

Commander's Corner

Col. Kevin G. O'Connell, Commander

Dear First Sustainment Brigade Soldiers and Families,

Families are important and a high priority of the 1st SB. They are always on our minds and knowing they are safe and being well taken care of is a combat multiplier. If a Soldier doesn't have to worry about his Family, he can focus 100 percent on mission accomplishment. That doesn't mean the Family is not always on the Soldiers mind, though. I was raised in a large Family in Clinton, Maryland, near Washington, D.C., with six kids spread out over a 20-year timeframe. My father died in 1984, but my mother is still alive at 87 years old, and lives in Virginia. I have brothers in Wisconsin, Virginia, Tennessee, and Maryland, and a sister in Montana. I have been married for 27 years to my high school sweetheart, who lives at Ft. Riley, Kan. We have a Family of our own now with two kids, two cats, and a dog. Our son is an Army 2nd Lt. at Fort Carson, Colo., and our daughter graduates from college in June and will be working in Pasadena, Calif. Even though I'm in the Army and always seem to be busy, I am lucky that I have been able to attend both our kids' high school and college graduations. I'll go to my daughter's graduation in June while I'm on R&R leave and will be able to spend time with the Family. It's always good to be with Family, and if you think about it, that's the reason we are here in Iraq -- to make the world a safer place for our children and grandchildren. We can't thank the Families enough for all they do to support their Soldiers and units. The volunteer work, care packages, cards, and letters do not go unnoticed, and we greatly appreciate all the support. Your Families want to hear that you're safe and well and I encourage you to send pictures, do a VTC, send letters, videos, and e-mails, share your unit newsletters, and be creative in finding ways to tell them ➤



Star Power: AMC leader hears sustainment initiatives

*Story by Sgt. Jennifer Schweizer
1st SB, PAO*

Col. Kevin G. O'Connell, a Clinton, Md., native, and commander of the 1st Sustainment Brigade, and his key staff played host to some very senior leaders on May 22.

"Today was the most stars we've had in our conference room at one time ... nine stars," said O'Connell.

The list of guests included Gen. Benjamin Griffin, the commanding general of the US Army Materiel Command, Lt. Gen. Ann Dunwoody, the Army G-4, and Maj. Gen. Robert Radin, the commanding general of the Army Sustainment Command.

The generals were accompanied by Command Sgt. Maj. Jeffrey Mellinger, command sergeant major for the Army Materiel Command, and Mr. Jeffrey Parsons, the executive director of Army Contracting Command - Provisional.

"It was great to have this august group of Army senior leaders able to come see us," said O'Connell. "They were very interested in the operations we are

conducting in support of MNC-I. More importantly, (they) wanted to hear about our initiatives and issues."

The generals spent about an hour with the brigade team and were briefed on a wide variety of logistics topics. "We discussed Iraqi self-reliance, AMC support, and the Brigade's contracting coordination cell model, which in turn may be used as the template for other Army sustainment brigades," said Lt. Col. Hielke "Hike" Welling, a Hackettstown, N.J., native, and the officer-in-charge for support operations at the 1st Sust. Bde.

"We had a great discussion on contracting which presents a very complex set of issues while deployed to Iraq, and all the 1st Sustainment Brigade Soldiers involved in the briefing did an awesome job," stated O'Connell. "As a result of our team's hard work and application of talent, in addition to providing world-class sustainment support to the warfighter, the Brigade is helping shape the future of the Army in the contracting, financial management, human resources, and Iraqi security force partnership arenas," concluded O'Connell. **STF**

CSM Time

CSM Frank G. Cardoza



Super Team

» what you are doing and how you are doing. I can tell you are doing great and are having a strategic impact on the security of Baghdad and Iraq. Keep on Soldiering with a positive attitude and perseverance... you are a critical part of the Brigade team.

Col. O'Connell

HAPPY FATHERS DAY!



Have you got your Hooah card yet?



Battlefield promotion

Making 1SB history

Story by Sgt. Jennifer Schweizer 1st SB, PAO

Originally designed during World War I to help fill the ranks due to immense losses, the battlefield promotion system has been tucked away for some time. The Department of the Army has reactivated this program as a one-year pilot program in order to give Soldiers, who exemplify extraordinary performance while engaged in combat operations, the chance to advance to the next rank without meeting the normal requirements. This program allows one promotion per Soldier, up to the rank of staff sergeant, for those who excel while performing duties in a level above the rank they wear. Recently, the military personnel message system released » Pg. 25



**1st Sustainment Brigade
Public Affairs Office**

**Commander:
Col. Kevin O'Connell**

**Command Sergeant Major:
Command Sgt. Maj. Frank Cardoza**

**Editor:
Staff Sgt. Bryant Maude**

**Staff Writers:
Sgt. Jennifer Schweizer
Spc. Andrea Merritt
Spc. Michele Meadows**

The Sustainment Times Forward is an authorized publication for the U.S. Army. Contents of The Sustainment Times Forward are not official views of the Army or the 1st Sustainment Brigade. The appearance of advertising in this publication does not constitute endorsement by the Department of the Army, the 1st Sustainment Brigade, or The Sustainment Times Forward of the products and services advertised.

The editorial content of The Sustainment Times Forward is prepared, edited, provided and approved by the 316th Expeditionary Command Public Affairs Office.

The Sustainment Brigade Times welcomes columns, commentaries, articles, letters, and photos from readers.

Contact us at Bryant.maude@Iraq.centcom.mil

Check us out online at www.1ID.army.mil

Cover: Susan D. Tyree, of Brooklyn, Ark., at graduation.



Mission to Trebil

PART ONE: Camp Korean Village

Story by Staff Sgt. Bryant Maude

1st SB, PAO

Col. Kevin O'Connell, commander of the 1st Sustainment Brigade, smiled and kind of laughed a bit when he informed me it would take at least a week to get to Trebil; and he wasn't kidding - seven days to be exact.

Trebil is a small outpost along the Iraq / Jordan border and I was traveling there to visit the 266th Movement Control Team, a unit that originates from Fort Riley, Kan., under the 1st SB. "I want you to cover each of our units from Riley and the 266th is one of them," said O'Connell during our meeting. So off I went; bags packed and camera in hand.

Traveling from Camp Taji to Al Asad was a piece of cake. But after four days in a hot tent, and multiple failed attempts to get a flight to Trebil, I decided to look for alternate means of transportation out of there.

I inquired at the flight desk, made

a few phone calls, and the next day I hitched a ride with Company D, 2nd Battalion, 153rd Infantry Regiment, an Arkansas National Guard unit attached to the 39th Brigade Combat Team, 507th Corps Support Group, 316th Expeditionary Command, who was escorting trucks from Al Asad to Trebil. The next morning, I was happy I did. "At least I'm moving in the right direction," I thought.

Company D is a highly-skilled group of Soldiers brought together in an effort to provide convoy security for Multi-National Forces-West. They are a diverse group of national guardsmen with a large mix of job specialties.

"I'm originally a logistics specialist," said Staff Sgt. Johnny Woodley, a Little Rock, Ark., native, and team leader for Company D. Woodley and his two Soldiers made room in their truck, without complaint, and made me feel right at home during our two-day trip to Trebil.

Our first stop was several hundred miles southwest of Al Asad at a small outpost called Camp Korean Village (CKV). Occupied by Ma-

rines, with a smattering of Army Soldiers, and civilians, CKV is a transportation stop for convoys traveling along Main Supply Route Mobile.

I inquired about the unusual name and discovered it was named after the Korean workers who built the freeway years ago when Saddam was in power. The old faded green brick buildings stick out like a sore thumb next to the newly built wood Quonset huts and tents. It's here where I made my initial contact with members of the 266th MCT.

Capt. Michael Huber, a Virginia Beach, Va., native, the executive officer for the 266th MCT, attached to the 330th Movement Control Battalion, 316th Expeditionary Command, arrived in theater in April 2007 and was initially stationed in Camp Taji, Iraq, where they ran the passenger terminal.

"Our initial mission was to support fixed-winged operations into Taji," recalled Huber.

Six weeks later, the mission at Taji changed, and as a result, the 266th MCT was split up. The main body went to Trebil and a small element to Al Asad.

"At least I'm moving in the right direction!"

"I put him [CPT Huber] there [Al Asad] mainly because it was just he and I as officers at the time; and it's a big mission, so I felt he needed to be there," stated Capt. Fredrick Kelo, a Gurney, Ill., native, and the detachment commander for the 266th MCT.

Huber, a political science major from Christopher Newport, a small college located just outside of Fort Eustis, Va., is no stranger to deployments. After college, he was commissioned in the Transportation Corps. However, during his first few years in the Army, he served with the 1st Infantry Division detailed as an Armor officer where he deployed to Iraq.

"This is my second deployment," stated Huber. "And being >>>

A fast break

» stationed at Al Asad was good duty.”

While in Al Asad, his team supported the 507th Corps Support Group, managed 70 civilian personnel to include 20 linguists, and provided critical oversight on the RFI tags. They pushed about 7,000 trucks per month thru Al Asad bound for 13 different destinations throughout MNF-W; places like Fallujah, Ramadi, Taq Qadum, Habbaniyah, etc.

“We supported the war fighters with all ten classes of supply less bullets and medical supplies,” said Huber.

Some of the challenges they faced at Al Asad were dealing with the local nationals and all 7,000 trucks coming and going in various states of disarray. They also dealt with their medical needs.

“All our people are combat lifesaver qualified, so we either treat them ourselves or send them to the Combat Support Hospital. However, when we send them to the CSH, we have to provide an escort and that takes one of our personnel off the mission,” affirmed Huber.

But, this little extra touch was necessary, in his opinion, to keep the local nationals happy. He felt that without the local national drivers, the Army “wouldn’t have the stuff we need. Our dining facilities wouldn’t



Checking the manifest

have food, our PX shelves would be empty, we wouldn’t have the lumber we need to build things like (Southwest Asia) Huts, etc... We try to keep them happy so we can support the fight.”

After ten months of hard work and long hours at Al Asad, the small band of Soldiers moved a third time to CKV were they hope to ride out the remainder of their 15-month tour.

Huber speaks a good bit of Arabic now and enjoys learning not only the language but the culture. His team spends a lot of time out in the yard with the Jordanian drivers, and they will sit and chat with them on occasion.

“They all have their own little kitchens attached to their trucks, so we drink Chi and eat with them sometimes,” smiled Huber.

Before I left to Trebil, I asked Huber if it’s been quiet in this part of Iraq, and he confirmed that it had.

“I forgot what a mortar sounds like ... The Marines have done a good job keeping it quiet,” declared Huber.

The following day started early. Huber’s crew had all 95 local national trucks lined up, cleared of any last minute maintenance issues, and ready to roll out the gates. We loaded up the security vehicles, made final checks of gear, and pulled out of the local national yard bound for the Jordan border.

About two hours later, our convoy pulled into the Trebil truck yard where I was dropped off by my friends at Company D and picked up by Staff Sgt. Ethan Braud, a New Orleans native and a movement control supervisor with the 266th MCT. “Are you the PAO?” he asked. “Yes, I am,” I replied. He tossed my bags onto the gator and smiled. “Welcome to Trebil,” and took off down the dusty road.

After seven days of traveling, I was happy to know that I had arrived and was looking forward to meeting the rest of the 266th MCT.



Trebil

PART TWO: Trebil at last

Located a few hundred meters east of Jordan on a very small plot of dirt in the shadows of a tall Muslim prayer tower, sits Trebil, an outpost that houses 120 Soldiers, Marines, and civilians who ensure cargo arriving from Jordan en-route to Coalition Forces in Iraq and to the warfighters located in Multi-National Forces-West, gets through without a hitch.

“Welcome to Trebil.”

After seven days of travel, I was happy to finally arrive in Trebil, and I wasn’t sure what to expect. I was greeted by Staff Sgt. Ethan Braud, a New Orleans native and movement control supervisor, with the 266th MCT, and escorted down some winding, dusty roads into the maze of small buildings, wood huts, and tents they call home.

Our first stop, after dropping my gear in a room, was the main living area where I was delivered to the office of Capt. Frederick Kelo, the commander of the 266th MCT, and a Gurney, Ill., native.

Kelo graduated with a meteorologist degree from Iowa State University and was later »

» commissioned in the Army as a Transportation Corps officer in 2003. He was working in the supply office at the 1st Infantry Division in the early months of 2007, when he received his three-weeks notification to deploy.

“It took me by surprise,” said Kelo. “Originally I was thinking we would be up at the border of Turkey.” He discovered later that his team would be going to Camp Taji to manage fixed-winged operations in and out of the airfield.

His 18-person team arrived in Camp Taji and six weeks later, their airfield mission was scrubbed and their team was split in two. Five members went to Al Asad and the rest of them went to Trebil.

“Originally I was thinking we would be up at the border of Turkey.”

“The mission of the 266th MCT at Trebil is to control the movement of cargo and personnel through the border separating Jordan and Iraq,” stated Sgt. 1st Class Patrick Lynch, an Enfield, Conn., native and detachment first sergeant for the 266th MCT.



Managing the yard

Lynch is a friendly guy with a quick smile who knows a great deal about the mission and his Soldiers.

There was a lot for the Soldiers to learn early on and no real formal training was offered by the unit they replaced. Kelo and his team interact with about a dozen agencies and 35 private companies, and as a result, they have had to learn as they go.

“Since there’s so many variables from day to day, you learn to adjust fire, as needed,” replied Kelo.

Life in Trebil took a little getting used to at first. Since there is no real life support for the Soldiers, they learn to be content with what they have.

“Mail runs every two weeks or so, if you’re lucky, and the mobile PX pulls into Trebil once a month, if it makes it,” said Kelo.

“There’s not much selection other than cigarettes, chips, and sodas,” explained Lynch. “The guys will go buy something just because it’s something to do.”

To pass the time, Soldiers read, e-mail friends and Family, play basketball, ping pong, and video



Way to relax

games.

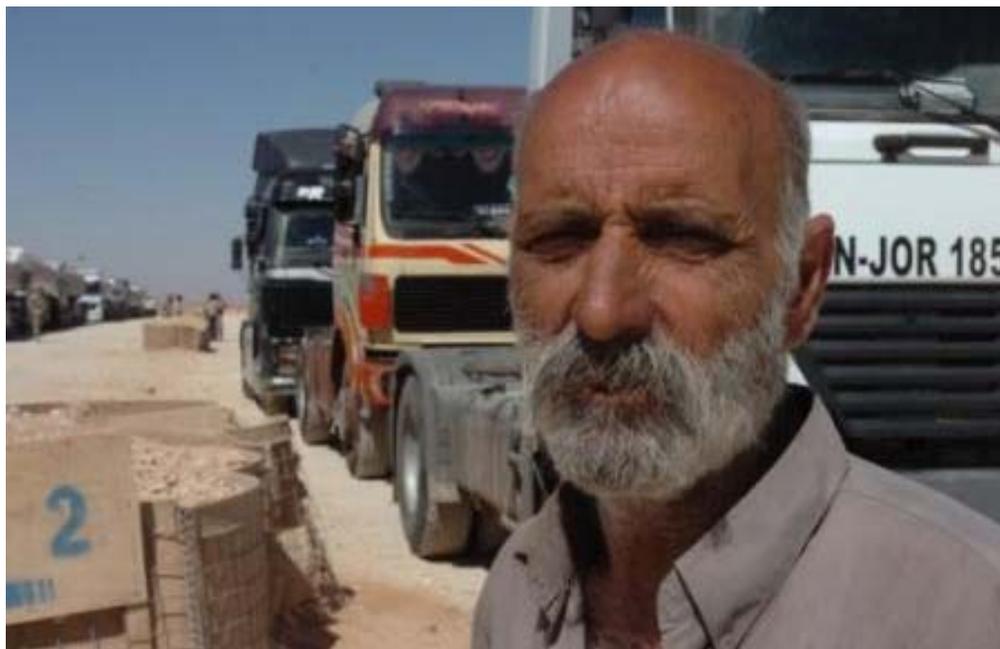
“I’m the best Halo player in MNF — West,” said 1st Lt. Brandon Lundrum, a Newport News, Va., native, and the support officer for the 266th MCT. Lundrum gave me the two-dollar tour of the post when I arrived, and I was welcomed by everyone. It felt more like a family than a duty assignment.

As I interacted with the Soldiers at Trebil, I found that most of them were content with the slow pace and relaxed environment.

“It’s better to be at a small post like this for me,” said Pfc. Darrell Wilson, a San Antonio native and movement control specialist, “even if we don’t get the PX that often.”

Lots of improvements have been made at Trebil since they arrived a year ago. One of the early wins was reducing the turn-around-time for the security escort teams coming in and out of Trebil by five hours. Five hours may not seem like much, but for Soldiers who are on the road for four days, that five hours makes the difference of them getting a hot meal in Camp Korean Village or a cold one at Trebil.

Instrumental in this accomplishment was Staff Sgt. Braud, a husband and father of two boys. Braud arrived a few weeks after the rest of the team, but after some »



Rebhi the driver

» careful observation, he started conducting informal meetings between the various elements involved in the hand-off process to see if he could make improvements on the way trucks moved in and out of the yard.

“I noticed a lot of information on the manifests that was confusing and not very important to getting trucks in and out,” said Braud. He eliminated unneeded information on the manifest making it simpler to read and understand, and as a result, the process sped up. “I wanted anyone to be able to look at the manifest, read it, and without any help, understand exactly where any vehicle was in the yard, regardless if they did this job or not,” stated Braud.

“I noticed a lot of information on the manifests that was confusing and not very important to getting trucks in and out.”

“Our Soldiers have done an outstanding job at building the manifests,” stated Kelo. “The accuracy and proficiency of how they do the task is important because this is the first time these trucks enter

Iraq, and what the Soldiers mark down on the manifest gets passed along to all the other locations in Iraq they travel to.”

A second win for the team was reducing fuel pilfering by an estimated \$75 million a year. Shortly after they arrived, it was brought to their attention by the 507th CSG commander that there was a massive amount of fuel disappearing somewhere between the border and them, the customer. Kelo and his team set out to discover why. “Everyone knew it was happening, but no one knew to what degree,” stated Kelo.

The Soldiers started really scrutinizing everything on the trucks and paid close attention to the seals on the tanks. It was discovered that the seals were being broken along the route. The drivers would sell up to 500,000 gallons of fuel, and replace the seal without anyone catching on.

“The Soldiers started paying attention to the seals,” recalled Kelo. “And you couldn’t just stop 70 percent of the trucks and turn them around because we needed the fuel to support the mission. So we had to get the outside agencies and the Jordanians involved.”

It was discovered that the seal

manager in Jordan was taking bribes and selling extra seals to the drivers. People were fired, new safeguards were put into place, and the pilfering was reduced to almost none.

“The drivers know now that if they do things that are illegal, they will be removed from the list of drivers who can cross into Iraq, so they are very careful to do what’s right,” stated Kelo.

“You couldn’t just stop 70 percent of the trucks and turn them around.”

“They don’t want to be banned,” said Lynch.

To this day, the Soldiers are on the look-out for anything that looks suspicious.

As the sun set on my second day in Trebil, and I sat outside my room, I discovered a quiet calm that I found refreshing and although it might be difficult to get mail, and there’s no Taco Bell, Subway, or Green Bean Coffee nearby, I couldn’t help but think that it might not be a bad place to be stationed. **STF**



Mess and mail

PART THREE: Out with the Marines

Can be found on-line at:
www.1ID.army.mil/1stSustainmentBDE

Special Troops Battalion

Lt. Col. Robert D. Brem, Commander



Ladies Bible study

Story by Kimberly Howard

When the concept of writing an article about how things are going on the home front came about, it seemed like a daunting task. How could the article be written without making it sound like a pity party for the spouses? Finally, I decided to ask a few spouses about the worst *and* best things about the deployment.

From my standpoint, I have come to realize that the deployment has pulled me closer to the spouses of some of the other Soldiers. When I had to be briefly hospitalized, my friends immediately jumped in to take care of my three children. My neighbors kept an eye on my house and let me know of any strange comings and goings. Fraternity boys have come and raked my leaves. Mormon missionaries shoveled my driveway every time it snowed during the winter. My Bible study group and another organization I belong to have brought meals during my toughest times. And there have

been really hard times. From after Christmas until April, I didn't think I was going to make it. There were lots of tears on the phone between here and Iraq. It was a truly miserable time where all I could do was to pray that I would make it day by day. Even in that I found strength, though. JR and I had to communicate in new ways and solve problems together long distance. With so much time apart, we have been forced to really talk to each other about things besides what is immediately going on. I think our faith in our marriage and God has grown throughout the time we have been separated. I have learned that I have individual strength and *can* handle plumbing problems, ice storm damage, sick children, holidays, broken bones, dead appliances, torn ligaments, car problems, and much, much more by myself. All of that being said, December cannot come soon enough!

Other spouses were also able to find a brighter side of the separation. Tina VanHook says, "I have learned

to rely more on Christ and let Him help me and fulfill my needs while my husband's gone." On the not so bright side, there was "Living through the ice storm. Living with no electricity, being cold and traveling so Family could help me." She has also created a Bible study group for Battalion spouses, works out each day, and shuttles her three kids around.

Monica Neypes says, "I have discovered how strong I am. I can make it through difficult times and situations with grace and confidence even when I am exhausted and overwhelmed." The hardest part of the deployment for her is that, "I am exhausted taking care of the kids, cleaning the house, and getting through illness. There is no one to help or to take over or provide support, and that is so hard."

For Kim Buchholz, "I have been able to discover a depth to our relationship that I have never experienced before. >> Pg. 10

Sand Storms in Taji

Story by Capt. Xarhya Wulf

Special Troops Battalion

If you live on or around Camp Taji, you've probably noticed the increased frequency of dust storms sweeping through here in the past month. If you're like me, you probably wondered why and how does it impact our mission.

I sat down and did a little research and found out the first part of my question fairly quickly. There is a scientific study that was conducted in 2000 by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association that shows dust activity shifts with the season. In Iraq, dust activity rises tremendously in the late spring and summer, but dramatically declines in the winter.

The three major sources of aerosols in the atmosphere are desert dust, smoke from biomass burning, and anthropogenic air pollution. These three sources make up particles that move through the air via wind. Dust storms contain small particles moving through long distances with a sustained wind speed of up to 35 knots, whereas sandstorms are small and large particles moving through the area closer to the surface with a sustained wind speed of over 40 knots.

The second half of my question took a little more research. There are several ways dust storms affect Soldiers and their mission. Dust and sand blowing through their areas at high rates of speed has an obvious effect in that it gets everything dirty and dusty and that is an obvious nuisance. The more important impact is the effect sand storms have on transportation.

For that reason, the Multi-National Division-Baghdad satellite weather office monitors the dust loop satellite along with the enhanced infrared satellite and can therefore predict dust and sandstorms up to 48-hours prior to its occurrence. This information is passed down to the various logistical organizations that in turn use the information to determine if and when they can operate. >>

» In the case of the 168th Brigade Support Battalion, a major mover of cargo for the 1st Sustainment Brigade in support of MND-B, when sand storms are in the area, they take into consideration the route their trucks are traveling, whether there's adequate visibility along the route, distance to a medical facility in case of emergency, and the priority of the load.

"As long as we can see a couple 100 meters ahead - enough for Soldiers to be able to (spot danger), we're going to push stuff out," said Maj. Paul Sanders, a Detroit native, and the 168th BSB support operations officer. "Even in a dust storm, because there are units waiting on [this cargo] and we can move even when aircraft can't."

The biggest effect a sandstorm has, in my opinion, is the morally dejecting and daunting effect on Soldiers who hurry off to the local passenger terminal en route to

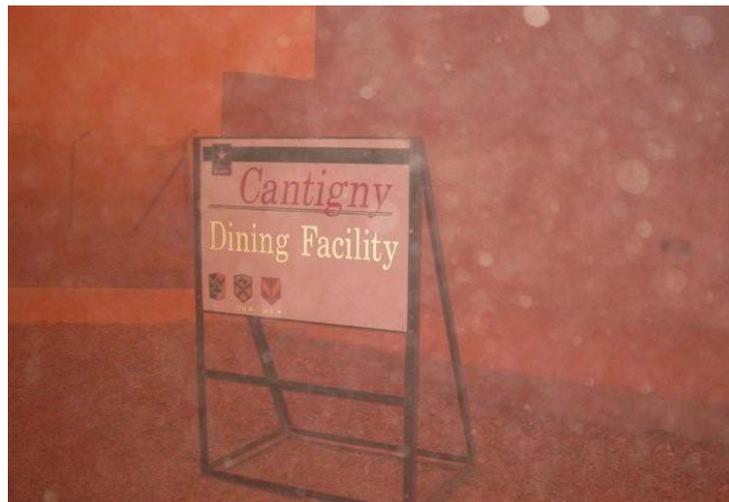


Dust storm engulfs the living area's

» From Pg. 8 A relationship that goes beyond our daily routine. A relationship based on communication and friendship. The hardest part for her? "Realizing all the milestones that my husband is missing. He is unable to see his children grow. He will miss first steps, first words, and smiles."

Erin Kaberline finds that the worst part is, "Being without my husband during my daughter's first year! I always imagined him being here for her birth and all of her firsts. It has been very hard on our Family to miss all of these things, and with the 15-month deployment, he'll also miss her first birthday." Even so, she is able to find a brighter side by, "Being creative in helping my husband develop hobbies through sending fun care packages. This has helped us communicate better and learn more about each other."

There is bad and good in this whole deployment separation. Many have suffered tragedies alone, parents are missing seeing their babies grow up, there is a huge frustration when someone says, "Oh, I know just how it is. My husband is gone one week a month for his job." There is a sense of pride for our country and complete fury when someone shows disrespect for our country, our flag, our



Dust storm engulfs the dining area

R&R, only to find out that all aircraft are downed due to a sandstorm.

"It is disheartening to hear that you will be delayed anywhere from a couple hours to a couple of days due to the whims of Mother Nature," said Sgt. Cassandra McKinney, a Swainsboro, Ga., native, and a human resources non-commissioned officer for the Special Troops Battalion, 1st Sust. Bde. "I will applaud the passenger terminal personnel though, for continuing to keep the passengers informed and updated to changes. It helped tremendously knowing what to expect, good or bad."

With my curiosity satisfied, I have one piece of advice to add: If you're about to embark on a mission or a journey, ensure you stop by your battalion or brigade intelligence office and get the current and projected weather data so the next time billowing red dirt fills the sky, it won't be much of a surprise. **STF**

mission, or our troops. It can be the loneliest feeling in the world to need to talk to your spouse and not be able to call. The evenings drag on with homework, dinner, and putting the kids to bed. There is a sense of guilt for not being a great mom *and* dad, and for just losing our temper because we're worn out and we need a break.

Most of all, we want you to appreciate all that we are trying to do to keep things running smoothly so that you can concentrate on your mission and your safety. When it seems like there are only endless crises in our homes and there is nothing you can do to fix it, we know it must be frustrating for you; but sometimes we need to vent and feel your support for us. Remember, just as we can't envision a day in your lives right now, which is very difficult for us, our lives are very different from the way they seem when you are here. But I can tell you that if you see my van driving down the street or the front of my house that you will know that a Soldier lives there and that I am darn proud of it!

Please know you have our support, our love, and our pride. And most of all, remember that we are over halfway there! **STF**



1st Squadron, 152nd Cavalry Regiment

Lt. Col. Robert Burke, Commander



Photos from home

Marine, Soldier, deployments- Dad through it all

Story by 1st Lt. George Fowler

Alone with his thoughts, Staff Sgt. Andy Graves, a Paragould, Ark., native, sits quietly in the “Snack Shack” during his guard shift reminiscing. Presently, Graves is a squad leader for the 1123rd Transportation Company, an Arkansas National Guard unit, attached to the 1st Squadron, 152nd Cavalry Regiment, which is attached to the 1st Sustainment Brigade in support of Multi-National Division-Baghdad.

His eyes did not always reflect a digital pattern. His military career dates back to 1995, when he enlisted in the Marine Corps straight out of high school. Deciding to jump behind the wheel, he enlisted as a motor transportation operator and enjoyed life at his first duty station in

Okinawa, Japan. While there, he went to Norway twice for cold-weather survival training and to Estonia once for the Baltic Challenge until bidding farewell to the Marines in 1999.

“The Marines were the best time of my life,” he recalls.

Despite leaving the Corps, Graves could not put serving his country behind him. A couple months later, he enlisted in the Arkansas Army National Guard under the 875th Combat Engineers in Little Rock, Ark. He attended the engineering advanced individual training in 2000, and ironically, admitted he joined the guard because, “Well, they never go anywhere.”

In February 2003, Graves was pulled out of the 875th Combat Eng. with only a day’s notice to report to the 1123rd Trans. Co.

“They never go anywhere,” consequently landed him in Iraq twice while assigned to the 1123rd Transportation Company.

“The Marines were the best time of my life.”

He spent from April 2003 until April 2004 in Iraq running transportation missions, and instead of returning to the engineers, he remained with the 1123rd Trans. Co., where he was activated to deploy with the 39th Infantry Brigade Combat Team in 2007. When asked about both deployments, Graves calmly replies, “It’s just another deployment.”

Yet through the years, deployments, and long training exercises, Graves has had the support any Soldier should have from his loving wife, Chasity, and his three daughters, Sydney, Madeline, and Adrian. Despite the “Army” way of life his Family has become accustomed to, he was able to be home for the birth of his youngest daughter.

“He’s not only my dad, he’s my hero,” said Sydney, the youngest of three girls.

When not serving his country, Graves’ enjoys spending some good old-fashioned quality Family time camping and boating back in Arkansas. He already has plans in the works upon his return in January 2009.

“He’s not only my dad, he’s my hero,”

“The thing I miss most during this deployment is my kids,” concluded Graves. **STF**



165TH Combat Sustainment Support Battalion

Lt. Col. Randall Bradford, Commander



Proud father

In the nick of time

Story by Sgt. Aaron LeBlanc

Although deployed over 7,000 miles from their homes in Louisiana, Staff Sgt. Tatsi McKissick of Anacoco, La., and Sgt. 1st Class David Miller of Pineville, La., were nevertheless present at the births of their daughters, born May 6, and March 17, respectively. Both Soldiers are assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 165th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 1st Sustainment Brigade, in support of Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

As luck would have it, Miller's wife, Kandice, gave birth to their 7-pound, 8-ounce baby girl, Kayleigh, less than a week before his unit deployed to Iraq. During this time, the 165th CSSB was conducting mobilization training at Camp Shelby, Miss., and Miller was able to attend the birth of his youngest child during a pass scheduled in the nick of time.

"The first thing that went through my head was 'Thank God I made it home.' The next thing was to wonder what I had done to deserve such a blessing," said Miller. It's hard to discount the influence of providence. Miller's imminent de-

ployment turned out to be the least of the hardships to overcome by his family during the birth.

"I very nearly lost both the baby and Kandice due to complications during labor. Leaving them and deploying to Iraq shortly after making sure they were okay was very hard."

A couple of months later, Staff Sgt. Tatsi McKissick's presence was made possible during the birth of his child in spite of his current assignment in Iraq through the Army's R&R program which affords Soldiers deployed to combat zones two weeks leave during their tour. "I was worried that I wasn't going to make it back in time, especially since the original due >>

Soldier on the Street

We asked Soldiers the following question: “What techniques do you use to keep in touch with your family?”



Sgt. St. John, Heather

“I use the phone to call my Family everyday.”



Sgt. Phillips, Wilson

“I use the internet and phone to talk to my Family almost every night.”



Spc. Cilumba, Kamba

“I use the DSN phones just about everyday.”



First hours

» date moved from the 11th to the 6th of May. My command and I had already scheduled my leave around the later time, but I made it,” said McKissick, with a touch of pride.

“There was no way that I could have made it home any faster than I did,” he continued. “And it seemed like everything that could go wrong, did. One of the airlines carrying me went bankrupt a few days before I was scheduled to leave. In every terminal I went through, I constantly had to explain and re-explain my situation to airline agents ... But I left no stone unturned.”

McKissick’s arrival wasn’t a moment too soon. Within hours of his return, his wife Cheryl gave birth to their 9-pound, 8-ounce healthy baby girl, Emma Marie Baileigh McKissick.

“You can’t really describe what goes through your head the first time you hold your newborn child,” he said. “It’s an inexplicable combination of emotions. It’s something a parent never forgets.” 

BIG RED **1** was there during

D-DAY

NORMANDY, France-
In the early hours of June 6, 1944 Allied Forces launched a massive offensive called “Operation Overlord” in an attempt to penetrate the German defenses along the northern coast of France.

The operation involved several hundred thousand American, British, Canadian, and Free French troops who crossed the English Channel from England to France. It was massive in scope and was the largest amphibious invasion to date.

The invasion began with overnight parachute and glider assaults in the countryside just beyond the German defenses. Out in the grey ocean, waiting for the seas to calm long enough to assault, were the young brave Soldiers of the oldest infantry division, the Big Red One.

No strangers to amphibious assaults, the 1st Infantry Division landed on a beach dubbed Omaha. “Easy Red” they called it, although there was nothing easy about this beach. With the noise of artillery going overhead, fighter planes blaring past, and ordnance from pill-boxes gunning them down left and right, these brave men stormed their way onto the beach, up the embankments, killing the enemy, and gaining a foothold on a lost continent.

This mission caused the loss of an estimated 6,036 casualties; no small sacrifice for freedom. I’m curious if we were to undertake this today, if we wouldn’t be declared losers’ by our media before the first bullet was fired.

STF

Normandy France, June 6th, 1944

STAGE RIGHT: **Armor up**

Movie review by Pfc. Samantha Schutz

Superheroes are deeply rooted in American culture. It's only natural for us to identify with these seemingly ordinary human beings who suddenly find themselves transformed by twists of fate, inadvertently becoming enforcers of justice and goodwill.

Considering Americans' affinity for these characters, whether in comic books or cartoons, it seems to be a long-running American tradition to start the summer off with a brand-new, big-screen blockbuster featuring one of many crime-stopping do-gooders.

This year, joining the likes of Superman, Batman, Spiderman, the Incredible Hulk, and the Fantastic Four, to name a few, is Iron Man.

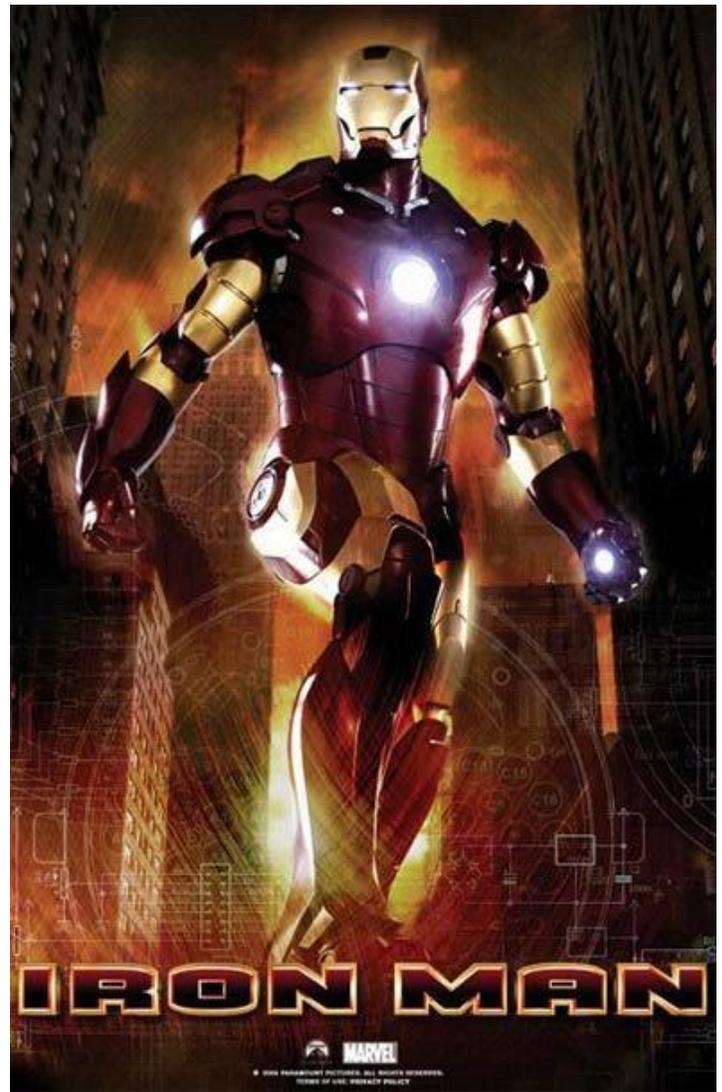
Robert Downey Jr. (*Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*) takes on the role of Tony Stark, the successful head of Stark Industries, a weapons manufacturing company that supplies American troops with heavy munitions during the war in Afghanistan.

During a visit to Soldiers on the battlefield, Stark's convoy is hit by a barrage of enemy bombs, which – much to his dismay – bear the logo of his own company. He is critically wounded and taken captive by a terrorist cell leader. A fellow prisoner, a doctor, is tasked with bringing Stark back to health. He installs an electromagnet in Stark's chest to keep the shrapnel from entering his heart and killing him. Stark, a scientific genius, devises an improved device based on a technology he'd developed for his company.

Instead of building the massive warhead his captors intend for him to make, Stark begins working on an improvised, interactive, robotic suit that will harmonize with the equipment installed in his body. With the help of the other captive, Stark manages to defeat the terrorists and escape, to be rescued by American forces.

Upon his return to civilization, Stark is a changed man. He has every intention to cease his company's

production of weapons, arousing suspicion and concern from his business partners and the media. Before the incident, Stark was a charismatic socialite, but the experience has left him obsessed and determined to improve his suit and use it for the greater



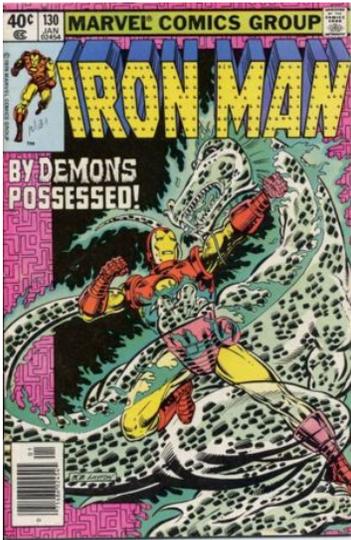
good of the world.

“I’m not crazy. I just finally know what I have to do.”

Iron Man comes with all the hallmarks of the superhero movie genre: a person who has been

physically and mentally transformed, an awesome outfit, a mentor – in Tony Stark's case, his mentor is played by his faithful and responsible assistant, Virginia “Pepper” Potts, played by Gwyneth Paltrow (The Royal Tenenbaums), and, of course, a villain to defeat. ➤





» Jeff Bridges (The Big Lebowski) excels as Obadiah Stane, Stark's business partner and, ultimately, his nemesis. The story's plot thickens when Stark discovers Stane's two-faced ways of doing business; he is disgusted when he learns that Stane had a hand in the war profiteering that Stark Industries was indulging in overseas. Likewise, Stane is furious to see Stark thinking for himself and putting the company in jeopardy.

So Stane attempts to one-up Tony Stark by building a suit of his own, resulting in a high-flying, metal-crunching, computer-generated (CG) battle of epic proportions.

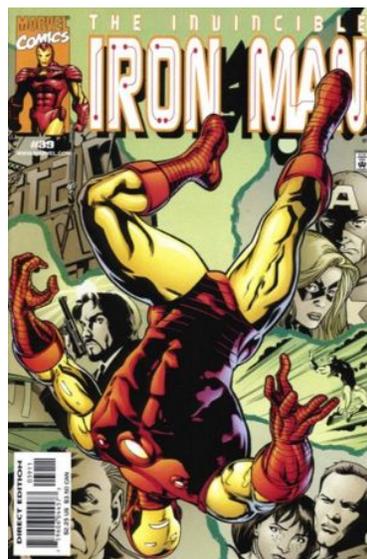
Don't worry; when I tell you Stark wins, I'm not spoiling the ending – everyone knows good always prevails in superhero movies. That's not to say the suspense won't have you on the edge of your seat, though. After all, these types of films thrive on creating adrenaline with wild stunts, near-death experiences, and visually stunning graphics.

Jon Favreau, an actor-turned-director, did a decent job on Iron Man, his first major action flick. He succeeded in presenting a world that exists somewhere between now and the near future, a believable dream state in which Stark's use of technology and a battle royal between two robots in the middle of New York City seem feasible.

It seems, though, that character direction is Favreau's forte. The script for Iron Man was little more than a draft when the crew started shooting, but it developed along the way to include realistic, witty dialogue, and very human portrayals of all the eccentric characters we meet.

Downey's Tony Stark is especially well-crafted. This is his first leading role in several years, following a mandated stint in drug rehab, and he acts skillfully and confidently. Personally, I questioned whether or not he'd be right for the part – but after watching his performance, I don't think a better actor could have been chosen. He shows us the aloof-yet-intelligent playboy and its enlightened, determined counterpart in a flawless contrast.

"It's not a piece of equipment. It's a suit. It's me!"



My problem with Iron Man is the problem I have with the majority of modern superhero movies – there's no real depth. It's a very cut-and-paste genre.

The recipe is simple: take one part good guy, add an equal part bad guy, and blend well until it reaches a conflict. Don't forget to season it generously with CG special effects. However, the right amount of garnish in the form of good dialogue and unique cinematography can make all the difference.

If I had to make the distinction, I'd say Iron Man soars high above Fantastic Four and completely blows Ghost Rider out of the water. But it is nowhere near the level of any Batman film, nor is it as interesting and stunning as The Incredible Hulk or Hellboy.

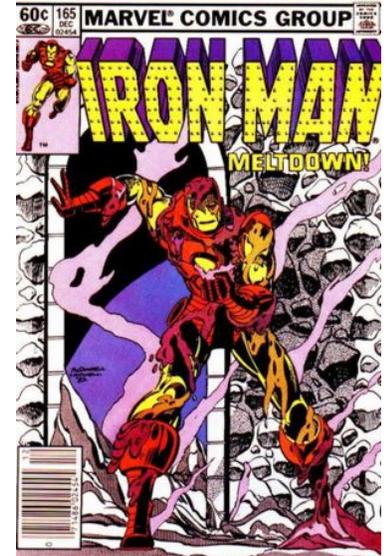
Okay, before any of you Marvel comic book enthusiasts come after me with threats of paper cuts, I feel obligated to give the following disclaimer: I am a nerd, but I am not a comic nerd. I don't know Tony Stark's background and how it differs from Bruce Wayne's. In no way am I qualified, in my limited knowledge of this genre, to analyze how well the movie version of Iron Man tells the story of this particular superhero. I don't really even understand the obsession with superheroes and special effects.

All I do is judge movies based on my opinions, and in my opinion, Iron Man was okay. Granted, like so many big Hollywood movies, it shamelessly exploits fast, name-brand cars to the point where I sometimes felt like I was watching an Audi commercial. That's something that really upsets me, but I must deal with the fact that Americans are a consumer culture and move on.

I doubt Iron Man will ever grace my DVD player again, as I prefer to fill it with films that stimulate my imagination instead of my adrenal glands and my urge to spend money. When it comes to superhero movies, they just don't leave much to be imagined. But, like riding a new rollercoaster or being in the front row at a rock concert, it was fun while it lasted. Until you walk away slightly nauseous with ringing ears, that is.

I give Iron Man 2.5 stars out of 5.

STF



HIGHROLLERS ROCK OUT

Story by Sgt. Jennifer Schweizer

1st Sustainment Brigade, PAO

Sounds of The Eagles, Bon Jovi, and original music by Spc. David Palmer, a Chicago native, and a member of the 515th Transportation Company, 165th Combat Sustainment



Guitar man

Support Battalion, 1st Sustainment Brigade in support of Multi-National Division-Baghdad, echoed through the night as the HighRollers' band performed May 10 at the Camp Taji Mudhouse on an open mic night.

Six months ago, the band was merely three people looking for something to pass the time.

"[SPC] Barker and I started out with an acoustic guitar and a set of bongo drums," laughed Staff Sgt. Benjamin Reyes, a Boston, Mass., native, and the band's lead vocalist,

percussionist, and drummer. "Later that day Palmer joined in to give us a total of three 'bored' members."

Songwriter, vocalist, and guitarist are among the many talents Palmer has brought to the band since he joined. He is also the only member who is able to say he was once on American Idol.

"I love music and that's all there is to it," said Palmer, who plays rhythm guitar and sings vocals for the band.

Since then, many other Soldiers in the unit have joined the band looking for an escape from the long deployment months. Steadily growing, the band is presently seven deep with members from various ranks.

The band's members include: Reyes, Palmer; Sgt. Michael Kilroy, an Egg Harbor Township, N.J., native, and back-up drummer; Sgt. Antares White, a New Haven, Conn., native, and a vocalist; Sgt. Brandon Jones, a Whiting, Maine, native, and the lead bassist; Spc. Malcolm Barker, a Tupelo, Miss., native, and the lead guitarists who also plays the harmonica; and Pfc. Carl Ross, a Greensboro, N.C., native, and vocalist.

One goal of the HighRollers is to produce a Mudhouse CD and leave behind a piece of their music history. How, one might ask, can a small, unit band produce such a thing?

The band has a recording studio built right into their unit's Morale, Welfare, and Recreation room.

"The sound-proof room, now that was a crazy thing! We were going over some songs one night and Barker said how much he wished we had a booth to record in," Reyes commented.

Before the room was built, the band was using a padded wall locker located in a Soldier's living quarters.

"After about fifteen minutes of brainstorming, I got up from behind the drums, went out back and got some lumber. It took me three days to get the majority of it done before the guys realized it could work," he continued.

For the most part, the band performs its favorite songs, which range from rock to the blues. The HighRollers also pride themselves on giving their own unique twist to their all-time favorites. How often is Lynyrd Skynyrd's Sweet Home Alabama performed with a b-box, free-style rap twist to it?

"The band has come together so much over time. It has been real fun and given us all the chance to be part of something great," said Reyes.



America's pastime played on Taji



"Durable" House of Pain



ASV training at STB motor pool



Battlefield circulation in Kalsu



Practicing the fundamentals of Boxing

Review



X-Box 360

Ninja Gaiden II

Ryu Hayabusa returns to conquer familiar foes

*By Sgt. Jason Thompson
MND-B PAO*



Games

If, as many have said in the past, Ninja Gaiden on Xbox was the greatest action game ever made, then Ninja Gaiden II on Xbox 360 is just a sequel.

Once more, we find Ryu Hayabusa confronted by the Black Spider Ninja Clan and supernatural foes, the likes of which would cause most men to cower in fear.

Ryu is no normal man. He's a ninja that thinks stealth and shadowy motion is for chumps. If a confrontation doesn't begin with a full frontal assault and end with a pile of bloody stumps, something went wrong. From one gore-filled assault to the next, across 14 stages, the last of the Hayabusa clan is our only hope against the resurrection of the Archfiend.

Of course, the story along the way makes no sense. The plot has something to do with the CIA, defeating greater enemies, and the resurrection of the Archfiend.

Ryu begins his adventures with nothing more than a Dragon Blade – yet, it does not take long to build a large arsenal of various weapons. Each weapon can be upgraded to add even more depth to an already robust system of combat.

Slow weapons have no place in Ninja Gaiden II. Even the massive Eclipse Scythe moves in streaks and flashes. The faster weapons, like the Tonfas and Kusari-gama, are a blur as you rack up massive combos. It's just plain sexy.

Let me offer this word of warning before I go any further – Ninja Gaiden II is one of the most graphic games available. I highly do not recommend this game for children. The game is rated Mature by the Entertainment Software Rating Board for a reason. If you are not looking for a complete blood fest out of a game, then I would recommend looking elsewhere for



entertainment purposes. Each move in the game has a percentage chance to remove a limb from one of Ryu's adversaries. A quick counterattack with the wolverine-esque Falcon's Talons might leave a foe without an arm. A slash of the massive Eclipse Scythe could remove both legs.

No sharp blade on your Lunar staff? No worries. Blunt objects can literally crush body parts into explosions of flesh.

Even when all would appear victorious – the battle is not over. With nothing but bloody stumps, Ryu's attackers will limp, crawl, and flop their way onward fighting to drag the Dragon Ninja with them into the hands of death.

With all of his weapons, slick moves, and killer techniques, you'd think that nothing could stop this ninja.

That's true, to a point. Ninja Gaiden II sports four levels of difficulty, two of which must be unlocked, to test your merit. Even the lowest level will pose a challenge for the amateur gamer – this is still very much a game for those willing to invest time into it – but the learning curve is friendlier at the bottom this go around.

That doesn't mean this game won't cause many of us to blow a gasket or two. I know it caused me to lose it once or twice. Rarely do you feel as if the game is cheap – you simply aren't good enough yet, and the game's relentless artificial intelligence and swarming enemies are letting you know. Only once ➤➤

» did I feel like the game was punishing me without recourse.

There is a boss who explodes without warning when you kill it. It's as if Team Ninja sat down and said, "How should we reward players for beating this tough part of the game? I know – make them do it again."



Perhaps the only thing that can ultimately compete with a ninja like Hayabusa is the camera itself.

Team Ninja opted for a viewing angle that seemed better equipped to show off the action stylishly rather than give the player the whole picture.

You can re-center the camera with the pull of a trigger or manually move it with an analog stick; however, in the heat of the battle, these options are not the easiest to take advantage of.

If you're prepared to face the challenge of Ninja Gaiden II, be ready to battle the camera as enemies attack you from off-screen. At times, the camera can lose a worthwhile view entirely, leaving you effectively blind.

Even with a technical hiccup here or there, Ninja Gaiden II is a sight to behold and a great deal of fun to master. In terms of straight action and stylish, deep game play, Ninja Gaiden II succeeds on nearly every front.

What it lacks is the fat – that extra something on the meat to give it flavor.

Levels are kept largely linear to keep you moving from one confrontation to the next and

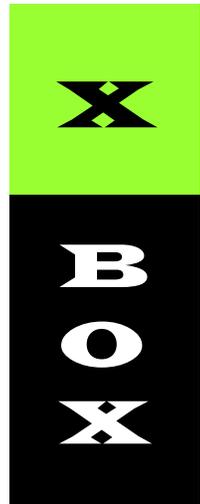
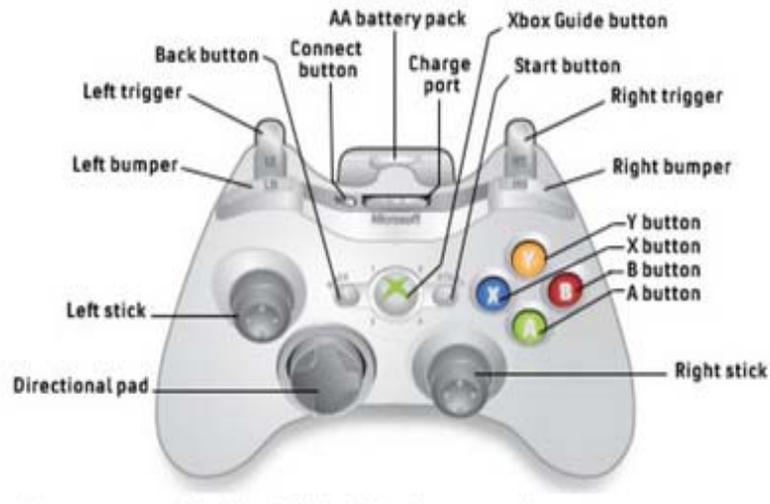


focused on the action.

Ninja Gaiden II is challenging and rewarding. It looks great in motion, and it feels great to know you're the one at the helm, directing this bloody dance.

It won't redefine the way you look at action games. It won't make you cry tears of joy. Don't let that dissuade you. Sequels to such outstanding games often have difficulties living up to expectations and that may end up being the case for some with Ninja Gaiden II, but those who go in looking for some pure action will leave all smiles – and perhaps with a controller broken out of frustration or two.

I give Ninja Gaiden II a strong 4 ninja swords out of 5. **STF**





553rd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion

Lt. Col. Gregory Koller, Commander

62nd Quartermaster delivers success

Story by Spc. Michele Meadows

Recently, I had the opportunity to shadow a few drivers with the transportation platoon of the 62nd Quartermaster Company, 553rd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 1st Sustainment Brigade, to observe their day to day routine. What I witnessed was amazing.

They start their day before dawn at the dispatch office; and by 7:30 a.m., they have already received their morning safety brief, risk assessment, and a mission brief highlighting the Transportation Movement Requests their mission will consist of.

From there, we hit the bays to perform Preventive Maintenance Checks and Services on the vehicles they would be driving. It was here that they encountered their first challenge. The M172 trailer that Spc. Robert Seaton, a New Orleans native, and Pfc. Daniel Yancey, a Ravenna, Ohio, native, were planning to pull had a flat tire. But, without missing a beat, they had the tire off and replaced in a matter of 20 minutes. "That was fast," I thought.

Radio checks were performed to ensure each vehicle had 100 percent communications in case of a mechanical or safety issue, and then we were on the road.

For Seaton, driving a M1088 with a trailer is something totally new since he is an automated logistical specialist working as a motor transport operator. "I'm glad I was given this chance to be a driver. I don't really like a job where I have to sit at a desk all day, especially when there are places to go and sites to see," said Seaton.

As the day progressed, we picked

up various classes of supplies from the Arrival / Departure Airfield Control Group and delivered them to different Supply Support Activities around Victory Base Complex.

Eying the efficiency in which they moved cargo on and off the trailers gave me an inclination that these guys aren't playing around. They are here to get the mission done and to ensure cargo and supplies are constantly on the move to the required destinations, thus ensuring Soldiers outside the wire are getting adequate amounts of much needed supplies.

"We help them with their supplies so they don't have to worry about running a sidebar mission outside the wire, or worrying about having to get supplies on their recovery day when they can be relaxing. I guess you can say we are like the Army's FedEx in a small kind of way," said Seaton.

Driving down the dusty roads between stops I discovered other facts about their platoon that I found interesting. Seaton and Yancey have been deployed with the 62nd QM Co. for almost six months now in support of Multi-National Division-Baghdad, which is a big mission. When they encounter an Iraqi driver, they will often times spend a few minutes teaching the Iraqi drivers things they need to know to get a firm grip on how to transport cargo and supplies. "If they are pulling something and we are pulling something, it shows the ability of us being able to work together," stated Seaton.

It's their hope that one day Soldiers are able to take a step back to let the Iraqi drivers execute the missions on their own accord.

Once the mission was complete, we navigated back to the bays to perform an "After" PMCS on the vehicles and close out the cargo trackers indicating what was picked up and delivered for that day. "Hopefully, tomorrow we won't come out to another flat tire," laughed Yancey. **STF**



Securing the load



168th Brigade Support Battalion

Lt. Col. Todd Heussner, Commander

GROWING THE ARMY FAMILY FROM WITHIN

Story by Capt. Paul A. Brown, 168th BSB

Retaining quality Soldiers is and will always be a challenge. Growing an Army by 64,000 Soldiers while at war would seem nearly impossible. However, the 168th Brigade Support Battalion, 1st Sustainment Brigade, is exceeding the established goals of keeping Soldiers in boots by a wide margin in all measurable areas. Each and everyday, Soldiers in the combat zone are raising their right hand and continuing to make a commitment to the Army and their beloved country.

Since the beginning of Fiscal Year 2008, the 168th BSB re-enlistment numbers have been staggering. In all of the Army re-enlistment categories (initial term, mid-career, and career), the battalion is averaging at least 131

percent mission complete and in most cases, closing in on nearly 200 percent of its assigned mission at this early stage. More than 89 Soldiers in the 168th BSB have re-enlisted since Fiscal Year 2008 began, along with another 26 Soldiers from attached units. Nearly all of the Soldiers who have re-enlisted are eligible for a retention bonus, which has resulted in Soldiers receiving a grand total of more than \$1.4 million to date.

In recognition of her outstanding work, the Battalion Career Counselor, Sgt. 1st Class Yajaira Epps, a Bronx, N.Y., native, has been sought out by other units in the area to help. She is currently working with four other companies not assigned to 168th BSB, four Military Transition Teams, and another support battalion on the Victory Base Complex to help them achieve re-enlistment objectives while deployed. >>



Selling the Army long term

\$1.4 MILLION IN BONUSES

131% MISSION COMPLETE

89 SOLDIERS

» Soldiers are re-enlisting to stay in the Army because they are getting what they signed up for upon initial enlistment. Each Soldier joins the Army for different reason, but they all have a common desire for a challenge, discipline, respect, leadership, and camaraderie. They are getting all of this and more in the “Make It Happen” Battalion of the 168th BSB.

“I’ve never seen so many Soldiers who want to continue their careers, even in the midst of a combat deployment,” said Epps. “It is amazing to see this many Soldiers that are motivated and want to stay in, not only for their own benefit, but to make the Army better, and they are proud of their team and want to stay on the winning team.”

The Battalion’s accomplishments have not gone unnoticed or un-rewarded. To date, the Battalion has won the 4th Infantry Division “Top Battalion Award” for the highest mission accomplishment out of the roughly 28 battalions in the Division. This prestigious award was presented to the Battalion by the 4th ID Commander, Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond, in Baghdad, Iraq, on Feb. 20. The Battalion also received the “First to Fire Award” given to the top battalion in the 214th Fires Brigade and the “Fires for Effect Plaque” for the first battalion in the 214th Fires Brigade to meet mission.

“I’ve never seen so many Soldiers who want to continue their careers, even in the midst of a combat deployment.”

Keeping quality Soldiers in the Army is a way to ensure the future of a viable fighting force, and the 168th BSB is doing more than its fair share to meet the objective. Even as the Battalion is deployed in support of combat operations in Iraq, the Soldiers continue to extend their careers and defend their country.

The 168th BSB Commander, Lt. Col. Todd Heussner, a Fort Myers, Fla., native, summed it up best when he stated: “The Soldiers are excited and re-enlist because they are getting what they have always sought from the Army. They are on a great team with great leaders accomplishing a great mission. Soldiers thrive on standards and discipline and see the result of their incredible work on the battlefield everyday. They know what they are doing is important, and the Soldiers take great pride in all they have accomplished. Staying part of the team allows them to continue to live the Army dream.” **STF**



Sgt. 1st Class Epps loves what she does



Chaplain's Thoughts

Chaplain Terrence E. Hayes, Brigade Chaplain



Chaplain Leggett on the job

Finishing strong

168th BSB prepares for the challenges of reintegration

Story by Capt. Charles Leggett

One of the most stressful pieces of any deployment for both Soldiers and their Families is the reunion following a long separation and the reintegration back into the daily Family life. This is true regardless if a Soldier is single or married, or if they have five children or none.

Since the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism and the ensuing deployments for operations all over the world, the U.S. Army has responded by stepping up its care for Soldiers and Families during and after separation. Now, the 168th Brigade Support Battalion, 1st Sustainment Brigade, has raised the bar to a higher level to ensure our Families receive the absolute best

re-integration training in the Army.

Traditionally, the Army has utilized a series of briefings called the Deployment Cycle Support to prepare Soldiers for redeployment and reunion with their Families. In these briefings, addressed in utilitarian fashion, are topics ranging from the normalization of deployment experiences to possible medical threats and successful reunion tips. The Commander of the 168th BSB, Lt. Col. Todd Heussner, a Fort Myers, Fla., native, wanted a more encompassing approach that used both the DCS and additional measures. The normal regimen of DCS classes has been augmented to focus on those high risk areas where

Soldiers needed additional guidance and assistance. Nearly five months prior to re-deployment of the Battalion, leaders began identifying Soldiers with specific needs to be addressed prior to redeployment; Soldiers who had experienced a break-up in relationship or were having difficulties in their relationship, the death of a loved one or friend, financial strain, and depression.

One of the key skills that must be developed to help Soldiers overcome challenges is communication skills, especially the communication between husbands and wives. As the Battalion Chaplain, I developed a course of instruction centered on the book *"The 5 Love Languages"* by Dr. Gary Chapman, to help address this issue and equip the Soldiers with the skills to facilitate healthy communication within their Families.

As deployed Soldiers in Iraq are focusing on identifying risk areas and developing the skills to better address them, the Families back at Fort Sill, Okla., are also engaged in preparing for reunion. Denise Tribble, the Family Readiness Support Assistant for the 168th BSB is heading this program at Fort Sill by offering spouses classes in Expectations, Communication, Stress Management, Divorce Proofing Your Marriage, and Financial Readiness. These classes closely mirror what the Soldiers are learning in Iraq. Additionally, monthly newsletters that focus on reunion issues, tips, and suggestions for how to handle conflicts and make the most out of reunion are being distributed both in Iraq and at Fort Sill. The intention is very clear and very direct — to keep the Soldiers and their Families as well informed as possible and on the same track for a successful reunion following the deployment. ➤➤

»» And this is only the beginning.

Upon return to Fort Sill, the Soldiers of 168th BSB will enjoy a three-day pass following their welcome-home ceremony; this will allow them some quality Family time after their long separation. Soldiers and spouses alike will then attend a series of classes and discussions designed to reinforce the skills and lessons taught while deployed and during the first phase of re-integration training. Seven days of classes will provide more information for the Soldiers and their Families on financial management, stress management, conflict resolution, and above all, communication. At the conclusion of the reintegration classes, the Battalion will gather for a Heroes' Ball, paying tribute to the sacrifices made by both Soldiers and their Families during the deployment. The conclusion of the ball marks the beginning of the Battalion's block leave period, a well-deserved 30-day block of rest and relaxation.

This is the point where most reintegration programs end, but for the 168th BSB, this only marks the mid-point of the plan. After the return from block leave, Soldiers and their Families will have access to additional resources to help them overcome holiday stress and further strengthen their relationships, both married and single Soldiers.

Finally, a series of retreats for both married and single Soldiers are scheduled to add additional skills and resources to all they have already learned in a relaxed setting away from Fort Sill. While these retreats may conclude the official reintegration plan, they do not end the 168th BSB's commitment to their Soldiers and Families. Throughout the reintegration and reunion process, Soldiers and their Families have access to chaplains and marriage counselors for personal consultation and advice. The leaders of the Battalion and of each company stand ready to assist the Soldiers and their Families in any way possible to ensure a successful reintegration and reunion.

The goal of all of this effort has been to prepare and equip Soldiers and their Families to successfully reintegrate following a deployment, mitigating the risks and challenges posed by extended separation, and providing them with the resources needed to overcome any obstacles. To this end, the 168th BSB has far exceeded the standard reintegration guidelines, linking the training given to Soldiers in Iraq and Families at Fort Sill, providing multiple opportunities for all involved to acquire the skills needed to strengthen their relationships and survive the challenges of reunion. The plan developed by the 168th BSB is a mark of the importance placed on the welfare of Soldiers of their Families.

Taking care of Soldiers and their Families during and following deployment is a primary concern for the Battalion, and anything that can be done to help out Families and Soldiers will be done. **STF**

Battlefield promotion

»»*From Pg. 3* a bulletin outlining the program; thus making this available to Soldiers deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Spc. Corey McDowell, a Lumberton, N.C., native, and Cpl. Jeffery Johanson, a Redding, Calif., native, now sergeants, were the first Soldiers assigned to the 1st Sustainment Brigade to receive their sergeant stripes under this program.

"This is an exciting day for the 1st Sustainment Brigade and for these outstanding Soldiers," stated Col. Kevin G. O'Connell, a Clinton, Md., native and commander of the 1st Sust. Bde.

"Not only are they the first (Soldiers) within the Brigade to ever receive this honor, they were promoted on Memorial Day, which is also something great," he continued.

McDowell is a member of the Headquarters Platoon, Signal Company, Special Troops Battalion,

1st Sust. Bde., and works as the noncommissioned officer in charge of the communication and electronics cable install and repair section. He was also hand-picked by his first sergeant to be the height and weight control NCO for the company, in which he developed a program that helped six Soldiers to be successfully removed from the overweight program. In addition, he is certified as a combatives level II instructor and enjoys competing for excellence at various promotion and Soldier of the Month boards. McDowell has won numerous Soldier of the Month boards ranging from company to brigade levels.

"It is truly an honor to be one of the first (Soldiers) promoted under this program," said McDowell.

Johanson reflected pride in his eyes as he took part in the ceremony beside McDowell. Johanson is a member of the personal security detail to the Brigade command sergeant major. Ironically, he did not deploy with the 1st Sust. Bde. In fact, he is not an active duty Soldier. With courage and dedication to the mission, Johanson volunteered to stay behind when his unit, Battery A, 1st Battalion, 143rd Field Artillery, a California National Guard unit, headed home in March.

"Johanson came on board after serving his deployment in a convoy security platoon with the 1-143rd (FA). He volunteered to put his expertise to use as a member of our PSD to the command group," said Sgt. Salvador Ramirez, a Wichita Falls, Texas, native, and command group administrator for the 1st Sust. Bde. "He has been a huge help and certainly earned this," he continued.

At the end of the day, Johanson is happy with his decision to extend his tour of duty in Iraq and is even considering another extension after the 1st Sust. Bde. leaves later this year.

"I am honored and truly grateful to be a part of this (day) and to be under such great leadership," said Johanson. **STF**

H O N O R



Chief Warrant Officer Three Melonie Pichon-Smith, a New Orleans native and the officer in charge of the Human Resources Office for the 165th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, a Louisiana National Guard unit attached to the 1st Sustainment Brigade.