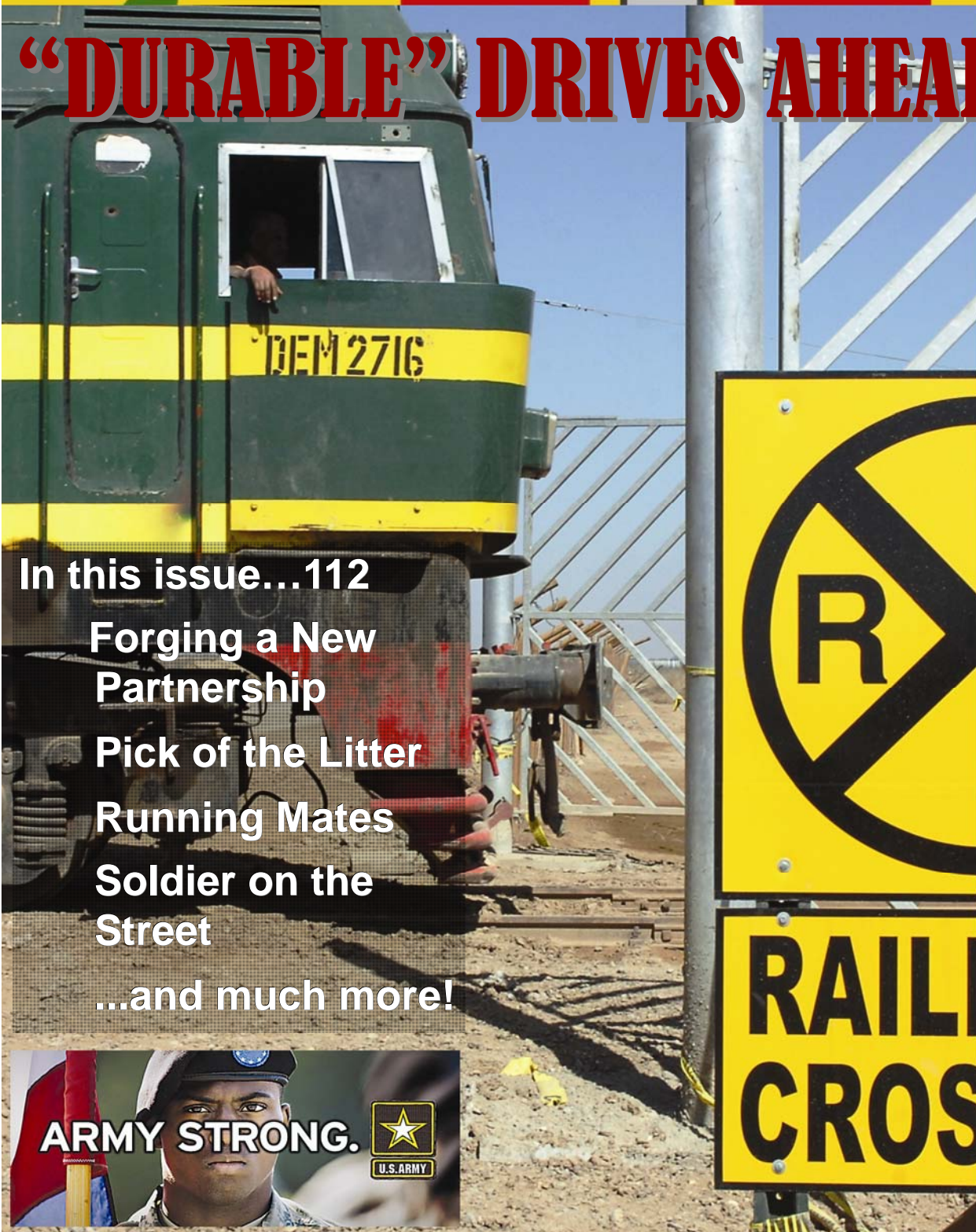


The Sustainment Times

FORWARD Camp Taji, Iraq

Published by the 1st Sustainment Brigade Public Affairs Office

“DURABLE” DRIVES AHEAD



In this issue...112
Forging a New Partnership
Pick of the Litter
Running Mates
Soldier on the Street
...and much more!

APRIL 2008 The Sustainment Times FORWARD PAGE 11

Iraqi trainers learn rules of the road

Jeffrey Schwartz, while they drive along the highway, they are learning a lot about driving in Iraq. The Iraqi drivers are learning a lot about driving in Iraq. The Iraqi drivers are learning a lot about driving in Iraq.

DRIVERS TRAINING SCHOOL

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APRIL 2008 The Sustainment Times FORWARD PAGE 12

Hooray for Hollywood

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APRIL 2008 The Sustainment Times FORWARD PAGE 13

U.S. Army transfers humvees to ISF

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ARMY STRONG.

Commander's Corner

Col. Kevin G. O'Connell, Commander



Dear First Sustainment Brigade Soldiers and Families,

The 1st Sustainment Brigade continues to expand its already huge, complex, and critical mission set. The latest undertaking is increasing support to Iraqi Security Forces in order to help them rebuild their Army. We have begun a partnership with the Taji Location Command, commanded by BG Abdul Mahady Sharaque Sabah, which is sort of like the Garrison Command on the Iraqi side of Camp Taji. This allows us to establish a long-term relationship which is very important in the Iraqi culture. Our officers, NCOs, and Soldiers also have great experience in supply, maintenance, distribution, and medicine that will allow us to teach, coach, mentor, and train BG Sabah's key personnel, with the ultimate goal of improving his unit's ability to support their customers in the area surrounding Taji. This newsletter focuses on some of the other areas where we are supporting the Iraqi Security Forces.

Our "routine" missions in support of roughly 90,000 coalition forces throughout Baghdad, which is about the size of Dallas, Texas, continue to go very well and the Soldiers are performing magnificently day in and day out. From driving trucks, to issuing supplies, to fixing equipment, to providing showers and laundry, to paying Soldiers and contractors, to processing mail, to protecting the force, every unit is doing an amazing job.

Being a Soldier is a very important and noble profession. Soldiers stepped up to protect and defend their country when other people didn't. I applaud all of you that took the path less traveled in order to serve your country when it needs you most. In World War II, approximately 9% of the eligible population served in uniform. Today, even though we're in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, it's less than 1%. Thanks for all you do to support the 1st Sustainment Brigade, the Army, and the Nation. >> Pg. 4



Staff Brigadier General Sabah greets Col. Kevin O'Connell outside BG Sabah's office on Taji. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Bryant Maude)

New partnership forged

*Story by Staff Sgt. Bryant Maude,
1st SB, PAO*

It started with a handshake between the 1st Sustainment Brigade Commander, Col. Kevin O'Connell, a native of Clinton, Maryland, and the Taji Base Commander, Staff Brigadier General Abdul Mahady Sharaque Sabah, a native of Diyala, Iraq, March 29.

"Today was the first meeting between the 1st Sustainment Brigade Commander and the Base Commander of Taji," said Lt. Col. Mark Meyer, a native of Neillsville, Wis., and the senior advisor to the Logistics Military Assistance Team for Coalition Army Assistance Training Team, Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq, and the person responsible for setting up the meeting. "It

was important to put a face to the coalition side of Taji," stated Meyer.

The two leaders sat down in General Sabah's office with some of their key staff and shared chi, discussed needs, and got to know one another. Sabah is a 27-year veteran of the Iraqi Army and was assigned to the role as Base Commander of Taji six months ago.

"We look forward to a partnership with General Sabah to improve the support he gives to his customers, the Iraqi units on Taji and in the surrounding area," stated O'Connell.

Taji is the largest [Iraqi Army] base in Iraq, with maintenance depots, supply depots, the 9th Division, and all their schools; General Sabah's span of control and responsibility is >> Pg. 3



Capt. Tim Weiser, the officer in charge of the Logistics, Training, and Advisory Team, along with Lt. Col. Mark Meyer, the senior advisor to the Logistics Military Assistance Team for Coalition Army Assistance Training Team, Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq, are offered a cup of chi at the office of Staff Brigadier General Sabah.

(Photo by Staff Sgt. Bryant Maude)

O’Connell.

The meeting lasted a bit over two hours and already there are plans for more meetings with the two respective commanders and their staffs in an effort to get the partnership moving and producing results.

“The 1st Sustainment Brigade was like a breath of fresh air coming in here to help; ‘We’re here to help you.’ They are partnering with their Iraqi neighbors here on Camp Taji. Every one from the brigade commander to the specialist I’ve run into has been totally team-oriented,” stated Meyer.

“The Iraqi Soldiers work with very little, but they do a good job. They do their very best. They love their country,” stated Sabah. “It is my hope that our

Army will be equipped to the same level as the rest of the good Armies of the world, and that we will be powerful enough to protect our people and our country.” **STF**

» huge, and his resources are scarce.

“I have so many challenges; water, ice, fuel for power,” stated Sabah. “But I am hopeful. I am looking forward to working with my counterparts in the 1st Sustainment Brigade.”

“We’re here in a partnership role to assist in teaching, coaching, and mentoring General Sabah’s staff in identifying their shortcomings, and then through training, to help develop a plan to improve their mission readiness posture,” declared O’Connell.

“We’re trying to synergistically use the resources that the Iraqi Army has inherent to what they are doing and what they’ve built up for themselves over the last five years, and then linking Col. O’Connell and the 1st Sustainment Brigade’s Soldiers, resources, and expertise in an effort to marry these two groups up; again, with the goal of increasing General Sabah’s capabilities,” affirmed Meyers.

“It’s a great team effort here; if only to help the base commander move forward with things that we can do to help with capabilities where we have expertise like supply, maintenance, distribution, medical, and things that we share in our comparison roles,” said

“I am looking forward to working with my counterparts in the 1st Sustainment Brigade.”



Staff Brigadier General Sabah discussed his needs with the command team of the 1st Sustainment Brigade

(Photo by Staff Sgt. Bryant Maude)

The Sustainment Times

FORWARD

The Sustainment Times Forward is an award winning monthly newsletter produced by the 1st Sustainment Brigade Public Affairs Office.

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Command Sgt. Maj. Frank
Cardoza

Editor:

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We are looking for content,
so please submit letters,
articles, photos, drawings,
comics, etc. to:

bryant.maude@iraq.centcom.mil

On the cover:

The giant train was the first train to
enter the base since before the war.

(Photo by Staff Sgt. Bryant Maude)

CSM Time

CSM Frank G. Cardoza

Command Sgt. Maj. Frank Cardoza (left) sits and enjoys a cup of chi with his Iraqi counterpart Command Sgt. Maj. Saleh, the command sergeant major for the Taji Base. The two met for the first time on March 29 when they paid a visit to Staff Brig. Gen. Sabah's office.

(Photo by Staff Sgt. Bryant Maude)

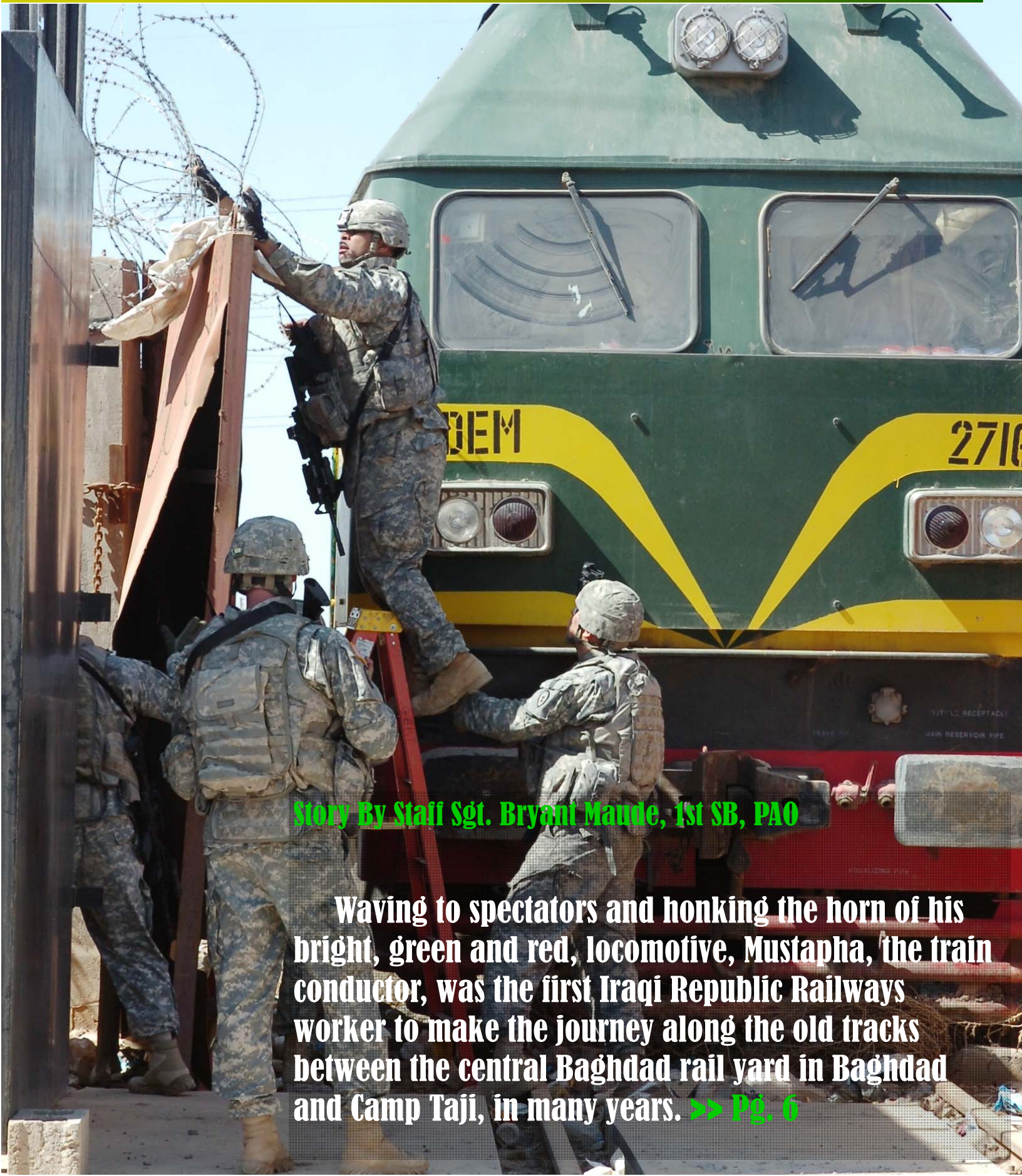
» It also takes a special Family to be an Army Family. All the PCS moves, deployments, training exercises, and separation can make things more stressful and challenging than "civilian" Families may have. Army Families end up being stronger as a result. We stick together, help each other, and take care of each other, because many others before you have "been there, done that." Thanks to all the Families for their great support to their Soldiers and all that you volunteer to do to help in any way you can.

I like to think of the 1st Sustainment Brigade as a big team. Right now, we are in the equivalent of the Super bowl, serving in combat in Iraq. Everybody on the team has a critical role, and everybody has to perform at their peak to best accomplish our mission. Regardless of your rank, MOS, or Company, always know that you are important, and we can't get the job done without you. Keep safe and take care of each other. **STF**

Durable 6

Durable 7 wants to know, "Have you got your Hooah card yet? If you're caught doing great things, you might!"

A train runs through Taji again



Story By Staff Sgt. Bryant Maude, 1st SB, PAO

Waving to spectators and honking the horn of his bright, green and red, locomotive, Mustapha, the train conductor, was the first Iraqi Republic Railways worker to make the journey along the old tracks between the central Baghdad rail yard in Baghdad and Camp Taji, in many years. >> Pg. 6

➤ This historical journey was part of a proof-of-purpose designed to rebuild the tattered railway and stimulate the young economy; it was one small step in that direction for sure.

“An increased use of the rail infrastructure will translate to big dinars for the Iraqi economy,” said Maj. Ira Baldwin, Laurinburg, N.C., native and mobility chief for the 1st Sustainment Brigade.

As far as Coalition Forces are concerned, the new train will enable large movements of cargo between the port at Um Qasar and Camp Taji, creating greater logistical economies-of-scale.

provided overwatch.

“We are on the lookout for any suspicious activities along the route line,” stated Spc. Justin Cox, a native of Visalia, Calif., and artilleryman with Det. 1, HHB, 1st Bn., 143rd FA.

Although there was no call for security intervention, like all things in life, this exercise did not come without challenges.

“There were at least two attempts prior to the successful engine proof-of-purpose (PoP),” said Baldwin. “The conductor’s house was raided and his son was arrested the night prior to the first scheduled PoP; then later, there was another train carrying petroleum originating from Bajji that was high jacked.”

In spite of the challenges, the train movement was a success. Compared to what occurred repeatedly back in 2004, at the height of the insurgency, where seemingly every train was a moving target.

“The Multi-National Corps-Iraq future operation cell, the 316th Expeditionary Sustainment Command, the Taji Base Defense Operations Cell, and the Soldiers of the 1st Sustainment Brigade came together and proved that

joint efforts do work with close coordination and rehearsals,” stated Baldwin. “I am very proud of what the Iraqi people want to reestablish in regards to improving their lives.”

This increased use of the

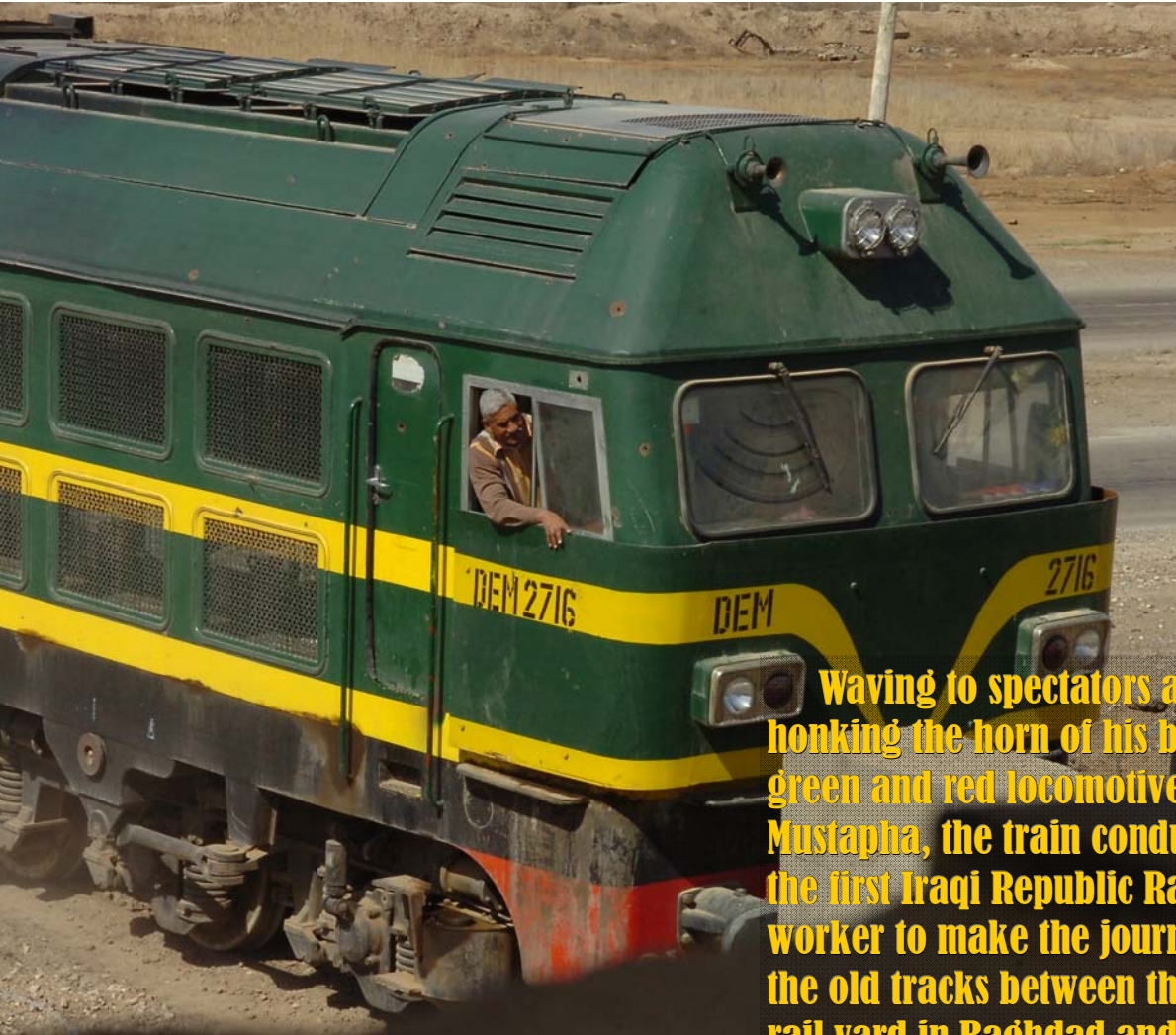
Waving to spectators and honking the horn of his bright green and red locomotive, Mustapha, the train conductor, is the first Iraqi Republic Railways worker to make the journey along the old tracks between the central rail yard in Baghdad and Camp Taji in many years.

(Photo by Staff Sgt. Bryant Maude)

Iraqi Republic Railways (IRR) will equate to increased income generated by local, national, and eventually international trade; overall, the rail industry will provide solid jobs for the Iraqi people as exemplified by the conductor Mustapha who has been employed by the IRR for over 27 years.

“I am very lucky to be a part of history in the making by helping to make a train run through,” stated Baldwin.

STF



“Since Taji is the closest secured location nearest to Logistics Support Area-Anaconda, the trains will allow a faster movement between the two,” stated Baldwin. “This will reduce the costs of moving cargo as compared to over the road, but the greater benefit is that trains will take a great number of Soldiers off the road which translates to lives saved.”

This concern for safety translated to a heavy presence of security forces on Camp Taji. Soldiers from Macedonia were on-hand to inspect, Soldiers from Battery A, 2nd Battalion, 11th Field Artillery Regiment opened the rail gates, and Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 143rd Field Artillery, 1st Sustainment Brigade,

Cpl. Jeffery Schmeltz, teaches Iraqi Army instructors the basics of operating a HMMWV with the help of an interpreter during the new drivers training course at the Iraqi Army Service Support Institute on Taji.

(Photo by Spc. Andrea Merritt)



Iraqi trainers learn rules of the road

Story by Spc. Andrea Merritt, 1st SB, PAO

The Iraqi Army Service Support Institute on Taji is comparable to a U.S. Soldier's advanced individual training school, where Iraqi soldiers can learn their jobs to better serve their army.

The school offers 30 different service support courses that range from food service, to supply, to maintenance, to transportation.

In addition to those courses, the institution recently added a drivers training program to their agenda. During the class, U.S. Soldiers teach Iraqi instructors the basics of operating the HMMWV so they can teach the drivers training course to their own Soldiers.

"It's like new equipment training. They need to get oriented with the vehicle, so they get classes on the controls and indicators that are specific to the HMMWV," said Chief Warrant Officer Two Daniel Barclay, the officer in charge of the maintenance section at IASSI. "This is all tied in with the HMMWV fielding initiative, in which we're going to be fielding several thousand HMMWVs to the Iraqi Army."

U.S. Army units are trading in their HMMWVs for the new Mine-Resistant, Ambush-Protected vehicles. The old HMMWVs are then given to Foreign Military Sales and sold to the Iraqi Army to help them increase their maneuverability.

While in the course, the Iraqi instructors receive basic driving instruction, roll over training, night-driving instruction, self-recovery lessons, off-road driving instruction, and they also learn how to conduct preventative maintenance checks and services on the vehicles.

"It's progressing better than expected. Several of these guys show a lot of promise. They will >>

[DRIVERS TRAINING SCHOOL]

“be great instructors,” said Sgt. Brandon Monk, supply sergeant with 377th Transportation Company, 1103rd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 1st Sustainment Brigade, who

One of the biggest challenges that the Soldiers faced while teaching the course to the instructors was the language barrier.



An Iraqi Soldier gets familiar with the inside of a HMMWV during the drivers training course at the Iraqi Army Service Support Institute on Taji.

(Photo by Spc. Andrea Merritt)

“The language barrier has been difficult so far, but they’re learning pretty well with the cooperation of the interpreters,” said Cpl. Jeffery Schmeltz, a mechanic with Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 143rd Field Artillery, 1st SB.

Although working past the language barrier has been an adjustment for everyone, the Iraqi instructors are doing well in the class.

“The (Iraqi) instructors have picked up on the classes pretty well; very quickly. Of course, the instructors that we have are already seasoned instructors. They have been teaching over at the basic training for a while. All they had to do was get the equipment-specific information and run with it, which they’re prepared to do,” Barclay said.

“We’ve given them all the material and trained them up on the equipment. Now, we’ve turned it around and they’re

is one of the instructors for the drivers training course.

Many of the U.S. Soldiers who are teaching the Iraqi instructors are truck drivers and mechanics who come from different units within the 1st SB.

“(The U.S. instructors) are not only familiar with the vehicle from a maintenance standpoint, but an operational standpoint as well,” Barclay added.

One of the biggest challenges that the Soldiers faced

actually teaching the Coalition (instructors) the class so that they can get practice at instructing the course,” Barclay stated.

Once the instructors complete the course, they will be able to take their new-found knowledge to their troops. It will be one small step toward the bigger focus of making an independent Iraqi Army. **STF**





Special Troops Battalion

Lt. Col. Robert D. Brem, Commander

Finance Soldiers build morale with money

Story by Spc. Andrea Merritt, 1st SB, PAO

Soldiers who reside on combat outposts (COP) often miss out on services that Soldiers on larger forward operating bases have, such as a Post Exchange, a dining facility with a wide selection of food, or a facility that provides them access to their money.

Like at many other COPs, servicemembers based at the Old Ministry of Defense in Iraq do not have a finance office to go to when they need cash or have questions about their pay.

In an effort to help these servicemembers, a financial support team from Detachment E, 230th Finance Battalion, which is attached to the 24th Financial Management Company, Special Troops Battalion, 1st Sustainment Brigade, traveled to Old MoD March 20, to provide financial services to Soldiers on the camp.

“We give Soldiers an opportunity to get casual pay up to \$350 a month. They can write checks, and they can enroll in the Savings Deposit Program. They can also fill out pay inquiries and start or stop allotments,” said Sgt. Jennifer Davis, a Soperton, Ga., native and FST noncommissioned officer from Det. E, 230th Finance Bn.

The financial support teams (FST) from the unit, which is based out of Fort Hood, Texas, visit approximately 12 different locations twice a month to provide services to Soldiers.

“I love missions. I’d rather be on missions than sitting in the office all day. I like coming out meeting new people and seeing the different camps,” said Spc. Benjamin Johnston, a Troy, Ohio, native and a pay clerk with Det. E, 230th Finance Bn., who was the cashier for the one-day mission.

The Soldiers on the FST weren’t the only ones looking forward to their visit to Old MoD. When they arrived, a hint of excitement stirred in the Soldiers of 1st Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, who stay on the camp.

“Their visit is beneficial for us because we can’t even get hair cuts without these guys coming to visit,” said 1st Lt. Blakely Anderson, the mortar platoon leader for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Sqdn., 2nd SCR.

“It boosts the guys’ morale because there are no financial services out here and everywhere on camp is cash only. This is it,” said Blakely.

“It feels good to know they’re waiting for us, to know that we’re doing something good and that we’re doing our part out here,” said



Troy, Ohio, native Spc. Benjamin Johnston, a pay clerk with Detachment E, 230th Finance Battalion, which is attached to the 24th Financial Management Company, Special Troops Battalion, 1st Sustainment Brigade, counts money prior to paying Soldiers at Old MoD.

(Photo by Spc. Andrea Merritt)

Davis.

By the end of the finance mission, the Soldiers on the FST assisted about 150 Soldiers on Old MoD with casual pays, enrollment in the Savings Deposit Program, and check cashing.

“When people think of finance, they think all we do is sit behind a desk all day. For the most part we do, but at the same time, we still come out and provide financial support for Soldiers in these areas,” said Davis. **STF**



1st Battalion, 143rd Field Artillery

Lt. Col. Ian Falk, Commander

Pick of the litter

1st SB Soldiers learn MEDEVAC safety



Orlando, Fla., native Staff Sgt. Paul McQuown, a flight medic with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, teaches a cold-load medical evacuation class to Soldiers of the 1st Sustainment Brigade. There were two classes with about 30 Soldiers each, and they were taught the proper way to load and unload patients from an aircraft using a litter.

(Photo by Spc. Andrea Merritt)

Story By Spc. Andrea Merritt, 1st SB PAO

Flight medics of Company C, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, put the skies on hold to team up with the 1st Sustainment Brigade and teach 62 of its Soldiers about safety during a medical evacuation.

“It’s important to have this training because a lot of the Army training that we have is based around the nine-line MEDEVAC,” said 1st Lt. Alex Wild, a Loveland, Colo., native and medical plans operations officer with Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 143rd Field Artillery, a California National Guard unit.

“They never go through what happens after you submit the nine-line. There’s a lot more to it afterwards,” said Wild, who planned the training.

The flight medics taught two 30-minute classes with about 30 Soldiers each. While on the flight line, 1st SB medical personnel, combat lifesavers, radio and telephone operators, training noncommissioned officers, and transportation Soldiers learned to load and unload patients onto an aircraft using a litter.

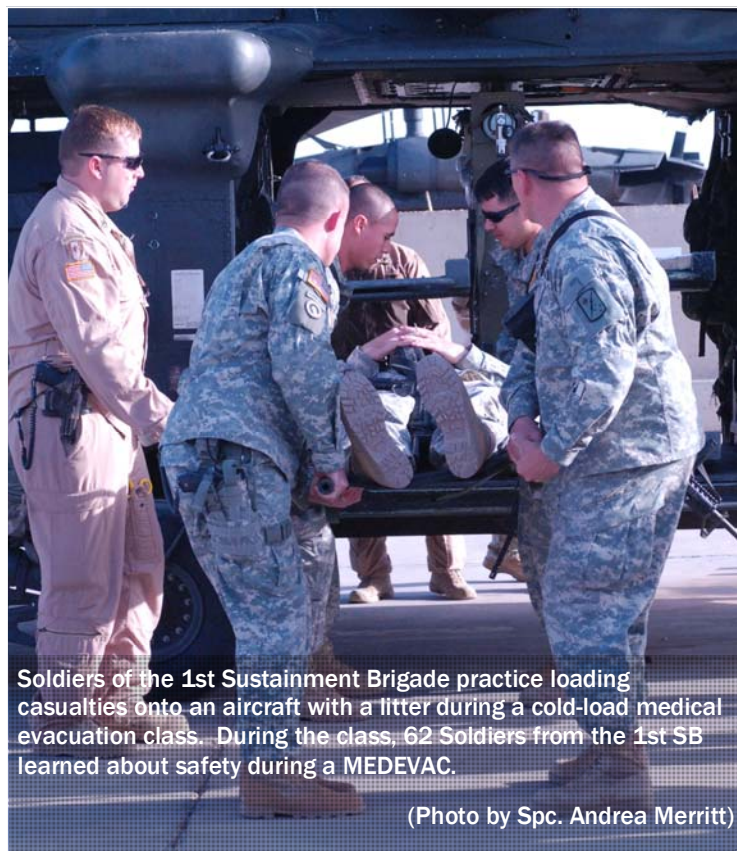
“The class gives people who are not used to being around aircraft a better understanding of safety around the aircraft because that’s the most important thing,” said Staff Sgt. Paul McQuown, an Orlando, Fla., native and flight medic with Company C, 2nd Bn., 3rd Avn. Regt.

McQuown has been a medic for more than 16 years and is currently serving a second tour of duty in Iraq. As a flight medic, he has seen a number of injuries occur around the aircraft during a medical evacuation and, at times, they have been fatal.

During the first class, the heaviest Soldiers were picked to be

casualties. Everyone took turns putting them on and taking them off the aircraft.

“That’s reality. The way to be a more proficient >> Pg. 11



Soldiers of the 1st Sustainment Brigade practice loading casualties onto an aircraft with a litter during a cold-load medical evacuation class. During the class, 62 Soldiers from the 1st SB learned about safety during a MEDEVAC.

(Photo by Spc. Andrea Merritt)

» Soldier or fighter is to have the most realistic training that you can,” McQuown said. “The reality is it’s hard to put people in that bird.”

Some of the Soldiers struggled during the cold-load training, – where the blades of the aircraft aren’t spinning – but they completed the task.

“The training did meet my needs. It was very well done. I was kind of hoping for more examples or stories, some experience from the MEDEVAC medics to the ground medical personnel,” said Wild.

“It’s not that they’re better medics; they’re just more experienced medics,” Wild said. “They’ve seen a lot more triage than ground medics, and they see higher risk patients more often than a combat medic does.”

The flight medics of Company C, 2nd Bn., 3rd Avn. Regt., which is based out of Hunter Army Airfield near Savannah, Ga., provides medical evacuation services to areas between Baghdad and Kalsu, Iraq.

They head out on an aircraft within seven minutes of receiving a call for a MEDEVAC. They never know when a call is going to come, but when it does, they are ready to answer.

As the flight medics were conducting training with the first class, a call came in, so they had to end the session.

“It’s never a dull moment,” said McQuown. “We try to give (the class) to whoever we come in contact with ... we have no problem giving a class on the MEDEVAC because all that’s going to do is make everybody work as a cohesive unit and have a fine-tuned machine instead of controlled chaos.”

At the end of the day, Wild was satisfied with the training he planned for the Soldiers.

“Decision makers needed to know this asset is here and that they have this support. This unit is here for them and to support their operations,” Wild said. “Also, the Soldiers know if they get wounded, this medical asset is there to get them to an echelon-three clinic as quickly as possible.”

“I think it helped everybody. I hope it helped out those who mostly go outside the wire because that’s who we did this for,” Wild concluded. **STF**



“The class gives people who are not used to being around aircraft a better understanding of safety around the aircraft because that’s the most important thing.”



As flight medics of Company C, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment, were giving Soldiers of the 1st Sustainment Brigade a class on safety during a medical evacuation, they received a request for a MEDEVAC so they had to end the session.

(Photo by Spc. Andrea Merritt)



1103rd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion

Lt. Col. Lee Ellis, Commander



Building hope in Assriya

Story by Spc. Andrea Merritt, 1st SB, PAO

The Soldiers of Battery A, 1st Battalion, 143rd Field Artillery, a California National Guard unit attached to the 1103rd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 1st Sustainment Brigade, spend most of their nights conducting convoy security missions.

Although they have a job that requires them to be nocturnal, a few of the Soldiers have chosen to use their daylight hours to work in a village located outside of Camp Taji, instead of sleeping.

“When we first started, we started with volunteers, but everybody volunteered >> Pg. 13

» so it ended up 100 percent participation,” said Sgt. 1st Class Richard Weaver, a Greenville, Calif., native and the platoon leader for 2nd Plt., Battery A, 1st Bn., 143rd FA.

“It’s a good cultural awakening for these guys. It gives them a side of Iraq that they normally don’t get to see and a chance to interact with the Iraqi people,” said Weaver.

Once the supplies were delivered, the platoon asked if there was anything they else they could assist with. The platoon has also placed concertina wire around the wall of the girls’ school and worked on repairing a leaky roof.

Working on the school house in Assriya has been hard work for the Soldiers, but it is a task that many of them find rewarding, especially because of the children in the village.

“I’m just real glad to be on this. I don’t get to go on a lot of missions as an armorer, but this definitely would have been the one I chose if I had my choice of missions,” said Sgt. Brent Courtney, a Hesperia, Calif., native and armorer for Battery A, 1st Bn., 143rd FA.

“The kids make my day when I go out there. As bad as things are, they still have a good attitude about everything,” added Courtney, who was asked to get involved with the project because of his background as a general contractor.

The platoon is mostly made up of combat engineers, so doing the work at the schools in Assriya was not a problem. Courtney did much of the construction around the unit’s area of operation and was asked to run the work crew for the mission at the school.

The children have bonded with the 2nd Platoon Soldiers and even try to help them with some of the projects as they work. The village sheikh, Sheikh Luqman Raheem, is very grateful for the work that has been done in his area.

“Thank you so much for what you do. You have done more for my village than even my own government has done,” said Sheik Luqman.

The unit is scheduled to return home in April and the work they have done will leave a lasting impression on the villagers in Assriya as well as the Soldiers of 2nd Platoon.

“It’s been an eye opener. It’s a totally different experience that nobody could ever understand unless they came here and were a part of it themselves,” said Spc. Shane Miniger, a Hughson, Calif., native and a gun truck driver for 2nd Plt., Battery A, 1st Bn., 143rd FA.

“Maybe they will have a little bit of a different opinion about troops in this country and know that we’re here to help out and affect them in some positive ways,” Miniger added. **STF**



Weaver, who is a teacher in the civilian world, organized a drive at his school back in California to collect school supplies after he saw the need Iraqi schools had for basic materials during a previous deployment to Iraq in 2005.

After he was given clearance to go into Assriya, the platoon distributed the initial packages, which were filled with notebook paper, pencils, colored pencils, crayons, chalk, and staplers.

“When we first came in, they only had one stapler for the whole school, and keep in mind there are about 450 students. There were no computers, no copiers,” Weaver explained.

“I have a \$1 million budget to run my school back home and here they only had one stapler. It’s an extreme situation over here,” said Staff Sgt. Richard Martinez, a squad leader in the platoon and a gun truck commander for the unit, who is also a principal at Washington School in Cloverdale Unified School District in California.

Hot Wheels



A SOLDIER'S PASSION



By Master Sgt. Benjamin Wingfield

Staff Sgt. Maude told me about a Soldier in the 68th CSSB who was into street cars, and I thought that was hip so I asked him to get me some details. If you're into hot cars and want to save some bucks, look to my man Luna for inspiration.

Spc. Reynaldo Luna is from El Centro, Calif., and his car is a 1986 Buick Regal.

"My dad knew that I wanted a Regal for a long time," wrote Luna. "He found one in San Diego and got it for me as a present."

Luna's first move was to ride his new wheels down the block to Eronos Paint Shop where the boys laid down a Nevada Silver base for the Mandarin Candy color.

"They also added gold pearl to the clear coat," stated Luna.

When the car was done, my man moved next door to the local upholstery shop where they replaced the entire interior with a tan vinyl.

Luna's plans for the future are to add two Adex hydraulic pumps with tree dumps and get some

gold leaf patterns added to his paint. This is hot! Where is Xzibit when you need him? **STF**

Wingfield Out!



"My dad knew that I wanted a Regal for a long time," wrote Luna. "He found one in San Diego and got it for me as a present."



Bonnie-Jill Laflin and Gabriel Tuite take time to pose for photos, sign autographs, and talk with Soldiers at the Mud House on Camp Taji, Iraq.

(Photo by Sgt. Stewart Brown)

Hooray for Hollywood

Story by Staff Sgt Bryant Maude

On a recent world wind tour of Iraq, entitled the “Ambassadors of Hollywood,” four stars spent seven days with Soldiers stationed in Iraq. One of their stops was at Camp Taji, and they wasted no time in getting out to visit the troops.

“It’s everything I thought it would be and nothing I thought it would be,” explained Cynthia Watros, an actress from Los Angeles. You might remember her from her roll as Kellie Newmark in the “Drew Carey Show,” Annie Dutton in the “Guiding Light,” or her most recent roll as Libby in the hit show “Lost.”

No one would have guessed she was so famous because her manner with the troops was very humble and genuine.

“I will go back to the states understanding so much clearer what you guys are doing and how well you are doing,” stated Watros. It’s not all about the war, it’s about building this place up and making sure people are safe, happy, fed, and they have fresh water, and I absolutely love seeing that.” **STF**



Actress Cynthia Watros signs an autograph for a Soldier during a recent visit to Camp Taji. (Photo by Sgt. Stewart Brown)

COMMUNITY, CONNECTION, COFFEE

Story by Spc. Andrea Merritt, 1SB, PAO

Almost a year ago, two chaplains from different units had a dream to turn a little abandoned building on Taji into a haven for Soldiers as well as others who stay on the base.

The haven came in the form of a coffee house called the "Mud House." After months of hard work from volunteers to build and keep the facility running, the dream was realized.

The Mud House was founded by Capt. Brandon Moore, the battalion chaplain for the 407th BSB, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, and Capt. Troy Morken, chaplain for the Brigade Troops Battalion, 15th Sustainment Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, in June 2007.

"I've had a blast creating and watching it grow from the ground up. I'm looking forward to getting home, but this was definitely a highlight of my deployment, being able to run this place and watch Soldiers have fun," said Moore.

Before the coffee house officially opened, the little white building was hardly noticeable. It was nothing more than a shack that blended in with the drab scenery surrounding it.

Soldiers from all different units volunteered their time and worked to renovate the building. They painted it, built a deck on one side of the Mud House as well as a rooftop deck with stairs leading to it.

Churches in the states donated supplies to the Mud House. They sent different flavors of coffee, a coffee machine, cups, and cigars.

Soldiers towed a truck from a junkyard to put in front of the Mud House and welded a stage onto it so that people with musical talent would have a place to perform on open mic night.

Staff Sgt. Sam Negus, a Gainesville, Texas, native and mortuary affairs sergeant with the 407th BSB, 2nd BCT, 82nd Airborne Div., was the first to ever perform at the Mud House.

"When I first performed, there was no stage, only a seat in the dark," Negus recalled. "I only knew one song and the chaplain said, 'Play it again. More people will start showing up,' and they did." >> Pg. 16



Soldier on the Street

We asked Soldiers the following question: "What is your favorite T.V. show here?"



"Paper Chase"; It's about law students and all the cases they solve as students."

Capt. Steven Doyle, 1st Bn., 143rd FA Chaplin



"The 'Ultimate Fighter'; It's the best show because of the fighting moves and all the hard core training they do."

Sgt. Juan Flores, HHB, 1st Bn., 143rd FA

"CSI is the best show out there. It deals with sometimes hard to crack murder cases and drug trafficking."

Spc. Suzanne Ganitano, HHB, 1st Bn. 143rd FA



» Attendance at the coffee shop grew from about 15 people on "Open Mic Nights" to about 100. "The music has been a big thing that's drawn people. It's a way to forget you're in Iraq for a little while," Moore said.

The 15th SB redeployed to Fort Hood, Texas, in October 2007 and the 407th BSB returned to Fort Bragg, N.C., in March 2008.

Since Moore will be returning home, he has chosen Capt. Larry Vanhook, a Temple, Texas, native and the chaplain of the Special Troops Battalion, 1st Sustainment Brigade, to continue the dream. Moore handed the keys to the Mud House over to Vanhook on March 1.

"Basically, we want to preserve and enhance the vision of Chaplain Moore and Chaplain Morken, and that is to provide Soldiers a place of community, connection, and coffee," said Vanhook.

"More than that is to provide a place where we as chaplains can have visibility and access to Soldiers that we wouldn't otherwise have ... because we want to be an influence, and we want to be a good influence for Soldiers," Vanhook continued.

The Mud House has been a place where not only Soldiers, but civilians, third-country nationals, local nationals, and members of other Coalition Forces often stop by to enjoy a cup of coffee, music, or a game of cards.

"That's what makes this unique out of any other place on Taji. Everyone can come," said Moore, who ran a coffee shop back in Fort Bragg before he deployed.

It has simply been a place where different types of people on Taji could relax and enjoy each others company.

"The thing I will take away from here most of all is fellowship," said Negus. "Through this deployment, it's been really hard; especially dealing with my fallen comrades and being away from loved ones. Coming together as a whole with all the Soldiers, it was a lot easier to get by with the deployment."

"It's been hard times, but when you have somebody beside you to cheer you up, it helps," Negus added. 



Staff Sgt. Sam Negus performs during "Open Mic Night" at the Mud House.

(Photo by Spc. Andrea Merritt)



68th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion

Lt. Col. Darrell Duckworth, Commander

SLCR TEAMS

help Soldiers stay fresh and clean

Story by Spc. Andrea Merritt

A few months ago, the ability to take a nice, hot shower after a long day of conducting patrols and other missions did not exist for the Soldiers on Patrol Base Murray.

Before help arrived, the base was not equipped with shower and laundry facilities. Soldiers had to make due with make-shift showers, which often left them and their morale out in the cold. >> Pg. 19

» “Before the shower and laundry units came in, all we had for showers were wooden hut structures, and we would use bottled-water (to wash up),” said Tallahassee, Fla., native Spc. Jacob Kersey, a medic attached to Company C, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division.

“When it was cold outside and all you could expect was a bottled-water shower, we dreaded it,” Kersey added.

At one point, they didn’t know when their next shower would be because the supply of bottled-water became limited. There was not enough water for the Soldiers to drink and bathe with, so they often found themselves making a choice of which was more important.

In order to have clean clothes, Soldiers either had to wash them by hand or send them on a convoy to Forward Operating Base Falcon, then wait three to four days to get them back.

In November, a team of shower, laundry, and clothing repair (SLCR) specialists from the 549th Quartermaster Company, 68th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, which is attached to the 1st Sustainment Brigade, arrived to PB Murray from Camp Liberty, Iraq, to install and operate shower and laundry systems.

Within 24 hours of their arrival, the SLCR team had set up a functional site and boosted the morale of the Soldiers on the base.

“When you’re coming off a hard day’s work and you can take a shower and relax, it’s awesome,” Kersey said.

Now, Soldiers on PB Murray enjoy hot showers and they only have to wait 24 hours to get their clothes back from the laundry.

“When we originally got here, we had taken some of the cold showers they were experiencing and it wasn’t fun at all,” said Pfc. Todd Tyler, a Sarasota, Fla., native and SLCR specialist with the 549th QM Co., 68th CSSB.

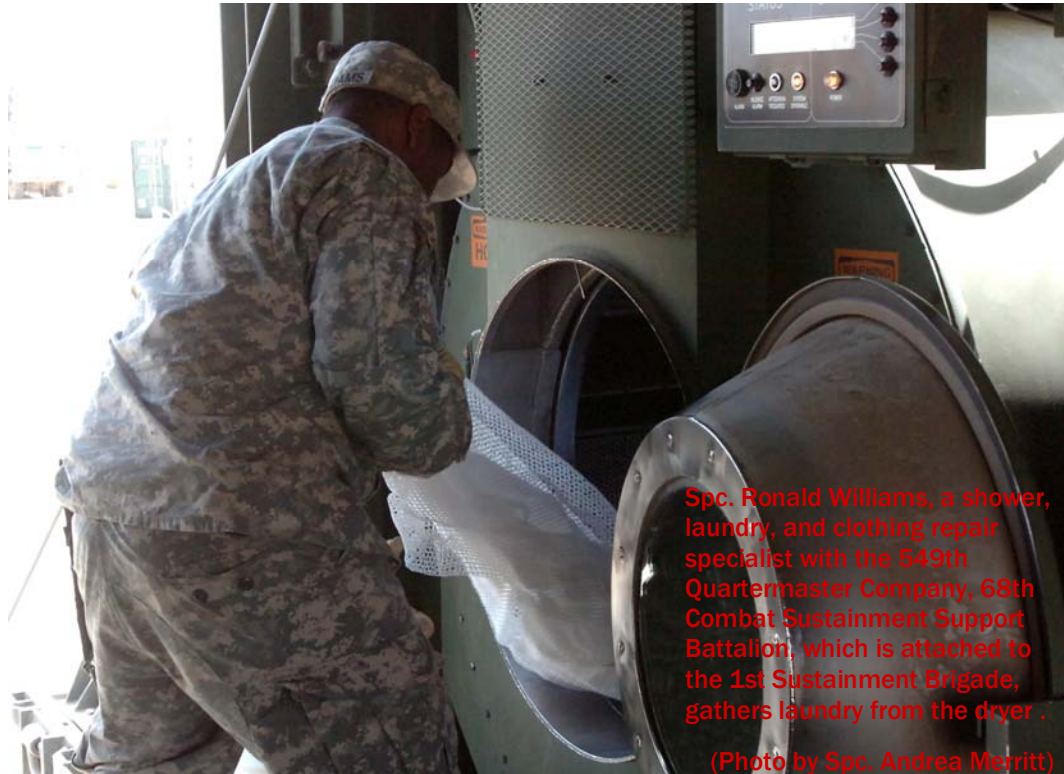
“Getting the opportunity to come out here and set up the hot showers and the laundry site was nice,” Tyler said. “It’s given me a little bit of pride in our (military occupation specialty).”

The 68th CSSB has SLCR teams in eight different

locations in Iraq servicing thousands of Multi-National Division – Baghdad and Multi-National Division – Central Soldiers on a daily basis.

The SLCR team in Iskandariyah is as highly praised and appreciated as the one at PB Murray.

“In my 19 years of service, being both enlisted and officer, this is some of the best support we have ever received,” said Maj. John Peebles, the battalion executive officer for 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division.



Spc. Ronald Williams, a shower, laundry, and clothing repair specialist with the 549th Quartermaster Company, 68th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, which is attached to the 1st Sustainment Brigade, gathers laundry from the dryer.

(Photo by Spc. Andrea Merritt)

“They are very timely, extremely professional, and it’s just a joy to work with them ... They are absolutely 100 percent part of the solution of running successful combat operations here,” Peebles said of the 549th QM Co. SLCR team on Iskandariyah.

Although the 549th QM Co. is a new unit that was stood up about a year ago, the Soldiers have proven they can get the job done efficiently. They are happy with the work they do and so are their customers.

“I think we run a first-class operation. I’m glad we’re here to help the Soldiers who go outside the wire,” said Staff Sgt. Laskiasha Fitzgerald, the laundry section sergeant for the 549th QM Co. SLCR team at Iskandariyah.

“We get multiple Soldiers that thank us for what we’re doing out here and that always makes us feel good,” Fitzgerald said. **STF**



Two Iraqi Soldiers drive off in an M1114 HMMWV that was transferred from the U.S. Army to the Iraqi Security Forces after their graduation from the three-day Drivers Training Course at the Iraqi Army Service Support Institute on Taji March 18.

(Photo by Spc. Andrea Merritt)

U.S. Army transfers HMMWVs to ISF

Story by Spc. Andrea Merritt, 1st SB, PAO

Ninety Iraqi Soldiers from the 5th Iraqi Army Division stood proudly on the parade field during their graduation from the Iraqi Army Service Support Institute's Drivers Training Course on March 13.

Not only did they have the honor of being the first Iraqi Soldiers to go through the three-day course, but after graduation, they drove off the field in the first 45 M1114 HMMWVs transferred from the U.S. Army to the Iraqi Army.

"These HMMWVs have served as work horses for the United States military and will now serve the Iraqi Security Forces just as well," said Lt. Gen. James Dubik, the Commanding General of Multi-National Security Transition Command – Iraq. >> Pg. 21



IRAQI SECURITY FORCES



Yasir, a native of Iraq, and mechanic, teaches other Iraqi students how to check transmission fluid on an up-armored M1114 humvee. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Bryant Maude)

“The Iraqi Security Forces will have the improved capability fighting against those who seek to do harm against this nation and its people,” Dubik said.

The drivers training program at IASSI is part of the U.S. Army’s HMMWV fielding initiative, where the U.S. plans to transfer 8,500 vehicles to Iraqi Security Forces in the next two years.

When U.S. Army units began trading in their HMMWVs for the new Mine-Resistant, Ambush-Protected vehicles, the HMMWVs were given to Foreign Military Sales and sold to the Iraqi Army.

“As the MRAPs were fielded to the U.S. Army, it created a situation where we had an excess capacity of up-armored HMMWVs. So what happened was discussions were made at high levels within the Army to rather than move these up-armored HMMWVs back to the U.S., (we would) sell them through the Foreign Military Sales to the Iraqi government to go to the Iraqi Army,” said Col. Kevin O’Connell, the commander of the 1st Sustainment Brigade.

“The 1st Sustainment Brigade’s involvement is the transportation of the MRAPs between VBC and Taji for fielding to units within (Multi-National Division – Baghdad),” said O’Connell.

As the 1st SB helps field MRAPs to U.S. units, the HMMWVs that are transferred to the ISF undergo a refurbishment process to ensure the Iraqis receive quality vehicles.

When U.S. military units first turn-in the HMMWV, the Redistribution Property Assistance Team collects the vehicles and makes sure they meet the requirements to be refurbished.

The HMMWV has to have a gunner’s protection kit, all basic items of issue need to be present, and the vehicle can only be in need of minor repairs.

After the vehicles are deemed it to refurbish, all sensitive items are taken out of them. The chairs and floor mats are also taken out of the vehicles so that they can be washed inside and out.

Sometimes during the process of stripping the HMMWVs, damage to the frame is found. If this happens, the vehicle is not refurbished, but used for parts for other HMMWVs.

“Nothing goes to waste in this program,” said U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Paul Hasley, the officer in charge of logistical support operations for Multi-National Security Transition Command – Iraq.

Once the HMMWVs are washed, they undergo a technical inspection to find any mechanical problems the vehicles may have. Depending on the issues the vehicles have, they are either sent to the speed line or heavy line when they go in for maintenance.

At the maintenance bay, Iraqi local nationals have been trained to work on the HMMWVs. More than 1,500 people applied for the job, but only 300 were hired and another 200 workers are scheduled to be employed.

“The whole mindset is (that) by the time the civilians get done with the 8,500 HMMWVs, they will be specialized on how to fix or repair the M1114s,” said Hasley. “We’re quite impressed with their work standards ... It’s quite enjoyable because instead of asking them to fix something, they fix things without being told.”

On the speed line, all HMMWVs have 20 parts that are mandatory for the mechanics to replace, such as the swing arms, ball joints, springs, oil and air filters, and serpentine belts. The fluids and electrical system are also checked on the speed line.

The heavy line is reserved for vehicles in need of major repairs, such as engine or transmission problems.

After the repairs are complete and the mandatory replacement parts are put on, the HMMWVs are put through a five-mile road test to check the brakes and gears.

“We make sure we have a sound vehicle after we’ve replaced all the parts,” said Hasley.

When the road test is complete and no extra repairs are needed, the HMMWVs are taken to the paint shop. At the paint shop, the HMMWVs are transformed from a plain, tan color to a desert camouflage.

The Iraqi flag is plastered on the front doors of the HMMWVs, officially making it an ISF vehicle.

By the time Iraqi soldiers attend the Drivers Training Course, the refurbished vehicles are ready to be signed for.

During the three-day course, the Iraqis learn to operate and maintain their new vehicles, which is a huge step for many of them considering many of the ISF Soldiers who go through the course have never had a driver’s license.

“IASSI actually has a hard chore because they have to teach them to drive responsibly and to take care of their vehicle,” said Hasley.

“We also trained the Iraqi Security Forces to drive and perform preventative maintenance checks in an effort to keep the vehicles at a high-quality state of readiness. The quality of these vehicles is very good,” said O’Connell.

In the weeks since the first class graduated from the course at IASSI, two more classes have graduated and about 50 more HMMWVs have been fielded to the ISF.

In approximately two years, the ISF will own more than 8,500 HMMWVs, which is an upgrade from the pick-up trucks with guns mounted on the back that they used to use on convoys.

They will be more protected in their efforts to rid Iraq of the terrorists and extremists who try to tear the country apart.



168th Brigade Support Battalion

Lt. Col. Todd Heussner, Commander

RUNNING MATES

Story by Spc. Marcus Johnson, Company F,

151st Inf., 168th BSB, 1st SB, UPAR

Cpl. Scott Bieri, a native of Danville, Ind., is a maintenance technician for Company F, 151st Infantry, 168th Brigade Support Battalion, 1st Sustainment Brigade. He works days, while Cpl. Robert Strebe, a native of Laporte, Ind., and a vehicle commander for Co. F, 151st Inf., works nights. This difference in schedule would normally prevent them from being friends; however, the two do have a lot in common; they both are corporals and they both love to run.

Before Company F, 151st Inf., deployed in May 2007, both Strebe and Bieri worked together in the supply section as specialists, assisting the company supply sergeant in inventories, showdown inspections, and a dozen other different tasks necessary to prepare the unit for its deployment.

During the mobilization process at Fort Dix, N.J., Strebe was transferred to a line platoon and assigned to a vehicle commander position. "We had different duties and different hours," said Bieri, "but we still found time to run."

As it turned out, it was time well spent. Bieri had failed a diagnostic Army Physical Fitness Test in June 2007. In order to improve his score, both Bieri and Strebe developed a workout program that not only resulted in marked improvement, but also drew the attention of their unit leaders.

Impressed with the initiative and leadership potential of both Soldiers, Capt. Steven Bell, company commander for Company F, 151st Inf., promoted both of them to the rank of Corporal.

After a couple of months in Iraq, Bieri and Strebe discovered that Victory Base Complex sponsors monthly

competitive runs.

"These races are very popular," Strebe said, "Often times, there are as many as four to five hundred people participating in one race." The two are a regular turnout at almost every event, provided mission requirements allow them to participate.

Strebe is currently in Kuwait, assisting in the training of the unit that is set to replace Co. F, 151st Inf., in late April. However, Bieri has no intention of neglecting a good tradition. On March 30, another Fun Run is scheduled for Victory Base, and Bieri is making plans to attend. **STF**



Runner number 139 Cpl. Scott Bieri, a native of Danville, Ind., is a maintenance technician for Company F, 151st Infantry, 168th Brigade Support Battalion, 1st Sustainment Brigade and runner number 224 Cpl. Robert Strebe, a native of Laporte, Ind., and a vehicle commander for Co. F, 151st Inf., started running together as a result of an impending Army physical fitness test that they were trying to pass.

(Photo by Spc. Marcus Johnson)



Chaplain's Thoughts

Chaplain Terrence E. Hayes, Brigade Chaplain



Maj. Terry Hayes, a Grants Pass, Ore., native and the 1st Sustainment Brigade chaplain, plays guitar as members of unit ministry teams from the brigade's subordinate battalions sing at the close of the prayer breakfast.

(Photo by Spc. Andrea Merritt)

Spiritual Fitness

Story by Spc. Andrea Merritt, 1st SB, PAO

Leaders and Soldiers of the 1st Sustainment Brigade rose early in the morning to join together for the brigade's first prayer breakfast, which was held at the Cantigny Dining Facility on March 18.

bottom drops out, look up," Knox said during his message. "When you look up and get a glimpse of God and his glory, you get the strength to make it."

After the message, Col. Kevin O'Connell, the commander of the 1st SB, said a few words and presented participants a commander's coin for excellence.

"I think it's important for people to draw aside on a regular basis and just be reminded of the importance of spiritual values

At the beginning of the program, guests enjoyed a medley of praise songs from the Praise and Worship Team, a praise team on Taji.

During the event, guests also heard an inspirational message from guest speaker Maj. Mark Knox, the chaplain for the 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division.

He spoke to listeners about staying encouraged through the tough times a deployment may bring.

"No matter where you are, no matter how it comes, when the

"You're mentally fit and physically fit, and the purpose of this is for us to work out spiritual fitness," O'Connell said.

At the close of the prayer breakfast, members of the 1st SB's unit ministry teams sang patriotic tunes.

"I think it's important for people to draw aside on a regular basis and just be reminded of the importance of spiritual values and of prayer, whatever their faith background may be," said Maj. Terry Hayes, and Grants Pass, Ore., native and the 1st SB chaplain.

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CW3 Russell Campbell, the command food service technician for the 1st Sustainment Brigade. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Bryant Maude)