



# Ironhorse Desert News

## Operation Iraqi Freedom

*“Steadfast & Loyal”*



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# Task Force News



Spc. Christine Seal, 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, 502<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Company, scans the cliffs rising out of the Tigris River during a security patrol.



A boat from 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, 502<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Company, patrols the Tigris River along the shores of Tikrit.

*By Staff Sgt Craig Pickett*

TIKRIT, Iraq—The sun sets on the Tigris River as eight soldiers push off from the west bank of the river and power their two boats into the fast-flowing waterway. The soldiers and the boats belong to the 502<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Company (Assault Float Bridge) from Hanau, Germany. They are assigned to Task Force Ironhorse and their job is to ensure the compound is safe and maintain a military presence on the river.

Typically the engineers build float bridges, but that has changed as infantry units have secured bridges throughout Iraq, explained Capt. Christopher Jeszenszky, commander of the 502<sup>nd</sup>. Now that most of the float bridge missions are complete, the Engineers are focused on protecting the west side of Camp Ironhorse, where elements of the task force are staged.

Jeszenszky said patrolling is not one of the unit's mission essential tasks and has not been performed by the Army since the Vietnam War, which means they've had to adapt to the new role. Working with his 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt., Jeszenszky formulated a plan with principles based on mechanized travel in a linear danger area along with aspects of dismounted patrolling. With this concept in mind, a group of boats patrol the river, with some headed north while others go south. The 502<sup>nd</sup> has a presence on the river day and night.

Though the engineers enjoy their regular job of bridging, they have found patrolling offers its own benefits. "I love my job," said Spc. Steve Mata, crew chief on the lead boat. "It's days like this - I've got a twelve hour shift, but I'm out on the water all night long, I don't have to deal with anybody; I just get to sit around and patrol this river. And enjoy the cool air," he added.

Spc. Christine Seal, one of the security personnel on the boat, agreed with Mata's assessment of the mission. She enjoys the isolation, cool air and the simple fact that it gives them something to do. Seal takes her job seriously. With binoculars in hand, she scans the river for anything out of the ordinary. Her squad automatic weapon is within easy reach to quell any uprising.

The cliffs that rise up out of the water 200 feet or more are Mata's biggest concern. "It's too easy to get people up there and start shooting at us," he said. That is why Seal has a counterpart on the other side of the boat. Spc. Daniel Jones is also looking for the odd and unusual in the water and on the cliffs. Both have night vision devices for use after the sun goes down.

"We're looking for any suspicious behavior," said Mata. "We have to check all boats coming down the river. Most of them are just fisherman trying to catch their meal for the night.



*Story by Master Sgt Dave Johnson*

CAMP IRONHORSE, TIKRIT, Iraq -- When the shout rang out in the post office, "Mail's in," a team of soldiers scurried into position to sort mail. The mail clerks run the operation like a meticulously rehearsed professional football team runs its two-minute offense -- except there is no stoppage in play. The precision passing, hand-offs, and laterals continued until all the mail had been sorted, stacked, organized, and readied for distribution to units.

The 449<sup>th</sup> Postal Company, an Army Reserve unit from Brevard, N.C., operates the mailroom at Camp Ironhorse, Tikrit. Every day they take on a monumental mound of mail, but they don't work alone. They get additional help from mail clerks assigned to units within the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

"The teamwork is great," said Sgt. Felicia Stroud, noncommissioned officer in charge. "It really helps to get all these soldiers to pitch in during sorting."

According to Stroud, the 4<sup>th</sup> ID, on an average day, receives four 20-foot military vans of mail. Camp Ironhorse alone gets a two-and-one-half-ton truck packed full of letters and packages. Sorting all the mail that comes in daily is a monumental task. Many of the care packages received from family members are quite heavy.

"You have to be physically fit to lift these heavy boxes," said Spc. Melody E. Williams, an administrative specialist with the 449<sup>th</sup>. Moving and sorting mass amounts of mail is not only physically demanding, but a strain on the eyes as well. "It definitely helps when packages come in written in big, block letters," said Spc. Thomas A. Christian, II, a medical specialist, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4<sup>th</sup> ID, who helps in the mailroom.

"Sorting goes faster when the complete unit's and soldier's name is on the package," said Spc. Clayton E. Fundersol, Jr., the mail clerk with HHC, 4<sup>th</sup> ID.

According to Stroud, soldiers can help speed the mail sorting and distribution process by properly labeling letters and parcels. "Use their full APO return address, and complete the entire address for the recipient. Many letters are sent without zip codes for USA addresses," said Stroud. "Use a customs form when sending film, CDs and cassettes through the mail."

"Some *do not*," said Stroud, "are alcohol, sending or receiving. "Also," she said, "please do not send sand. Some soldiers want to mail sand back to the States. I don't know why, but we saw a lot of that while we were working in Kuwait. Don't try to send spiders or scorpions, either," she added facetiously. "A last *do not*," said Stroud, "is sending any agriculture product."

The 449<sup>th</sup> does a lot more for the soldiers of the Ironhorse Division than distribute mail. According to 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Tiwana J. Richardson, commander of the 449<sup>th</sup>, soldiers can now send mail home that weighs more than 13 ounces. Soldiers must pay the stateside rate for postage from the APO in New York to the recipients' address.

"Of course," said Williams, "mail weighing less than 13 ounces is free mail to another APO address or home to the States. When mailing to a fellow soldier at an APO, be sure to write 'MPS' (Military Postal Service) instead of 'Free Mail'." Stroud added, "The limits on mailing packages is a girth of 108 inches and weight of 70 pounds."

The hours of operations of the finance operations section of the mailroom are: Monday-Friday, 9:00-Noon and 3:00-6:00 p.m.; Saturdays 3:00-6:00 p.m.; and Sundays 9:00 to Noon. The 449<sup>th</sup> is located next to the HHC, 4<sup>th</sup> ID warehouse on Camp Ironhorse.

Getting mail to the troops of Task Force Ironhorse in the Tikrit area quickly and efficiently is the 449<sup>th</sup> goal and it operates with NFL-like proficiency.



An Iraqi baby, suffering from diarrhea, rests under the watchful eyes of her mother.



A mother comforts her sick child at Tikrit Hospital.



A family waits to see a doctor at Tikrit Hospital. The hospital reopened thanks to the help of the 418<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Battalion.

*by Master Sgt Dave Johnson*

TIKRIT, Iraq -- On May 24<sup>th</sup>, the Tikrit Hospital reopened its doors to patients. Babies cried and mothers smiled as their children received much-needed care. Doctors are back working in their specialties and practicing medicine for the first time in two months.

The Public Health Team of the 418<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Battalion based at Belton, Mo., coordinated payments and labor to get the hospital running again. The windows were broken during the war, so a sterile environment was impossible to maintain until repairs were made. Not only was there structural damage, but there were added problems because the former Iraqi Government had not paid the staff for months.

"Staffing the hospital was a problem," said Staff Sgt. Dustin M. Graybill, non-commissioned officer in charge of the Public Health Team. According to Graybill, the hospital had been providing only limited emergency care, and was staffed by volunteers who worked without pay. Even before the war, doctors who belonged to the Ba'ath Party were paid incentives. Doctors who were not party members were paid a rate of approximately \$30 per month.

The Civil Affairs Public Health Team went to the Iraqi banks to coordinate getting the staff paid. The banks had to unfreeze government assets to make payments. Now that the staff is being paid again, the 418<sup>th</sup> is working with ORHA (Office of Relief and Humanitarian Aid) to increase doctors' pay.

Getting the medical staff paid solved many problems, but making repairs to the hospital was also imperative to its reopening. "We pull from all our assets to get help where it is needed," said Graybill. "We get Army engineers and Iraqi civilians to help. The civilians volunteered to do most of the repair work on the hospital." "The Iraqi people helped put the windows in. Now we're working to get them paid," said Graybill. The Public Health Team members spoke with doctors after seeing the reopening of the hospital. According to Graybill, the doctors are elated to be in business again. The doctors are looking forward to a close relationship with the United States to improve conditions and medical care for the local populace.

The past two months have been difficult for the Iraqi people, but thanks to the combined efforts of the United States Army and local civilians, the future holds hope.

# Task Force News



Staff Sgt Isidro Beley, 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, 38<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company, places a bolt in one of the cross members of the Mabey-Johnson bridge over the Tigris River.

*By Staff Sgt Craig Pickett*

TIKRIT, Iraq—After many days of working under the scorching sun and moonlit nights, members of the 38<sup>th</sup> Engineer Co., from Hanau, Germany, completed their work on the Tikrit Bridge.

During the early stages of the war, the Air Force bombed Saddam Hussein's palatial grounds and left two gaping holes in the nearby bridge over the Tigris River. It is the only crossing for 60 kilometers north or south of the city.

Before repairs were made eastbound traffic had been using the left lane and westbound traffic used the sidewalk. Pedestrians took their chances on either side.

The engineers were tasked with repairing the bridge for local traffic use and for ensuring it could handle a military load class of 70. In other words, it needed to be able to bear the load of an M1A1 Abrams tank.

For 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Viki Binstock, the officer in charge of the bridge project, the biggest challenge was the stringer bearings. These support the weight of the entire bridge and had been damaged at each blast site. It took four, 35-ton jacks to lift the bridge and fabricate new bearings that would support the repairs and future traffic, she explained.



Spc. Jared Medrano, 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, 38<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company, waits to place a pin into a section of the Mabey-Johnson bridge.

The system she and her soldiers are using to span the gaps is a civilian bridge used widely all over the world. It is made by Maybe-Johnson and is typically used as a temporary bridge while repairs are made to the main structure. In this case, the Maybe-Johnson Compact 200 will be a permanent fixture to the bridge.

"It will last just as long as traditional bridging methods," said Robert Rayman, a civilian technician with Maybe Bridge and Shore hired by the Army to help soldiers with the installation.

"We spent a lot of time training," said Sgt. Christopher Davis. "It has really paid off. (The Army) brought down people from Maybe-Johnson and trained the noncommissioned officers and upper specialists how to build the bridge and how to do site layouts and prep the site."

Davis' only complaint, along with Staff Sgt. Isidro Beley's, was the worksite area was too restrictive. Railing lined each side of the bridge, which limited the swing of the large crane used to maneuver bridge panels. Also, there was no room to down load all the building materials, so they had to be brought up one truckload at a time.

Fortunately, the bridge was closed to vehicles; only pedestrians and the occasional goat were allowed to cross. All traffic was directed across a military float bridge constructed weeks earlier in a combined effort by engineers from Fort Hood, Texas, Fort Polk, La., and from Hanau, Germany.

Despite the training, the on-site guidance, and the 24-hour work cycle, the process took longer than expected. Not only did soldiers have to contend with a restricted worksite, but also daytime temperatures averaging over 100 degrees.

"The heat and sun are the most challenging part and wearing all our gear," said Spc. Jared Medrano, a bridge builder with 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon. "Everything else is a piece of cake. Everyone knows his or her jobs."

# Task Force News

*By Staff Sgt Craig Pickett*

TIKRIT, Iraq—An entire family of mechanics moved into the maintenance area at the Division Support Element (DSE); there is not a traditional mom or dad, but a family nonetheless. They are members of Charlie Co., 704<sup>th</sup> Division Support Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division from Fort Hood, Texas.

“We all work together as a family,” explained Sgt. Billie Wesseling. “We all have our quirks and we have our days; but if one person is down, we lift them up and if someone has a problem, we all have a problem.”

Wesseling says that’s why they work so well together. They rely on each other and everyone is willing to work with everyone else to get the job done.

And jobs are aplenty, explained Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Donald Williams Jr., non-commissioned officer in charge of the section.

“We’re servicing about 130 vehicles, anywhere from five-ton trucks to generators,” said Williams. “The command put a priority on maintenance, and they have been good at keeping us off details so we can focus on maintenance.”

With a crew of only seven, Williams said every last one of them is busy. “Air conditioning is always going out with this heat, and we have to keep the generators up 24 hours a day.”

Air conditioning mechanic, Spc. James Brander, said the number of jobs could be overwhelming; he deals with it by taking it one job at a time.

Brander also relies on his family members, like Spc. Ruben Ramirez. Even though Ramirez is a generator mechanic, Brander knows he is a whiz at electrical things and has him help him when he’s stuck on a job.

There is another force at work on this family of mechanics. Not only do they rely on each other, they continually assess their situation and try to make it better.

“What keeps us focused and our heads above water is a positive mental attitude,” said Williams. “We constantly improve our working and living conditions. These things keep our motivation up.”

This effort can be seen in their office area. The family pulled together and erected a tent over an expando-van and acquired a swing somewhere along the way. With a couple plastic chairs and a few palm leaves thrown in for affect, they have a cozy area for customers to wait while their vehicles are being repaired.

The team recently pulled together again and acquired two ceiling fans and installed them in their living quarters. They have already fabricated a window air conditioning unit and a small corner shower.

Future plans include a picket fence and maybe some flowers said Williams. Ramirez said he has more amenities here than he usually does in other field settings. That’s why the generator mechanic has no complaints when they come and wake him up at 2 a.m.

“This is the best deployment I’ve been on,” said Ramirez.

## Community Note

When you pass through the gate at Camp Ironhorse there is a big sign posted on the right hand side of the road. It’s amazing how many times soldiers drive by that sign without noticing it. That sign could save your life or the life of your buddy. The sign directs everyone entering the complex to clear their weapon. It only takes a couple of moments to get out of your vehicle and do the right thing.

**Clear your weapon when entering all installations!**

*By Spc Derek Dexter*

TIKRIT, Iraq -- In another effort to help the citizens of Tikrit and the soldiers of Task Force Ironhorse, Command Sgt. Maj. Gary McElligott, 418<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Battalion, reached an agreement with the local directors of sewage and water.

The agreement calls for the Army to help fix one of the city’s sewage trucks which has been broken since March. In return, the city will send the truck to Camp Ironhorse to clean out the compounds’ septic tanks. Another city truck is already making stops at the compound, but the second truck will ensure all buildings are regularly serviced. The trucks will pay visits twice a week and cost \$50.00 per trip. McElligott is waiting on a list of necessary parts and labor costs to begin the work on the truck.

The meeting took place in the local water and sewage office. With the help of a translator, McElligott discussed the truck with Mr. Nassir, director of water, and Mr. Ahmad, director of water. “I’m trying to develop a light-hearted business relationship with these two,” McElligott explained.

After much discussion and a short drive to inspect the broken-down truck, McElligott said he felt the missions he set out to accomplish had been accomplished; the city will be better able to remove wastewater from its streets and the soldiers will have better living conditions.

## 361<sup>st</sup> Psychological Operations Company

By Pfc Jason Phillips

AL-FALLUJAH, Iraq--One soldier was kissed on the cheek and two others had their ears pulled and noses pinched while on a morning street patrol in Al-Fallujah, Iraq. It's not exactly the kind of treatment soldiers expect when they're on patrol, but that's how the Iraqi children showed their affection for the soldiers.

Sgt. Jason McGinn, Spc. Nicholas Peterson and Spc. Andrew Fyfe received a lot of attention from the children and adults who gathered to observe them. The soldiers are from the 361<sup>st</sup> Psychological Operations Company (PsyOps), USAR, based in Bothel, Wash.

The PsyOps soldiers were members of Task Force Gauntlet operating in Al-Fallujah, Iraq. Fullujah has approximately 200,000 residents and is located 20 miles west of Baghdad. General William Wallace, V Corps' commanding general, sent the task force to the city to restore order and stability following anti-U.S. riots and escalating violence.

The task force included two armored cavalry troops, a mechanized infantry company, a military police company and other specialized teams. It was able to dramatically reduce the violence and helped restore stability to the city. McGinn, Peterson and Fyfe played a role in the success of the mission. They were the first soldiers to go into the city streets to greet citizens following an April 30 grenade attack on U.S. soldiers, and they conducted daily missions during the task's force time in Al-Fallujah.

PsyOps teams are the commander's primary means of communicating with the general public, said McGinn. They communicate by conducting loudspeaker broadcasts, distributing brochures and by face-to-face communication, he said.

"In Al-Fallujah, we went out into the city as a 3-man team, with a small security element, to meet and greet the people and tried to win their hearts and minds. We tried to get them to talk to us and feel comfortable with us, to let them see our faces and build trust with them," McGinn said.

McGinn and his team performed a variety of missions in support of Task Force Gauntlet. They drove through Al-Fallujah's neighborhoods broadcasting pre-recorded messages in Arabic about a citywide curfew. They also went on raids with military police and infantry soldiers to capture weapons and arrest Ba'ath party members. The PsyOps soldiers broadcast instructions for laying down weapons and relayed other directions to keep innocent civilians safe.

It was during foot patrols through the crowded and colorful streets when the soldiers were able to directly communicate with the Iraqi people. They passed out brochures with coalition messages printed in Arabic to adults and messages about the dangers of unexploded ordinance to children. Wherever they went they always attracted a large following of giggling children, boisterous youths and inquisitive adults who crowded around them.

"The Iraqi people are a very touchy-feely people," said Fyfe. "They get right up in your face when they talk to you. Sometimes they want to put their arms around you and it's our job to embrace that 100 percent. We bring a security element to watch our back so we can be the ones to let our guard down and allow them to put their arms around us."

"We're trained to deal with large crowds coming around us and pulling on our gear and asking all kinds of questions," said Peterson. "So we're pretty relaxed about it and we know how to watch out for each other."

McGinn, Fyfe and Peterson enjoyed the close interaction with the people of Al-Fallujah, and the Iraqis seemed to feel the same. They shared jokes with the people, patiently endured the youths who playfully pulled on their ears or pinched their noses, and drank sodas or ate ice cream that people bought for them as they passed local shops. They rode children's bicycles down the sidewalks, or danced to music blaring out of a restaurant--much to the delight of the crowds following them.

Their most rewarding success with Task Force Gauntlet came during one of their first missions in Al-Fallujah, while passing out brochures about the danger of unexploded ordinance to local children, said McGinn. A young boy approached them and led them to a live hand grenade that was lying at the side of the road. The grenade was secured and disarmed by an explosive ordinance disposal team.

"That made us feel really good," said Peterson. "It let us know that our job is really working out here."



Sgt Jason McGinn, 361<sup>st</sup> Psychological Operations Company, listens as a local man voices his concerns in Al-Fallujah, Iraq.



Soldiers get their noses playfully pinched by Iraqi boys.

## Parting Shots



**Command Sgt. Maj. Henry Burns, Jr.**

*by Spc. Joseph Norton*

Caring. Helping. Rewarding. Words that frequently come up when talking with Command Sgt. Maj. Henry Burns, Jr., 2/20<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. These are words he uses when he talks about his work and responsibilities.

Burns' job allows him to get out of the office so that he can do what he enjoys most--interact with his soldiers. That's when he is able to put those words into action everyday.

"I get a chance to really be with the soldiers," said Burns. "I'm out and about watching the young soldiers grow and turning those young soldiers into future leaders is rewarding, very rewarding," he said.

Burns feels part of that growth process takes place when his soldiers are in the community and tending to the needs of Iraqi civilians.

"One of the best things this battalion is doing is we're getting out in the population and really showing the people we care," said Burns. "For instance, we have our medic who goes down into the town every two days to administer to the sick people."

Burns said one of his proudest moments during this deployment happened when a medical team member cared for an Iraqi child with an ear infection. The child was very nervous, and the way the medic overcame the language barrier by touching the child's eyes to sooth him. The crowd of Iraqis watching showed its approval by applauding.

For Burns, improving the quality of life for his soldiers is important. "I want to do everything I can do to make their stay in Iraq as smooth as possible," said Burns. "Give them some touch of home. Since we've been here, we've opened a PX, and we show movies at night for the soldiers, because they work hard."

Burns said he has served 26 "glorious years" in the Army, the last seven with the 4<sup>th</sup> I.D. He is married to Ramona, and they have a son Tim, 22, who is a tanker in the Army serving in Iraq; and a 16-year old daughter, Neisha.

Looking back on his career, Burns said he wishes he hadn't waited so long to go to college, but he doesn't regret it. He was focused on becoming a leader-- the caring and helpful leader he is today.



Lt. Col. Ed Mount, G-3 Chief of Operations, stands at attention as Maj. Gen. Raymond Odierno, Commander of TF Ironhorse and 4<sup>th</sup> ID, places silver oak leaves on his collar. The promotion ceremony took place at the Water Palace in Tikrit, Iraq.



Maj. Gen. Raymond Odierno, Commander of TF Ironhorse and 4<sup>th</sup> ID, pins rank on the collar of Lt. Col. Mike Jones, Secretary General Staff.