



DRAGON FIRE

Vol. 1, Issue 6

December 2007

Forward as One

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Holidays in Baghdad Issue

For the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team

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Holidays a time of reconciliation

FROM THE MOUTH OF DRAGONS

Dragon Soldiers, families and friends- it is a time for thanksgiving and celebration both here in Baghdad and at home as the Christmas and New Years holidays approach. While we all wish we could be home with our families, we are truly in the midst of an awakening here the likes of which had not been seen in the Rashid District since we arrived.

This particular issue of DRAGON FIRE magazine depicts the ongoing reconciliation efforts across the Rashid District and beyond, including those of the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery "Proud Americans" who are seeing much success in Mansour to our north. By bringing the various sides who used to oppose the coalition and Government of Iraq together to resolve their differences and work together towards security and stability here in Baghdad and the rest of Iraq, active



Col. Ricky Gibbs

allenges and other issues that have plagued everyone in recent months.

We also welcome the Tuskers of 4-64 AR, who took over portions of West Rashid from the Vanguard's last month and come to us from Fort Stewart. They have hit the ground running and it is an honor to welcome them to Task Force Dragon.

It is time bid farewell to the

Warriors of the 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, who put Al Qaeda on the run in Doura after months of heavy fighting. Their tales of heroism have been chronicled in every edition of this publication to date, and we take one final look back on their honorable service over the past 15 months, while also celebrating the first service at St. John's Catholic Church since May, an event that truly underscores the diversity of our area.

I continue to be humbled by this brigade and its Soldiers. I was reminded of how tremendous our team is as I traveled out to the various Coalition Outposts to visit troops on Thanksgiving to recognize their service and share the holiday with them. Christmas will serve as one more reminder of all we hold precious and stand ready to protect. It is my distinct honor to lead you during this historic time.

In this issue, you will find that there is no Fallen Dragons section for the first time since we began putting out the publication. The fact that we have had no Dragon Soldiers killed in action since we last went to print is one more thing for us to be thankful for this Holiday Season.

Keep after it, and remember our division motto: No mission too difficult, No sacrifice too great...DUTY FIRST!

Col. Ricky D. Gibbs
Dragon 6



What is important to remember is that Iraqis of different religious sects have been living peacefully together for centuries, and will do so again. The key is getting them together where they can work out the sectarian chal-



Spc. Ben Jones, an infantryman with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division from Chambersburg, Pa., walks the streets of Doura with an Iraqi Army soldier in southern Baghdad, Nov. 27. The 2-12 Inf. "Warriors," who have been attached to the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division since February, are scheduled to redeploy back to Fort Carson, Colo., later this month. (Smith/4th IBCT)

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Correction: In the November issue Master Sgt. Julio Miranda was incorrectly identified as Master Sgt. Julio Medina78

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On the cover

Sgt. Zhuo Cao, a cannon crew member with Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Inf. Div., keeps watch during a joint dismantled patrol near Joint Security Station Torch in Western Baghdad, Nov. 20. (Timmons, 4IBCT)



Miami native Sgt. Danil Ramirez, a cannon crew member, with Battery A, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Inf. Div., searches a prospective recruit before allowing him into the Iraqi Police Auxiliary recruitment drive in Hateen, Nov. 17. More than 175 volunteers were processed during the Battery A sponsored drive.

Iraqis Line Up To Join Auxiliary

Story, photos by
Sgt. 1st Class Robert Timmons
4th IBC T Public Affairs

It has been a long, hard deployment for the Soldiers serving in Iraq. Threats of improvised explosive devices, snipers and chaos seemed to hide around every corner.

Yet through it all, the rates of attacks against Coalition Forces and their Iraqi counterparts are dropping. *The Associated Press* reported U.S. commanders as saying violence is down 55 percent since the surge of 30,000 troops arrived in the city.

Is this decrease a matter of more Soldiers patrolling the troubled streets of the Iraqi capital or is it because more Iraqis are standing up to the extremists to take their part and end the cycle of violence?

Amid the myriad reasons for the decrease, one thing is certain; Iraqis are lining up by the hundreds to join Iraqi Police Auxiliary forces.

These forces, though paid less than Iraqi Policemen and may one day become full-fledged police officers, are tasked with protecting their own neighborhoods or mu-



hallahs.

On Nov. 17 and 19, troops from 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment along with their Iraqi Security Forces brethren held recruitment drives to sign

up these volunteers in the Hateen and Yarmouk neighborhoods.

At the Nov. 17th drive, sponsored by Battery A, over 175 recruits volunteered, while at the Battery B drive in Yarmouk, 47 went through the recruitment.

"It is extremely important," said Dana, Ky native Sgt. Michael Webb, a petroleum supply specialist from Battery A, 2nd Bn. 32nd Field Artillery, who manned the final out processing station at the event. "We are giving back to the Iraqi people. It is very important for them to help take care of themselves."

During the drives, the recruits had to pass through a security checkpoint, a brief medical screening, a biometrics check, an interview with local ISF commanders and a physical fitness test before they could see Webb to get their final processing.

"This was planned for a couple weeks," the 32-year-old said. "We have been able to move people through efficiently through good communications."

He added that there was a good deal of interpreters at the event which helped speed it along.

One of the most important steps in the process was ensuring no re-



cruits had a suspicious background.

“We do biometrics checks to see if they come up on any list,” said Staff Sgt. Steven Guiffre, a military policeman with the 401st Military Police Company who oversaw the taking of fingerprints and retinal scans. “This helps eliminate those you don’t want as a policeman.”

The data gathered is put into a computer database which checks to see if the person is who they claim to be and if they are suspected of criminal activity.

The Waterbury, Conn. native whose unit helps train Iraqi police officers said it is important for Iraq to have a good strong police force.

“You don’t have a totally free society with the Iraqi Army pulling security,” he said. “Let the police take care of the towns and let the Army take care of the country.”

To ease any sectarian tensions, any male over the age of 17 was allowed to volunteer regardless if they were Sunni or Shia.

“Everybody is allowed to volunteer as long as they live in the area,” said Bloomington, Ind. native, Staff Sgt. Patrick Whaley, the battalion’s Civil Military Operations platoon sergeant. “This is a good step in the right direction for the Mansour area, especially Hateen. It gets the locals working with the (Iraqi Security Forces) as they police their communities.”

The 37-year-old father of a 19-year-old private said during the Hateen recruitment drive that a few months ago the idea of this many people showing up would have been laughed at.

“We had over 175 people show up today,” he said. “Six to seven months ago you wouldn’t even have had half that many.”

5 While the numbers seem small compared to larger neighborhoods like Saydiyah or Doura where the numbers reached up into the high hundreds, the IPA will soon hit the streets to help rid the city of criminals.

Top left: Cordova, Md. native Spc. Shane Osterman, a military policeman with the 401st Military Police Company out of Fort Hood, Texas, scans the biometric data of an Iraqi Police Auxiliary recruit during an IPA recruitment drive Nov. 17 in Hateen.

Top right: Bloomington, Ind. native Staff Sgt. Patrick Whaley, the Civil Military Operations platoon sergeant directs an Iraqi Police Auxiliary recruit to the next station during an IPA recruitment drive in Hateen, Nov. 17.

Above left: Dana, Ky native Sgt. Michael Webb, a petroleum supply specialist from Battery A, 2nd Bn. 32nd Field Artillery, watches recruits do pull-ups through a cast-iron gate.

Above right: An Iraqi Policeman holds his fist down to insure an Iraqi Police Auxiliary recruit does proper push-ups during the physical fitness portion of IPA recruiting in Hateen, Nov. 17.
Opposite bottom: Miami native Sgt. Danil Ramirez, a cannon crew member with Battery A, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, walks through the more than 175 volunteers waiting for a chance to be processed as Iraqi Security Auxiliary, Nov. 17 in the Baghdad neighborhood of Hateen.

School's in session

High School Open in West Rashid

Story, Photos by Cpl. Ben Washburn
4th IBCT Public Affairs

Despite being on the ground a month, the 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, currently attached to the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division has hit the ground running. The "Tuskers" continued their efforts to improve the life of Iraqi citizens, visiting two schools in Saydiyah, Nov. 26

The improvements in the Sunni neighborhood are important to Harker Heights, Texas, native Col. Ricky D. Gibbs, commander of the 4th IBCT.

"I want to be sure the government is taking care of all the people," Gibbs said.

With students lined up outside holding welcome signs, the Soldiers first stopped by the National Reconciliation High School for a ribbon-cutting ceremony which marked the re-opening of the school.

Inside the school for 220 students, which stands away from the city, is new paint, glass windows, and electrical wiring. The renovation of the school was the result of efforts by the "Tuskers" and the "Vanguards" of the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 1st Inf. Div., which redeployed home to Germany earlier this month.

Smiling school girls gathered in groups outside and asked the Soldiers in broken English "what's your name?"

One Soldier said he was able to see the results of his hard work.

"It makes you feel good because you see how they were before, and the better the area gets the better it makes you feel because it means you



Tampa, Fla., native Lt. Col. Johnnie Johnson, commander of the 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment, passes out backpacks during his visit to the Ishtar Elementary school Nov. 26.

are doing your job," said Staff Sgt. Jonathan Haynsworth, a native of Lake Wales, Fla., and member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment.

Just a short walk from the National Reconciliation High School sits the Ishtar Elementary School, tucked away in a block of buildings, providing stark contrast to the stand-alone campus of the larger school yards away.

Again, Soldiers were met outside by the student body and the school administrators. The Soldiers greeted many of the students outside, shook their hands, and communicated with universal hand gestures.

The children received new backpacks from the Soldiers as a sign of friendship.

"We've made friends with the people in the area, which in doing so has drawn the fighters and terrorists from the area," Haynsworth said.

With Iraqi National Police present in this Sunni neighborhood, Iraqi Security Volunteers assisting with security, and Coalition Forces working with local leaders, the area is a symbol of the transformation that is taking place all across Iraq.

"Before, the INP couldn't come in here; now that we're friends, there's no problem with the Shia and the INP coming down here in this area," Haynsworth said.

The opening of the school is a result of the increased security in the area. The citizens, as well as Coalition Forces, are safer he added.

"When we came here I believe it was May, June, time-frame. Since then we've not had one small-arms fire incident from this area here, period."



Students from the National Reconciliation High School line the walkway leading to the school's entrance, Nov. 26. The "Tuskers" of the 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment were on hand for a ceremony to mark the opening of the school after extensive renovations.



Lt. Col. Johnnie Johnson, commander of the 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment, 4th Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division from Tampa, Fla., and Command Sgt. Maj. Rodney Greene, the senior noncommissioned officer of 4-64 Armored, uncase the battalion's colors at Forward Operating Base Falcon, Nov. 18. The "Tuskers" relieved the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division.

Tuskers Ready to *Pierce* Baghdad

Story, Photos by Maj. Kirk Luedeke
4th IBCT Public Affairs

As the Soldiers stood at attention in formation on the concrete pad outside the Dragon Brigade headquarters on Forward Operating Base Falcon during their transfer of authority ceremony, the colors of the 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment swayed in the slight breeze.

The colors' most important feature is the Tusker Battalion's regimental crest, which consists of a black elephant head emblazoned on a silver shield with the motto 'We Pierce,' standing out against a sea of yellow cloth and adorned with campaign streamers. All represent a long and proud combat tradition, a legacy of service under fire which now continues with the unit's recent deployment to Iraq from its home station of Fort Stewart, Ga under the command of Lt. Col. Johnnie L. Johnson and Command Sgt. Maj. Rodney L. Greene.

The 64th Armored Regiment originated as the 78th Tank Battalion, activated in January, 1941 and redesignated the 758th Tank Battalion (light) later that same year. What set the unit apart from other tank battalions in the US Army was the fact that it was the

7 first to be organized with African American Soldiers, at a time when army units were segregated formations.

The 758th and its Soldiers served this nation during the



Second World War as part of the 92nd Infantry Division, and was inactivated in Italy in 1945.

In 1949, the 758th was renamed the 64th Heavy Tank Battalion, and assigned to the 2nd Armored Division, where it would later see combat during the Korean War with the 3rd Infantry "Marne" Division. After becoming part of the combined arms regimental system in 1963, as the 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment, the Tusker battalion spent more than two decades in Germany with the 3rd ID as part of the vanguard standing ready to face a potential Soviet threat in Europe.

In 1984, the battalion moved to Fort Stewart, where it joined the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) and deployed to the Middle East in 1990-91 as part of Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm.

The unit's troops put the 3rd Infantry Division patch back on in 1996, when the Marne Division headquarters moved from Germany to Georgia, and it was the Tusker Battalion that led the first 'Thunder Run' into Baghdad in Apr. 2003. The battalion redeployed to Iraq in 2005-06 for Operation Iraqi Freedom III, and has returned in late 2007 for its third tour of duty in the Iraq War.

Today, it is the head of the black, tusked African elephant which stands out most prominently as a proud reminder of the battalion's heritage and ancestry as one of the Army's most storied armored battalions in history.

Team Eagle joins Phoenix

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

Soldiers' ability to provide basic first aid to each other before reaching a medical facility has saved countless lives over the course of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Soldiers of Company C, 610th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division have teamed up with the 7th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division Transition Team, also known as 'Team Eagle,' to teach a Combat Life-saver's Course at Joint Security Station Doura in southern Baghdad, providing the INP's with the skills necessary to do the same.

The course, which is four days long, is scheduled to complete its first rotation Nov. 29.

Staff Sgt. Todd Young, the 7-2 NPTT medic from Columbus, Ohio, said the course is going to save lives.

"At every checkpoint, they should have a CLS bag. Somebody gets shot or somebody gets injured, that person's going to need to be treated," Young said. "We've found out from past experiences, if you stop the bleeding you have an 80 percent better chance of saving that person's life. If we can get everybody at every checkpoint to be CLS qualified, we can save lives better."

The course covers patient assessment, identifying injuries, airway management, splinting, vehicle extraction, bleeding control and intravenous therapy over four days and is scheduled to take place once a month.

Young added that having 'shurta,' Arabic for police, equipped with these skills is better than their prior routine of simply putting the wounded in a truck and driving to the nearest hospital, often resulting in death before the wounded could get treatment.

Spc. Christopher Lindsey, an instructor with Co. C, 610th BSB from Houston, the course is key to ensuring the wounded reach the level of care they need.

"Through these basic life-saving interventions we're teaching it's going to greatly increase the chances of their people staying alive," Lindsey said.

Sgt. Jason Kun, a combat medic with Co. C, 610th BSB from Silver Lake, Kan., said even though the course is similar to the U.S. Army's course, there were parts changed to fit challenges the INP's will face in Baghdad.

"We took standard American CLS and tried to tailor it and fit it with Iraqi cultural considerations and the education level," Kun said. "Certain areas that we focused on in American society, we shy away from and we'll delve more into practical and improvised techniques a lot more."



One of the main things that had to be changed, Kun said, was the use of dressings. Since the INP's don't have as easy access to specialized dressings, the instructors had to focus more on field dressings and basic first aid.

Lindsey, who said he has a passion for teaching, said the students' collective attitude makes the class easier and more fun to instruct.

"They want to be here and they want to learn; that's excellent," he said. "If you get a class of people that don't want to be there or don't take it seriously, it's very hard to give them that knowledge if they don't want it."

Kun, who has prior experience training Iraqis with Military Transition Teams in Al-No'a' amaniya, said the students get more out of the course be-

"If you stop the bleeding you have an 80 percent better chance of saving that person's life."

ix to train Iraqis



Above: An Iraqi National Policeman practices applying a bandage to an exit wound during the Combat Lifesaver's Course at Joint Security Station Doura, Nov. 27.

Top: An Iraqi National Policeman practices applying a bandage to an Iraqi Army soldier during the Combat Lifesaver's Course at Joint Security Station Doura in southern Baghdad, Nov. 27.

Left: Spc. Christopher Lindsey, a medic with Company C, 610th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division from Houston, demonstrates the proper method to insert a nasal trumpet during the Combat Lifesaver's Course at Joint Security Station Doura in southern Baghdad, Nov. 27. The tool is used to prevent the tongue from falling into the airway and blocking it.

Across Top: Sgt. Jason Kun, a medic with Company C, 610th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division from Silver Lake, Kan., demonstrates the proper method to evaluate a casualty during the Combat Lifesaver's Course at Joint Security Station Doura in southern Baghdad, Nov. 27. Kun has worked with Military and National Police Transition Teams in Al-Noa'amaniya to train Iraqis on basic first aid.

Across Bottom: Policemen with the 7th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division practice applying a bandage to a casualty at Joint Security Station Doura in southern Baghdad, Nov. 27.

cause of the rapport the instructors have built with their pupils.

"There's been a comfort level that if they have a question they know they can ask, and they're not going to be looked down on for not knowing the answer," he said.

Young, a reservist who is tasked to the 7-2 NPTT from the 256th Combat Support Hospital based out of Columbus, Ohio, said ultimately, 'Team Eagle' would like to have Iraqis instructing the CLS course.

"That's going to be the goal. With the Warrior Leader's Course, I teach bleeding control, and I have my Iraqi counterpart there watching. During time off, we'll work so he can be teaching it, and he'll work with the CLS also; maybe start watching and then assisting and work his way up to teaching when he feels comfortable."

Lindsey said his part in instructing the course has been one of the most gratifying experiences of his deployment.

"I'm very excited about doing this. This is why we're here: to help the Iraqi people during this transition phase," he said. "You don't really get to do this

in a (troop medical center). I'm actually elbow-deep in helping. It really is an awesome experience."

ent better chance of saving that person's life."

Brigade retains reenlistment honors

Story, photo by Spc. Nathaniel Smith
4th IBCT Public Affairs

Soldiers with a wealth of experience gained through deployment are one of the most valuable resources to the Army, and keeping these troops around is one of the primary ways to keep the “Army Strong.”

Career counselors in the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division have embraced that strategy, earning the Multinational Division-Baghdad Commanding General’s Retention Award for having the most reenlistments of any brigade in the division.

Maj. Gen. Joseph Fil, the commander of Multinational Division-Baghdad, honored the unit by presenting the award to Col. Ricky Gibbs, commander of the 4th IBCT from Harker Heights, Texas, in a ceremony at the brigade’s headquarters on Forward Operating Base Falcon, Nov. 20.

The 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 4th IBCT received the honor at the battalion-level, having reenlisted 79 Soldiers, 64 more than their initial goal of 15.

Sgt. 1st Class Tito



Maj. Gen. Joseph Fil, commander of Multinational Division-Baghdad, presents Col. Ricky Gibbs, commander of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division from Harker Heights, Texas, with the Commanding General’s Retention Award for Top Brigade at the 4th IBCT’s headquarters on Forward Operating Base Falcon, Nov. 20. The “Dragons” received the award for reenlisting the most Soldiers for fiscal year 2007.

Reed, the senior career counselor of the 4th IBCT, attributed the unit’s success to the command climate within the brigade.

“The commanders and first sergeants are involved in their Soldiers’ decisions to continue their careers in the Army,” the Long Island, N.Y., native said. “Command influence has always been a good thing here in the brigade. We always have all the support all the way down to the troop and company level.”

Sgt. 1st Class Juan Cruz, the career counselor for 1-4 Cav. from Arecibo, P.R., said the success also reflects the way retention noncommissioned officers go about their business.

“We don’t go out there trying to force them to do something they don’t want to do,” he said. “We actually let them tell us what they want us to do for them and we go out of our way to get it for them.”

In the 2007 fiscal year, career counselors throughout the 4th IBCT got the 432 Soldiers who reenlisted almost five million dollars in bonuses.

For Reed, taking care of Soldiers by getting them bonuses, schools or choice duty stations is what it’s all about.

“We’re doing great things here; we continue to do those things and help these Soldiers. That’s our main goal: to help the Soldiers in their careers,” he said. “We don’t do it for the recognition. It’s great we get it, but we do it to make sure we’re building a better foundation for our future Soldiers and leaders.”

Cruz credited all the sections in his unit for helping him help the troops.

“I cannot take the full responsibility for the awards because it was not only me. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time with the right atmosphere,” Cruz said. “At 1-4 Cav., the whole unit was part of this. It goes from the personnel section helping me out with whatever administrative paperwork we needed to our communications section making sure I was always up and running to our supply making sure I had the equipment I needed to do my job.

“I wish they had been here too because they were a part of this also.”

In Sector with COMCAM

THE WARRIORS
with Pfc. Michael Hendrickson
55th Combat Camera



Top: A Soldier from Company C, 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, inspects a civilian residence in the Rashid district during a clearing operation on Nov. 21.

Above: A Soldier from Company C, 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, stands guard during a clearing operation in Doura Nov. 21.

Above Left: Soldiers from Company C, 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, inspect a civilian residence in the Rashid district during a clearing operation on Nov. 21.

Left: A detained Iraqi citizen waits to be transported in the Rashid district of Baghdad, Iraq following a clearing operation on Nov. 21.

Black Lion efforts help reconcile West Rashid

Story, photos by Cpl. Ben Washburn
4th IBC T Public Affairs

Living at the Coalition Outposts has allowed American Soldiers to form bonds and friendships with Iraqi citizens. These relationships have sprung into a constant flow of communication, resulting in both Sunnis and Shia working together in reconciliation efforts.

In northwest Rashid, the home of the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, "Black Lions", 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Sunni and Shia leaders have met at six reconciliation meetings, restoring relationships among tribal leaders in an effort to curb violence and more quickly restore essential services.

"It's 100 percent turnaround. It's no secret the reconciliation is working in northwestern Rashid," said Corsicana, Texas, native Capt. Charles Turner, the 1-28 Fire Support Officer and Effects Officer.

Getting support from tribal leaders is al-



Shia and Sunni leaders of Baghdad's Rashid district meet at a Reconciliation meeting Nov. 17. The meeting, held at Baghdad International Airport's Business Center, focused on reducing violence in the northwest portion of the Rashid district.



Lt. Col. Pat Frank, commander of the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, "Black Lions", addresses tribal leaders of Baghdad's Rashid district at a Nov. 17 Reconciliation meeting. The Cuba, N.Y., native has been working with Shia and Sunni leaders to reduce violence in northwest Rashid.

lowing them to have a greater say in the direction their neighborhoods take to restore services.

"It's pretty much driven by the locals," Turner said. "You can't pull a project off if you don't have the cooperation of the neighborhood council and the locals. It just won't happen if you don't have the support."

That cooperation has allowed local leaders, with assistance from Coalition Forces, to start projects restoring electricity, picking up trash, and maintaining sewers.

"It's more of them taking the reins of the horse, build

their confidence up so they don't always have to depend on us," said Houston native Sgt. 1st Class Lloyd Rhoades, the 1-28 FSO Noncommissioned Officer in Charge.

At the latest reconciliation meeting both Sunni and Shia sheiks met at the Baghdad International Airport's Business Center where each neighborhood received grades for their level of violence. Each neighborhood has reduced violence from the previous month, continuing the trend present throughout Iraq the past few months.

Soldiers living at the COPs agree.

"(Soldiers at COPs), they're a lot more safe being there, they're not hearing gunfire, they're not getting shot at out there at the COP, day in and day out, like they were previously when they first took over the COP," Rhoades said.

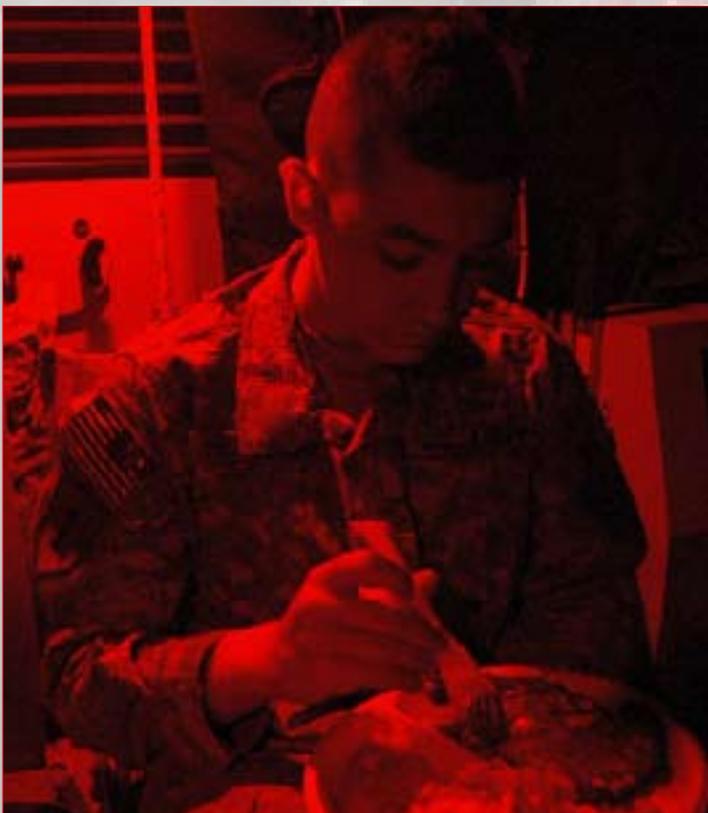
The COPs also host smaller reconciliation meetings, helping to set the agenda and issues of discussion for the larger meetings at BIAP.

"The leadership from each muhalla comes to their COPs to talk it out prior to the bigger reconciliation meetings," Rhoades said.

With Sunni and Shia leaders working together the future for northwest Rashid is bright.

"You've got Sunni and Shia there. The light has come on. This is a golden opportunity, the door is open, we've got to walk in," Turner said.

Giving Thanks



Top Right: Col. Ricky Gibbs, commander of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division from Harker Heights, Texas, serves Soldiers their Thanksgiving dinner at Coalition Outpost Attack, Nov. 22.
Above: Pfc. Michael Anderson, a fire support specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th IBCB from Des Moines, Iowa, pours a glass of sparkling grape juice Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 22.
Left: Murfreesboro, Tenn., native Pfc. Russell Hercules, a driver with the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division Personal Security Detachment, eats his Thanksgiving meal in the back of the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicle at Joint Security Station Black Lions in Baghdad's Rashid district Nov. 22.
Top Left: A "family" of pilgrims joins Soldiers at the Forward Operating Base Falcon dining facility for Thanksgiving Day turkey, Nov. 22.

'A lot has changed..'

Community celebrates church reopening



Story, photos by Cpl. Ben Washburn
4th IBCT Public Affairs

Nov. 15 marked an important day for the residents of south Baghdad's Doura neighborhood as Iraqi Christians returned to conduct worship services at St. John's Church.

Bishop Schlemmon Warduni, Auxiliary Bishop of the Chaldean Church, came to St. John's, in the heart of Doura where violence had been the worst and Al Qaeda most strongly entrenched, to give the first mass since May 5.

With Christians, Muslims, as well as Iraqi Security and Coalition Forces on hand, Bishop Warduni delivered a mass praying for peace and unity for all of Iraq. The Christians in the audience took communion to conclude the service, culminating a day over six months in the making.

"This service is a reflection of the current security situation in Doura," said Col. Ricky D. Gibbs, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team com-

mander. "Only a few weeks ago AQI had the Iraqi populace in the grip of terror but they've been pushed out and the people have returned to worship."

Tired that their Christian friends had been forced out by Al Qaeda, Muslim leaders sought a way to bring these families back into the community. Lt. Col. Stephen Michael, the commander of the 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, said the Muslim community played a role in the events of the day.

"One of the first people that called for the opening of the church was the Muslims here that have lived in this muhalla," said the native of Newark, N.J., standing in the church courtyard with a statue of the Virgin Mary in the background.

Many Muslim leaders attended the service, a sign of friendship and support to their Christian neighbors. Their attendance could be a sign that Muslims in the area have rejected Al Qaeda and em-

braced their Christian friends.

St. John's Church hasn't been spared from the destruction of war. In 2004, the church was attacked by terrorists and largely destroyed. It has since been rebuilt, and just a few weeks ago Christians there raised a new cross on the steeple of the church.

Doura's diversity has always been a strength. Nestled up against the Tigris River, a large percentage of Baghdad's Christian community called Doura home. In the spring, Al Qaeda terrorists began a campaign to force those Christians out of their homes. However, thanks to the efforts of Iraqi Security and Coalition Forces recent months have seen the situation change dramatically in Doura.

"A lot has changed in this muhalla, we've come through and cleared out pretty much all of the bad guys we can find, people feel safe now," said Sgt. 1st Class James Lee, a native of Glennville, Ga.

Today, the Doura market is a vibrant center of commerce. More than 400 stores sell everything from fruit and vegetables to toothpaste and shampoo. The residents can shop safely, without fear of attack from terrorists and criminals.

Doura's streets are filled with the shouts and laughter of children playing, as well as going to and from school. Businesses line the streets and shops stand on corners, with customers lining up in an area where people hardly ventured outside just a few months ago. The streets are clean, and the residents take pride in their neighborhood. The families that live there have formed friendships with the Soldiers from the 2-12th Inf.

An area that was once an Al Qaeda stronghold has transformed into a peaceful neighborhood, where people are learning to live together again.

15 Speaking after the mass, Bishop Warduni delivered a message of peace for everyone. "We pray for peace in every country, that in this war our lord protects everybody, and the peace of the lord be with you always."



Left: Auxiliary Bishop Schlemon Warduni conducts mass at the St. John's Church in Baghdad's Doura neighborhood. The mass was the first since May 5 held at St. John's Church.

Opposite: Muslim sheiks from Baghdad's Doura neighborhood attend a church service at St. John's Church Nov. 15. The sheiks attended the service as a sign of support and friendship to the church, which held its first service since May 5.

Above: Auxiliary Bishop Schlemon Warduni gives communion to an Iraqi Christian during the worship service conducted Nov. 15 at St. John's Church in Baghdad's Doura neighborhood.

The Dragon's

by Spc. Nathaniel
Smith
4th IBCT Public Affairs

Soldiers of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division may have felt like they had someone watching over them at some points of their current deployment.

That's because they have.

Members of the unmanned aerial vehicle platoon from Company B, Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division received Division-level Certificates of Achievement at Forward Operating Base Falcon in southern Baghdad.

Fifteen of the platoon's 16 operators, which are split up between FOB Falcon and Camp Tajji, have been honored for flying more than 1,000 accident-free hours.

The section has been providing target acquisition, surveillance and reconnaissance of the Dragons' area of operations.

Staff Sgt. Brandon Kroviak, the site noncommissioned officer-in-charge at Falcon with Co. B, 4-1 BSTB, said the accomplishment was a rare feat.

"Not a lot of people reach 1,000 hours within nine months of being here. It's a lot in a little bit of time," the San Diego native said. "When you're at that tempo, accidents can happen. We're flying non-stop here; that's not a trend across division."

Spc. James Crank, a UAV operator with Co. B, 4-1 BSTB from Colorado Springs, Colo., passed credit for the award to his platoon-mates.



"I don't know if it's an act of God or what. I know we're doing good things, but it's all up to the bird," he said. "The maintainers are doing an outstanding job. That's probably the biggest reason why."

"It's probably one of the best groups of people I've worked with. We're more like a family than a platoon."

Wingman



Left: Lt. Col. Joseph Birchmeier, commander of the 4-1 Brigade Special Troops Battalion, presents Spc. Devon Scarletto, a unmanned aerial vehicle operator with Company B, 4-1 BSTB from Fayetteville, N.C., with a division-level certificate of achievement in front of the battalion's headquarters at Forward Operating Base Falcon in southern Baghdad, Nov. 10. Scarletto and nine of his fellow UAV operators were honored for flying over 1,000 accident-free hours over the course of their current deployment.

Opposite: Spc. Nicholes Pryor, a maintainer with Company B, Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, works on one of the unit's unmanned aerial vehicles at in southern Baghdad. Spc. James Crank, a UAV operator with B Co., 4-1 BSTB, attributed much of the pilots' success to the maintainers.

Opposite Bottom: The unmanned aerial vehicle crew at Camp Tajji north of Baghdad. Below: The unmanned aerial vehicle crew at FOB Falcon in southern Baghdad.

Kroviak, a nine year Army veteran, had other reasons the platoon was able to accomplish all it has.

“Attention to detail, situational awareness, and training has played a lot into that; they strive to do the best they can,” he said. “They’ve been pushing themselves; they never stop trying to be the best.”

Lt. Col. Joseph Birchmeier, the commander of the 4-1 BSTB, appreciated the value of his pilots due to their demand for all kinds of events in sector, such as improvised explosive devices detonating and troops reacting to contact.

“Everybody wants to know where the UAV is all the time. They are an extremely valuable asset,” Birchmeier said. “Their skills are incredibly valued as they’ve shown throughout the year they are more than proficient at what they do. It’s a privilege to be able to recognize their great performance.”

Kroviak expected his Soldiers to be recognized at the brigade level, but he said it was good to see higher headquarters taking an interest.

“It’s great, I didn’t know it was going to go that high when we first put it in,” he said. “That division actually cares that we’re enforcing safety on our own is wonderful.”





Detroit native Sgt. Thomas Schulte, a shift supervisor with Company G, 610th Brigade Support Battalion, tightens up a wheel hub on a M1151 armored humvee Nov. 16 at Camp Liberty. Schulte and his crew work tirelessly to ensure the vehicles have no dry rot and are mission capable.

Keeping The Batteries Firing

Story, photos by Sgt. 1st Class Robert Timmons
4th IBCT Public Affairs

To support Operation Iraqi Freedom all units, whether infantry, engineers, armor and even artillery, have been called on to fill non-traditional roles and hit the streets.

Such is the case with the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, a part of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Inf. Div. back at Fort Riley where they call home, but while deployed are attached to the 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. They have traded in their howitzers for humvees so they can mingle with the residents of Hateen and Yarmouk.

While the artillerymen walk the streets, of arguably one of the quietest neighborhoods in the city, mechanics who, at base camp, keep the battalion's wheels to the road.

The troopers of Company G, 610th Brigade Support Battalion, the "Proud Americans" forward support company, don't just wait for vehicles to break down: they provide all necessary living support for the battalion including recovering disabled vehicles and getting them repaired for the next mission.

"It's fairly important here to keep the trucks on the road," said Vero Beach, Fla. Native Chief Warrant Officer Richard Jones, who heads the company's mechanic shop. "We are here 24-7; after the mission is over and the (After Action Reviews) are done they bring their vehicles here to see if anything is broken."

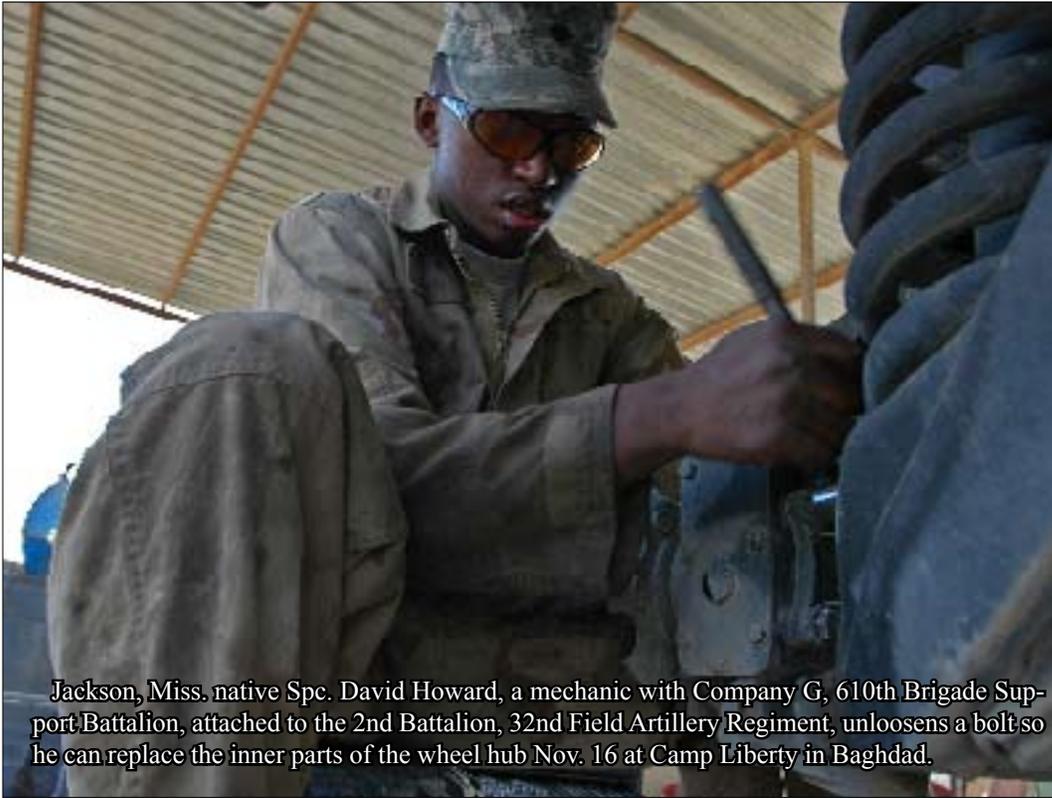
While the battalion had to change its focus from pounding the enemy with high-explosive shells to pounding the streets, the mechanics had to learn on the fly how to assess and fix the different style of humvees used here.

"They didn't have a lot of experience in these types of vehicles," the 16 and half year Army veteran and father of three said. "We have an outstanding bunch of mechanics here but it took time learning to troubleshoot the vehicles. The vehicles are different from that in the rear, they have different electronics and generator systems.

"It took a good 90 days for them to get used to the (M1151s) – now they are a regular pit crew."

Grindly, Calif. native Spc. Derrick Kale, a mechanic with Company G, 610th Brigade Support Battalion, the Forward Support Company attached to the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Inf. Div., uses all his might to unloosen a lug nut on a M1151 up armored humvee at Camp Liberty Nov. 16.





Jackson, Miss. native Spc. David Howard, a mechanic with Company G, 610th Brigade Support Battalion, attached to the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, unloosens a bolt so he can replace the inner parts of the wheel hub Nov. 16 at Camp Liberty in Baghdad.



San Francisco native, Spc. Alvin Garcia, a mechanic with Company G, 610th Brigade Support Battalion, checks the belts of a M1151 armored humvee Nov. 16 at Camp Liberty in Baghdad.

M1151 humvees are the latest generation of Army vehicles which are built with heavier armor and sturdier drive trains than older models.

“The M998 humvees we worked on at Fort Riley were a little different,” said shift supervisor Sgt. Thomas Shulte, a 29-year-old from Detroit. “They don’t have all the armor on them and it made it a lot easier. In the 1151s, a lot of stuff is packed into the work area. It’s much easier to work on once you know what you are looking for.”

Schulte, who took up fixing cars as a hobby, said the mechanics rotate between working the day shift and night shift. “There are a non-commissioned officer and a Soldier who work nights.”

During the day shift, the Soldiers concentrate on routine servicing of vehicles, ensuring preventative maintenance checks and services are done on the trucks before they are dispatched and any other problems the trucks may have.

When doing routine maintenance, the humvees are examined top to bottom, front to back, as the mechanics look for anything out of the ordinary.

“We make sure there is not dry rot,” Schulte said. “In these conditions the ball joints fail and tie rods bend. In these types of terrain they fail a lot.”

Even with that challenge, Shulte and his team are proud of what they do and look forward to



Port Huron, Mich. native Sgt. Robert Schwark, a shift supervisor for Company G, 610th Brigade Support Battalion, the Forward Support Company for the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, lubes a piece of a M1151 armored humvee hub Nov. 16 at Camp Liberty.



By Sgt. 1st Class Robert Timmons
4IBCT, Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE RUSTAMIYAH, Iraq – They readily admit they are a tight-knit group with most of them having known and served with each other during previous deployments.

Being from small Pacific islands helps these islanders come closer together.

You can see them in the companies of 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team stationed here. You can see them dominate the volleyball courts here too.

They are the Rangers' Pacific Islanders and they fight as a team and play as a team.

"I feel comfortable that I have brothers in the battalion," said Staff Sgt. Rudy To'ia, an infantryman and squad leader with Company C, 2nd Bn., 16th Infantry. "We share the same background and cultures. We also share things in our off time."

Though they all speak English, the 34-year-old from Alofa, American Samoa said it feels good when there is "somebody who understands your native language."

Even though others may not understand them, the Pacific Islanders don't speak the language around those who don't so they won't offend anyone.

"I would never speak it around other people," said Sgt. Pepero Taufagu, a 28-year-old infantryman from Aua, American Samoa with Company C.

There are 15 Pacific Islanders in the battalion,

with 11 of them being from American Samoa.

To'ia said their culture, though not any better than others, helps in their military service because they grow up to show "respect and have the ability to work together."

"No matter how old you are, if the high chief says to do something you do it no matter your age," he said. "It is the same thing in the Army."

Company C has a good track record that the islanders are proud of – they have captured numerous high-value targets including a man suspected of firing mortars into FOB Rustamiyah.

"We are proud to help Iraqi citizens and to capture lots of high value targets that were interfering with Iraqi and Coalition forces operations," To'ia said.

A platoon sergeant with another company credits their unit for capturing the person responsible for the death of one of his fellow Soldiers.

"That day we were turning in a bad guy when we were hit with an (improvised explosive device)," said Staff Sgt. Jose Vera, a 26-year-old, platoon sergeant for Company B, 2-16th Infantry from Philadelphia. "Charlie Company captured the guy behind the attack that day. He was a big cell member linked to indirect fires and transporting explosively-formed penetrators."

The company also bagged the number two bad guy in their area.

"It's a very good sign for us," said Sgt. Iakopo Te'i, a 28-year-old infantryman in Company C, from Fagatogo-Manu'a, American Samoa. "We

used to get hit by mortars 15-18 times a week. Since we caught him there has been none."

To'ia said he thinks being a Samoan helped them accomplish their mission.

"(The Iraqis) treat us differently," he said. "They can tell we are not Americans and that we are from a different part of the world. We treat everyone with dignity and respect at all times.

"We treat them with respect and they treat us with respect. That's why we have had success."

Though they are not all from the same place, the Pacific Islanders, the Samoans in particular have deployed with each other before. To'ia, Taufagu and Te'i served together in a National Guard unit at Camp Anaconda in 2005 – all decided to go on active duty.

Taufagu, whose wife Bernadette is in Samoa with his two sons Jake Jr. and Lucky Joe said that being a Samoan helped him assimilate into the new unit.

"When I first arrived at Fort Riley I didn't know anybody," said Taufagu, who initially joined the Army to take care of his mother, three brothers and four sisters. "A guy came up to me and asked if I was Samoan. I said yes and he drove me around, took care of me because I'm Samoan. I think it's something in our culture."

In keeping with the tight-knit family, Taufagu had a message to pass to his mother, who can't read English well, in his native language: Alofa mo oe siau tina pele. **20**

Dragon Fire Around the Brigade

Roughriders ready to dismount

Story, Photo by
Spc. Nathaniel Smith
4th IBCT Public Affairs



'Roughriders' of the 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 1st Iraqi National Police Division Transition Team at the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division's headquarters on Forward Operating Base Falcon. After a year of training INP's in areas like Salmanpak southeast of Baghdad, Al-Noa'amanieyh National Police Center south of the capital, and Saydiyah and Risalah in the Rashid District, the team is headed home.

For 15 months, the 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 1st Iraqi National Police Transition Team members were focused on one thing: handing the reins of security in Baghdad over to the 'shurta,' or police.

Now, at the end of their tour, they have to focus on a different kind of transition: that of going home.

Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Lowery, the 1-2-1 NPTT assistant intelligence noncommissioned officer from Decatur, Ala., said redeploying, while everybody's been looking forward to it, might be one of the most difficult parts of his deployment.

"It's something you've been looking forward to for 15 months," he said, "but I think the hardest part of this deployment is the going home process when you've got an 11-man family that's fixing to spread its wings and go to all four corners of the United States."

The familial bond among the team members was formed through facing the challenges that come with training Iraqi National Police in four different locations over 12 months after having known each other only 90 days.

Lt. Col. Andy Yerkes, the 1-2-1 NPTT team chief from Cincinnati said while he was concerned about the hasty assembly of the team, he had confidence from the beginning when the team started training at Fort Riley, Kan.

"The first thing that I was concerned about at Riley was building a team rapidly. Ultimately, you can only depend on yourself here. We've had support from other units, but ultimately we're 11 men trying to accomplish a mission," he said. "We're 11 men who have to trust each other and understand we have to work together. I knew right off that I'm very lucky; I've got a very strong team.

"We're all different but we all understand each other's capabilities and limitations."

For Lowery, who served as a drill sergeant prior to working with the 1-2-1 NPTT, adapting to the cultural differences in training the police as opposed to American Soldiers was one of his primary obstacles.

"For an American Soldier that's doing something that's not what needs to be done, you just walk up and stick both feet in his tail. Here you can't do that. You have to try to play a little chess with them, and they have to figure out what the right thing to do is," he said. "Sometimes with the officers, they know what to do and you've got to convince them your decision is the best decision, and you have to make them think it's their decision."

"I've transitioned away from the role of an operations

officer or an executive officer where I can say, 'Hey, you're going to do this right now,'" Yerkes added. "Now, I don't have that ability. Now I've got to convince somebody else that this is a good thing. Instead of going this way and pushing them, it's kind of coaching them.

"All people are the same: they only want to do something they've bought into themselves."

While their deployment had its fair share of challenges, Lowery said one of the biggest things he learned from the Iraqis he worked with was patience.

"I learned sometimes it's better to just shut your mouth and work at it. Sometimes right now is not the best time to fix something; sometimes it might take a day or so," he said. "With

that patience, you learn you've got a goal you're not going to achieve today; you're going to achieve it in a year. Patience to keep working at it, patience to stay focused on it, and patience to not just go crazy and just slap the hell out of the person you're working with because you're stuck with them 24/7.

"I can't think of more than 30 minutes since I've showed up in October that I've been without seeing one of the other 10 guys on my team."

Now, as the team prepares to head home to their families in a variety of different places, they will have stories to tell their loved ones from their time in Rashid. One of the most inspirational stories, Lowery said, comes from one of the darkest days of their deployment: a day in late July when one of their National Policemen found the abandoned Baby Fatimah under a pile of trash in Saydiyah.

"I think about that baby that we found. The impact we had on her," he said. "There's a life in this world that's still walking around because we were there, because somebody cared enough to look under something.

"You see warriors, people you know are capable of doing violent things, and they pick up a baby and they're crying their eyes out. You know they're real people."

"The fact that she was able to live is a highlight. We can't help the fact that terrorists took the parents she was living with," Yerkes added. "We can help mitigate the effects, and we've done that."

On the other side of the coin, that ugly side of war that all Soldiers must deal with on some level, Yerkes said he will lean on his better half for support.

"I will probably tell my wife more than I should. She's somebody who I'll spend the rest of my life with," he said. "I will tell her everything I can, stuff that relates to me; events that made me feel a certain way that might come back. My wife needs to understand that part about me."

Team trains Iraqi Police

Course teaches future leaders

Story, photos by
Spc. Nathaniel Smith
4th IBCT Public Affairs

In southern Baghdad's Doura region, change is in the air.

To the naked eye, it may not seem so, but anyone who spends a little time around the 7th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division headquarters can see it.

They'll see Iraqis training Iraqis, noncommissioned officers showing pride in their own NCO Corps, and a new generation of leaders in the Iraqi Security Forces developing in their country's time of need.

All in a day's work for the 7-2 National Police Transition Team.

The 7-2 NPTT has started a Warrior Leader's Course, training future noncommissioned officers on everything from drill and ceremony to weapons maintenance and discipline.

Master Sgt. Donald Sherman, the senior noncommissioned officer of the transition team from Salem, Ala., relies on his experience at the U.S. Army Airborne School to train Iraqi NCO's.

"It's the same as training our guys," said Sherman, who was a first sergeant at the Fort Benning, Ga., school for three years. "It's the same thing only you're using an interpreter. They grasp the concepts the same. They're just as intelligent as our guys."

The WLC is only one aspect of the 7-2 NPTT's operations and purpose. Maj. Joseph Parker, the team's chief of staff from Snyder, Texas, said the groups are a vital piece of the overall effort in Iraq.

"The teams are important because we're the eyes and ears. We interact daily with the Iraqi Security Forces," the West Point graduate said. "We can get the idea of what the Iraqis are looking for. We try to mesh the U.S. plans together with the Iraqi plans."

"Current Army plans have the NPTT's in the lead to decrease the overall number of forces in country and for the eventual total withdrawal. We're only right at the beginning of the process, but we'll start moving that way so we can fully withdraw the forces. We're just the vanguards of that effort."

That's where the WLC comes into play. Sherman said a stronger, more capable NCO Corps among the ISF could allow them to better conduct day-to-day operations, resulting in fewer U.S. forces being needed in the region.

"It's good; the sooner we get it done, the sooner we'll go through the transition," he said. "The sooner they can stand up on their own, the sooner we can execute an about-face and get out of here."

In the 7-2 NP's, already Iraqis have started training each other. Sgt. Ahmed Kamir, an NCO in the brigade from Karbala, Iraq, trained his fellow 'Shurta,' Arabic for police, on the basics of the



AK-47, the NP's primary weapon.

Kamir, a graduate from a prior class of the WLC, said he was thankful for the opportunity to learn and teach.

"I am very proud of this course, and I wish to thank the Coalition Forces for this course. They do their best to teach us," he said.

Kamir added that not only is the course valuable, but the students of it are showing potential.

"I think they are very good men; they are very good fighters," he said. "Each one of them is capable of being a leader."

Master Sgt. Donald Sherman, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the 7th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Transition Team from Salem, Ala., teaches an INP map-reading at Joint Security Station Doura in southern Baghdad's Rashid District, Oct. 22. Sherman has prior experience training Soldiers at the U.S. Army Airborne School in Fort Benning, Ga. Sgt. Ahmed Kamir, a member of the 7th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division from Karbala, Iraq, trains his fellow 'Shurta,' Arabic for police, on proper muzzle awareness at Joint Security Station Doura in South Baghdad, Oct. 23. Kamir is a graduate of the Warrior Leader's Course being taught at the JSS.



Keep Focused for the Holidays

Spiritual Fire

by Chap (Maj.) Gregory Thogmartin



A couple of things stand out in my mind right now. One, we are in the midst of the holiday season. Two, we are a long way from home and family. Given that those two statements are true, how do we make the most of this season?

Whether you think about Christmas or Hanukah – one thing shines out. Both holidays remember and celebrate what God has done. I think the way to make the most of season is to remember the reason for all the fuss.

In the celebration of Hanukah, the Jews look back to the overthrow of reign of tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes and the freedom that came to the nation because of the Maccabean Revolt in the second century B.C. It is an eight-day celebration that commemorates how

God delivered them from oppression and how He provided oil miraculously to keep the menorah or lampstand lit for eight days on one day's supply of oil.

For many Christians, Christmas is all about a season and not just a day. The season includes: Advent, 4-weeks to prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ; Christmas Eve and Christmas Day; the 12 days of Christmas (not just words to song); and the season ends on January 6, Epiphany. Advent is the time of preparation to receive a king. Christmas is the celebration of the coming of the King. Epiphany is the day we remember the coming of the Three Wise Men and their gifts and the worship theme

for that day is that what God has done is for all people.

In December, whether you celebrate these holidays as religious holidays or whether you see them as simply family times, one of the most important things for you is to remember what all the fuss is about. Don't overspend in order to make it a memorable holiday. Instead, make sure you say the things that need to be said and tell the valued people in your life that they are important.

For those of us who celebrate the religious aspects of these days – the key for our success is also to remember what the fuss is all about. Keep those truths in focus and celebrate what God has done and what He continues to do.

May God bless each one of you and your loved ones with His peace.

Steel Falcon Chapel Worship Schedule

Sunday

- Contemporary Protestant Service 1030
- Gospel Service 1300
- Latter Day Saints Service 1600
- Traditional Protestant Service 1930
- Prayer Service 2100

Wednesday

- Gospel Service 1900

Thursday

- Catholic Mass 1900

Friday

- Jewish Service 1800

Saturday

- Liturgical Worship Service 2000

Bible Studies

- Tuesday 1900

- Thursday 1930



We could all use some 'ground' guidance

When driving around Forward Operating Base Falcon, remember: all vehicles larger than a humvee must have a ground guide.

Buckle up: all the cool kids are doing it

In *any* vehicle, remember: always wear the seat belt.





EVER

VIGILANT

Newaygo, Mich. native Spc. Ron Lethorn, a 30-year-old cannon crew member with the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment, personal security detachment, stands guard as Lt. Col. Michael J. Lawson speaks to local Iraqis during an Iraqi Police Auxiliary recruitment drive in Hateen Nov. 17. The 2nd Bn. 32nd Field Artillery is currently attached to the 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, but is an organic part of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Inf. Div. based at Fort Riley, Kan. (Timmons, 4IBCT)