

Drumming for the Lord in Baghdad

Hanau Soldier adds rhythm to chapel services

By Anemone Rueger
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

Spc. Steven W. Hiott has two major tasks in Iraq — pumping Blackhawks full of fuel and Soldiers full of the Gospel. For the Blackhawks he uses a fuel truck and a hose. For the church services he relies on his drums.

Hiott, a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2-501st Aviation Regiment Soldier, de-

ployed with his unit to Baghdad in May. It didn't take long for his musical talents to be put to use. "I've played in every church I've been to," said Hiott, the latest version being a dilapidated building taken over by U.S. forces on Baghdad International Airport.

Hiott started playing drums in high school in Sarasota, Fla., where he was part of the marching band. Then he got his first drum

set. "The first place I put them was in church," Hiott said. "I went to drum shows with my friends, but I've never actually been taught by a professional. After a lot of practicing I got comfortable playing in the church. I also used to teach drums at high school."

In August 2002 Hiott, by then a green suiter, was assigned to Hanau. He went to Fliegerhorst Chapel for the contemporary service. "That Sunday there just happened not to be a drummer there. I asked if they needed one. I showed up Thursday for practice, and they said I was good enough to play with them."

Lt. Col. Howard L. Malone, 104th Area Support Group provost marshal and leader of the music ministry for the contemporary services at Fliegerhorst Chapel, was immediately impressed by Hiott. "I thought, 'this guy is great,'" he said. "We had been through four drummers in a year and a half — not because they were bad; they just kept leaving for other assignments."

Hiott was joined in Hanau by his wife Denise, who soon also found a home in the music ministry. "He told everybody I can sing," she said. "So when I got off the plane I was singing that same night at Fliegerhorst."

"They are both very gifted, and I thought it was really neat they are doing this together," said Malone. "They are faithful. You can always count on them, and that's so important in the church."

When things started heating up in Iraq, "Rumors on deployment started in March," said Denise. "May 1 he was gone. We've spent 10 percent of our time together since we got married last August."

Hiott flew first to Kuwait, then after a month he went to Baghdad International Airport in a 31-hour straight ride.

"The difference is so big," Hiott said about life in Iraq. "I've talked a lot to the Iraqis working on the compound. They bring their kids. Every day for them is very hard. You can give them the slightest thing and it's something they can't afford."

Hiott had a rare opportunity to see some of the country during a refueling operation in Babylon. He took a tour of the ancient city



Spc. Steven Hiott works at a fuel point during duty at Baghdad International Airport.

guided by a local Iraqi. "For 30 years nobody has been able to go there. Babylon was cool," recalled Hiott.

The challenging environment makes it harder to keep a regular life schedule, he said. "When I came it was hard to go to church. Everybody had so much to do. Whenever I wanted to go, everybody else was busy."

But one day he ran into Pfc. R. Keith Philipps, 1-501st Aviation, the guitar player from his church band on Fliegerhorst. "He asked whether I wanted to go to church. So we went together. Before I knew it he was involved playing the guitar there. He kept talking to me, and I asked if they needed a drummer. They said I was more than welcome. Tuesday I showed up for practice and Sunday I played."

"I certainly got a lot of compliments. And we started to get a bigger congregation. People started to enjoy praising God," Hiott said. "I'm surprised how fast it turned into a regular church service like back home."

The facility is used for several different church services. Hiott plays for the non-denominational service. A young couple, members of the 1st Armored Division Band, put the music together. They get the songs either from the Internet or from the library, he said.

Similar to the praise fests at Fliegerhorst Chapel, the BIAP Chapel holds praise nights occasionally. "One was on Halloween," said Hiott. "That was really, really cool. They

brought four different gospel churches. We all just had 20 minutes to play. It lasted two hours. One of the groups had had 48 mortar attacks. I thought it was amazing that they could come."

Hiott said his involvement in church helps him cope with everyday challenges of deployment. "Here, you are around the same people non-stop, all in one big tent. There are a lot of good people and a lot of bad people, too. For me and others, going to church helps us keep our focus on the Lord, and we are supporting each other."

"It's amazing, when I'm playing in the service, I'm not tired," he said. "One time I was sleeping in after a night shift. Suddenly the chaplain (Cpt. Perry Schmitt) comes and wakes me up. 'Hey, come, we need you.' It helps me to know that he cares enough that he wanted me to be there."

Hiott recently spent two weeks of Rest and Recuperation leave with Denise — and the chapel band — in Hanau.

"We've really missed him not being there," said Malone. "When he was here on R&R leave for a couple of services we got a little flavor of how it is to have him back again."

"Of course I want to get back as soon as possible," said Hiott. "But while we are there, we must make the best of everything." (Editor's note: Fliegerhorst Chapel praise fests take place once a month and are open to the entire community. The next praise fest is scheduled for Dec. 14 from 7-8 p.m.)



Spc. John Hano shows students around the Internet at a school in Baghdad.



Photo by Anemone Rueger

Spc. Steven Hiott adds a back beat to religious services at the Fliegerhorst Chapel during his two-week Rest and Recuperation leave from duty in Iraq.

Internet Cafe at Baghdad school

Giessen Soldiers bring Web to Iraq

Story and photo by Cpl. Todd Pruden
372nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

New computers and Internet capabilities were made possible for two local schools in the Al Adhamiya neighborhood of Baghdad with the help of soldiers of 2nd Battalion, 3rd Field Artillery Regiment.

Soldiers with the communications platoon of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery decided they needed to put their expertise to use in order to do their part in aiding in the reconstruction process in Iraq.

"When we first got here, we found out (the

schools) were missing a lot of supplies," said 2nd Lt. Lucian Ilardi, a signal officer from Long Island, N.Y., with 2-3rd Field Artillery.

"Our forte is computers and automation, and we decided to go that route," he said.

According to Ilardi, he submitted memos up his chain of command for the request to purchase and install the equipment in order to make the project happen.

He said each of the two schools received \$10,000 for the purchase and installation of the equipment.

The items purchased included comput-

ers equipped with Windows 2000, printers, scanners, air-conditioning to keep temperatures bearable in order for the equipment to function properly and a satellite system, which is used to gain Internet access.

"I think the Internet, most of all, is going to open up their world here," said Ilardi.

Ilardi said the Internet cafe at the girls school in the Al Adhamiya neighborhood was the first public Internet cafe in Baghdad. He said it opened in August.

Spc. John Hano shows students around the Internet at a school in Baghdad.

Project helps the children of Romania Wiesbaden employee collects tons of goods for needy youths

By Karl Weisel
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

Children in the Romanian "children's village" of Timisoara and surrounding communities will be welcoming Santa early this year, thanks in part to the efforts of local community members. That's because a dozen trucks loaded with goodies and humanitarian assistance left Wiesbaden Dec. 8 to bring donated goods to the children's village which is home to 180 children in need.

Not only is the humanitarian project benefiting Romanian children, but youths in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Guatemala are also finding themselves the recipients of the massive donation project.

"This is a humanitarian assistance project that we do in Romania every year," said James Federline, international relations specialist with the U.S. Forces Liaison Office for Hesse, Northern Germany and Thuringia located in Wiesbaden. "In my free time I collect for this project all year long throughout the American communities specifically around Wiesbaden, Kaiserslautern/Ramstein and Bitburg and have been able to receive many generous donations. I've been able to collect 24-plus tons this year alone."

While the fund-raising project, which now works under the auspices of the Rudolf-Walther-Foundation's "Children in Need" project, particularly seeks to provide school supplies, computers, musical instruments and books — "anything and everything that you would send your kid to school with," said Federline — donated items such as stuffed animals, toys and bicycles are also put to good use.

"Everything that people donate does go to good use," he said, describing how children in Iraq were the recipients of items collected for Romania which couldn't be shipped there because of new customs regulations, which prevent the importation of stuffed animals and used clothing into the country. "We sent everything that we couldn't send to Romania to the 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, in Iraq to be distributed through their support-a-school program," Federline said.

"The largest item I was able to acquire this year was an entire playground donated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Europe District," he said, describing how the equipment was donated after it was determined that it no longer met the U.S. Army standard for quarters in Mainz Gonsenheim, but was still a vast improvement over what youngsters in Romania had in the past.

Federline, who has been working with



James Federline, alias St. Nick, hands out gifts during a previous goodwill trip to Romania.

the Rudolf-Walther-Foundation based near Gelnhausen in Gründau-Lieblös, since his first trip to Romania, began his charity efforts after getting to know about the plight of needy children in the town of Brasov through a newly found acquaintance and calls to the Romanian village school his friend had attended as a child. "I started collecting for them in June 2000. Between June and November of that year I gathered some two-and-a-half tons of textbooks and other school supplies."

The project has continued to grow over the years, said Federline, now a member of the advisory council of the German charity outfit. "Every year it gets bigger. This year we collected 25 tons of donated items mostly from Wiesbaden, Sembach, Kaiserslautern, Landstuhl, Bitburg and individuals in Department of Defense Dependents Schools in Germany. I've even had people mail me stuff from DoDDS schools in Japan and England."

Show his gratitude

"The children's village (Kinderdorf) in Timisoara was built by the Rudolf-Walther-Foundation," said Federline. Rudolf Walther, the founder of the Möbel Walther furniture outfit, began the project as a way of showing gratitude to the people of the village. "He was a German foot soldier during World War II and the people of the village saved him from the Russians. He wanted to do something to pay them back for saving his life."

The 79-year-old Walther turned the family furniture business over to his son in 1988, Federline said, and founded the charity organization to concentrate on helping needy children and families. He founded his first "children's village" for orphans and abandoned youths in Guatemala. The Romanian

children's village project was established in 1994 followed by another in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1998.

Federline, two young American Kaiserslautern high-school volunteers, a retired American woman and members of the "Round Table" volunteers are traveling with the convoy of donated goods to Romania. He said the trip, which is 1,200 miles each way, typically takes about 25-30 hours. "There's still an awful lot of corruption in the country and sometimes it takes a 'money donation' to get through the border."

People who are interested in donating goods or funds to the project can contact Federline at mil 338-7569, civ (0171) 3265510 or by email at James.Federline@europa.dla.mil. For information about the Rudolf-Walther Stiftung visit them on the World-wide Web at www.rudolf-walther-stiftung.com.

"About 1,600 euros donated this year are going toward the construction of a youth center at the Romanian children's village," he said. This will provide greater opportunities for youths, particularly the older ones who are allowed to live at the center between the ages of 16 and 18 while making their first forays into the working world downtown. "A lot of kids graduate from the school, live downtown and continue to help support the kids at the children's village," he said. "It's drilled into them — once they get out they are obligated to help those in the social village."

Federline is also continuing to work with the State Department's Humanitarian Assistance Program to gain further support of his Romanian goodwill project. "When I retire I plan to dedicate myself to the project full time," he added.