THE MOUNTED RIFLEMAN

3d ARMORED CAVALRY REGIMENT OCTOBER 2005

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Published monthly by the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment

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The Mounted Rifleman is the official publication for the Troopers, Noncommissioned Officers, Officers, family members and friends of the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment. Views expressed herein are those of the authors.

The Mounted Rifleman is the primary Command Information tool of the Regimental command leadership. Its mission is to foster esprit de corps, enhance morale and keep Troopers informed throughout the Regiment.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

There aren't too many times in life when one can say they were a part of history, but on Oct. 15, the men and women serving in uniform here in Iraq could boast and make claim of witnessing a great and historic day.

The people of Iraq, who suffered at the hands of tyranny from one of the most evil men in history, made their voice heard at the poll booths throughout the country as they voted on their Constitutional Referendum.

The people of Iraq had their say!

This would not have been possible if it were not for the service and sacrifices of Soldiers, especially those of the Regiment of Mounted Cavalrymen.

Partnered with our Iraqi counterparts, we contributed significantly to the security on Election Day thus preventing terrorists from disrupting the democratic process.

We should be proud and honored to tell to our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren our role in securing freedom and democracy to those who were once oppressed.

Throughout the month of October, our Troopers have served the Regiment with distinction. Sgt. 1st Class Gary Villalobos of Sabre Squadron was pinned the Silver Star Medal by Maj. Gen. David Rodriquez for his actions recovering a fallen comrade.

Staff Sergeants Jeffrey Marjerrison and Gene Braxton of Remington Troop, continued the fine tradition of Troopers reenlisting to stay Army. Their actions are reflective of the many men and women who continue to serve our nation in both peace and war.

It is because of Soldiers who serve in our great Army and our great Regiment, we are able to have the successes we've accomplished so far during our deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

We've made history and we've witnessed history. We should be proud.

-- The Editor

Courtesy photo

Cover: An Iraqi solider proudly displays his ink-stained finger minutes after voting in Iraq's Election Day for the Constitution Referendum. See article and photos on Pages 8-10. Left: Sabre Squadron troopers walk down a street in Tal Afar, Iraq led by Vigor, a Belgium Malinois, trained to find explosives. See related article and photos of the K-9 team on Pages 29-30.

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Cover photo by Photographer's Mate First Class Alan D. Monyelle

A message from the
71st Colonel of the Regiment

Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks

Col. H.R. McMaster, 71st Regimental Commander, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, talks to a local sheik days before Iraq's national election to vote on the Constitution Referendum.

Over the past month, the Regiment has worked to secure its successes in Western Ninewa and expand security in South Baghdad. Sabre Squad-ron and the 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment have prevented the enemy from reestablishing its campaign of terror in Tal Afar.

Tiger Squadron conducted aggressive reconnaissance and security operations along the Syrian border after a month of fighting in Tal Afar during Operation Restoring Rights.

Tiger also deployed a task force to Tal Afar to increase security for the constitutional referendum. Thunder Squadron partnered with an Iraqi Army Battalion and secured an area south of Baghdad that the enemy used as a safe haven and a support base.

Col. H.R. McMaster and Lt. Col. Christopher Hickey, Sabre Squadron commander, share a moment in Tal Afar near the castle.

The Regiment, along side the Iraqi Army and police, secured a historic Constitutional Referendum that will allow Iraq to form a representative, stable government.

Our troopers continued to perform magnificently. After an intense period of tough fighting, the Regiment pursued the enemy and accelerated the development of Iraqi Security Forces.

Our aggressive actions preempted many attacks; protected the Iraqi people and the election process; and set conditions for the establishment of permanent security with Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army.

Life has returned to Tal Afar. Immediately following Operation Restoring Rights, the Regiment initiated a series of reconstruction projects throughout the city.

The change was dramatic and gratifying to see.

The streets are clean. Repairs to water and electrical systems are underway. New construction has begun and markets are opening.

The city government is functioning and the courthouse is open.

Children are back in school and playing in the streets.

Our partner Iraqi Army unit - the 3rd Iraqi Army Division (3rd IA) - continued to perform with distinction alongside our troopers.

The 3rd IA continues to improve and many companies and even battalions now operate independently.

This is due to the hard work and dedication of our troopers who have fully embraced partnership with their units and understand that developing the Iraqi Army into an effective fighting unit is the key to defeating the enemy.

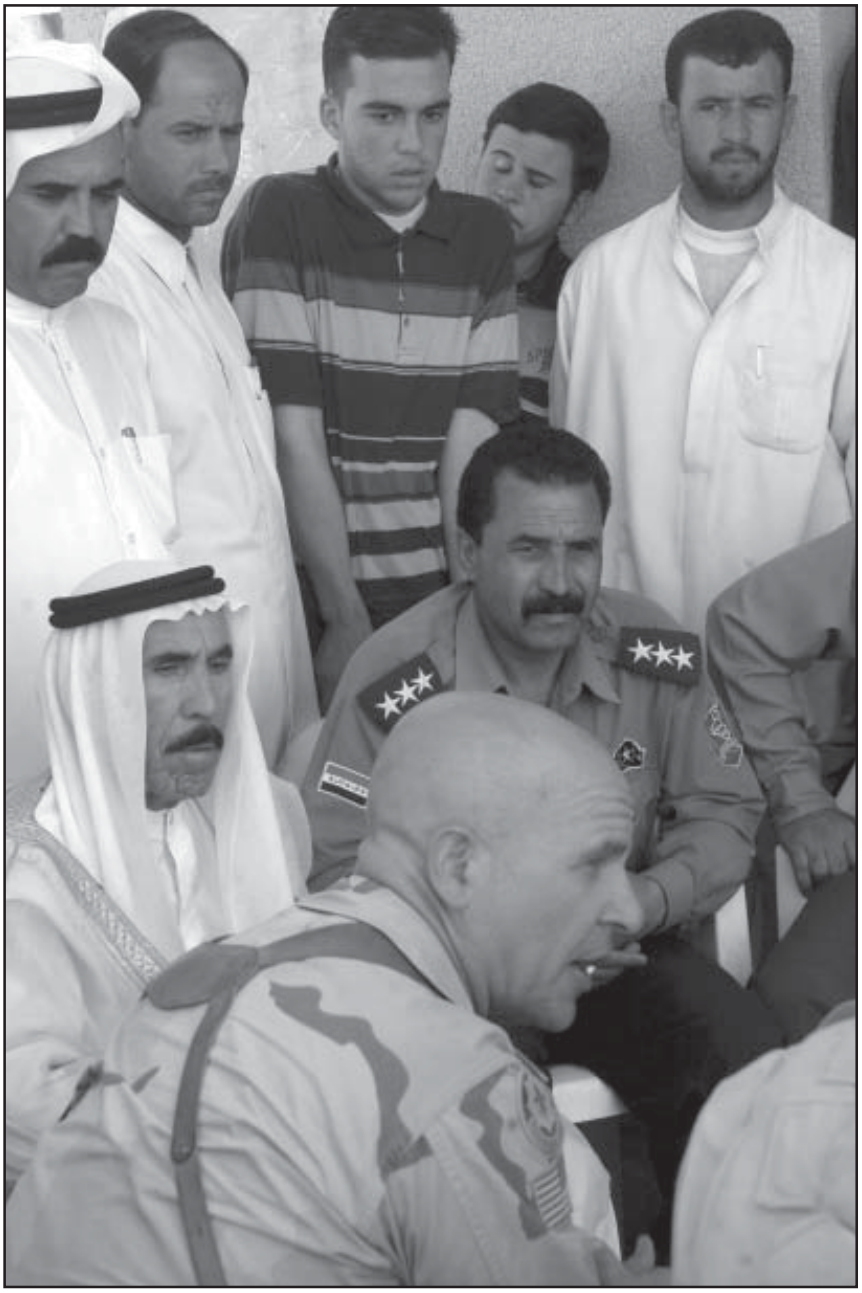
In Tal Afar, the division expanded operations into the heart of the city and are supporting the development of the Iraqi Police (IPs).

The Regiment began an aggressive police recruiting and training program.

With the pall of fear lifted from the population in Tal Afar, the Regiment was able to attract hundreds of recruits.

We are ensuring that the police are ready to fight, and we are integrating their security efforts into our operations and Iraqi Army operations.

"Life has returned to Tal Afar...The change was dramatic and gratifying to see...Children are back in school and playing in the streets."



Col. H.R. McMaster, 71st Regimental Commander, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, talks security to the leaders of an Iraqi town in the Western Ninewa Province prior to Iraq's Election Day.

The police in Tal Afar have therefore improved dramatically. The combined effort of our forces, Iraqi Army, and Iraqi Police forces, throughout the Regimental Area of Operations has greatly increased security.

The enemy can no longer hide behind the people.

Along the Syrian border, the Iraqi Border Police are identifying and capturing people who are smuggling weapons and contraband across the border.

Smuggled goods, such as sheep, benzene, and cigarettes, provide financial support for the insurgency. Tiger Squadron and their attached Border Police Training Teams continue to increase the capability of Iraqi Border Police to control the border with Syria.

The Constitutional Referendum, held on Oct. 15, was a great success. One hundred and sixty-two thousand people voted across the province – over 65 percent of registered voters.

This was a 400 percent increase in voter turnout over the January elections in our area of operations.

This high turnout was despite the terrorists' desperate attempt to intimidate the population prior to the referendum and is indicative of how the Regiment and our Iraqi brothers-in-arms have improved security throughout the region.

In the critical area of South Baghdad, Thunder Squadron protected the capitol city and exacted a heavy toll on the enemy.

The squadron established patrol bases in this difficult region and ensured that the predominantly Sunni farmlands south of the capitol were secure enough to vote.

Thunder's efforts were extremely successful. The population seized the opportunity to determine their future. They voted in unprecedented numbers for this area.

The White Falcons of the 82nd Airborne Division have made a tremendous contribution to our efforts in Tal Afar. They gained the trust of the population in Tal Afar and are protecting the people as they pursued the enemy.

With the addition of an elite airborne infantry battalion, the Regiment's combined arms team is complete.

Brave Rifles!

A message from the
XVII CSM of the Regiment

I would like to pay special tribute this month to our wounded troopers who are recovering in the United States from wounds they received on the battlefields of Iraq.

In October I had the privilege of visiting our wounded troopers in the Evans Army Hospital at Fort Carson, Colo., the Brooks Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, and the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington D.C.

First of all, I can assure everyone that these brave troopers are receiving top flight medical care as they recover from their wounds.

The staff, doctors, and nurses caring for them are dedicated to ensuring that they recover to the fullest recoveries medically possible.

The Soldiers were in great spirits and ready to get back to their units. They asked how their comrades were doing and said they wished they were still in the fight with them.

The determination and courage they are exhibiting on their long road to recovery is an inspiration to me.

Our brave wounded troopers deserve the highest honor and respect. We must ensure that we do not forget them. The hospital can be a lonely place.

The hardest part of the recovery process for the wounded is being separated from their comrades.

I encourage all of our troopers to make it a point to communicate with these troopers on a regular basis.

The small amount of time we take to communicate with them will keep them going through the long months ahead. When we think that our job is hard and stressful, take a moment to think of our wounded comrades.

They have the hardest fight.

My father served in the air force for 25 years and is a Vietnam Veteran.

He once told me about his experience seeing wounded comrades and how people treated them.

There is a tendency for people to act differently around wounded veterans, as if they are afraid to talk to them because of their wounds.

He told me that a wounded war veteran once told him, "Don't ask me to bleed for my country then whisper that I should be ashamed of my wounds."

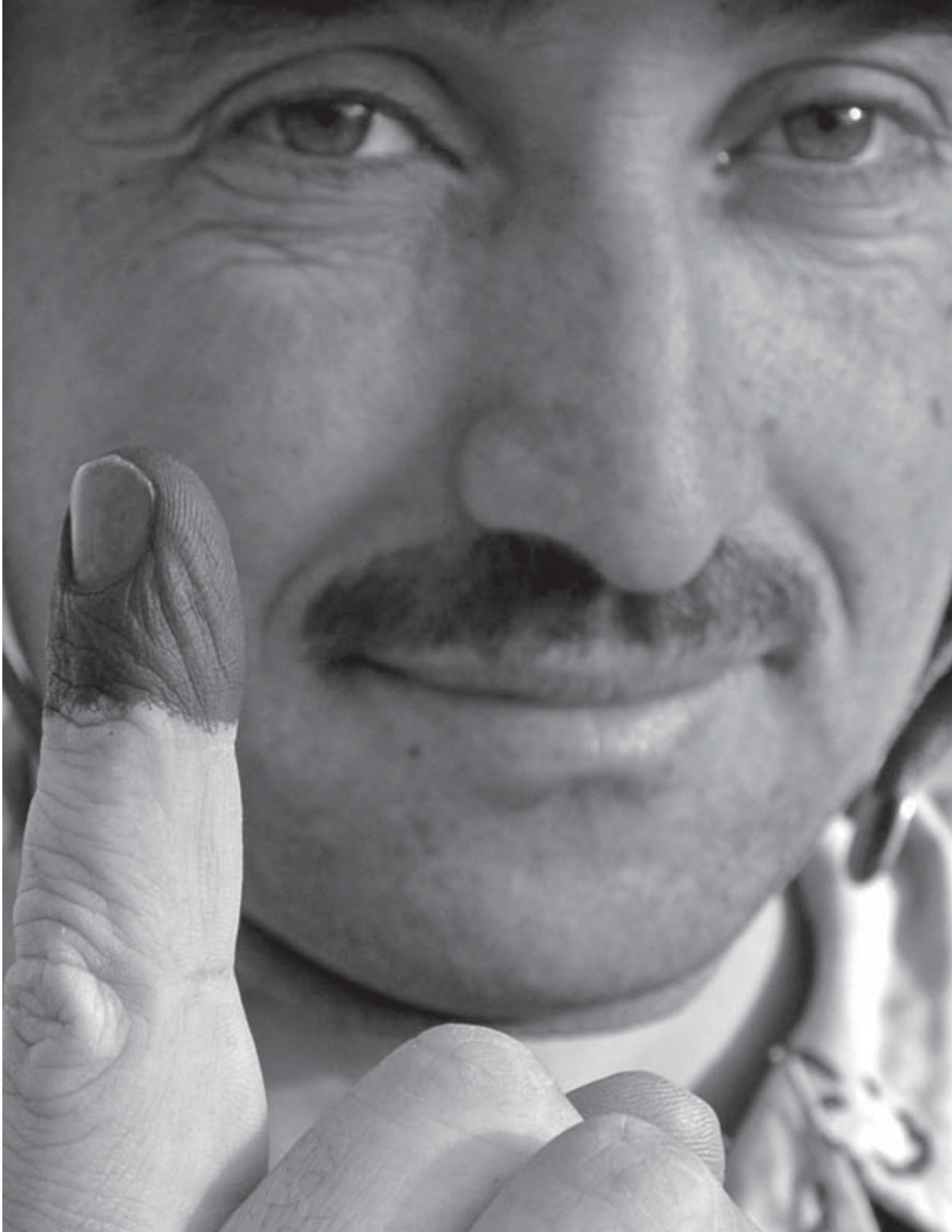
We must do our part to ensure that our wounded comrades never have to speak that line to us.

Finally, I would like to thank the families for their steadfast support of their Soldiers on their recovery.

The sacrifices you have made in support of your wounded loved does not go unrecognized by myself and the troopers of the Regiment.

We are fighting everyday to ensure that the sacrifice your Soldier has made was not made in vain.

Brave Rifles!



IRAQ'S HISTORIC DAY

3d Armored Cavalry Regiment partners with Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police to provide security for Western Ninewa Province voters as they take part in historic Iraqi elections, cast ballots for country's permanent constitution, future

Photo by Lt. Col. Christopher Hickey

BY SFC DONALD SPARKS
NCOIC, 3d ACR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Iraqis by the tens of thousands lined up to cast their vote for the country's permanent constitution Oct. 15 throughout the West ern Ninewa Province. The elections were considered a democratic milestone for citizens in the region, who united against terrorism to make their voice heard as 'free voters' for the national referendum.

The Iraqi draft constitution was put to a national referendum, giving the people of Iraq an opportunity to voice their approval or desire to make changes to the constitution.

In the cities of Tal Afar, Sinjar, Bi'aj and Rabiyah, polling stations opened for the first time since elections were held in January when the nation elected the Transitional National Assembly.

Unlike earlier this year, when only 17 total polling stations were available for the entire province, 58 polling sites were opened – with 11 in Tall Afar, which had the lowest turnout next to Fallujah in the January election.

In Tall Afar the citizens came out in masse to vote. Voters by the thousands exited the polls with their purple fingers raised.

Opposite photo by Photographer's Mate First Class Alan D. Monyelle

Photo by Photographer's Mate First Class Alan D. Monyelle

An Iraqi man shows his identification to an Iraqi soldier in downtown Tal Afar at a polling station. Iraqi Army Security Forces with assistance from the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment provided security for the region preventing terrorists from disrupting the election process.

"The people of Tall Afar are very happy to have this opportunity to vote and hope after today's elections that all of Iraq is unified together as one voice," said Tall Afar Mayor Najem.

"Yesterday I said to all of the people, 'go to the polls and refuse terrorism.' The terrorists made their voice with the car bombing; but the people of Tall Afar answered back by going to the polls," Najem said. "The people showed they were not afraid to stand up to the terrorists by voting. I am very proud of the people."

Two hours after polls opened, Independent Electoral Commission officials at one of the polling stations reported the site was running out of ballots.

Iraqi Police coordinated a rush resupply of ballots and the voting continued uninterrupted.

The high turnout of voters at the polls was attributed to the commitment to security by the Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police. More than 3,000 soldiers and police were committed to increasing law and order and stability which allowed the citizens to vote in a safe and secure environment.

As the lead agencies for security for the elections, the Army and Police combined and synchronized their efforts to gather intelligence, seek and arrest individuals threatening the election process and develop strategies for protecting voters.

Najem also expressed his pride in the Iraqi Security Forces for "their professionalism and service throughout the election day."

3d Armored Cavalry Regiment and 82nd Airborne Division Soldiers provided additional security measures in assisting the Iraqi Security Forces by providing concrete barriers and concertina wire.

The large voter turnout demonstrated the population's refusal to be intimidated by terrorists. Celebrating their day of democracy, a crowd of voters gathered, chanting, "Say no to terrorism!"

When one woman was asked whether or not she was afraid of terrorists spotting her ink-stained finger, she replied, "I don't care about the terrorists; this is what I believe in!"

Reconstruction projects aims to rebuild Tal Afar, help Iraqi citizens

By Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks
NCOIC, 3d ACR Public Affairs

The road to recovery for Tal Afar began immediately following Operation Restoring Rights as approximately $7 million was designated for reconstruction to rebuild the city.

The city's infrastructure was damaged by terrorists who used the Tal Afar as a stronghold and safe haven. Terrorists destroyed schools, roads, electrical and water resources and any government building resulting in.

According to Lt. Cmdr. Rich Anderson, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Liaison Officer to 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, there are 78 projects underway to reconstruct Tal Afar.

The $7 million breakdown includes $2 million for water, $1.2 million for electrical, $1.1 million for roads, $1 million for clean up, $750,000 for schools and $900,000 for other projects.

Anderson, along with Lt. Col. Miguel Sapp, director, Civil Military Operations Center, have worked directly with local Iraqi contractors to hire workers from the city, enabling the citizens to take part in rebuilding their own city.

They put together Bill of Quantities, collect bids from the contractors and award projects through the MOA process.

As a project purchasing officer, Anderson develops and manage the projects and he also conduct payment and receipt arrangements.

"Some of our projects have gone contract requiring assistance from Task Force Freedom, but for the most part all of the work is done through small jobs with local contractors," Anderson said.

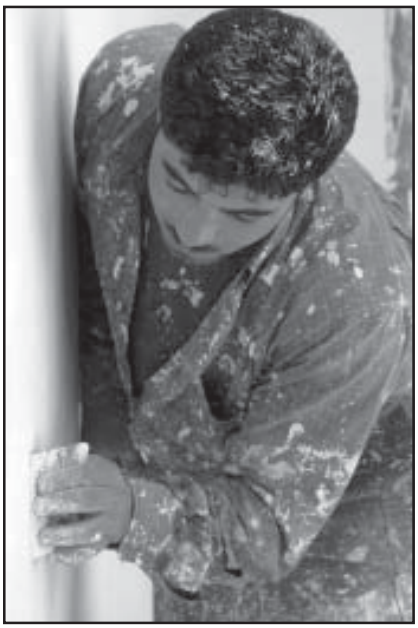


Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks

An Iraqi man scrapes old paint off a wall in an Iraqi school house classroom. Since Operation Restoring Rights,17 schools have undergone renovation to repair damages caused by terrorists in Tal Afar.

He cited several examples of projects and their progress:

Water: New water tanker filling station (starting), water tower repairs (complete), nine new 6,000-liter water tanker trucks (delivery on-going), treatment plant repair (on-going) and 11 wells drilled in areas with little or no water;

Electrical: Installed 60 transformers, cable, power poles and circuit breakers (50 percent complete);

Roads: 15 projects including pothole patching, curb and median repair (50 percent complete);

Schools: 17 school renovations (approximately 60 percent);

Cleanup: 23 projects that include trash and rubble removal, demolition and repairing building facing in public areas; and

Other: 10 projects that include things like repair of battle damage to Mosques, parks and playgrounds.

"Overall we are making good progress," Anderson said. "Schools are really going well. When I first saw some of these schools they were in such bad condition, I had never seen anything like it."

Anderson particularly commended the citizens of Tal Afar for their participation in the rebuilding of their city after suffering from nearly a year of intimidation by terrorists. He also expressed remorse for the day he has to leave the city.

"I'm excited to see all of this going on and am sad that I'll miss the finish of some of this work when I redeploy," Anderson said. "It is also great to see the Iraqi's taking charge. They have done all the work. We have simply supplied them with the missing parts.

"We haven't reached everyone yet, but we have a broad effort that is changing things fairly quickly."

On more than one occasion, Anderson said residents have come to personally express their gratitude and mentioned their electricity works or that their water is better.

TIGER SQUADRON

By Lt. Col. Gregory Reilly
Tiger Squadron Commander

October in Iraq for Tiger Squadron is a time of transition for many reasons, transition from summer to autumn, transition to the political period in Iraq, and transition into the last third of our deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The Squadron was instrumental to improving security in Tal Afar and across the remainder of northwestern Iraq.

The Squadron conducted over 45 combat operations during the last 30 days, resulting in 310 insurgents being captured and numerous weapons caches being found.

We conducted operations in places called Mahalabiyia, Tal Afar, Bi'aj, Sinjar, Rabiyah, Al Hussein and Dohola.

I am confident that no other unit in Iraq has been stretched as far, worked so hard, or been challenged in so many different ways as Tiger Squadron during the last 45 days.

Every member of the Squadron has been working at an incredible pace, sustaining a remarkable tempo in order to improve security in Iraq and set conditions for successful elections on the Constitutional Referendum.

The aggressiveness, skill, and flexibility of the Squadron continue to be tested as we conduct split-based operations from multiple locations.

Our Cavalry troops continue to successfully interdict those who illegally cross the Iraqi/Syrian border.

It is important to stop all those smuggling and crossing into Iraq from Syria as many of them are also involved in smuggling weapons and foreign fighters.

Our forces work together with the Iraqi Border Defenses and the Iraqi Army when conducting surveillance of the border in order to train Iraqi forces to conduct this mission once our forces redeploy.

Apache Troop, Bandit Troop, and Crazyhorse Troop have been very busy training Iraqi security forces and concurrently conducting operations in Tal Afar.

Their leaders and Soldiers consistently demonstrate that there are no better units in the Regiment at executing counter insurgency operations.

Dragon Company continues to conduct operations in Tal Afar, masterfully securing key roads so that all forces can move around safely.

See **TIGER,** Page 14

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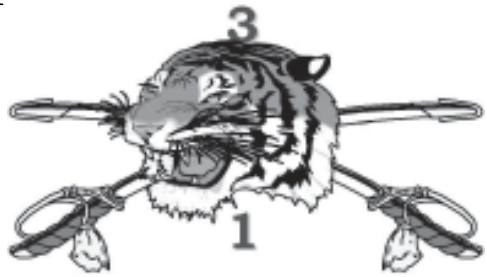


Support Platoon takes care of Tiger during operation

By Sgt. Eric Jezierski
Apache Squad, Support Platoon

When a twenty-man element from Support Platoon arrived at FOB Sykes on Sept. 25 to support First Squadron during Operation Restoring Rights, they soon realized their flexibility and stamina would soon be put to the test.

With elements of the platoon located at FOB Al Nimr, (FOB Tiger II near Sinjar), Rabiyah, Bi'aj, and the Retrans site on Sinjar Mountain, the platoon was already familiar with ever changing mission requirements.

The offensive in Tal Afar would be no different. Support Platoon, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, First Squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment is a unit that takes pride in being extremely versatile.

In a matter of days they found themselves supplying logistics to Tiger Squadron along with the Iraqi Army, police, police commandos and special operations forces – a total of 2,300 Soldiers spread over 12 separate locations throughout the city.

Looking back at the beginning of the mission, Staff Sgt. Eleaza Jynes, Support Platoon squad leader, said, "We realized early on in the mission that we were going to need everyone's best performance on this one. To their credit, none of the Soldiers had to be reminded of the importance of the task at hand.

"They all knew what was at stake and reacted with the resolve of a veteran formation."

Support Platoon pushed logistics to numerous locations within Tal Afar primarily at the Castle, Fort Apache, the grainery, the gas station and several checkpoints.

At the height of activity during the offensive, this required three to four logistical packages on a daily basis.

In addition, the platoon provided 24-hour fuel standby points at FOB Sykes and the grainery.

"Pushing fuel, ammunition, food, water, and ice to our troops in the field is an all too often under appreciated task, which receives little notoriety," Jynes said. "However, should these vital supplies are not delivered on time, then we become well known for the wrong reason."

Support Platoon was determined not to let that happen. Showing great resilience, the Soldiers performed their duties with diligence, efficiency, and pride.

According to Pfc. Kevin Evans, the unit really pulled together and jelled during the operation.

"I'm really proud of what we were able to accomplish in Tal Afar," Evans said. "I thought our guys did a great job."

Evans, who is best known by his fellow troopers for his strong work ethic and quiet determination, put in long hours driving and gunning on a HEMTT, as did the rest of the soldiers from support.

See **TIGER,** Page 14

Photo by Staff Sgt. Eleaza Jynes

Soldiers of Support Platoon, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, First Squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, marshall their convoy to move a logistical package to troopers throughout the squadron's area of operations.

TIGER from Page 12

Predator Battery continues to command and control all force protection operations to include securing our supply routes.

Their daily contribution is just awesome as they work hard to allow our soldiers to move freely in our area of operations.

King Battery provides responsive fires in support of the Squadron, secures a large part of terrain and conducts operations in Tal Afar. King Battery is without question the most versatile and resilient artillery battery in the Army.

Roughrider Troop continues to perform the impossible task of providing logistics, maintenance, and administrative support to the Squadron that is spread over 150 kilometers.

Together, working with our attachments, we are a versatile and adaptive force that is capable of achieving superior results when conducting any mission across vast areas under some of the most arduous conditions in Iraq.

The execution of the referendum election in October was executed flawlessly. The Squadron was assigned 29 of the Regiment's 58 polling sites.

Each polling site required barriers to be emplaced to protect the sites against suicide bombers and required Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army Forces to be trained and positioned at each site.

The Squadron worked hard for two continuous weeks preparing for elections which were a complete and total success.

The Iraqi people came out in droves to all the polling villages to cast their vote and participate in a new democracy. Over 75,000 people participated at the polling sites. This is a testament to the progress the great Tiger Team is making in Iraq.

This event, combined with the $2.1 million in contracts that are underway, along with the strengthening of Iraqi security forces every day, ultimately contribute to a stronger more confident Iraq whose future is very positive.

The weather is now changing, it is cooler and the winds of winter are gathering strength. The leaders and Soldiers of Tiger Squadron continue to exceed every expectation, performing magnificently at every turn.

Their contributions to the people of Iraq, to our Regiment, and our Army are distinctly unique and significant, and will last forever.

Tiger Squadron has a distinctive chemistry, with the key ingredient being the support we receive from our loved ones at home and formed by the bonds made during the hard work our leaders and Soldiers perform every day in Iraq.

I am so very proud of the Squadron, starting with the commitment and sacrifice of our Family Readiness Groups, our families, of the great work by our Rear Detachment, and the numerous accomplishments of our units.

It is a real pleasure to be part of such a great team. Thank you.

Tiger 6

TIGER from Page 13

The platoon's makeup of Soldiers includes truck drivers, fuelers, Cavalry scouts, and tankers.

Although each Soldier has his own individual assignment in the platoon, each man cross-trains to learn the job of their fellow trooper.

"No doubt we derive strength from being so well diversified," said Support Platoon leader Capt. Gary Mitchell, referring to his platoon's success. "During this past mission we leveraged that strength, accompanied by hard work, enabling us to facilitate mission accomplishment."

Mitchell added, "I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that the Soldiers showed their true merit on this mission; their performance was commendable."

As the mission in Tal Afar came to a close, the Soldiers of Support Platoon spent their last day working through the night cleaning up debris left behind by the departed line troops.

Quietly and efficiently they went about their task as the night passed into morning.

They performed their last task of the operation with dignity, as they had done with the first, and with a solemn sense of pride that is often associated with superb accomplishment.

SABRE SQUADRON

By Lt. Col. Christopher Hickey
Sabre Squadron Commander

Greetings again from Tal Afar! The Sabre cavalrymen have recently completed their most demanding task thus far in this deployment.

Our Soldiers were called upon to perform the daunting task of ridding the Sarai district of insurgents and they responded resiliently.

Now that we have overcome that hurdle, our focus has turned towards this month's elections. Coalition Forces have prepped the city to allow its inhabitants to practice democracy proudly and most importantly, safely.

The teamwork displayed by Sabre Squadron has displayed has been impeccable. We have carried out countless missions with not only our American brethren, but Iraqi Army and Police forces as well.

The recent completion of the Operation Restoring Rights boosted the morale of both our troopers and the local townspeople. The lack of insurgent presence in Tal Afar can now be felt by everyone.

All participants in the Sarai mission should be proud of their accomplishments. Our troopers spent endless days and nights searching for insurgent personnel and weapons caches.

Longknife Squadron deserves a great deal of credit for the assistance they provided to our ground troops. Without their air assets, it would have been a more complicated, drawn out fight.

Now that we have the distinct upper hand, we intend to keep it that way with a strong military presence in Tal Afar. It is important to give the local populace a feeling of security.

Naturally, families will not want their peace disturbed by violence. To prevent this, they will often volunteer valuable intelligence to the Coalition Forces.

Now that the major offensive has come to a close, Sabre has now begun undertaking its next task. The elections are currently the number one priority.

Through our joint planning with Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police we have been able to properly organize a network of secure polling sites to encourage a high voter turn out.

The main reason for America's presence in Iraq is to promote the spread of democracy. Therefore, the troopers coordinating and protecting the elections here in Tal Afar should hold their heads high knowing that they have a first hand involvement in ensuring freedom.

As it is often noted, we truly do need to win over the hearts and minds of the local people for democracy to take a foot hold.

In order to ensure a high level of trust in the Coalition's intentions, improvements are continually being made to the city's infrastructure and humanitarian aid missions go out on a regular basis.

Thus far, the troopers of Sabre Squadron have shown their merit. Time and time again they have portrayed their ability to use overwhelming force when necessary.

However, the finesse of diplomacy is often a fine line to walk. On all levels of warfare, our Soldiers have given me the utmost feeling of confidence that we will continue our successes.

I have no doubt that the future of the citizen's of Tal Afar is bright.

VILLALOBOS

SILVER MEDALIST

Villalobos pinned Silver Star for courage under fire

Article and Photos By Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks

One of the four tenets of a warrior is to never leave a fallen comrade behind. One of the seven core Army Values is personal courage – both physical and moral. Add these two elements together and you have Sgt. 1st Class Gary Villalobos.

Villalobos, assigned to Fox Troop, Second Squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, was awarded the Silver Star Medal Oct. 12 for his gallantry in combat while outnumbered by insurgents on June 7 in Tal Afar, Iraq.

Villalobos' courage under fire, tactical discipline and weapons proficiency destroyed an enemy attack position and prevented insurgents from capturing a fallen American Soldier.

In earning the Silver Star, Villalobos attained the Army's third highest valor award.

During the ceremony, Maj. Gen. David Rodriguez, commanding general, Task Force Freedom, said that Villalobos was a perfect example for all Soldiers serving the nation.

"When the authors wrote about the Soldier's Code and the Warrior Ethos, they were writing about Sergeant First Class Villalobos," Rodriguez said to an audience of both American and Iraqi Soldiers in attendance. "He stands as an example of what a brave Soldier can do. And it's because of NCOs like Villalobos; we can make a difference, win the fight against the terrorists and help the people of Iraq."

Visibly humbled af-ter pinned the medal, Villalobos, who has been in 3d ACR for four years, gave a short speech accepting the honor.

"I'm not a man of many words, but of many actions," said the 14-year Army indirect fire infantryman from Santa Maria, Calif. "I'm truly honored and I consider myself privileged to serve in this unit and regiment."

During a squadron operation in Tal Afar that consisted of several raids and a movement to contact by multiple units, Villalobos was tasked to follow and assist an Iraqi Army platoon and two members of the 1st Brigade Military Transition Team – one being Lt Col. Terrence Crowe.

The first member of the team was injured during a raid on the platoon's first target leaving Villalobos and Crowe to lead the Iraqi soldiers.

The squadron came under heavy attack from hand grenades, an improvised explosive device, rocket propelled grenades and machine gun fire as the engagement began with the enemy.

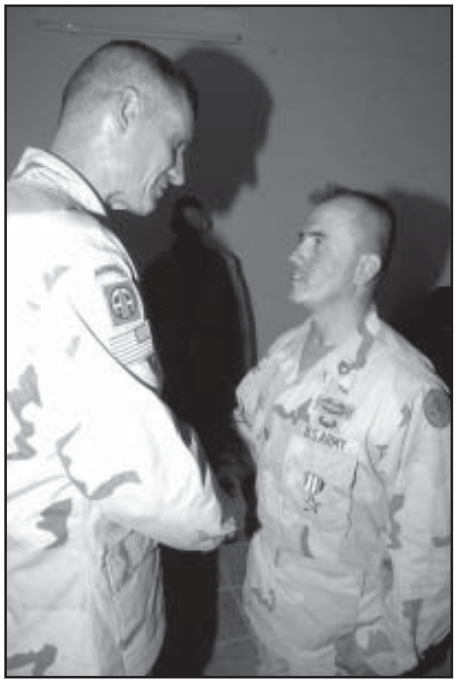
Villalobos was given the order to move a squad of his IA platoon to a position along a known deadly alleyway owned by the insurgents.

"I remember very clearly to this day the sound and sheer volume of the gunfire from his position in the fight," said Capt. Jesse Sellars, commander, Fox Troop, 2/3 ACR, who was fighting about 200 meters away.

Both Villalobos and Crowe maneuvered down the dangerous alleyway where five insurgents initiated a small arms ambush.

Crowe and two IA soldiers came under a hail of gunfire; with Crowe getting hit numerous times in the lower abdomen falling 10 feet in front of Villalobos.

At this point, according to Villalobos, his training and instinct as a Soldier kicked in despite taking a barrage of fire and witnessing all but two of the IA soldiers retreating to safety.



Sgt. 1st Class Gary Villalobos, assigned to Fox Troop, Second Squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, is congratulated by Maj. Gen. David Rodriguez, commander, Task Force Freedom, after receiving the Silver Star Medal for gallantry in combat.

"To this day, I'm still amazed that I did not break contact with the enemy," Villalobos said. "If I had a split second to think, I probably would have broke contact. I just instinctively stayed and fought until the enemy broke contact."

Indeed he did fight.

After reporting the downed officer, Villalobos returned fire with his M4 carbine.

He attempted to gain fire superiority with the remaining two IA soldiers, but without a translator, they would only return fire when Villalobos fired his weapon.

Unable to get fire cover, Villalobos was initially unable to move into the kill zone to retrieve Crowe.

After emptying his first magazine, he called for armor support and threw a well-placed grenade on the enemy fighting position killing at least one insurgent.

Living the other tenets of the Warrior Ethos, (refuse to accept defeat, never quit) Villalobos then moved into the kill sack and evacuated Crowe to an arriving Bradley Fighting Vehicle.

"The body of Lieutenant Colonel Crowe could have been captured by the enemy had it not been for Ser-

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SILVER from Page 18

Capt. Jesse Sellars, commander, Fox Troop, Second Squadron, 3d ACR, and Villalobos pose for a photo after Villalobos was pinned the Silver Star for his heroic actions on June 7, 2005 in which he engaged the enemy to retrieve the body of a fallen comrade.

geant First Class Villalobos' actions," Sellars said, who wrote the submission for the Silver Star. "It means a lot to me for this phenomenal NCO to be recognized for his actions on that day and service to our country."

After the ceremony Col. H.R. McMaster, 3d ACR commander and 71st Colonel of the Regiment, gave Villalobos a tight hug, several pats on the back and thanked him for his service to the Regiment.

"This courageous Soldier is an inspiration to every trooper in the Regiment of Mounted Riflemen," McMaster said. "He epitomizes the real strength of this Regiment and our Army – Soldiers who are willing to take risks and make sacrifices for their fellow Soldiers and to accomplish our vital mission."

McMaster added, "Serving alongside troopers like Sergeant First Class Gary Villalobos is an honor and one of the intangible rewards of service in our Army."

Training pays off for Sabre medics

Soldiers put skills to test during mass casualty events

By Capt. Samuel Cook
Regimental Adjutant

The explosion rattled the school where Spc. Otis McDowell was working. Unfazed, he continued to medically examine the Iraqi Army candidate. In his mind, explosions in Tal Afar are common, and nothing seemed particularly unusual about this one.

But then the screaming started, and he knew this one was different.

"Medic, medic!," yelled the Soldiers from 2-325 Infantry Battalion who were securing the Iraqi Army Recruiting center in the Hassan Qoi district of Tal Afar.

McDowell and Pfc. Jeffrey Regets from Sabre Squadron's medical platoon immediately donned their equipment, grabbed their aid bags, and dashed toward the chaos outside.

Just a few minutes before the explosion, nearly 100 men from Tal Afar were gathered outside the screening point to enter an Iraqi Army recruiting point.

A young woman and her small child began walking amongst the crowd of young men. Suddenly, she pulled

Photo by Capt. Timothy Coffman

Sabre Squadron medics treat injured Iraqi citizens following a suicide bombing attack at the Grainery in Tal Afar, Iraq. The medics received extensive training prior to prepare for mass casualty events.

out her prayer beads and began to pray, "Allah, Akbar, Allah Akbar [God is great, God is great]."

The men around her realized what was about to happen and started to scatter. The suicide vest that her mother was wearing under her Burkha exploded. The woman and child died instantly, along with six Iraqi Police recruits; over 35 others lay wounded.

McDowell and Regets arrived at the scene and im

See **MEDICS,** Page 20

MEDICS from Page 19

mediately took charge of the situation, aided by medics from Lion Battery and 2-325. The Soldiers from 2-325 secured the site and began collecting the casualties.

McDowell immediately took charge and conducted triage – a medical term for determining categories of patients: minimal (walking wounded who can wait for treatment), delayed (wounds that need treatment, but can wait), immediate (wounds that threaten life, limb, or eyesight and require immediate attention), and expectant (patients that have little chance of surviving and whose treatment would require resources and effort that would save the lives of other patients).

Meanwhile, Regets treated the patients who were classified as immediate.

McDowell, after separating patients, directed the Soldiers on scene on what he needed from them. Then he joined Regets and Pfc. Michael Calvello, a medic from Lion Battery, in treating the most seriously injured.

Within 40 minutes, all of the wounded had been treated and evacuated. Only two of the 37 injured died of wounds, and they had been deemed "expectant" from the beginning.

After the casualties were evacuated, the Sabre medics returned to the screening facility and finished screening the 60 recruits who were already inside the secure site when the blast occurred.

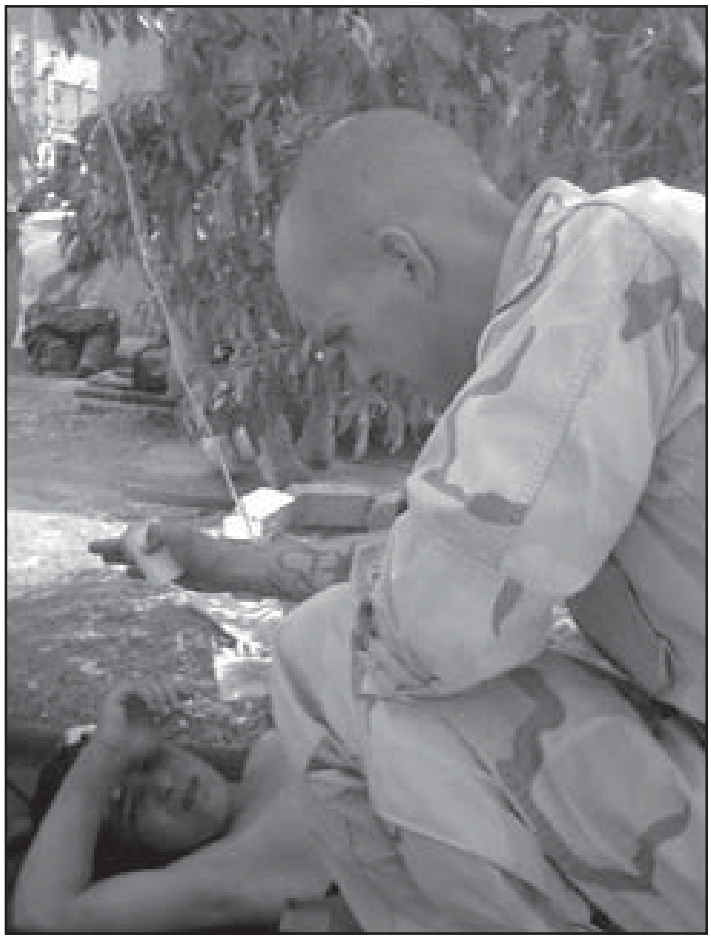

Photo by Capt. Timothy Coffman

Spc. Justin Harcum, a medic from Support Squadron, treats a young Iraqi child before evacuating him.

"Getting right back to work was the best thing for us," McDowell said.

The Iraqi Army Recruits were all screened by dinner that evening. The two young medics packed up their equipment and returned to the Squadron Forward Aid Station at the Grainery on the western edge of town.

Less than two weeks after the suicide bombing, Capt. Timothy Coffman was sitting at his medical table in the Forward Aid Station filling out paperwork for Iraqi Army recruits who had come to a recruiting station at the Grainery.

A large explosion shook the room, rattling the medical table and causing him to scribble wildly on his medical form.

"I could tell the blast was far away, but it was far larger than normal," Coffman said. "I told the guys to get ready for casualties."

This time the suicide bomber was driving an explosive-laden vehicle and struck a bustling market in the heart of Tal Afar, less than 300 meters from Sabre's Tactical Operation Center in the ancient Ottoman Castle downtown.

Fox Troop and headquarters elements, including the Squadron Commander, Lt. Col. Christopher Hickey, rushed to the scene.

This time, the terrorists had struck old men, women, and children shopping for their nightly Ramadan Feast.

Coffman and four Sabre medics, including McDowell, rushed outside to receive the first two casualties.

Before they could finish treating these casualties, twenty more were taken from the back of pick-up trucks

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MEDICS from Page 20

"They are not sure how to feel, so I sit them down to tell them they did as well as they could. You can't bear the guilt for what these people have done."

-- Capt. Timothy Coffmann, Sabre Squadron

and vans and put in a pile by frantic Iraqis, racing back to the market to retrieve more casualties.

Coffman began the triage, issued instructions to his medics, and continued to check their work, jumping in to treat the most critically wounded patients.

And the casualties kept coming in – more than 60 arrived at Sabre's Aid Station. The people of Tal Afar knew to send the most critically wounded to Sabre – the routine casualties went to the local hospital.

Coffman stopped to treat a five-year-old boy who had received shrapnel to the head. Coffman said he thought of his own children and lingered, desperately trying to stabilize him.

But his training reminded him: fifteen minutes spent on this patient, who would most likely not survive, would cost many more people their lives.

He made the heart-wrenching decision to move the child to the "expectant" section of the treatment site and instructed the medics to stop treating him.

"That was hard," Coffman said as his eyes trailed off.

Coffman and his medics treated and evacuated over 60 people within 90 minutes. They used more than 100 tourniquets, 400 bandages, and 100 IV bags.

The next day, Sabre medics would respond to another suicide bombing at an Iraqi Police Recruiting Station. In two weeks, they had responded to three mass casualty events and treated more than 140 patients.

Coffman and over two-third of his medics are on their second tour in Iraq with the Regiment. But when he returned from Iraq in March of 2004, he knew that there was much more he could do to prepare his Squadron to face another combat tour.

He designed and implemented an ambitious training program for his Squadron called the Combat Trauma Management Course.

He organized his medics to teach every Soldier in the Squadron advanced medical skills, including 11 tasks not covered in the Army's Combat Lifesaver course.

Typically, one Soldier in five is qualified as a Combat Lifesaver. Coffman trained every Soldier in Sabre Squadron these advanced skills, and more.

His program became the model for the Regiment's "Rifles Lifesaver Course" that every Soldier in the Regiment received before deploying.

The hard work paid off not only for the Soldiers trained but his medics – making them teachers.

"Each medic had to diligently prepare to teach these courses, which greatly improved their knowledge of these critical lifesaving techniques," Coffman said.

During the course of the mass casualty event at the Forward Aid Station, 15 Sabre Soldiers, all trained in the Combat Trauma Management Course, administered IVs and treated routine patients, allowing the medics to focus on the critically wounded patients.

"It made an immense difference," Coffman said. "Without all the training we did, I don't know where we would have been. We could not have done this nearly as successfully during our last deployment."

He added, "It was a bad situation for the civilians, but for us, it all came together. We certainly saved a lot of lives over those two weeks."

During OIF I, Sabre medics treated 288 casualties. Seven months into its current deployment, Coffman and his medics have already treated more than 350 casualties.

When asked about the effect these events have had on his Soldiers, Coffman responded, "It is natural to have abnormal responses to abnormal situations.

"They are not sure how to feel, so I sit them down to tell them they did as well as they could. You can't bear the guilt for what these people have done."

THUNDER SQUADRON

By Lt. Col. Ross A. Brown
Thunder Squadron Commander

As Thunder enters its seventh month of combat operations in southern Baghdad, it is my distinct privilege to report that the troopers of the Squadron are in high spirits and continue to execute missions with courage and determination.

The troop, battery, and company commanders have continued to refine their standard operating procedures and train their men on the latest enemy tactics, techniques, and procedures.

Daily, our team continues to grow stronger, gain knowledge, and conduct operations with a great deal of success.

October was a very important month for the people of Iraq. With Ramadan and the referendum vote, Thunder's area of operations saw increased friendly and enemy activity. To offset the enemy activity, Thunder Squadron continues to attack.

Our precision combined offensive operations with Iraqi Security Forces have been extremely successful, and the Squadron and the Iraqi people have benefited from the superb training and mentoring that our Military Transition Teams have conducted with their Iraqi counterparts.

The referendum voting conducted in our area of operations was an overwhelming success. The Iraqi Security Forces controlled the polling sites while the troopers of Thunder served as their quick reaction force.

I am extremely proud of the great job the troopers, noncommissioned officers, and officers of Thunder Squadron have done this month.

Also, I want to thank the entire Thunder team for all they have done for our troopers.

The troopers' motivation remains high as they look forward to completing their mission and writing another chapter in the distinguished history of the Regiment. Thunder!

Thunder 6

The troopers' motivation remains high as they look forward to completing the mission and writing another chapter in the distinguished history of the Regiment.

Thunder Troopers honored for Roy Hallams hostage rescue

Spc. Dan Balda
4th Brigade Combat Team PAO

As the urban sprawl of Baghdad bleeds south, the concrete roads turn to dirt pathways cutting between fields tended by the farmers who call this sparsely-populated area home.

Roy Hallums called one of these farmhouses home for 10 months, although it was not by choice. He was kidnapped Nov. 1, 2004 while supplying the Iraqi Army with food.

Photo by Capt. Todd Arnold

1st Lt. Steve Young, Sgt. Lee Prather, Spc. Forrest Gielenz (first three Soldiers) and Spc. William Forsyth, Sgt. Anthony Signorello (last two Soldiers in back row) are recognized during a ceremony honoring the Soldiers for participating in the Roy Hallums hostage rescue at Forward Operating Base Falcon, Iraq.

His captivity came to an end during a daring night-time rescue on Sept. 7. Soldiers assigned to 3rd Squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, provided valuable assistance during the raid on the farmhouse where Hallums had been held by terrorists.

The Task Force Baghdad Soldiers—1st Lt. Stephen Young, Sgt. Lee Prather, Sgt. Anthony Signorello, Spc. William Forsyth, Spc. Forrest Gielenz and Pfc. Christopher Carter, all assigned to K Troop, 3/3 ACR—were honored by the State Department during an informal ceremony Sept. 21 at Forward Operating Base Falcon.

They were members of the tank crews that set up a protective outer cordon to protect the UH-60 Blackhawk carrying the rescue team as it moved in on the farmhouse.

Hallums was discovered bound and gagged in a tiny cellar-like room. The only ventilation came from a small fan and cracks in the concrete slab that doubled as his door.

Each time his captors opened the door to give him food or water they would put a fresh coat of cement over the "door."

Although they were unable to personally talk to Hallums, the Soldiers still felt they played an integral part in the rescue.

"Our overall mission here is a hard one, but to be able to help rescue an American reminds me of who I am and what I do every day," said Prather, a tank gunner from Woodbridge, Va. "I later found out that we also rescued a young Iraqi boy. It reminded me of the good coming from (our mission)."

"It was an honor (to help free Hallums)," Signorello said. "I was proud that after 10 months he did not give up."

Gielenz, a native of Grass Valley, Calif., felt the ceremony was very personal. "It was a real sincere thanks that you could tell it came from the heart," he said.

He valued the certificate of appreciation signed by the ambassador but he had already received the one thing that really made him feel like he had contributed to something important.

"Knowing that I participated in the rescue of an American who is now home safe and sound with his family was the best part of the whole thing."

LONGKNIFE SQUADRON

By Maj. John Scott
Longknife Squadron Commander

Happy Halloween and greetings from all of the Longknife Troopers here at Camp Sykes, Iraq.

The Squadron has ushered in the month of November and with it, our eighth month in Iraq along with the outstanding support to Iraq and their new Constitution.

On Oct. 15, the troopers of Longknife Squadron participated in a historic event as they helped in providing a safe and secure environment for the people of Iraq to decide on its future.

From here, the Squadron transitions to the next milestone of supporting the upcoming National Election to be held on Dec. 15.

I am confident that their performance will be superb and their dedication to service unwavering. I am extremely proud of the way our troopers have performed and I know you are as well.

The Squadron continues to be focused on the entire breadth of the Regiment as they conduct reconnaissance and security operations to surveillance to attack operations.

When this goes to press, the troopers of Longknife will have logged its 20,000th flight hour during this deployment!

This accomplishment is impressive when you consider the environment, temperatures, long supply lines and harsh realities of combat in which they had to perform 24/7.

What an incredible feat by a great team. The team work displayed within Longknife is one of respect and dedication.

Of course, the living conditions continue to improve on a daily basis. The Morale, Welfare and Recreation center is still under construction and the Squadron has now undertaking its own effort in developing a MWR facility to offset the wait for construction.

I know the future of the Squadron and the Regiment is a pressing topic and I can assure you that as soon as the plan is set, we will get the word out immediately through the official channels.

I wanted to take the time to personally thank you and your families for the personal sacrifice that you are making for the service of our great nation.

Your strength back home is truly important and our troopers proudly grasp it as a touch stone of courage and dedication.

Without your support, our efforts here would be so much harder.

Again, thank you for everything you do.

Longknife 6.5

When this goes to press, the troopers of Longknife will have logged its 20,000th flight hour during this deployment!

MULESKINNER SQUADRON

By Lt. Col. Richard O'Connor
Support Squadron Commander

Dear Muleskinner friends and family, as the Squadron completes their eighth month of deployment the gears are running like a well oiled machine.

The Troopers efforts during Operation Restoring Rights were tremendous, but as the work slowed down to a roar and the dust hardly settled, the preparations for the National elections were upon us.

With out a question there is not a single Regimental mission or operation that Muleskinner does not play a significant role.

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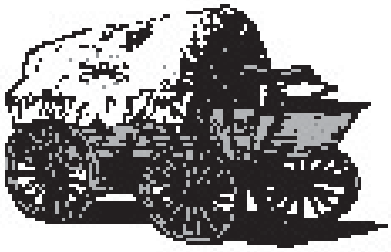


The October Referendum Elections was again such a mission. This operation required a great deal of effort for our logistic units and our staff.

The mission to haul and emplace hundreds of concrete and plastic barriers at more than 50 polling sites in less than a week is no simple feet.

Again the Regiment turned to Muleskinner for the planning and the assets to assist in this monstrous undertaking.

In conjunction with the line squadron transportation assets and supporting transportation units from Corps units the mission was a success.

Packhorse led the way in assisting the 2nd Brigade, 3rd Iraqi Army Division in emplacing the barriers in there area of operations.

After dozens of miles and hours of long hauls all the barriers were emplaced in time for the election workers and equipment to arrive and set up for the National Elections.

Muleskinner has played a critical role in the recent election process through training, supervising and assisting the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi election officials.

Some of this assistance was in warehousing operations and preparing for transport hundreds of pieces of polling equipment to include ballot boxes and ballot material.

In the end, the Motor Transportation Regiment of the Iraq Army and the election officials moved all their equipment to the polling materials and set up polling sites completely autonomous of U.S. forces and equipment.

Chemdawg continues to operate a state of the art internment facility as they have adapted to manage the influx from Operation Restoring Rights.

Each troop has assisted magnificently in this mission through augmenting the guard force.

Their efforts have allowed the Regiment to gain valuable intelligence enabling them to take the initiative and defeat the insurgency.

Blacksmith continues to operate and manage the entry control point to Forward Operating Base Sykes.

See **SUPPORT,** Page 26

Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks

Rock and a hard place

Command Sgt. Maj. Frederick Thompson, Muleskinner Squadron command sergeant major, is cornered by several Iraqi children requesting candy. Thompson, who was serving as the acting Regimental command sergeant major, took part in a tour through the Western Ninewa Province to check on voting conditions prior to the National Referendum elections.

SUPPORT from Page 25

Scalpel is adjusting to meet the medical demands of the Regiment as the forward surgical team attached to them redeploy.

They efforts and expertise saved many civilians lives during the recent mass casualty incidents that occurred leading up to the elections. They continue to amaze me with their level of professionalism.

Bullwhip continues to control the security on the FOB and improve the living conditions of the village of Zariqi. Bullwhip partnering with Scalpel has provided medical care, food and water to the local town of Zariqi.

The future looks very promising in this village of almost 500 families as several men continue to earn a living supporting the operation of several FOB Sykes operations to include the Class I site and the Supply Support Activity.

Recently Scalpel conducted medical support and the dentist provided lessons in dental hygiene by teaching several villagers how to brush their teeth.

During my R&R I had the opportunity to visit Rear Detachment and attend the September Family Readiness Group Leaders Meeting.

Their efforts do not go unnoticed and they continue to accomplish amazing feats and remain strong during our absence.

I have complete confidence in their abilities and are thankful for their continued dedication and support.

I was able to take time out of the battlefield for some R&R at Fort Carson with my wife and son, Pfc. Ryan O'Connor. Ryan is in the 4th Infantry Division, 3rd Combat Action Brigade as a cavalry scout and is preparing for combat operations in Iraq beginning in November 2005.

I also had the honor to promote him to private first class.

Prior to returning to Iraq, I went to Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington D.C. to visit with Chief Warrant Officer Tess Lazaro, Master Sgt. Maleioi and several other Soldiers from the Regiment who are undergoing medical treatment.

It was great to see them and their family and I let them know they are in our thoughts in prayers everyday.

Godspeed, Brave Rifles!

Muleskinner 6

REMINGTON TROOP

By Capt. David Olsen
Remington Troop Commander

Dear Remington families and friends, greetings from Camp Sykes. October was an extremely busy month for the Regimental Staff as they prepared for the Constitutional Referendum, one of the most important days in our year-long deployment to Iraq.

Last month's hard fight in Tal Afar paid huge dividends in the weeks leading up to the vote.

The work done by the line Squadrons allowed our Staff to move freely about the city and the surrounding countryside to prepare for this important milestone in Iraq's history.

Capt. Elizabeth Helland and her Civil Affairs team have done an incredible job of gathering together Iraqi government representatives, polling officials, and local leaders to ensure that Western Ninewa Province was ready for the Constitutional Referendum.

The Civil Affairs team traveled throughout the Regiment's area of operations to hold planning meetings and help teach the democratic voting process to the Iraqi people in this region.

Their hard work directly contributed to the success of the Referendum voting process and will have a lasting impact on the country of Iraq for years to come.

Following the combat operations in the city, the Regiment began the challenging task of helping the citizens of Tal Afar rebuild their damaged homes, schools, and roads.

An important part of this mission was performed by Sgt. 1st Class Theodore Scully and Staff Sgt. Guadalupe Ona of the Regimental Staff Judge Advocate office, who have been operating the Civil Military Operations Center in downtown Tal Afar.

They have been meeting daily with local citizens to address claims of damage to their homes or property sustained during the fighting in the city.

Their work is an important part of the effort to help the people of this region reclaim their lives and bring back a sense of normalcy after years of conflict.

The Regimental Engineer section also has their work cut out for them as they help plan and implement reconstruction projects throughout Ninewa Province.

They have already helped the residents of an outlying village bridge a ravine on the road to their town and are now working to restore power and water to Tal Afar as crews clean up rubble and trash in the streets.

There is already a noticeable difference in the city, with people returning to the markets and their jobs.

Our Troopers continue to earn well-deserved promotions as they support the Regiment here in Iraq. Staff Sgt. Gene Braxton, Sgt. Michael Perritano, and Sgt. Zachary Scholts were each recognized this month in front of their fellow Soldiers.

I would like to close by acknowledging a number of Remington Troopers who re-enlisted this past month to continue serving their country.

Staff Sergeants Jeffrey Marjerrison and Braxton were sworn in by the Regimental Commander on top of their Bradley Fighting Vehicles at Camp Sykes.

Pfc. Melissa Romero, Spc. Robert Dillon, Sgt. Annette Graham, and Sgt. Marlon Butterworth also renewed their commitments to the Army.

I truly appreciate the sacrifices that these Soldiers have made and their willingness to continue to serve the Army and our nation.

All of our families and friends back home are in our thoughts as the holiday season approaches. I would like to thank them for everything they are doing for us – we deeply appreciate their support.

Brave Rifles!

Remington 6

REMINGTON HALLOWEEN

By Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks
NCOIC, 3d ACR Public Affairs

The troopers of Remington Troop traded their Desert Camoflage Uniforms for costumes ranging from Snow White, Saddam Hussein and Beauty Queens to celebrate Halloween during a party at Camp Sykes, Iraq.

"This was an opportunity for the Soldiers to have some fun and have a good time," said Capt. David Olsen, Remington Troop commander.

Prizes were given to best male and female costume and there was plenty of candy to satisfy every trooper's sweet tooth.

Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks

Spc. Arturo Lopez, left, and Pfc. Reed Monson, poses as Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, claiming first place for best male costume.

Above: From left to right, Sgt. Gina Street, Staff Sgt. Veronica Toussaint, Staff Sgt. Elena Dickens and Sgt. Lisa King, transformed to become The Desert Queens for a Year. Left: Spc. Christopher Davis, Martian, and Pfc. Cassandra Purdy, Snow White, makes an odd couple during the party. Purdy won first place for best female costume.

Courtesy photo

One of the K-9 dogs sits in the back of a Bradley Fighting Vehicle waiting to be called to duty by Soldiers conducting a foot patrol in Tal Afar, Iraq.

Taking care of your dogs takes on new meaning

By Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks
NCOIC, 3d ACR Public Affairs

A cliché affectionately said by Soldiers referring to their aching feet is that their 'dogs' hurt. For the Soldiers assigned to 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, if the 'dogs' are hurting, then it might call for a bad day – literally.

The troopers went on numerous combat missions accompanied by real 'dogs' of war in the city of Tal Afar. The dogs, assigned to two K-9 teams, were a pivotal asset on the battlefield as they led from the front while pursuing the enemy.

Since arriving to the Regiment in June, Donald Duncan and B.J. Johnson have guided their dogs Bruno and Vigor, on numerous missions that may have saved Soldiers lives.

Col. H.R. McMaster, 3d ACR commander, praised the K-9 teams during a departure ceremony held Oct. 24. During the ceremony he awarded the dogs with Regimental coins that were placed on the dogs' collars.

"You have saved countless lives," McMaster said. "I can't thank you enough for what you have done for our troopers here in the Regiment. These dogs were tremendous resource for the troopers on the ground."

The dogs have tracked terrorists hiding in houses, discovered weapons caches and most importantly – detected buried improvised explosive devices.

See **K-9,** Page 30

K-9 from Page 29

"Once they saw a dog come out of a house, they knew it was clear for them to go right on in."

-- Donald Duncan

Bruno, a Dutch Shepherd breed, and Vigor, a Belgium Malinois, were both trained as apprehension dogs and to find explosives.

With the dogs leading enemy engagements from the front, Johnson said it saves a lot of stress from the Soldiers.

Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks

BJ Johnson guides Bruno during an inspection at a suspected terrorist's house for weapons cache. The K-9 teams assigned to the Regiment discovered numerous caches and improvised explosive devices which could have been used against American and Iraqi Soldiers in Tal Afar.

"I send the dog in off leash to scan a building and it is a countless lifesaver," Johnson said. "Where it takes a Soldier a half hour to clear a building with a metal detector, the dog can go in and clear the building in 10 minutes."

Both Johnson and Duncan related how much the Soldiers trusted the dogs to clear houses before they'd enter.

"It was great to see the reaction of the Soldiers when they see us arrive with the dogs," Duncan said. "Once they saw a dog come out of a house, they knew it was clear for them to go right on in."

During a house raid in September, the dogs found ordnance packed inside a wall around a house.

The wall contained mortars, anti-tank rounds, demolitions (blasting caps, detonation cord), grenades, claymore mines, and ammunition.

A search at a school turned up 40 AK-47 rifles and during a search in another house, the dogs found a false room containing an anti-tank round and multiple ammunition boxes.

The dogs located three separate caches on Aug. 27; one consisting of seven 122mm and two152mm rounds and one other consisting of seven 107mm rounds.

Those first two finds were minimal compared to the third cache.

Bruno and Vigor found a cache consisting of parachute grenades, five 107mm rockets, 27 152mm artillery shells, 83 120mm mortar rounds, 24 rocket-propelled grenade warheads, 100 projectile fuses, two grenade launchers with more than 500 57mm rounds and one anti-aircraft gun with pedestal.

For all the dogs' heroics, the only reward they wanted in the end from the Soldiers was a little bit of love and attention, according to Johnson.

"They're faithful, dedicated and the Soldiers just love them," Johnson said referring to Bruno and Vigor. "And the dogs loved when the Soldiers pet and played with them."

Johnson and Duncan's departure meant the end of the two K-9 handlers' six-month tour in Iraq – a tour which both men volunteered to be a part of.

"I just wanted to help and save a few Soldiers lives the best way I could," Johnson said. "Nobody got hurt because of the work our dogs performed. If we saved just one life, then this tour was worth the six months over here.

" I'm proud of what these Soldiers are doing here and they appreciated what we did for them."

Keep hope alive when all else fails

By Chaplain (Maj.) David Causey
Regimental Chaplain

As much as we shrink from challenges, we need them. They're essential to our well-being. That's what one physician says – Dr. Larry Dossey.

In fact, Dr. Dossey believes that the very germs that attack and penetrate our bodies contribute to our overall health. How?

Because these biological attacks help keep our body on its toes. "Our own body," he writes, "contains the wisdom derived from countless challenges to its integrity.

Only through threats to its well-being does the body learn to respond and to be efficient at the business of health."

I recall an example of this while touring a submarine docked at Norfolk Naval Base.

One of the sailors explained to me that while the vessel is submerged for three months at a time, the air purifiers on board filter out all impurities, airborne viruses and bacteria.

"That's great," I said. "You get to breathe in germ-free air." To my surprise the sailor replied, "No, it's not so good. Because the first thing that happens when we return home to our families is that whole crew comes down with a cold."

He explained that the human body's defense system, in just three months of *not* being tested and challenged, becomes lax and weaker. It needs to be challenged.

Dr. Dossey goes on to explain that the same is true of us in all the facets of our lives: mental, emotional and spiritual.

Tough challenges test us and may be painful, but we thrive on them. If we are to be successful in life we must learn to face our challenges and understand their health-giving powers. (Adapted from *How Your Church Family Works*, Peter L. Steinke)

The Scripture concurs.

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:11)

Whether your personal life, your workplace or your organization confronts you with challenges – realize they are meant to do you good and make you stronger.

Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks

Peace brother

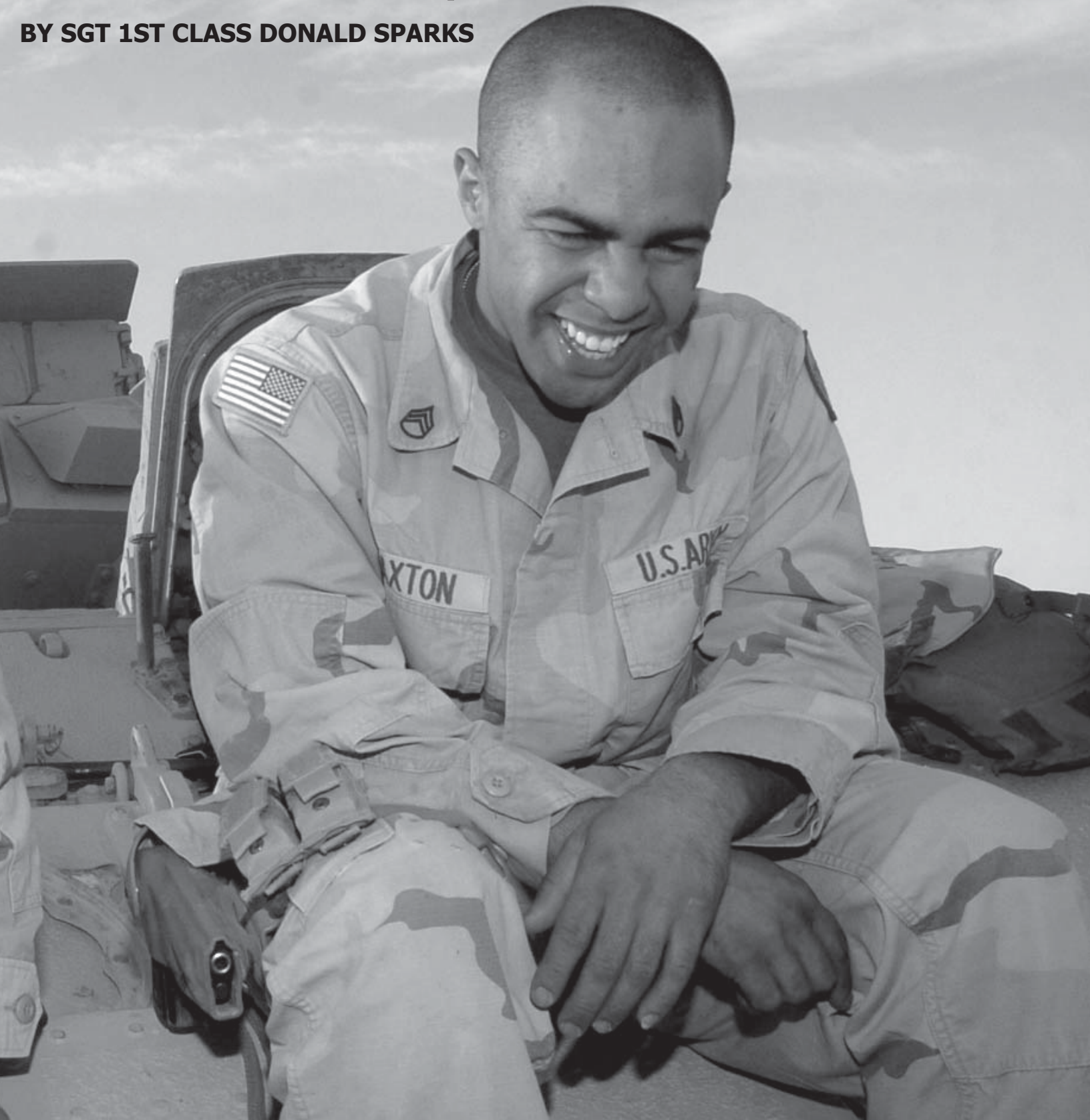
1st Lt. Morgan Plummer, Howitzer Battery, Second Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, flashes the peace sign while being mobbed by Iraqi children during a visit to a school house on Oct. 25. The school was refurbished after suffering damages from terrorists who took over the school to conduct terrorist operations.

No Short End

l Of The Stick

They may be short in height but Staff Sergeants Jeffrey Marjerrison and Gene Braxton are long on commitment to the Army, nation

BY SGT 1ST CLASS DONALD SPARKS



The bonds of friendship between Soldiers are first formed in Basic Combat Training when a drill sergeant assigns new recruits as battle buddies. As a battle buddy, a Soldier must train, eat, and live together with another Soldier for nine weeks. Those friendships are strengthened as Soldiers move from unit to unit through their careers as they attend schools, conduct field training exercises and deploy together.

In a unique display of friendship, two noncommissioned officers, from two different paths of life, but two similar roadmaps of Army success, took the battle buddy concept to another level.

Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Marjerrison and Staff Sgt. Gene Braxton, both assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, re-enlisted Oct. 2 together as a testament to their devotion to the Army, their Soldiers and to each other.

Braxton was promoted to staff sergeant moments before taking the Oath of Enlistment, making it an extraordinary day in his career.

Col. H.R. McMaster, 3d ACR commander, gave the oath to the two cavalry scouts serving on his Personnel Security Detachment, with Marjerrison on top a Bradley Fighting Vehicle.

The reenlistment culminated the perseverance, devotion to duty and resolve both Soldiers demonstrate as leaders after rocky periods in their career.

Military service sure thing for Mojo, fate for Braxton

Marjerrison, affectionately known as 'Mojo,' joined the Army in 1995 after graduating Widefield High School in Colorado Springs, Colo., because he didn't feel like going to school anymore.

With an older brother already in the Army serving as a radiology specialist, Mojo's mother didn't want him to go into the Armor field or anything related to combat arms.

"I didn't want to go to college," Mojo said. "My mom wasn't supportive at first, but she came around."

After concluding his One Station Unit Training at Fort Knox, Ky., Mojo became a Cavalry Scout and was assigned to Korea. After a year overseas he arrived to Fort Carson for his first stint with 3d ACR from 1996-1998.

He was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 3d ACR and later Ironhawk Troop, 3d Squadron.

Following a second tour in Korea, he returned to 3d ACR in July 1999 and was assigned to Grim Troop, HHT, and later Eagle Troop, 2/3.

The road to a life in the military was paved for the 25-year-old Braxton long before he was born. His father, Gene, was in the Army for five years serving as a helicopter mechanic at the time of his birth.

During his speech to the Soldiers assembled in formation for the reenlistment ceremony, Braxton said, "I was born into this and I will die into this," referring to his life-long affiliation with the Army.

Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks

Col. H.R. McMaster, 71st Colonel of the Regiment, gives the Oath of Enlistment to Staff Sgt. Gene Braxton during his reenlistment ceremony held Oct. 2 on Forward Operating Base Sykes, Iraq.

Braxton joined the National Guard as a Cavalry Scout in December 1997 from Fayetteville, N.C. Initially he thought about joining the Air Force, but he knew he'd always wanted to be in the Army – after "living a little life" first.

After dropping out of high school Braxton went to a military academy in Baltimore, Md., and received his GED, but delayed any thoughts about military service.

"I just wanted a break from that and see different options and act a fool," Braxton said.

After graduating the academy he returned to his parent's home in Fayetteville one month later. It wasn't long afterwards before the nonverbal hints from his dad became obvious.

"My dad didn't push me to join the Army," Braxton said revealing a wide grin. "He didn't have to say it, but I always knew it [Army] was there."

He told his dad before going to the Recruiter's Office that he wanted to be an infantryman, Ranger, and Special Forces.

Imitating his father's voice, Braxton said, "You don't want to be in the dirt, in the field, and *dirty all the time*."

At the recruiter's office he was shown a video for 19D – Cavalry Scout.

"It was a high-speed eye catcher with Soldiers riding on motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles, dune buggies and Bradley's jumping off of sand dunes," Braxton said after laughing uncontrollably. "That caught me right there. I was sold like a sucker. What's funny is that my recruiter was a scout, which I found out later."

Hardcore lessons key to developing seasoned NCOs, leaders

At 64 and 65 inches tall respectively, Braxton and Mojo walk with the attitude of two pit bulldogs and their leadership style is reflective of the breed – energetic, playful, loyal, loving, protective, and intelligent. Both are brash, tough and bring an uncompromising aura of discipline to the men under their charge.

Whether it's breaking track or breaking down a weapons system, the two NCOs don't mind getting dirty with their Soldiers.

And both have brought the pain to their Soldiers when they've failed to perform to standard.

"If you're buddy-buddy with a Soldier, it's wrong because a Soldier will think they can get away with anything," Mojo said. "You have to set your boundaries and let them know who is in charge. That's the way I was brought up in the Army."

Braxton who revealed he was a 'knucklehead' as a junior Soldier, but was thankful for the tough love his NCOs gave him – although he didn't appreciate it at the time.

"I always tell my Soldiers that everything we do, we do it for a reason," Braxton said. "I've learned that since I've become an NCO. I see the benefit from that tough love and it was for a reason. And that's what I try to pass on to them."

Not every moment of the two seasoned NCOs career have been glorious. Both have stood 'on the carpet' to accept punishment under the Uniform Code of Military Justice and accepted the consequences of poor performance.

Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks

Col. H.R. McMaster, 71st Colonel of the Regiment, share a laugh with Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Marjerrison on top of a Bradley Fighting Vehicle following Marjerrison's reenlistment ceremony held Oct. 2 on Forward Operating Base Sykes, Iraq.

Photo courtesy of Craig Walker

Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Marjerrison performs corrective training with Pfc. Martin Gaymon.

"I lost my stripes right before we deployed to Bosnia in 2000," Mojo said to begin describing what he calls the darkest days of his career.

After returning to the Regiment from his second tour in Korea, Mojo, a junior E-5, was hanging out at the barracks drinking with the Soldiers, something he'd done regularly back in Korea.

"Over there we worked together and we played together, regardless of it was junior enlisted Soldiers or NCOs and I still had that mentality when I came back to the States," Mojo said.

His conduct was frowned upon by the unit leadership and he was punished for fraternization and demoted to specialist. Even though he was demoted, he tried not to have a pity party.

"I don't know what kept me motivated," Mojo said as he clasped his hands. "After they ripped my stripes off my collar, I was crushed. I think the one thing that really motivated me to rebound was that the squadron commander told me that I would never be an NCO in his squadron as long as he commanded."

Mojo used those words to fuel his drive to succeed and eventually earned his sergeant stripes in January 2001, and later promoted to E-6 in April 2003, right before deploying to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Mojo would often cross paths with the squadron commander, as a personal vendetta, just so he could see that he'd made his stripes back – but mostly to show that he was a leader.

The lessons learned from his experiences and dealing with adversity is something he passes on to his current Soldiers.

"Everyone has skeletons in his closet, and that one hurt me pretty bad," he said with a tone of repentance in his voice. "But you always rebound. You still have to climb that hill and show you have the potential to advance."

Braxton, who came on active duty in May 1999, was assigned to Fort Stewart, Ga., where he was fast-tracking up the ranks. At the same time, he thought he was untouchable and invincible.

Days before he was scheduled to go to the E-5 promotion board, he'd done something he described as "stupid" which resulted in a Field Grade Article 15.

"I got busted all the way back down to private," Braxton said. "Because I was in my window to reenlist, my punishment prevented me from reenlisting."

Still feeling the sting of the punishment, Braxton mentioned the demotion was a low-point in his life, and afterwards he didn't care anymore about being in uniform.

That's where he drew strength from his father to keep his spirits up.

"I took a couple of months talking to my dad," Braxton said. "My parents were always there for me, they kept me motivated to keep on going. After I did my extra duty, I worked real hard to get my rank back, doing everything I could, but there were certain leaders who held grudges. Once you did something bad – you're bad forever."

Braxton eventually departed the Army in 2002 and joined the Reserves. He also met his now ex-wife soon after getting out. He was going to become a parachute rigger, but the school didn't have any slots for him to attend.

Struggling with employment in the civilian sector, Braxton was fired from an under-the-table job, so he made the decision, much to his wife's objection, to rejoin the Army on active duty.

"I didn't have a job; my wife was pregnant; so I had to do something," Braxton said. "It was a lot to persuade her to come back in, but I was determined on coming back."

Because he had to wait two months to get released from his Reserve unit and he had to wait another three months for the system to allocate prior service Soldiers to reenter on active duty, Braxton waited for what seemed like an eternity.

He returned on active duty March 2003 where he was assigned to Fort Carson and 3rd ACR.

At this point, Braxton shared his feelings on the sacrifices he made to serve in the Army.

He was scheduled to depart to Fort Carson alone because his wife was pregnant and couldn't travel in her condition.

"At the MEPS station there was some complication with my paperwork, so my recruiter was able to rush me to the hospital for the birth of my daughter," Braxton said.

Six hours later he was back at MEPS departing for Carson.

Second deployment to Iraq requires different mindset

In March, Mojo and Braxton departed Fort Carson to deploy with the Regiment for their second tour in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom III.

During his first deployment, Mojo served as a Bradley commander in Eagle Troop and had his share of combat.

Although he goes 'outside the wire' [leaves outside the gate] routinely as a member of the PSD, his mentality has changed from OIF I.

"Now I have a family," he said proudly referring to his wife Eliza and daughter, Magdalena. "I was married [during OIF I] but it was just me and my wife. Now I have a daughter and one on the way."

His voice shifts to a monotone pitch.

"It's a little different situation," Mojo said. "I don't want my kids growing up not knowing who their dad is. I grew up like that for most of my life because my parents are divorced."

His wife supports his career, sends him letters, care packages and photos of his daughter. She knows deploying is part of his job and accepts it.

His voice rose again as he expressed what he truly loves – being a scout.

"If we go out on mission – I put my thoughts of my family in the back of my head," Mojo said. "When we come back, it's just another mission down and another day done.

"I can't put my emotions of my family ahead of the mission because then it will affect judgment calling. Sometimes you take a little bit extra precautions, but then again, most of the time I don't."

As the Regiment was prepping to deploy for OIF I, Braxton remembers the moment he knew that he had to leave for Iraq.

He was watching CNN on television and saw his old troop from Fort Stewart headed to Iraq.

"I was upset, I could have been there, and I should have been there with them," Braxton said. "It made me want to deploy even more. I was in the platoon for less than two weeks before I volunteered to deploy early with the advance party to Iraq."

During OIF I Braxton, who was assigned to Support Platoon, HHT, 2/3, didn't see any combat.

Why re-up?

Photo courtesy of Craig Walker

Staff Sgt. Gene Braxton performs security after dismounting from his vehicle outside of Baghdad in April.

In a time when many Soldiers are debating about serving in uniform, the decision for Mojo and Braxton to continue serving was too easy for both NCOs. Mojo reenlisted to remain indefinitely and Braxton will serve five more years.

Despite being deployed twice in three years and the Regiment's high operational tempo, Mojo didn't think twice about his military career plans.

"I have over 10 years and I ain't throwing away 10 years of my life in the Army; so Uncle Sam is going to get his years out of me," Mojo said.

The pride of serving echoes loudly in his voice.

"The Army, if you don't mess up, it's the easiest job in the world," Mojo said. "If you be where you're supposed to be and do what you're told to do – you have no worries."

He wants to leave a simple legacy for Soldiers to remember him by.

"I expect them to be able to do the hard right over the easy wrong," Mojo said. "For example, maintenance, the hard right is doing it by the book. The easy wrong is to do it by memory and just pencil whip it just so you can say you did your maintenance. That's wrong."

After experiencing a close call with death, Braxton did not let the encounter dissuade his decision to continue serving and is willing to answer anyone who asks him 'why bother.'

"It all goes back to sacrifice," Braxton said emphatically. "You have to know what you want to do. I love my daughter, but also love being a Soldier. Being a Soldier

helps me to take care of my daughter. That's the number one thing that pushes me and I get job satisfaction out of it."

Braxton said he also loves the camaraderie, standards and discipline, benefits and travel that the Army offers.

"It's not the best travel in the world because you get to see Iraq," he said while laughing.

Mojo and Braxton also share the pain of losing comrades and brothers-in-arms in combat – another reason they raised their right hands to continue serving.

"I still think about the guys I lost in OIF I," Mojo said referring to Staff Sgt. Michael Quinn, Sgt. Thomas Broomhead, and Staff Sgt. Will Latham. "They're the ones who gave their lives to save their Soldier's lives. I always think about them and try to cope with it.

"Those are the guys you learn from – they were true leaders, they didn't know they were going to give their lives up that night – but they did what true leaders do – always take care of their Soldiers."

Struggling to find the words to say, Braxton pauses for a moment to describe the grief he still feels from the deaths of Pfc. Joseph Knott and Cpl. Jeffrey Williams during his current deployment.

"Sometimes I feel bad because I try to forget it," Braxton said, recalling Knott's and Williams' death. "I don't want to ponder or think about it because it makes you wonder more what you could have done. You play that what if game? Instead of playing the 'what if' game, you try to prepare yourself so you don't lose any more Soldiers."

Battle buddies forever

When asked about what they think of each other during separate interviews, neither Soldier could stop laughing.

"Oh wow!" Mojo chuckled. "What can I say about him? He is a young stud. Well deserving of staff sergeant – I wanted to send him to the promotion board earlier, but he told me wasn't ready yet."

Upon Braxton's arrival to Eagle Troop, Mojo said he thought, "This little fat 'expletive.'"

Shortly afterwards Mojo would be bringing Braxton along with him to be part of the Regimental Commander's PSD.

"He was pissed off because he was coming to another S-3 shop, after being assigned to HHT, 2/3 during OIF I," Mojo said. "At first he had a bad attitude about it. He'd just graduated PLDC and found out he was being reassigned to Regiment. He wanted to go to the line."

Braxton's version of their encounter parallels Mojo's.

"After graduating PLDC, he said, 'Hey sergeant, you're coming with me to the Regiment,'" Braxton said.

Both agree the move has been beneficial and working together on the PSD has nurtured their relationship professionally and personally.

"We both have a Napoleon complex because we're both small, both hard charging and always expect the best," Braxton said reflecting on his friend. "I've learned a lot from him. When I was an E-5 and had to match myself up with someone, it had to be him because we see eye-to-eye a lot. We're both the same."

Mojo thought so much of Braxton's potential, that he wanted to recommend him for the E-6 board in the summer, but Braxton refused to go at the time.

"He told me wasn't ready," Mojo said. "He knew if he went to the board he'd get promoted and sent back to the line (squadron) and he wasn't ready. But since then he has grown so much."

Braxton said he had his reasons for not attending the board earlier this year.

"I seemed like I was a good NCO, and I know I am, but it was still more that I needed to learn," Braxton said. "A lot of Soldiers these days just think about that paycheck and power. There are two types of NCOs – the E-5 and the sergeant.

"I'm here to lead Soldiers; I'm not here just to collect a paycheck. I'm here to train Soldiers and bring them home from combat and help them progress in their career."

Just as a big brother is pleased to see a younger sibling following in his footsteps, Mojo has great satisfaction in watching Braxton develop as a leader.

"He reminds me a lot of myself four years ago," Mojo said. "Hard charging, hard ass, and he takes care of his Soldiers. He will nuke a Soldier in a second and not think twice about it if they're wrong. He's just awesome."

Photo courtesy of Craig Walker

Staff Sgt. Jeffrey "Mojo" Marjerrison, 28, of Wiedfield, Colo., and Gene Braxton, 25, of Fayetteville, N.C., of the of the Regimental Personnel Security Detachment, share a laugh in their tent while playing dominos back at Camp Striker, Iraq in April.

Although they won't be in the same unit forever, both Mojo and Braxton said splitting up will be tough. Braxton is trying to transfer to the line so he can take on a new challenge in his career.

"I can honestly say that I'm going to hate to see him go and not work with him," Mojo said. "One he's a hard charger, two, he knows his job, and three; we can clown and joke with each other all day long."

Both are fierce domino players when playing against each other and there is plenty of verbal jabbing and insults to spare.

Braxton mentioned he's going to miss joking around a lot with Mojo, will miss Mojo's voice yelling at Soldiers louder than he does, and mostly – the camaraderie.

That's why when Mojo came to him about reenlisting together, it made the moment so special for Braxton.

"He said let's do it together, and I said cool," Braxton said. "He just reenlisted last year and I don't know what his main reason for doing it this time, but to do it on the same day with me, it meant a lot for me to have him there."

What we should never take for granted

By Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks

On Oct. 15 Iraqis, by the tens of thousands, took part in the country's historic election to vote on its Constitution – a pivotal stepping stone in Iraq's future.

Even the Sunnis, who were persuaded to participate in the elections, came out in mass to take part in the democratic process. No vote was taken for granted as the Constitution was passed

As an outsider looking how the election process was taking shape and form, I was amazed to see how serious the opportunity to vote meant for the Iraqi people.

Prior to Election Day I took part in a two-day trip with Col. H.R. McMaster as we visited several cities and villages in the Western Ninewa Province.

During our trip, McMaster talked to the mayors and police chiefs to get a feel and assessment of the polling stations and security estimate. Each of the municipal leaders proclaimed the people would come out to vote and security measures were in place to ensure the citizens could vote without worry.

It was evident the leaders of Iraq were swollen with pride with the thought of voting. After all, the future of their country was in the forthcoming ink-stained fingers of the people.

I found myself thinking, the people of this country have been oppressed for so long from participating in a fair and open political process and although democracy was still in its infancy – it was an honor to observe the inalienable right to have one's voice heard.

Sadly, I also found myself reflecting on how many thousands of innocent civilians who have died at the hands of terrorists to derail the advancement of democracy in the region.

Too often reports on the result of attacks committed by suicide bombers have filled news headlines since my time here in Iraq. Too many times the headlines have debated, criticized and scrutinized the entire election process.

Despite the terrorists attempt to cast a shadow of intimidation in the days leading up to the elections, the people proved their bravery, determination and resolve to walk from their homes to the polling stations and vote.

The people of this country were not going to be denied the right to vote. They did not take this right for granted.

Again I was proud.

And once again, I reflected.

I thought about how Americans once cared about the right to vote. Forty years ago, the Voting Rights Act was passed following a period in which African Americans were brutalized in the South for voicing their right to vote.

The campaign of intimidation and fear was cast by the local law enforcement agencies upon blacks, as police dared them to go to the polls and vote.

But justice prevailed in our country and the Voting Rights Act empowered the federal government to oversee voter registration and elections in counties that had used tests to determine voter eligibility.

In 1965, the right to vote was not taken for granted.

Forty years later that right, once treasured, is now taken for granted by many of our fellow countrymen. Leading up to our own presidential elections, millions of Americans decided not to vote.

Democracy, which in my opinion is our nation's greatest strength, was nothing more than an afterthought to so many.

What saddens me more about our apathy towards voting is there are the too many times our nation's flag have been lowered to half-staff because a Soldier paid the ultimate sacrifice in guaranteeing the right to vote.

Maybe we can take a lesson from the people of Iraq. The right to vote is often paved by bloodshed, pain and tears. And it is a right that no one, whether American or Iraqi, should ever take for granted again.