was second in order of movement and Spc. Setzer's vehicle was fifth when an EFP struck the lead vehicle. The blast immediately killed the truck commander, ejected one Soldier out of the vehicle and severely wounded the other three occupants of the vehicle and set the vehicle on fire.

Ume responded immediately to the attack by securing the forward area of the enemy kill zone, dismounting, and quickly moving to the disabled vehicle. Ume completely ignored his safety as he worked to free one of the Soldiers from the burning vehicle despite the intense fire and exploding ammunition.

Ume carried the first Soldier from the vehicle then returned to the vehicle despite the growing intensity of the fire in order to free the remaining Soldier from the flames.

The Soldier's clothes had already caught fire while Ume removed him from the vehicle. After extricating him, Ume retrieved a fire blanket from another vehicle and smothered the flames. Ume started immediate tactical casualty care and then carried the Soldier to the CCP 75 meters away.

At the same time, Setzer moved to the commander's side of the flaming vehicle and attempted to extinguish the flames with a fire extinguisher. Setzer was unable to extinguish the fire yet repeatedly attempted to extricate the vehicle commander. Unable to access the door, Setzer moved to the driver's side and extracted the severely wounded driver all while ammunition was exploding in the vehicle. Setzer then began tactical casualty care and then carried the Soldier 75 meters to the CCP.

Ume has been submitted for an Army Commendation Medal with Valor and Setzer has been submitted for the Army Commendation Medal with Valor.

2-32 Field Artillery reups lead MND-B

by Staff Sgt. Danelle Magalit
2-32 Field Artillery

Being the top battalion for retention in Multi-National Division--Baghdad during the first quarter of the 2008 fiscal year says a lot about the Soldiers, as well as the command climate, of the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division.

The Soldiers know their battery commanders and first sergeants have a vested interest in their careers by continually talking to them about staying in the Army, whether in their current job or in a different field based on the Soldier's interests and abilities.

The care and concern shown lets the troops know they are important, as individuals as well as a team, and reinforces the idea that they make a difference by reenlisting.

What's more, the morale of the Soldiers improves, knowing they are going to move on with their lives in the Army learning a new job or learning different aspects of their current job at a new duty station with a different team.

The awards program established by 2-32 Field Artillery has helped the reenlistment program become a battle to the finish, as the battery with the most reenlistments for the month gets a plaque and the most reenlistments for the quarter receives a streamer to fly on their guidon.

We will continue to press on reenlisting the great Soldiers of Task Force Patriot, the "Proud Americans."

The 2-32 Field Artillery is currently attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, deployed out of Fort Campbell, Ky.



Spc. Roy Burkhalter of Company C, Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 4th IBCT is reenlisted by Hon. Robert Gates, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, at Forward Operating Base Falcon, Feb. 11.

Dragons hit 1,000th reenlistment

Story by Spc. Nathaniel Smith
4 IBCT Public Affairs

When Spc. Roy Burkhalter decided to reenlist, he didn't picture anything out of the ordinary for his reenlistment ceremony: he wanted his old platoon leader to reenlist him at his battalion's headquarters building on Forward Operating Base Falcon in southern Baghdad.

Both were before his unit's first sergeant offered him the opportunity to be reenlisted by Hon. Robert Gates, the U.S. Secretary of Defense.

Burkhalter, the 1,000th Soldier from the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Inf. Div., was reenlisted by the Secretary of Defense in a ceremony at Forward Operating Base Falcon, Feb. 11.

Burkhalter, a native of Rome, Ga., serving as a network specialist with Company C, Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 4th IBCT, 1st Inf. Div., said while he's happy to be the 1,000th reenlistment, he believes it reflects more on the 4th IBCT as a whole.

"That's awesome, to be number 1,000, but it's nothing that I've done; it's the brigade's retention noncommissioned officers, all those guys throwing the options out there. The brigade's a really good unit, and people want to

stay in the brigade as long as they can."

Sgt. Adam Chapman, the retention NCO for Co. C, 4-1 BSTB and Burkhalter's first-line supervisor, said having a Soldier from his unit reflected well on the company.

"Our motto is 'We set the standard,' and what better person to be reenlisted by the Secretary of Defense than my Soldier, who is I feel a very outstanding and deserving Soldier," the Tampa, Fla., native said.

Burkhalter reenlisted for six years, a \$12,500 bonus, the college option which will allow him to go to school for two semesters, and stabilization at Fort Riley, Kan.

Despite the perks, he said it wasn't about the benefits the Army offered, but it was more about the lifestyle.

"People say the bonus is not high enough for the amount of years I'm reenlisting for, but it's not about the bonus; it's about doing what I love," Burkhalter said. "When I signed the contract, I didn't feel any regrets or any second-guesses about my decision. It was like 'This is what I really want to do.'"

Chapman said helping his Soldier get the extra incentives was just a matter of seeing what he wanted.



Cpl. Travis Ueke poses with 1st Lt. Gerald Velasco at Camp Liberty in Baghdad after his reenlistment. Both Soldiers are with Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 2nd Battalion, 23rd Field Artillery Regiment.

In Sector with COMCAM

CLEARING SAYDIYAH
with MC2(SW) Greg Pierot
NECC DET
Combat Camera



Top : First Lt. Brendon McGann from the 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment, 4th Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division looks through the rubble of a house that has been ravaged by fire and theft in southern Baghdad's Saydiyah neighborhood.

Top Right: First Lt. Brendon McGann from the 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment gives a piece of candy to a local Iraqi girl in the Saydiyah neighborhood of the Rashid District.

Right: Spc. Eric Stephens from the 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment stands security for his platoon in a house that they are searching for weapons or insurgent activity in southern Baghdad's Saydiyah neighborhood.

Above: Soldiers from the 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment move up a staircase while making sure the house they are in is empty of weapons and has no insurgent activity in the Saydiyah neighborhood of southern Baghdad.



Coyotes help Dragons



Sgt. Hicks from 318th Tactical Psychological Operations Detachment hands out newspapers to shopkeepers at the Doura market in the Rashid District of Baghdad, Jan. 17. (U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class David Quillen)



Sgt. Simpson from 318th Tactical Psychological Operations Detachment hands out newspapers to shopkeepers at the Doura market in the Rashid District of Baghdad, Jan. 17. (U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class David Quillen)

Army messengers put Soldiers, Iraqis on same sheet of music

by Spc. Nathaniel Smith
4 IBCT Public Affairs

It doesn't take a geographer to know that St. Louis is a long way from Baghdad, and most people living in the "Gateway to the West" probably don't take more of an interest in what's going on in the Iraqi capital than what they see on the news.

The Army Reserve Soldiers with Detachment 1080, 318th Psychological Operations Company, based out of St. Louis, did more than simply take an interest: they took action.

The "Coyotes" deployed to Baghdad with the surge of early 2007 to support the forces on the ground and get the Soldiers' message to the Iraqi people.

For High Ridge, Mo., native Spc. Austin Davenport, a PSYOP specialist with Detachment 1080, supporting the surge has been rewarding.

"It feels awesome; I don't think I could have picked a better route. I wanted PSYOPs, and it's the only job I wanted," Davenport said. "I felt like it was the job for me. I got in, deployed a couple weeks after I got back from advanced individual training, I got on the best detachment, and I don't think I could have been surrounded by a better bunch of guys or leadership."

Maj. Jimmy McGrath, a Sallisaw, Okla., native and officer-in-charge of Detachment 1080, wasn't even with his Soldiers for the beginning of their deployment, and the unit still got their job done.

"When we first got here, the surge was going, and our company had to support two divisions," he said. "I was sent east of Baghdad to stand up their PSYOP program. In July, I got to come back to my detachment."

Davenport added that despite having a large area of responsibility and being in one of the roughest areas of the country, he wouldn't have picked a different situation.

"Being where we're at, right here in the middle of Baghdad, we are in the middle of it all, and I don't think I would have picked a better place," he said. "Sometimes it sucks, but going out there and seeing the people, it's awesome, I love it. There's always something.

"You really feel like you're making a difference."

The short-handed detachment has accounted for the dissemination of approximately 2.5 million products, such as handbills and newspapers, all while operating at roughly 75 percent manpower. The unit's production tallied up as nine-tenths of all PSYOP dissemination in Baghdad.

McGrath, a 36-year military veteran, said having the opportunity to lead such a productive group of Soldiers has been an honor for him.

"I'm very proud of these guys. I don't think there's another detachment in theater right now that could



Spe. Austin Davenport, a psychological operations specialist with Detachment 1080 of the 318th PSYOP Company, talks with Iraqis in the Saha neighborhood of southern Baghdad about their concerns, Aug. 18. The High Ridge, Mo., native went on this particular missions with the “Bandits” of Troop B, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division. (Smith/4IBCT)

have accomplished what we have,” he said. “I know we’ve made a very big difference.”

Outsiders may not understand the impact a quality PSYOP detachment can have on a unit’s mission, but to Sgt. 1st Class Ted Vytlačil, the senior noncommissioned officer of Detachment 1080 from St. Louis, psychological operations falls in line with the overall counterinsurgency strategy.

“It’s an important step to convince people we’re not aliens,” the 37-year veteran said. “I do need to be sensitive to how it is we can complete and deliver messages; it’s easier to do that if you’re not seen as an enemy, foe or villain.”

Vytlačil, who holds two master’s degrees from Boston University and is working on a Ph.D. from St. Louis University, said having the opportunity to lead a talented group of Soldiers like those his detachment in their first tour to Iraq has been a rewarding experience.

“This is my second tour in Iraq; no one in the detachment has had the chance to serve as a PSYOP Soldier and be deployed,” he said. “It feels good to say that I’m in any way responsible for the success here.”



Sgt. 1st Class Ted Vytlačil of Detachment 1080, 318th PSYOP Company discusses the need of propane with a resident of the Al Haytar region of Baghdad, July 1. The “Coyotes” of Detachment 1080 have been attached to the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division since March 2007. (U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class David Quillen)

Never in a 100 years

Snow falls on Baghdad



Humvees manned by Soldiers from the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division endure the snowfall and patrol the Doura region in the Rashid District of Baghdad Jan. 11. (Hendrickson/55th ComCam)



An Iraqi Security Volunteer provides security through snowfall in Doura, Jan. 11. (Hendrickson/55th ComCam)



Left: A tropical mural scene reminds residents of warmer seasons during snowfall in the Doura region of the Rashid District of Baghdad, Jan. 11. (Hendrickson/55th ComCam)

Below: Spc. Luke Beck from the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division dismounts from his humvee into the snow during a patrol of Doura in the Rashid District of Baghdad, Jan. 11. (Hendrickson/55th ComCam)





Staff Sgt. Cristian Disla is the senior data systems integrator for the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

'Big Brother' watches government computers

by Staff Sgt. Cristian Disla
4th IBCT Communications Shop

Government computers are not private.

The 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division Communications Shop updates the Acceptable Use Policy.

The section has updated the Computer Acceptable Use Policy to remind troops and civilian employees that nothing they do on a government computer is private.

The new policy emphasizes that government networks are for official purposes only, and any e-mails, files or notes on a defense-owned system are subject to monitoring.

Department of Defense employees should understand that when using DOD information systems, they are giving consent to monitoring and should have no expectations of privacy.

The basic policy has been in place since the 'Dragon' Brigade stood up back at Fort Riley, Kan., and the changes seek simply to clarify and standardize the language.

The Acceptable Use Policy update specifies that the brigade communications shop routinely monitors

all communications on their network, that at any time they can seize any data stored there, and that "communications occurring on or data stored on this (information system) is not private."

The move comes more than a year after court officials ruled the old login warnings did not give the DOD the full legal authority to use information found in random searches in legal proceedings.

In 2006, Marine Lance Cpl. Jennifer Long was convicted of drug use in part because military officials found numerous e-mails to friends from her military address detailing masking agents she used to pass drug tests.

She appealed the conviction, saying the messages were illegally used private property.

The Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces agreed, mandating a retrial because she had "a reasonable expectation of privacy" in her e-mails.

The updated Acceptable Use Policy also states that passwords, access cards and encryption methods are designed for the security of the network, not for the privacy of employees, and any data stored on the network "may be disclosed for any (government) authorized purpose."

News Briefs

Dragons arrest three

4 IBCT Public Affairs

BAGHDAD – Iraqi Security Forces and Multi-National Division-Baghdad Soldiers arrested three suspected Sunni extremists during operations across the Rashid District of the Iraqi capital, Feb. 3.

In the early afternoon, policemen of 1st Brigade, 7th Iraqi National Police Division, arrested a man believed to be an Al Qaeda operative after he tried to pass through a traffic control checkpoint in Massafee.

The man, suspected of murder, placing improvised explosive devices and weapons trafficking, was taken to an Iraqi facility for further questioning.

Earlier in the day, "Warriors" of 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division, attached to Task Force Dragon captured two suspected AQI cell members in two separate raids in Doura.

During the first raid, Company B, knocked on the door of home believed to be an AQI sniper and arrested a man fitting the extremists name and description. The man is believed to have set up false checkpoints to kidnap Shia and Christian Iraqis in the Arab Jabour region of the city.

A few minutes later, Company C arrested a man believed to have participated in murders, forcibly displacing families and placing IEDs in the Doura area.

The Warriors took both alleged extremists to a Coalition Detention Facility for further questioning.

Two caches, suicide vest seized

4IBCT Public Affairs

Multi-National Division-Baghdad Soldiers found two caches and a suicide vest during ongoing operations in the Rashid District of the Iraqi capital, Feb. 4.

During an afternoon patrol in Risalah, Soldiers of Company C, 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, and Company C, 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment, both part of Task Force Dragon, when they found a cache in an abandoned home.

Explosive Ordnance Disposal personnel were called in to destroy four grenades, 300 PKC machine gun rounds, 10 loaded AK-47 magazines and two Iraqi-style flak vests.

Thirty minutes later, the Soldiers found 15 62mm mortar rounds in another house nearby.

Earlier in the day, "Cougars" from 2nd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, found a suicide vest inside a home in East Rashid.

The munitions were safely destroyed by EOD personnel.

Sgt. Audie Murphy Club Inductees



*Sgt. 1st Class Brian Sowder
1-28 Inf.*



*Sgt. Loyd Rhoades
1-28 Inf.*



*Staff Sgt. Jason Brannan
1-28 Inf.*



*Staff Sgt. Jon Clark
1-28 Inf.*



*Staff Sgt. Jonathan Duncan
1-28 Inf.*



*Sgt. 1st Class Mike Quintana
1-28 Inf.*



*Staff Sgt. Matthew Lemon
1-28 Inf.*



*Staff Sgt. Justin Puls
1-28 Inf.*



*Staff Sgt. Kevin Reinhardt
1-28 Inf.*



*Staff Sgt. William Shomaker
1-28 Inf.*



*Sgt. 1st Class Richard Ward
1-28 Inf.*



*Sgt. Matthew Edwards
1-28 Inf.*



*Staff Sgt. James Kampe
1-4 Cav.*



*Sgt. Nelson Walker
610th BSB*



*Staff Sgt. Tomeko Eaddy
610th BSB*



*Staff Sgt. Charles Lusk
2-2 SCR*



*Sgt. Daniel Leinweber
2-2 SCR*



*Staff Sgt. John Owens
2-2 SCR*

Steel Falcon Chapel Worship Schedule

Sunday

Contemporary Protestant Service
1030

Gospel Service
1300

Latter Day Saints Service
1600

Traditional Protestant Service
1930

Prayer Service
2100

Wednesday
Gospel Service
1900

Thursday
Catholic Mass
1900

Friday
Jewish Service
1800

Saturday
Liturgical Worship Service
2000

Bible Studies

Tuesday
1900

Thursday
1930

Spiritual Fire

by Chap (Maj.) Gregory Thogmartin



With end in sight, finish strong

The end is in sight! And, everybody said, "AMEN!!!!"

However, many things must be completed before we can leave the area of operations that we call AO Dragon. I hope each of you is prepared to finish strong.

There is saying in the book of Ecclesiastes: "The end of a thing is better than its beginning..." (Ecclesiastes 7:8).

The writer seems to have in mind the sense of satisfaction and accomplishment that comes with completing a task. Perhaps he is describing the feeling that comes from facing a challenge head-on and overcoming the obstacles.

We have had some up-close and personal encounters with challenges here in Rashid during this past year.

We have some scars to show for our time here. For some of us the end brings a mixture of emotions that are hard to sort through.

It is my prayer that each of you individually and all of us together will finish strong here in theater. And, that following the flights home – we will make wise choices that will allow us to start new things well back in the States.

Two things to consider as you begin to get ready to go home. First, many of us may be

tempted to splurge in buying gifts for loved ones – especially spouses and children in an attempt to make up for being gone. You may feel some guilt over being gone and having missed significant dates and events. There is no gift you can buy that will make up for your absence. So don't even try to gift your way into feeling better.

If you want to give small gifts that say, "I love you! You are important to me!" Go for it, but don't wreck the family budget to cover any feelings of guilt. Instead, find some way and some one that you respect to talk about those feelings.

Second, when you get back what your loved ones want most from you is you. You will need to decide on a regular basis to be where your boots are.

That is – to be present, not one place in your head while you are physically present somewhere else. It is tough to hide not being where you are – so why try. Plus, most people can see through us when we play that game. Affirm the people you love by really being with them.

I am grateful for your service and your commitment.

I ask God to bless you with wisdom, courage, endurance, and hope as we come into these last weeks in theater.



FALLEN DRAGONS

NO MISSION TOO DIFFICULT
NO SACRIFICE TOO GREAT

"If you are able, save them a place inside of you and save one backward glance when you are leaving for the places they can no longer go. Be not ashamed to say that you loved them, though you may or may not have always. Take what they have left and taught you with their dying and keep it with your own. And in that time when men feel safe to call the war insane, take one moment to embrace the gentle heroes you left behind."

- Maj. Michael Davis O'Donnell
Dak To, Vietnam, January 1, 1970

INTO THE BREACH



Soldiers attached to the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division clear a neighborhood of any insurgent activity and possible weapons caches in southern Baghdad's Rashid District. (Pierot/NECC DET Combat Camera)